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THE POSITION OF NUNS IN THAI BUDDHISM

The Parameters of Religious Recognition

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This thesis is my own work and all reference to the work of others has been duly acknowledged.

[Signature]
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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: WOMEN IN EARLY BUDDHISM

The material presented and the conclusions I hope to reach in this thesis are based on an eight-month period of fieldwork, from December 1978 to July 1979, mainly in a large Bangkok wat. The participant-observation method was used in an attempt to assess the nature and characteristics of the status and role of an hitherto unstudied group—female Buddhist ascetics—which does not form part of the traditional sociological paradigms of Theravada Buddhism. It is hoped that this will help to illuminate some of the points which need to be kept in mind in any study of Theravada Buddhism, and of several particular areas of Thai Buddhist society.

This study necessarily involves an examination of three basic areas of discussion: the status of women in Buddhism, the status of Buddhism in Thailand, and the status of women in Thailand. Of these three areas, the first has been the subject of some scholarly discussion, but based on Buddhist texts rather than Buddhist practice, and the second has received a good deal of attention. Until recently, however, the status of women in Thailand has received only scant, and somewhat cavalier attention from scholars inevitably interested in other aspects of Thai society. An article by Thomas Kirsch in 1975 was one of the first intelligent assessments of the fact that although women in Thailand are frequently and visibly involved in many areas of Thai
economic and agricultural life, this has not been accompanied by equally prominent political status. Despite the undeniable political and social influence of the present Thai queen, and the possibility of female heirs to the throne now under review, it is nevertheless generally true to say that legitimate power...

lies firmly within a triangle formed by the mutually reinforcing strata of Thai social fabric — the Buddhist Order, the monarchy and the military, each making up a network of power relations which are closed to women ... (Thitsa 1980:5).

This thesis, then, is a very delimited study of the relationship of women and Buddhism within the framework of exclusion. It examines the status of those Thai women — maechii — who live in seclusion and take religious vows, but who are not permitted to take the vows of the original Buddhist nuns, bhikkhuni. The Buddhist canon preserves an account of the founding of the Order of Buddhist Nuns (Bhikkhunī-Sangha) a few years after the establishment of the Order of Monks (Bhikkhu-Sangha). The ordination tradition prescribed, however, has been lost in all Theravada schools, and the women's Order has ceased to be a part of Theravada communities. I shall use the English word 'nun' interchangeably with 'maechii', however, since the group in question lead a life of religious renunciation similar to some extent to that of the monkhood in Buddhist Thailand.

The literal meaning of the Thai word 'chii', applied to these women, is 'ascetic'. It usually refers to maechii, but it can also be used with reference to men. The polite prefix 'mae', which primarily means 'mother', is commonly affixed to forms of address used for women, and is part of the general use of extended kinship terms in Thai social intercourse.

Maechii, though not ordained, must be distinguished from pious laywomen, the ubaasikaa of the Pali canon, who, with their male
counterparts, \textit{ubaasok}, form part of the traditional four-part division of society into monks (bhikkhu), nuns (bhikkhunī), laymen and laywomen.

Maechii, then, are not part of the original divisions of the Buddhist community described in the canon, nor do they appear in traditional references to such communities. However, they form a group which has local counterparts in the other Theravada countries, Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Laos. Although the condition of these women varies from country to country (as indeed does that of the monks), they share certain general characteristics in that they accept for themselves the life taught by the Buddha as one leading to salvation, and approximate to a Buddhist community of religious women, despite the lack of the legitimate lineage of ordination established by the Buddha. On the whole contemporary Theravada 'nuns' appear to have less recognition as religious specialists than do the bhikkhunī of the Mahayana tradition. No doubt a primary reason for this has to do with their lack of traditionally ascribed role and legitimate form of ordination. In order to understand the role of women in Buddhism in general, however, we must return to the original canon subscribed to by the present-day Theravada Buddhists.

\textbf{Women in Early Buddhism}

Laywomen devotees receive scant attention in the Pali canon, but reference to the Order of Nuns appear in almost every work of the canon (Horner 1961:2). Nevertheless, we do know that women, both lay and ordained, formed a considerable part of the early Buddhist population, were among its most ardent and generous patrons, and its most eloquent teachers. The age of the Buddha, and of the establishment of his Order, 'was an age of great religious and ascetic upsurge. It was at the same time an age of marked social, economic, and political change' (Misra
1972:35). It is possible to argue that there are a great many contrasts between the status of women in pre-Buddhist India and that found after the spread of Buddhism (Horner 1930:2). Of those who found benefit in the newer ascetic Orders women were by no means a small minority. Of the two main factions of the Jain Order, for example, the Digambaras did not allow entry of women to the Order as they did not judge them competent to gain Release (*moksha*). In the Svetambara sect, which was not so slighting of women's capabilities, 36,000 women became nuns in the female Order, as compared with 14,000 male counterparts of the same sect (Horner 1930:102). Similarly, the canon of the Buddhists informs us that the Buddhist Order of Nuns was sought by a great many women soon after it was established. There was, therefore, no dearth of enthusiastic women followers of those who preached that women were spiritually as capable as men in relation to ultimate goals.

The starting point of the Buddha's teaching was the existential 'crisis' of *Dukkha* (sorrow, suffering) (Misra 1972:79), and the craving which led to sorrow was located quite clearly by the Buddha in the life and the world of the householder: the domestic and business spheres of life. Women were, of course, largely restricted to the domestic sphere, and hence it is not surprising that many would take the initiative provided by the Buddhist Order to escape the causes of prolonged sorrow and the cycle of rebirths. Women were also freed from the burden of duties contributing to their husbands' salvation under the individualistic theory of Buddhism, and where previously they had only indirect means by this of contributing to their own spiritual development, they were now free to pursue this directly.

In Vedic India women were not encouraged to take up a religious life, although this was a possibility (Basham 1954:178); only widows, who
were a socially and ritually anomalous category of females, were forced to spend their remaining lives as ascetics, performing rituals for the benefit of their deceased husbands (ibid.:186). Women were under the authority of parents, husband and son consecutively throughout life, and whatever their class, their wergeld was equal to that of the lowest caste, the Sudra (ibid.:177). In this setting, the Buddha introduced teachings of salvation which created new divisions, between ordained and lay, and to a lesser extent male and female, which cut across the old rigid divisions of caste and gender. However, despite some immediate popularity and royal favour during the life of the Buddha, Buddhism remained subdued as a social influence until the reign of Asoka two and a half centuries after the death of its founder. It is not likely, therefore, that a radical re-evaluation of women's role took place in the immediate period during which the male and female Buddhist Orders were consolidated. In fact, the radical implications of Buddhist thought and practice were only ever partially realised in the case of women. To a certain extent this was inevitable, given the interaction between Indian perceptions of woman, which largely emphasised her fecundity, and the Buddhist teachings of liberation from involvement in the world, samsāra. The latter, the 'realm of ceaseless generation and destruction that inevitably bred suffering' found an obvious source in the two things of which women, according to the Anguttara Nikaya (II, 6, 10), never tire: intercourse and childbearing (Falk 1974:110). Buddhism, as a primarily ascetic doctrine, preached the danger represented by women, even while it allowed them direct access to spiritual liberation. Hence the tones of different Buddhist texts vary markedly in their portrayal of women and their position, according to the nature of the texts and the times in which they were written.
The student of early Buddhist texts is somewhat hampered in an investigation of the original Buddhist attitudes towards laywomen and nuns by the sense of time lapse and changed attitudes which probably occurred between the time of the Buddha and the time when many of the texts were recorded. It is tempting to attribute some of the more virulently misogynistic stories in the Jatakas to an increasingly monk-oriented narrow-mindedness on the part of the monastic recorders (Coomaraswamy 1956:154). According to the commentary, the more lurid Jatakas were used within the Order as salutary tales in a very pragmatic sense where, for example, 'the vast majority of tales about unfaithful wives were told to backsliding husbands who were tempted to return to the householder's life' (Falk 1974:108). Because of their human interest, of course, the Jatakas are still the favourite and most memorable part of the scriptures for most laymen. Similar statements attributed to the Buddha may also be suspect, if one argues, as does Basham, that 'so much of the material attributed to [the Buddha] in [the Pali] scriptures is so obviously inauthentic that we cannot but suspect almost everything' (1966:395).

There are discernible trends in the terms to depict women, and some of these have to be kept in mind. Horner notes the 'reappearance' of more traditionally limited notions of womanhood by the time the Jatakas were being written down (1930:351). Similarly Talim has pointed out the increasingly unfavourable characterisation given to the wife of Gautama Buddha, to the point of implying that she 'was a lady without morals and a debauchee' (1972:107). It is significant, then, that some of the best-known parts of the canon relating to nuns were probably written quite a long time after the Buddha's death. The Vinaya, the texts in which the extensive rules of those in the monastic orders are found, are unlikely
to have been written until the Buddhist Order had become powerful and widespread (Basham 1966:397). They are a very detailed list of rules regulating behaviour, reflecting a history of disciplinary problems rather than an ideal schema. Although we do not have a text of the nuns' rules in its entirety, the fact that it partly subsumes many of the monks' rules, and that there are many more rules for nuns than for monks indicates a possible later codification of the Bhikkhunīvinaya.

In the passages of the canon which give the history of the establishment of the Nuns' Order, it is mentioned as being established at least five, and in other sources perhaps twenty years, after the establishment of the Monks' Order. It is thus clearly represented as a secondary institution, even an afterthought. More, importantly, the Buddha is recorded as having resisted the entreaties of those who requested the establishment of such an Order. In terms of the fact that tradition maintains that it was the Buddha's aunt (who was also his fostermother) who first entreated him to allow women to enter the Order, the Buddhist tradition is similar to that of the Jains, which suggests that the tradition may owe as much to myth as it does to actual events (F. Wilson 1979:81). Nevertheless, the tradition is instructive as to what it has preserved of contemporary reservations towards the female Order. In the Pali canon, the Buddha's fostermother, Mahapajapati, with five hundred Sakyan clan women who support her request, is repeatedly refused permission to go forth into the 'homeless state' by the Buddha. Such is their grief at this refusal that Ananda, the Buddha's faithful disciple, takes up the case only to be refused with the same warning to 'be careful' of such an idea. Embarking on a syllogism based on the Buddha's own doctrine and logic, Ananda asks the leading question,
Now, Lord, are women, having gone forth from home into homelessness in the dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, able to realise the fruit of stream attainment or the fruit of once-returning or the fruit of non-returning or perfection?

Significantly, the Buddha confirms this potential of women without qualification, so Ananda is free to proceed to the next step of the argument. Instead of simply doing this, however, he introduces an appeal to the Buddha's emotional side at the same time; in fact, in the middle of the sentence.

If, Lord, women ... are able to realise ... perfection — and, Lord, the Gotamid, Pajapati the Great, was of great service: she was the Lord's aunt, foster-mother, nurse, giver of milk, for when the Lord's mother passed away she suckled him — it was well, Lord, that women should obtain the going forth from home into homelessness. (Cullavagga X, 1, 1-3)

The passage thus contains a carefully ambiguous argument in which logic is compounded with sentiment; they both discuss Mahapajapati as an individual to who the Buddha owed affection, gratitude and respect, and it is largely though the mother-figure evoked that a suggestion of women as a whole entering the Order is achieved.

Interestingly, at the First Council held after the Buddha's death, where senior monks attempted to reach agreement on the Buddha's true doctrine, Ananda was compelled to ask the monks' pardon for faults committed, among them striving for the ordination of Mahapajapati on the ground of her fostering care. Ananda is recorded as not seeing the fault in this, but confessing it as such in faithful deference to the members of the Council (Thomas 1949:109).

Basham points out that another well-known part of the canon related to the Nuns' Order, probably dates to a period well after the Buddha's death; possibly a time of strong heretical tendencies within the Order (1966:396). This is the passage, cited below, where the
Buddha is reported to have prophesied the disappearance of the true Dhamma in five hundred years because of the admission of women into the Order. Most text historians tend to ignore the attribution of such sayings to the Buddha, since they appear at best unlikely. Nevertheless, as far as Buddhism as a living tradition is concerned, the monks who recorded such views have had an undeniable influence on the attitudes of Buddhists to women.

Swayed by Ananda's pleas, the Buddha granted ordination to Mahapajapati only on the condition that she vow to abide by eight special rules that were to be the condition of entry of all nuns to follow her. These special rules, garudhamma, make quite clear the condition of subservience which bound the women who chose the homeless life as their life's path. The first of the garudhamma illustrates the intent behind all eight:

A nun who has been ordained [even] for a century must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day. And that rule is to be honoured, respected, revered, venerated, never to be transgressed during her life.

The next five rules establish the collective dependence on the Order of Nuns on the Order of Monks in perpetuity. They make clear that nuns must ask monks for permission and cooperation for the most important ceremonies of monastic life, as well as being subjected to their disciplinary decisions. The other two rules stress quite clearly where the prerogatives of righteousness lie: 'a monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun', and, 'from today admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden' (Cullavagga X, 1, 4). If these rules need no justification in the eyes of the chroniclers, the reasons for them are given in such a way as to make the Buddha's misgivings quite clear. After Mahapajapati has
fervently accepted the conditions placed upon her (Cullavagga X, 1, 5), and been declared specially ordained as the first nun by the founder, the Buddha is said to have predicted gloomily to Ananda,

If, Ananda, women had not obtained the going forth from home into homelessness in the dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, the Brahma-faring, Ananda, would have lasted long, true dhamma would have endued for a thousand years. But since, Ananda, women have gone forth ... the Brahma-faring will not last long, true dhamma will endure only for five hundred years ...

Even, Ananda, as those households which have many women and few men fall prey to robbers, to pot-thieves ...

Even, Ananda, as when the disease known as mildew attacks a whole field of rice that field of rice does not last long ...

Even, Ananda, as when the disease known as red rust attacks a whole field of sugar-cane, that field of sugar-cane does not last long, even so, Ananda, in whatever dhamma and discipline women obtain the going forth ... that Brahma-faring will not last long.

Even, Ananda, as a man, looking forward, may build a dyke to a great reservoir so that the water may not overflow, even so, Ananda, were the eight important rules for nuns laid down by me, looking forward, not to be transgressed during their life. (Cullavagga X, 1, 6)

Commenting on a Sanskrit (Mahayanist) version of this passage, Frances Wilson comments on the argument as being a seeming non sequitur:

Women should stay at home if the Buddhist Dharma is to survive. By implication, men should have a responsibility to stay home to protect women who are vulnerable, but the parallel claim that men outside the home threaten society by causing the family to be susceptible to "attack and spoilation" is never made. A man was ultimately to renounce the family for religion. Family and religion are mutually exclusive for a man, but a woman was placed in an ambiguous position — to remain in the home, which had minimal religious value, but to be, at the same time, a devout Buddhist. (1979:78-79)

There is still some feeling among Thai Buddhists that for women, whatever the paradoxes involved, to stay at home is to be a devout Buddhist.

Besides the reluctance ascribed to the Buddha in relation to the establishment of a Nun's Order, despite the clear statement of his that women are capable of arhatship, the other theme to emerge from a study of the Pali canon in relation to the Order is the subordination of the
Nuns' Order to that of the Monks'. This is evident even in small matters, for example the several rules, apart from the first of the garudhamma mentioned above, which stress the behavioural subservience of nuns to monks. A nun could neither admonish nor talk ill of a monk, either officially or privately, although this rule did not apply to monks themselves, within their honour system of reporting transgressions (Bhagvat 1939:160). A nun had to request permission from a monk before sitting herself in his presence, or asking him a question (ibid.:161). Furthermore, the nuns were expected to perform menial duties for the monks such as sweeping their park and leaving food prepared, on pain of rebuke (ibid.:162). While nuns' access to the quarters of the monks was subject to the permission of the latter, the nuns did not have the same rights to privacy in return (Horner 1930:271-272).

However, as Bhagvat points out (1939:162), the fact that the nuns, both as individuals and as an Order, were subject to the legal authority of the monks was of much greater importance than these behavioural observances. In the matter of punishment, for instance, the monks conducted the trials of the nuns, admonished those they found guilty, and declared an irrevocable verdict on them. The nuns in the Order were reduced to being 'mere legal supervisors' with the task of ensuring that the punishment decreed by the monks was carried out (ibid.:162). Moreover, when the rights of the two Orders clashed over important activities such as Observance and Invitation, the monks were unquestioningly given the right to suspend the activities of nuns, but nuns were not allowed to suspend those of the monks (Cullavagga X, 20). Not only did the monks have the power to veto these most important activities for the nuns on each occasion, the rule affirmed the inferior position of the nuns in perpetuity, with status no better than that of pupils to teachers. It
was, then, on the whole, in regard to their relations with the monks, rather than with the laity, that the independence of the Order was restricted.

The nuns also suffered indirectly in important areas of their corporate life. While the oral transmission of the Dhamma was an important collective experience within the Sangha routine, this mode of transmission also served as a preventive against the Dhamma reaching those unfit to receive it (Conze 1960:16). It is significant that, through lack of foresight, the nuns had to pass some time without having the Patimokkha (laws) recited to them, although this was a primary duty of the Sangha community. It was eventually realised that this was the case, and after the monks had consulted with the founder, the monks were deputed to recite the Patimokkha for the nuns (Cullavagga X, 5, 1).

No small amount of the changes introduced in the laws relating to nuns was a result of the actions by or the situation of the nuns themselves. Seventy-four of these criticisms are said to have been made by the 'modest nuns' (Horner 1942:xz). Apparently models of exemplary behaviour themselves, they were quick to recognise a predicament of nuns in general, or the demeaning misbehaviour of others; and to report them. On the other hand, lay-people account for forty-two complaints leading to modification of the laws. Nuns in general complained only three times, and monks four (ibid.:xz). Thus, some proportion of the nuns themselves would appear to have played a significant part in the delineation of their proper conduct. This is the more surprising because very few nuns are shown to have had direct access to the Buddha (ibid.:xzi). In some cases, nuns made the Buddha aware, through the monks, of such problems as the rape of members of the Order. These attacks led to various rulings concerning the nuns being forbidden to go out alone, even to meditate alone in the forest.
(Cullavagga X, 23), a deprivation of one of the more rarified experiences which the members of the Order prized. In other cases the cause of the criticism was rather slighter than the restrictions of the law might warrant. This was often due to the need to maintain good relations with the laity — at the expense of the nuns. Of course, it is probable that given the repetitive nature of the description of the way in which the history of each law is given, that the justification of the laws are a canonical formality, and that in fact many of the laws pertaining to behaviour within the monasteries were based on similar codes of the other ascetic sects.

A constant cause for scandal amongst the public was the intermingling, even in the form of brief association, of monks and nuns although there are in fact few recorded cases of romantic liaisons between monks and nuns, and only one involving a compromise of discipline — at least in Ceylon (Mudiyanse 1966:48). For this reason, the recital of the Patimokkha, and other important functions at which the Sangha assembled, had to be performed separately by the two Orders. Even so, when monks were deputed to recite the Patimokkha to the nuns, public reaction was such that this had to be abandoned and the nuns themselves were left to perform this duty for themselves (Cullavagga X, 6, 1). When the nuns had been finally taught the Patimokkha, it gave them some autonomy. But it also emphasised the difficulty of the two Orders ever achieving solidarity in the symbolic ceremonies of their common striving. Another example of this process involved the ordination of nuns. The embarrassment of would-be nuns at having to answer personal questions in front of the assembled male Order led to the ordination procedure to be performed first in the Nuns' Order, then in that of the Monks' (Cullavagga X, 17, 1-8). Again, this increased the participation of the nuns in their
own concerns, though the male Order never relinquished the power to sanction or veto entry into the membership of the Nuns' Order. Ironically, it was just this step that meant that, following the demise of the female Order, no women can today become members of the Buddhist Order within Theravada tradition, since it is the female ordination lineage which has not stood the test of time. This, despite the fact that at least one branch of present-day Mahayana nuns in China were originally ordained by Theravada nuns, and that this link is perhaps not, at least theoretically, lost.5

In general, the effect of this enforced unequal relationship between the two Orders cannot be ignored in its implications for the position of Theravada nuns. For while the monks maintained the initiative in terms of practice and interpretation, the nuns, excluded from the initiative, were dependent on the monks for their own initiation and fulfilment of their duties. Frances Wilson, in noting the subordination of the nuns' organisational structure to that of the monks, points out that in Mahayanist China, where the organisational structures were separate, the nuns often have 'formidable powers, not only in religious matters but in the political arena as well' (1979:80).

In that chapter of the Cullavagga which deals with the reasons for and the creation of the laws governing the Order of Nuns, the laws are always shown to be revealed by the Buddha to the monks. It is, then the monks who have, where necessary, the duty of passing on relevant information to the nuns. The most important regulations, and down to those concerned with the details of intimate clothing, are passed on in this way. Moreover, in the texts as a whole, very few nuns are shown to have direct access to the Buddha for the complaints or for requests. Of the exceptions, Mahapajapati is one. Usually the nuns were forced to
go through the monks themselves for matters that were of concern to them (Horner 1952:359 fn. 4). Although there is no reason to suppose that this process led to deliberate distortions in representation either to the Buddha or of his decisions, it does show the unquestioned hierarchy which controlled not only law-making, but also information concerning the law. It is possible that this hierarchy is reflected in the content of some of the laws, for with the exception of those cases where the physical welfare of the nuns was at stake, modifications in the laws were made to suit the convenience and status of the monks rather than of the nuns. This is as true of petty considerations like the permission needed for nuns to enter the monks' retreat being modified so that the nuns could sweep it (Vinaya IV:306-308), to the control over group activities mentioned above (Cullavagga X, 20).

However, if the right of the nuns to autonomy in the running of their own affairs was only negatively countenanced in the considerations of the Buddha, the nuns themselves are not shown to have claimed injustice in their situation, or to have demanded more say in their affairs. As with the monks, the textual convention is to show the nuns' awareness of a problem, and for them to present this problem for the Buddha's consideration and solution. For example, it is narrated that Mahapajapati, in asking as her one boon that the Buddha should renounce one of his rulings, requested that in relations between monks and nuns the exchange of salutations and giving of respect should follow lines of seniority rather than gender. The Buddha refused this request, for the reason that in the other sects such behaviour as monks saluting nuns was not countenanced, and hence that he would not allow his monks to salute women (Cullavagga X, 3). It is clear that even in this extreme case, a nun was concerned with the outward forms of respect and not the legal
position between the two Orders, presumably taking the latter to be irrevocable.

It is not difficult to conclude from reading the stereotyped history of the laws for nuns that

What struck the Buddhist law-givers most about women was their sensuality, their dressy habits, quarrelsome nature and lack of discipline on the whole. Thus many of the offences recorded in this code [i.e. the Bhikkunī-Vibhanga] are of a petty nature though the penalty is more severe than that in the Bhikkhu-Vibhanga [code for monks]. (Bhagvat 1939:164)

These petty concerns of the law-givers were given application in the case of the Order of Nuns over and above the rules which governed all members of the Order. According to the texts much of this excess was the result of public criticism of the nuns 'like women householders who enjoy pleasures of the senses'. This points to a greater vulnerability of the nuns to public gossip, as well as to the acceptance by the Buddha of the values which underlay such gossip. Much of the laws laid down for nuns served the purpose of denying nuns access to all manner of everyday practices which, because of their common currency, were regarded by the public and by Buddha as being sensuous and luxurious (e.g. Cullavagga X, 27, 4). Though all the paraphernalia associated with womanhood was denied them, as the Buddha's rejection of Mahapajapati's request demonstrates, the nuns were inevitably trapped by the status of their sex in the society at large.

One of the nuns, Sister Soma, indeed wrote in her praise of the nuns' path of just this problem:

How should the woman's nature hinder us?  
Whose hearts are firmly set, who ever move  
With growing knowledge onward in the Path?  
What can that signify to one in whom  
Insight doth truly comprehend the Norm?  

(C.A. Rhys Davids 1909:45)

and moreover,
To one for whom the question doth arise:
Am I a woman in these matters, or
Am I a man? or what not am I, then?
To such an one is Mara [the Evil One, as Tempter] fit to talk!
(from the version in the Samyutta Nikaya, ibid.:46 fn.)

This poem indicates not only a spirit of rebellion among at least some of the women who came to join the Order, but also the fact that the role of the women ascetics was still regarded as unsuitable by some.

The Buddhist Order permitted entry to men of all castes and classes. Whoever joined the Order renounced his gotra (name) and his jāti (caste) (Misra 1972:36-37). Caste and class were therefore dissolved in the new levels of equality within the Order, and only seniority and special skills distinguished the most eminent and respected among them. For women, then, much more than for men, the outside world and its influences intruded upon their retreat, for they retained consequences of the commonsense views of the basic inferiority pertaining to women to which they had been subjected in the household life. Moreover, as time passed and the difficulties of the new Orders became apparent and were assessed, this influence increased, with the consequent further restriction of the nuns.

While caste was no barrier to entrance to the Sangha, free men had only to obtain the permission of their parents to enter if they were still young enough to be legally under their guardianship. However, women, as noted above, were always legally under the guardianship of someone; and so they had to obtain the consent either of parents or of husband to join the Order. This permission, as several stories attest, was not always forthcoming, and some women were forced to wait until their husbands died before they could consider themselves free to join the Order (see Horner 1930:213). Moreover, women married less than twelve years were ineligible to enter the Order (Horner 1942:21), and
thus the Sangha made as little infringement as possible on the rights of the patriarchal society on which it depended. Once ordained, however, women were protected by the Sangha. There is even a case recorded of a nun who, having conceived before she joined the Order, was allowed to rear the child, with the help of a fellow nun, within the Sangha, and finally hand over the child to lay guardians when it had reached years of discretion. Once it was established that the nun had not broken her vow of chastity after entering the Order, there was no question of forcing her to go back to her husband's family to fulfil obligations to them (Cullavagga X, 25, 1). Yet, while women in the Order received protection vis-à-vis lay society wherever possible, including protection from physical molestation, they were not subject to the same legal judgements within the Sangha as were the monks.

Horner has described a strange feature of the texts of the nuns' rules, which tend to support a view of partiality on the part of monk editors. This occurs in the account of the Parājika (the most serious) class of offences, where 'each rule is, in the "rule" itself named after the woman who does the action giving rise to the particular offence'. The association of blame of the offender in this form does not occur anywhere else in the laws of either Order (Horner 1942:xxxiii). This seems to indicate a slightly discriminatory frame of mind on the part of the recorders. It is, of course, a slight discrepancy in a large work, but it is interesting because the monks strove so hard to maintain consistency not only with the very words of the Buddha, but within the texts as well.

The most notable inequality between the Orders as regards the rules made for their benefit is the consistently harsher penalty inflicted on nuns compared to monks for similar behaviour over a whole range of
offences. The reasons for this are not made clear. Possible and conjectured explanations for such legal conventions, however, must take into account the fact that these are also found in the Jain monastic order (Misra 1972:132), which in turn reflected the laws of the State. Here, as in the patriarchal State, the idea of impurity seems to have been more attached to the female sex. The rights endangered within Buddhism, however, are the spiritual ambitions of the male Sangha.

On this point Horner argues, not very convincingly, that because of 'the great number of women [who] are traditionally held to have flocked to the Order ... [it] is conceivable that they were generally regarded as of poorer quality than the monks, and that therefore there had to be a severe testing in order to weed out those who entered the Order without having had a real vocation (Horner 1952:xiv). This argument is not really consistent with her view, stated elsewhere, that at the time of the inception of the Order and for some time after, it was regarded as perfectly respectable for women to enter upon the homeless life (1930:172) and that 'there is ample evidence to show that [the Order] was freely sought by many in the full flush of prosperity' (1930:76), unless one is conscientiously to subscribe to a disparity between the women joining the Order and attitudes to those women who were in the Order. However, there may well have been an element of this testing; as is shown by the longer time needed for a nun than for a monk to qualify for full ordination (Falk 1974:107) and to prove maturity within the Order, and also by the fact that nuns who had joined another sect and then wished to rejoin the Order were debarred from entry (Horner 1952:xiv), while monks in a similar situation merely had to undergo four months' probation (Mahavagga I, 38,1). In the scene discussed above which contains the Buddha's views on his introduction
of the garudhamma, there is a reference to the dangers of allowing the many women in proportion to the number of men. But the analogy of a household falling prey to pot-thieves disguises rather than discusses the danger to the Sangha of the entry of women.

In the portions of the canon which describe some of the more notable of the nuns and the stories which lie behind their decisions to become nuns, we see some instances of women grieved at occurrences or situations in their personal lives which prompted them to join the Buddhist Order, as well as those who were simply overwhelmed by the teaching of the new doctrine and as a result renounced other options to practice according to these teachings. On an analysis of the reasons why the nuns responsible for the psalms celebrating the early Order, for example, Sharma concludes that a slight majority of cases of these nuns became nuns out of regard for the positive aspects of Buddhism rather than the negative aspects of domestic life from which they came (1977:249-250). But since repulsion with the worldly state of affairs is a necessary part of the Buddhist path, these may be regarded as two sides of the same coin. 'Demanding husbands ... domestic drudgery and ... domestic tragedy' (ibid.:249) were experiences of some of the nuns but, as Horner concludes, there is no more evidence to show that women joined [the Order] more readily in their widowhood because their neighbours and children abused them, than there is to show that in their wifehood their husbands ill-treated them, or that in their girlhood their parents neglected them ... They did not join because of the exigencies of status, but because of individual conditions. (1930:76)

And, if women were sometimes driven to the Order by what they found outside; or if they were led, their aspirations seem to have been no less than those of the monks:
It is a suggestive point that the percentage of the Sisters' psalms in which the goal achieved is envisaged as Emancipation, Liberty won — about 23 per cent — is considerably greater than the corresponding proportion in the Psalms by the Brethren (13 per cent) ... it was the freed mind, the release from sense, superstition, craving, and the round of rebirth that made them break forth into singing. (C.A. Rhys Davids 1909:xxiv-xxv)

Indeed of the seventy-one nuns whose psalms are recorded, eleven had already reached exceptional stages of advancement in spiritual awareness before becoming nuns, including two who reached the ultimate stage of arahantship (Sharma 1977:249).

Nevertheless, the path of the nuns, as the texts attest, was in some ways more difficult than that of the monks. Nuns had to be forbidden from staying alone in the forest to meditate because of several recorded instances of rape and harrassment of nuns who had chosen this retreat (Horner 1930:155). Respect for members of the Order did not extend to all members of society. There are vaguer hints, too, that life for the almswomen was more difficult. The nuns, like the monks, went on an almsround each morning with the bowl given to them for the purpose at their ordination. But in one portion of the canon 'because "women obtain things with difficulty" it was made an offence to be confessed if a monk accepted, with certain reservations, food from the hand of a nun who was not a relation' (Horner 1952:xiv) although overall the rules are not clear on this. We may suppose, then, that there may have been an easier relationship between monks and laity than between nuns and laity at least at the start. There seems no internal reason, however, why it was that, as Horner puts it,

later ... the Order [of nuns] lost its primitive character and became a refuge for the poor, the unsuccessful, the unmarried and the widowed, the entrants being looked upon as unfortunates who had found life too difficult on account of the fruit of deeds done in former becomings. (1930:172)
This situation, the author claims, might be said to cover the situation of modern Burmese 'nuns' where, according to one Burmese,

Fifty per cent of the women who have become nuns have done so because they are poor and unsuccessful: the remaining fifty per cent are disgusted with this world and have become nuns in order to free themselves from the troubles and evils of life (ibid:172 fn).

We may only speculate as to whether the membership of all the female Orders degenerated in similar fashion after the spread of Buddhism to other countries. Similarly we do not know whether such trends are related to the extinction of the female Order as such in all Theravada Buddhist areas, for nowhere are the reasons for this clear. The date at which this is commonly set is the tenth century A.D. (Gombrich 1971:32). However, Luce maintains that there are 'numerous proofs' of the existence of nuns at Pagán, and mentions references to them as late as 1224 A.D. (1969:101:109-110). And Gunawardana mentions references to Buddhist nuns in Burma until the second half of the thirteenth century A.D., and comments on the apparent lack of interest in restoring the Order of nuns in Sri Lanka using nuns from Burma, suggesting only that Burmese nuns may not have been regarded as 'orthodox' enough (1979:39). It is conceivable, however, that there were no ordinations of nuns in Burma after the end of the twelfth century A.D., if those mentioned in the texts were the last elderly survivors of the Burmese Order.

In the remaining Theravada countries of Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Laos, however, the women who choose to live in the monasteries, if not as bhikkhuni, as devout lay devotees, have a lower religious status than that of monks. In Thailand, the common image of the maechii is that of the hopeless and destitute mentioned by Horner with regard to Burma, and contrasts sharply with the high status of the
well-organised national Sangha, or body of monks. It is to the particular evolution of a latter-day development of the religious role of women in a Buddhist society, Thailand, that we now turn. Before doing so, however, the particular nature of Thai Buddhism must be outlined, and the status of women in that country also delineated.
Footnotes to Chapter 1

1. See glossary for this and other indigenous terms.

2. Exceptions to this generalisation are largely concerned with non-Theravada communities e.g. Topley 1954; Förer-Haimendorf 1976. The only study of Theravada 'nuns' of which I am aware is that carried out over three months by Suzanne Vangnoo, then of the School of Oriental and African Studies. Ms. Vangnoo worked in Moulmain in Burma. I am grateful to her for sending me a copy of her most informative report.


4. In the Sanskrit version of the Mahayanists, who have maintained their Order of Nuns, the rules are in a different order, beginning, significantly, with the rule prescribing that nuns are to be dependent on monks for permission to be ordained, and ending with the rule concerning salutation, which is the first rule of the Theravadists: F. Wilson 1979:85.

5. Chissell points out the rather interesting fact that for some time, the Chinese nuns were ordained by monks only, and untroubled by their lack of legitimacy until the 'Sinhalese nuns pointed out the obvious to them' and helped re-ordain them in both Sanghas (1972:22), Mudiyanse points out that since the Ceylonese Buddhism of this time was in a period of schism, the nuns who went to China may not have been Hinayanist (1966:47).
Chapter Two

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THAILAND

The Buddhist Background

Thai tradition claims that Buddhism was introduced to the region during the reign of Asoka (c.269-237 B.C.). Certainly Mahayana Buddhism was a dominant influence in Thailand and Cambodia from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries (Wells 1975:xiii-xiv). Theravada Buddhism was then introduced during the first Thai Kingdom of Sukhothai about 1238 A.D. Buddhism, then, has long been a state religion; part of the social and political tradition that continued through the successive kingdoms of Ayutthaya to present-day Bangkok, and it continues to receive a prominent place, the like of which was unknown when the original Order flourished under the Buddha's guardianship.

This association of Buddhism and the Thai state has its best expression in the close mutual support of the Sangha and the monarchy, whereby the King not only provides material support for the Sangha but has as an important kingly duty the task of 'purifying' the Sangha in periods of decline. In return, the Sangha provides legitimation for the king as leader of the state and serves as a living example of his ability to preserve the religion. This association has become even closer in the present dynasty where in the nineteenth century the most powerful kings pursued the highest standard of strictness for the monks and 'further enhanced the prestige of monastic life by encouraging the ordination of
princes' (C. Reynolds 1973:iv). In fact church and state became so much a part of the same bureaucratic framework that by 1902, in the *Buddhist Order Administration Act* the Sangha was officially placed under the control of the state (Ishii 1968:865).

A number of major changes occurred in the relation between the state and Sangha in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (C. Reynolds 1973), among them the extent and nature of support of monasteries by the government; the elaboration of a complex hierarchy of Sangha officers by the king; and the development of a highly organised religious education programme. The changes in economic and social conditions which affected the endowment of land and the assignment of labourers to monasteries (C. Reynolds 1979) increased the monasteries' dependence on the goodwill and piety of the laity for both income and necessary labour, since resources such as those supplied by the institutions of slavery and corvée were no longer available to the state. The elaboration of hierarchy designated by the king was expressive not only of his position in relation to the Sangha, but also developed as the organisational framework through which the increasing demands made by the government on the Sangha were implemented. The result of the extension of the religious education system offered to monks, whereby standardised levels of attainment were rewarded with recognised qualifications, was to enforce

> a sort of orthodoxy by banning free interpretations of the Buddhist doctrines which are liable to bring about schism within the Buddhist Order. Thus, the Thai monks' understanding of Buddhism became stereotyped, and the monks' subjugation to the State was strengthened. (Ishii 1968:866)

Today, as Thitsa notes, 'To a surprising extent Thai theological writings are inspired and composed by non-ecclesiastics belonging to the Department of Religious Affairs ...' (1980:8). Even the time-
honoured ordination ceremony is today based closely on a manual revised in 1916 which incorporates various corrections made by scholar monks during the late nineteenth century and codifies ritual procedures so that ordination 'would be conducted by qualified ritual experts for qualified ritual initiates only' (Rittenberg 1977:300-301). This plays very nicely on the practitioners' assumption that the ritual should have one correct and accepted pattern (ibid.:80-81).

The other most important development in the nineteenth century was the emergence of a new reform sect, the Thammayut ('those that adhere to the Dhamma') which was started by the then prince-monk who was later to become King Mongkut. The sect maintains a distinct ordination procedure, lays great emphasis on strict discipline, and has always retained its early aristocratic links. As a stricter sect it has remained a minority sect in relation to the original Mahaanikaai sect. While the Thammayut emphasis on textual purity and purging of religious accretions has increased the scholastic tendencies of its member monks, the sect has also been foremost in social programmes and the modernising influence which the Sangha seeks to propagate in Thai society (Kirsch 1975b).

At the village level these links with the state apparatus and ideology have always been much less firm, and the village wat has always relied closely on its local community for support and recruitment and has been in turn a village centre providing not only religious teaching and general education, but a village meeting place, fairground and a source of advice on medical, personal and other matters. Urban wat, on the other hand, tend to have had this general role diminish and, as religious centres, they tend to be specialised in terms of the kinds of monks' needs catered to and the kinds of services offered to laity.
Thus there has been a proliferation of religious teaching wat, especially in urban centres, while some wat specialise in the field of meditation, many of which are to be found in the Northeast of Thailand (Heinze 1977: 152). Some wat offer particular services for laity, such as those equipped to provide cremation services, and so on. Although the Thai Buddhist monk is nominally in retreat from the world, he is still very much in demand by the layman who expects various services to be performed including the opportunity to make merit (tham bun) by presentation of gifts.

One of the most important forms of merit-making in Thailand, is the act of becoming a member of the Sangha. To follow the path of the monk rather than that of the layman involves the sponsorship of members of the community who will both provide one with the eight requisites canonically allowed to monks and sponsor the elaborate ordination ceremony which must involve gifts to the Sangha. Thus the ordinand not only makes merit for himself, but enables friends and relatives to do the same. In addition to the role it already maintains as an initiatory rite within a mystery religion (Lévy 1957) ordination also has become in Thailand a form of rite de passage by which young men are regarded as learning dhamma and being subjected to discipline which gives them maturity (cf. Tambiah 1968). Thus the Thai maintain an ideal of every young man becoming a monk for a few months in his early twenties, before marriage, which contrasts with, say, the more restricted and permanent pattern of ordination in Sri Lanka.

In Thailand those who live as monks for long periods receive somewhat more respect, for they are following the path recommended by the Buddha as leading to salvation. The way of the monk involves study of the scriptures and the practice of meditation and he seeks his
religious goal through his devotion to the teachings. In this he contrasts with the layman who, bound still to the worldly life, must seek to make merit to improve his karmic state. There is thus a strong interdependence between the monk, who must rely on the layman for his physical needs so that he may continue his spiritual path, and the layman, who through his gifts is allowed by the monk to make merit which will bring him improved status, either in this life or a subsequent one.

The ideology of merit performs various functions in Thai society. At the village level Tambiah sees in the institution of monkhood 'a pattern of reciprocity and exchange of values between the parental and filial generations' in that 'ordination is an event in which merit is transferred by the monk who is of a filial generation to his elders, who in fact install him in this office.' (1968:61). At the level at which most Thais tend to experience the idea of merit, however, there is an assumption of the relation between the merit made in previous lives and one's present social and political power. As a Thai writer has put it, most Thai Buddhists adopt

intentionally or unconsciously, the belief that virtue is equal to success and happiness, and vice to failure and ruin, instead of virtue to virtuous life and vice to vicious, regardless of any worldly forms of measurement. (Wibha Senanan 1975:86. See also Hanks 1962; Keyes 1973)

Since the Sangha provides the main means by which laymen, from the humblest peasant to the monarch, are able to validate their social position by means of merit-making, the Sangha tends to legitimate the status quo and is associated with the ideology of power that explains it. The basic hierarchical structure in Thailand is maintained because 'the social superiority of one layman over another [is] established and confirmed by the relative size of their gifts to the monkhood.' (Brand 1975:131; author's italics omitted.) The status of the monk itself is,
theoretically, the highest one in Thai society and in the process of becoming a monk a man is subject to a swift and remarkable change of behaviour towards himself and one may imagine that this has no small effect on the monk concerned in his attitude to his new path. The construction of a new social role is vividly portrayed by the young prince-monk Vajirananavarorasa when the King visits him shortly after his ordination:

Just before Rains the King brought me an offering at the monastery ... When he came to my residence and gave me the offering he prostrated himself to show respect to a monk. This was unusual behaviour for the King compared to his greetings for other princes whom he merely greeted in the ordinary way. It saddened me, since in his status as King he was my lord, in his status in the same royal family he was my eldest brother, and in his status as adviser for official tasks he was my tutor. When I saw him prostrate himself, even though I realized he was showing respect not for me but for the [robe as the] sign of an Arahant, I still was not completely comfortable in my role, I did not want him to lose his confidence in me. I did not want him ever to see me, before whom he had prostrated himself, take up the lay life again. This [feeling] is exactly what is meant when they say one fears disaster will overcome one. I decided at that moment not to disrobe ... (Vajirananavarorasa 1979:40-41)

Although most monks do not go through such a dramatic realisation of their ritual status, the fact of the monks' superiority is made clear in every behavioural and linguistic act of the laymen.

Ultimately, however, the basis of the monks' higher status is merit previously acquired. Thais tend to believe that the opportunity to become a monk is presented only to those with sufficient merit and that to remain a good monk requires a great deal of merit also. It is in witness to this merit that the layman pays respect to an individual monk of high reputation. Those who leave the monkhood after a short time will sometimes say that they do not have enough merit to stay in the Sangha, that the discipline and commitment involved is too rigorous for them.
Women in Thailand

The position of women in any given society is notoriously difficult to 'assess' and in this chapter I merely want to mention some of the factors relevant to Thai perceptions of women which are of interest in a discussion of their religious role. I will consider such aspects as their economic role, legal status, educational opportunities, and the more abstract images of women which emerge from a consideration of the Thai world-view. I am thus eschewing the often ethnocentric writings of early foreign travellers, whose value judgments on this topic were usually impressionistic at best.

The economic role of women in Thailand has always been prominent in that women in the rural sector have duties similar to those of men and also tend to form a significant part of the rural market traders. Similarly, in Bangkok a disproportionately large percentage (according to a Time magazine report, 90%) of real estate and large companies are owned by women (Kirsch 1975:175). The latter fact, however, may have more to do with keeping male political slates clean, and with property laws, rather than indicating a positive role of women in economics. Until 1976, for example, a woman needed her husband's official consent to enter into any legally binding contract. Oonta Nopakun suggests that the rural women, as joint family providers, have been able to be more independent than the more aristocratic urban women who were confined to home activities (1977:16) but on the whole their economic contribution has not secured for Thai women significant social or political esteem.

In the formal sector of the urban Bangkok economy, women make up 38.6% of the industrial workforce, but on the whole are paid significantly less than men (Thitsa 1980:8, 26). They are treated as
supplementary wage earners, although the number of households headed by women may be as high as 18% (ibid.:9). In the trade sector also, whereas women had formed 60% of own account traders ... only 22% of the employees in the modern trade sector are female and are mostly at the lower levels' (ibid.:11). It seems, therefore, that at least in Bangkok, women are losing their foothold in an important area of livelihood.

Another disturbing trend is pointed out by H. Graham in his survey of changing Thai family patterns. Although he notes that it is more socially acceptable for single and married women to work outside the home, a factor which he states is attributed to Western influence (n.d.:17-18), and although an impressive number of women appear to have chosen to do so, he also reports that

A number of men we interviewed commented on the increasing difficulties in obtaining the kind of employment they want and a significant proportion of these believe that a chief reason for difficulty is the recent entrance of women into the office and professional employment market. Particularly disturbing to these men is their feeling that a considerable number of women use their sex attractions to get and hold coveted positions. (ibid.:17)

The phenomenon of women being unwanted in an overfull job market is familiar in many areas of the world, but it is significant that the Thai interpretation of this phenomenon is to assert the immoral use of wily feminine charms to compete in the high-status competition for jobs.

Another economic development which characterises the position of women in the Bangkok workforce is the migration of numbers of women from the countryside who end by becoming prostitutes. Thitsa quotes an estimation of 100,000 women earning a living at this trade out of a total of 241,111 working women in the capital (1980:13). This is thus a not insignificant reflection of the type of placement given to women
in the modern urban economy. Although the presence of American troops during the Vietnam war, and the tourist industry have doubtless been partly responsible for the growth of this sector, there are local factors which have been able to sustain it.

The legal position of women in Thailand also reflects the lower status of women in comparison to men. Formerly, a woman was legally under another's protection. To a certain extent marriage to certain categories of wives resembled purchase (C. Reynolds 1977:7) and until 1868 a man could sell his wife without her consent (ibid.:9). While women have long had the right to initiate divorce and have had equal inheritance rights with men (ibid.:10), husbands received two-thirds of post-nuptial property on divorce and an adulterous wife lost all rights to both pre-nuptial and post-nuptial property. In 1971, there were moves afoot to improve the rights of women to property in marriage, and to maintenance; to allow male adultery as a ground for divorce as female adultery already is; and to allow wives to choose a new career without their husbands' approval (Wimolsiri Jamnarnwej 1971:39-40). These proposals indicate that, at least until the revised laws of the Civil and Commercial Code in 1976, civil law discriminated against women in a number of important areas.

Changes in attitudes to the status of women in Thailand were stimulated by the complex of moral and social issues which arose as a result of contact with the West. One of the aspects of Thai society about which Western missionaries were prepared to be most critical was that of polygamy, and although members of the élite defended it for some time, their successors eventually came to argue that the practice was not justified. These same people, among them Thianwan and King Vajiravudh were also inclined to argue for changes in the status of
women (Mattani Rutnin 1978:102). The impetus for these changes, therefore, came from male members of the élite, and was closely associated with the modernisation of Thailand according to Western models. One of the changes suggested by the writer and critic Thianwan was the need for women to be educated, since they had the potential to better contribute to the development of the nation (Oonta Nopakun 1977:9). Unfortunately this idea was not accepted until much later. It was only in 1921, with the Elementary Education Act, making primary education compulsory, that girls were permitted education on a level equal with boys. Until this time, education was open to boys who could spend time at the local wat, learning from the monks. Traditional education, therefore, was not open to girls. The 1921 law caused a dramatic change from a mere 7% of girls in schools at the time to 38% four years later (Vella 1978:159). Today, one writer goes so far as to suggest that, 'The number of woman and girl students and teachers in schools and universities exceeds that of men' (Mattani Rutnin 1978:101).

In a telling analysis of the nineteenth century work 'A Defence of Polygamy', Reynolds reveals that thinking on questions such as marriage was based on the idea that man's nature differs from woman's and that this justifies the subordination of the latter to the former (1977:28). Moreover, a prime argument, to the original author's mind, concerns the Buddhist idea of merit: 'Since polygamy reduces misconduct or demerit because it prevents the husband from forcing a wife against her will' (ibid.:27). Needless to say, neither women's needs nor women's merit is taken into consideration. It is time then, to look at the place of women in the traditional Thai view of the world.

It is generally accepted that the view of karma which structures all beings within a hierarchy of increasing merit attained, envisages
that a woman is on a lower plane than is a man. A fourteenth century cosmography text from Sukhothai reinforces this view. In it 'women are placed towards the more worldly, corporeal end of the scales'. Moreover in the higher realms where the brahma deities live, women are not found, since the deities 'have accumulated such a store of merit that they have lifted themselves above sensation and desire ... and hence they have no need of women' (ibid.:3-4). On the other hand, earthly rulers, in imitation of the celestial monarchs of the Buddhist cosmographies, had large numbers of wives as 'an index of self sufficiency and, consequently, a check on greed and craving' (ibid.:12). In this way a man's prestige (even, according to Mattani Rutnin 1978:102, his baaramii) was measured by the number of women whose services he controlled, an idea which lent itself very readily to political analogies.

Hanks and Hanks (1962:435-6) maintain that the karmic ramifications of gender are minimized in Thailand in that since the Thai 'expect many hundreds of rebirths before release from suffering, all are believed to take turns as male and female'. It may be that at the lower end of the social ladder, where all work hard and share the burdens of poverty, that neither sex has a distinct advantage, and this sort of rationale prevails. Nevertheless, there is also a tradition in which, through acts of merit, women seek the status of male, as is the case with the Sukhothai Queen Mother who, founding a monastery in 1399 A.D., inscribed the request 'By the power of my merit, may I be reborn as a male ...' (Griswold and Prasert Na Nagara 1969:55).

Position on the social ladder is indeed an important element in the determination of a person's karmic status, although to assert, as do Hanks and Hanks (1962:436) that it is more important than gender is possibly artificial hair-splitting. If, indeed, one argues, along
with the author of the Defence of Polygamy, that man's nature is
different to that of women, it is entirely possible that the kind of
merit associated with each will be different. To cite, for example,
a more modern, less misogynistic view, we have the words of a monk's
sermon: 'Mother means one who is our benefactor, but father means a
person who has power ...' (ibid.:440). It is the man, Hanks and Hanks
go on to argue, who has the power necessary to be able to advance up
the social hierarchy (ibid.:443). In other words, it is men who have
the merit to rise socially. As we have already seen, moreover, it is
men who have the opportunity to rise to the most elevated status, that
of monk, a position denied to women.

Although it is not expressed in terms of merit, there is a sense
in which the status of women, those unable to become monks, is posited
as structurally lower, even opposed to that of men and of monks. Thus,
for example, 'women are considered antithetic to many kinds of magical
power' because menstrual blood is 'dangerous, polluting, and diametrically
opposed to beneficial power', (Terwiel 1979:93) even that bestowed by or
associated with a monk. Moreover, in their association with the home,
sexuality and childbearing, women are seen as directly threatening the
sanctity of the monastic order by virtue of their ability to lure away
monks. Thus the former monk, King Mongkut (Rama IV) wrote of the
tendency of women seeking husbands to regard Buddhist monks, especially
those 'grown great in fame and wealth' during their period in the
monkhood, as 'fattened hogs'. He continues the analogy of seduction
by claiming that such women 'feed ... all the toothsome tidbits and
choice delicacies calculated to break down the resistance of the holy
brother they intend to victimize' (Seni Pramoj 1950:45). In the
structural distinction between woman and monk, therefore, is the corollary
that 'women are deemed to be more firmly rooted in their worldly attachments than are men: men are thought to be more ready to give up such attachments' (Kirsch 1975:185). In terms of the Buddhist soteriological path as it is perceived in Thailand, therefore, women are less advanced, and thus necessarily have less merit as a group.

Paradoxically, although they have less merit, and are seen as needing to make more merit, the most common form of merit-making which is thought suitable for women, the daily donation of food to monks, is not itself ranked very high as an act of merit (Kaufman 1960:183-184) since it has in Tambiah's sense, no 'scarcity value' (1968:69).

There is, however, the path of merit-making suitable for women which entails both regular support of the monks in alms, and allowing one's son to become a monk. Women's sacrifice is of a different sort, from that of men therefore, and is based upon women's full participation in the worldly round of life. Although women, in popular thinking, need to make more merit, they are denied one of the prime means of such merit, i.e. ordination, but must be satisfied with the indirect merit obtained on the occasion of the ordination of their sons. Women's Buddhist role, monks may then assert, is found in the home, looking after husband and children, and extending some of the same services to monks. In this sense, women's role in relation to the Sangha, is an economic one of support, not a religious one of participation. It is worthy of note that the contribution women are seen as making to the Sangha, food and sons, is not a contribution that would accompany any rise in secular status with its implication of increased karma. It is a contribution associated with a static status based on gender. It is also possible to speculate that woman, in the fulfilment of her 'natural functions' of wife and mother, experiences her lowest
level of social independence. As has already been briefly indicated, the marriage laws until very recently have done far more to protect men's rights than women's. It is as wives, also, that a recently formed group of Thai women eulogise their own inferiority and dependence on men to an almost absurd degree:

We (women) will always accept that men are superior to use ... We will always be grateful to our husbands for everything they give us, whether children, home or the simple satisfaction of seeing them...

These oaths, taken by members of the Safety Pin women's club in Bangkok, were approved by a former Prime Minister of Thailand as models for modern Thai women in the 1970s (Mattani Rutnin 1978:103-104).

It is not only in the domestic, supportive world of the hearth that Thai women's position is clearly identified, however. For as Kirsch has written, 'Economic roles generally are not popular and tend to be associated with Thai women: men tend to specialize in religious and political roles' (1975:178-179). Thus, while men have been involved in the pursuit of the highly esteemed religious, or failing that political, goals in Thai society, the residual economic sphere has been left to Thai women and to Chinese. This is appropriate given the this-worldly orientation of women. Kirsch's argument uses Buddhist principles to elucidate the way in which, in Thailand, women's strong economic role has not been accompanied by political and ritual prominence, but rather has been diametrically opposed to these.

Maechii as religious specialists

There is little known about the history of maechii in Thailand, although there is some speculation that they came to the country with Theravada Buddhism in the thirteenth century (Prakhong Singnaathanitiraksa
Indeed, it is possible that women of this period followed the male practice of being ordained at the beginning of the rainy season (ibid.:1) but there is no reference in the existing Thai records of the Sukhothai period to the word 'chii' despite other similarities of Buddhist practice in that kingdom and present-day Thailand. The first records of maechii in Thailand in fact are found in descriptions of the Ayutthayan kingdom (1350-1767 A.D.) by Western travellers who visited the Siamese capital towards the end of the Ayutthayan period. Although there is a number of inconsistencies in the literature of this period, the reports indicate many similarities to the maechii we know today. The white garments and shorn heads which are the rule for maechii today were also in evidence then, since Gervaise explains:

They shave the hair of the head and eyebrows as do the monks, and they dress in white. This color is the most modest amongst the Siamese; it is the mourning color and also the same as that worn at all important ceremonies. (1688:88)

Both Schouten (1636:141) and Gervaise (1688:88) claim that, although they follow the activities of the monks, maechii take no vows; and although both writers report the devout participation of the nuns in religious observances and ceremonies, Gervaise reports that 'Their chief work is to attend to the needs of the monks, to prepare their food and supply their wants with continual alms.' (ibid.:88). He also reports that they are engaged in works of charity among the poor and sick laity, both of which facts might indicate that these women came of reasonably wealthy families. Both Schouten and Gervaise also report that the women live near some of the larger wat, although La Loubère claims that they are usually housed in residences within the wat compound and not strictly separated from the monks' residences.

There are a number of other features of the maechii of this time that deserve mentioning before we look at their present-day successors.
One of these is that, as both La Loubère and Gervaise report, women do not become chii until they are elderly:

... as they have much business with the monks, they are not allowed to enter the order before they attain the age of fifty years in order that there be no occasion for scandal. (Gervaise 1688:88)

Gervaise elaborates that women who follow this path rarely 'quit the outside world before it quits them', making it plain that it is the path regarded as desirable only for the elderly anyway. Age notwithstanding, the chii are, according to Gervaise, highly regarded:

They ... enjoy the same privileges as the monks and they bow to none except the priests and the pagodas ... They have a place specially set apart for them in the pagodas and at important ceremonies. They are in demand at the funerals of mandarins whither they go by order as in a procession, and their presence there is always liberally rewarded. (ibid.:88)

As discussed in a later chapter, the role of maechii in ceremonies, especially funerals, is a continued although a complex one, with ambiguities that arise out of a status that cannot be described as being simply as Gervaise once found it. Just two centuries after Gervaise there is a considerable change in tone in the description of chii given by Pallegoix. While noting that they live near monasteries, he writes that the abbots give them the white clothes by means of which they have the right to ask for alms, not only for themselves but also for the wat to which they are attached. If they are badly behaved, however, they are expelled and handed over to their parents for punishment. These 'demi-religieuses', says Pallegoix, have to recite their prayers with their backs turned (1854:II: 43). This does not sound like the respected and busy maechii of the Ayutthayan reign. Crawfurd, in fact, writing at roughly the same time as Pallegoix, reports that chii are not well respected (1828:313). Moreover, Pallegoix writes of these chii as widows who 'ne sachent que devenir', devote themselves to the service
of the monks, thus placing their motivations of pessimism and apprehension in an ambiguous light. Nor does this description of the elderly tally entirely with the idea of persons needing the chastisement of parents.

It is difficult to account for what seems to be a change in tone in such brief and inadequate records. We do know that after the sacking of Ayutthaya by the Burmese and the establishment of the new kingdom of Bangkok, one of the prime tasks of the first kings was the tightening up of the discipline of the Sangha which had been dispersed and reduced in numbers during the chaos. Rama I passed a number of laws to this end, but of the laws which were passed to exhort better relations between laypeople and Sangha — to ensure respect for and proper conduct towards the Sangha — we find only one specific reference to chii in which the king forbids them to live in or near wat. In a document which decries the laxity of many monks and the practices of laity which do not reflect appropriate attitudes towards the Sangha, this is but a small point, but it reflects the low status of the chii in the eyes of the monarch that he bans them totally from their association with wat, presumably on grounds of preventing cause for scandal, whether actual or putative. Half a century later, Pallegoix finds them attached to wat, but the power of sanction to expel them in punishment is still in existence. It is not clear from such scanty sources what the legal position of chii was in Ayutthayan times, but that they may be regarded by some as models for present-day maechii to emulate (PrakhQQng 1973:181) is a reminder that the status of maechii today is lower than it might once have been in a different social and religious climate. Since the reports we have are brief and limited, however, it is possible to conclude that maechii have not changed very much over the period of
time for which they have been part of Thai society.

Since maechii were not a feature of every wat, it is likely that even in Ayutthayan times few women became chii. The number of maechii in Thailand today is somewhat of a mystery, for they are not necessarily entered on wat records, and many may live at home. Indeed, the wide range of estimates give some indication of the lack of knowledge that surrounds the subject of maechii today. According to a Department of Religious Affairs report on maechii in 1967, there were 77,559 of them in Thailand (Prakhong 1973:4), but Prakhong (ibid.:4) asserts that 30,000 would be a more realistic figure, although she does not explain how she reached the latter figure. The Department of Religious Affairs, in its annual census reports of monastery dwellers, however, reports just over 10,000 chii in 1967, and again recorded 10,235 in 1978. This figure, which indicates stability of numbers over the last decade or so, tallies quite well with the voluntary membership of the Thai Nuns' Institute of over 7,000 in 1979. The number of registered monks in 1978, by comparison, was 221,446, and that of novices was 105,206, so it is clear that we are concerned with a relatively small proportion of the wat population in Thailand. This paucity of numbers should not be conflated with insignificance, however. It should be remembered that the number of monks belonging to the highly influential reform sect, the Thammayut, was 12,347 in 1978, not really that much higher than that of the maechii. Significantly, an unusually high proportion of the maechii recorded by the Department of Religious Affairs live in Thammayut wat.3

Maechii can be divided into various categories, since there is a certain amount of variation according to local conceptions of the maechii role, and some tendency, as among monks, to follow teachers
who offer distinctively different forms of practice. Prakhong mentions two sorts of nuns, whom she claims together represent less than 0.01 per cent of the nuns in Thailand (1973:3). The first group, called siilaoxarinii, wear dark brown robes, maintain the ten precepts of the novices, and follow the style of the Burmese 'nuns'. The Burmese nuns are, to some degree, concerned with social welfare activity. The other group wear yellow and follow either eight or ten precepts, and refer to themselves as songnii (ibid.:3). These two categories of nuns meet with a certain amount of disapproval in Thailand, since they do not conform to the Thai ideas of women keeping to a lay status, maintaining lay precepts and wearing lay clothes, but aspire more to the requirements of members of the Order.

The nuns with which this study is concerned comprise the other categories, the maechii, and maechii phraam. Maechii proper are the persons who are registered by census counts of the Department of Religious Affairs. They wear a simple white blouse and, also white, the phaasin which has become part of the national dress of Thai women since 1920 (Vella 1978:160). This costume is completed with a white cloth draped over the left shoulder. Maechii, in addition to maintaining precepts, shave the hair of the head and eyebrows, and wear plain sandals, without decoration, in accordance with the seventh precept. While in many Bangkok wat it has become common for the full length outer robe to be made of diaphanous cloth, in upcountry areas this may remain as a plain white cotton cloth. As I mentioned above, white is the traditional mourning colour (although under Western influence black is now frequently used), and also the colour expressing purity for participants of various rituals. Men and women observing eight precepts on wan phra, for example, may wear white. The clothes of the
maechii, however, closely resemble the clothes worn by the male ordinand (*naak*) after he has been ritually bathed and shaved, and before he receives his yellow robe from the Sangha. The maechii are perpetually associated with this liminal stage of the *naak*. The Thai attitude on this apparently differs from that in Sri Lanka and Burma, where a similar category of women wear robes of yellowish hue, although in each case a different shade from that of the monks.

As we have seen, Ayutthayan spectators mention the nuns following the activities of monks but without taking vows, and Kingshill, working in the north, maintains that they keep the same ten precepts as the novices (1960:73). In some areas, moreover, including the central Thai villages near which Terwiel worked, the chii maintained only the basic five precepts of all Buddhist laity (Terwiel 1979:254). Most of the maechii in Bangkok, and possibly other regions, maintain the eight precepts usually taken by laymen on days of special religious activity such as wan phra.

Maechii phraam, although named after Brahmins, are very little different from their sisters in activity or practice. However, they are women who choose to become chii for less than one month, and not to shave their hair in order to do so. This latter has earned them their title of 'brahmin nun' after the Brahmin devotees who converted to Buddhism and wore white but who did not shave their heads (Prakhoa 1973:4). They wear a shorter outer robe, but in other respects maintain the same number of precepts as the maechii with whom they take up residence, and they are bound by the same expectations. This half-way measure open to women is adopted by some who have limited time available or are 'ordaining' for a specific period for other reasons, and for whom a shaven head after the resumption of lay life does not bring the
kudos a disrobed monk may expect. Possibly because this sort of practice implies limited commitment, maechii regard it as a lesser form, and many a maechii phraam is told by older maechii or by monks that the step of shaving the head would make a lot of difference. The maechii phraam have a lower status in the wat than those with more (potential/implied) seniority, the maechii proper, and sit behind them in chanting and so forth. This is, however, virtually the only behavioural distinction made.

The comparative ease with which a woman can become a maechii, the fact that it requires only a change of clothes and the determination to maintain the precepts, means that in fact women can become maechii in their own houses, and many do so. To this extent, there is very little to distinguish maechii from pious laywomen, and partly because of this the Thai Nuns' Institute has chosen to adopt the Thai word 'chii' for the women who wear white and who should therefore maintain the eight precepts, having requested them from a monk; thus implying that the Pali word ubaasikaa be used for other pious laywomen who do not comply with a limited number of these common standards held by others. In the canonical sense, 'ubaasikaa' is used for all laywomen, as opposed to 'bhikkhunī', but in Thailand the term is usually reserved for the more devout attenders of wat ceremony and preaching, in common with its male equivalent, ubaasok (Terwiel 1979:198). Since it is easier to practise meditation and listen to sermons and so forth in the wat rather than in the house, moreover, there is a tendency to prefer maechii to reside in wat, at least on the part of those who would like to see maechii able to encourage each other. By no means every wat has maechii living within its precincts, but small numbers of them can be found in wat in both rural and urban areas, living in
houses or *kuti* within the wat compound, usually at a discreet
distance from the residences of the monks and novices. Maechii may
also simply live among the laity who have houses on the wat land, and
many even own a house there. There are also *samnak chii*, residences
for nuns, which are autonomous compounds not connected to any wat,
where maechii may live and practise together. These institutions are
usually constructed by lay patronesses, or even one of the maechii
themselves, although anyone with the inclination to do so can construct
or donate such a residence as a pious act.

Since maechii in Thailand, with rare exceptions, do not go on
almsround, they, unlike monks and novices, must be either able to support
themselves, or be attached to a patron or a wat where they receive such
support. This is, no doubt, a considerable limitation on those who
choose to lead a religious life, as well as preventing many others who
thus have no opportunity to do so. Maechii living in a wat are subject
to the conditions set by, and the authority of the wat abbot, and to
the rules of the residence itself, but there is no institutionalised
form of legal proceedings and, as we have seen, it is easy for a maechii
to be independent of formal affiliation.

No doubt partly because of the lack of uniformity of maechii there
is no widespread common attitude towards such women in Thailand, and
although their ostensible duties are similar to those of monks in terms
of chanting, study of the teachings, and perhaps most importantly,
meditation, there is a good deal of characterisation of maechii which
contrasts them unfavourably with monks. Much of the justification for
less respect shown to the maechii is as self-evident to many Thais, as
the fact that they are not members of the Order, but this in itself
is not an explanation. I will turn now to a brief survey of the sorts
of perceptions of Thai maechii most commonly expressed by Thais, before
discussing some of the implications of such perceptions.

One statement in response to my interest in maechii was that
they were not like Christian nuns; what this usually meant was that
they are not socially active, useful members of the Church devoting
themselves to the welfare of the community. The response usually came
from well-educated and Westernised laypeople who generally had quite
good notions of the role of those Christian nuns in Thailand (at least,
those who are involved in education and nursing) and had absorbed some
of the influence of Western missionary ideas about the activities of
missionaries in society. The assumption here seems to be that only
someone from a country and/or religious tradition where nuns have a
long-accepted social role would expect to investigate nuns in the
Buddhist tradition: a mistaken plan since in the latter case nuns have
no social role to speak of, nor the pastoral role which Buddhist monks
perform in their own society. Such informants could not imagine what
I could hope to learn about, i.e. from, maechii, when it is monks
who are the recognised teachers in Thai Buddhism.

The most common description of maechii which I received from a
wide range of Thais was that maechii are usually women who, for one
reason or another, have troubles and problems, and who thus flee to
the wat as a refuge from these, and as a place where they will be
looked after either indefinitely or while they recuperate. Such
problems include marital breakdown or upsets, broken hearts (often
attributed to the young), illness, poverty, the vulnerability of the
old, or just generally the troubled minds of those feeling that they
are suffering the results of bad karma.
In this sense, maechii should not be confused with ordinary laity who can manage their lives satisfactorily (cf. Phiis Phyaansaarakdii 1978:19). This view maintains that the maechii are dropouts or no-hopers with nowhere else but the wat to go, and are thus usually classified as a socially maladapted, rather than a religious, category of person. Phiis (ibid.:19) however, argues that a touch of glamour might have been added to the image of maechii by the several prominent movie stars who have become maechii for brief periods in recent years.

Another important aspect of the Thai view of maechii is that, as mentioned above, they are regarded as being just people who are following the eight lay precepts rather than the normal five, and as such are only laity. They therefore should not be considered to be different, nor should they consider themselves to be different, from ordinary laity. As lay people, they are not to be confused with monks and novices, members of the Order, even if they do dress distinctly and live at a wat, leading an essentially unworldly life. Pious laymen otherwise absorbed in mundane cares will occasionally observe the eight precepts at a wat for one day and then resume a nominal five precepts; there is no great concern over transitions from one set of lay precepts to another, and when the eight precepts are taken as the distinguishing feature of the identity of maechii, there is often a tendency to regard their lifestyle as incongruous with their ritual status.

This counting of precepts is taken quite literally by some. Some laymen (more usually, though, laywomen) will defer to maechii because they do maintain eight rather than five precepts, while novices are in this sense higher up still, maintaining ten precepts. Monks, of course, maintain an awe-inspiringly difficult 227 training rules. It is interesting to note in this regard that the original bhikkhunī,
as I have already mentioned, had many more training rules than monks, totalling at least 311.

That maechii constantly maintain, rather than occasionally make temporary observances of, the eight precepts, does for some put them in a class above the majority of laity. A striking case of fidelity to this argument was the slightly scandalised comment that arose in some quarters when the Queen, nominally a five-precept personage despite her social rank, on a formal occasion seated herself above the maechii present, thus indicating her superior ritual status. As a member of the royal family, of course, the Queen is of the class of 'mana-filled objects' that monks and Buddha images also share, and maechii are not part of this higher class.

An important concept which partly lies behind this attitude concerning precepts is the practice called buat kae bon, that of becoming a maechii in fulfilment of a vow made to a deity or spirit who has helped one overcome some difficulty such as the illness of oneself or a relative, an examination, and so forth. Such a practice is supposed to be quite frequently a reason for becoming a maechii, and it has connotations, therefore, of sacrifice of time, performing strict religious duty, and making merit. It is not too far away from the concept of buat sadp khrg, becoming a maechii after a run of bad luck in the hope that the merit made will allow an upswing in one's affairs. The Thais I spoke to recognise that monks may have been ordained in fulfilment of a vow, but maintain that this very rarely happens in comparison to the incidence among maechii.

Usually the last possibility mentioned as to why women become maechii is that of true dedication to the life laid down by the Buddha for the members of his Order. This highest aim is only ever attributed
to a small number of maechii, and it is within this framework that
the distinction between maechii and bhikkhunī is probably most pertinent. Those women who leave the lay life in order to practise dhamma free from
distraction still cannot become bhikkhunī, and can only take on the
eight precepts as such, regardless of how many other rules of discipline
they may decide on for themselves. This last factor is relevant to the
attitudes of those who hold that only ordained members of the Order,
monks (and therefore men), can ever attain arahantship, reach enlighten-
ment. In this view the eight precepts are those of laity, even if
combined with the correct practice, and preclude maechii from achieving
anything more in this life than the hope of rebirth as a mere man (a
potential monk) in the next life. Needless to say this view is not
shared by all Thais, but it does underscore difficulties behind the
perceptions of maechii who are neither one thing nor another: neither
ordained nor simply lay Buddhists.

There is, however, an idealistic representation of these sorts of
motivation of women who become chii which some maechii put forward.
Thus, according to this 'inside' tradition, the broken-hearted who come
to seek solace in Buddhism will usually leave quite soon, only to meet
new disappointments and return to the wat.

Those who are buat kae bon mostly become maechii for seven to
ten days or for a Phansaa period like the monks. But of these, some
who, for example, have been incurably ill for some time and are finally
cured as a result of the vow have their faith strengthened; sometimes
so much so that they become maechii for the rest of their lives.

Another category are those who become maechii out of anxiety,
usually the elderly who are unwilling to live alone and without children
to provide and care for them, and these women come to the wat (as do
elderly men), often never to leave again.
There are also those who come of their own accord, usually in order to practise meditation. With the practice of this discipline they are confirmed in their faith and dedicate their lives to the study of various facets of Buddhist teaching and discipline. They are not likely to leave (Phiis 1978:21).

The ultimate point of this latter counter-view is not merely a classification of types of reasons for becoming a maechii, but also reflects the common view that many roads lead to good, and that each should act according to his own level of understanding of Buddhism. Whatever the initial reasons for becoming a maechii, the experience brings people to live at the wat under the sorts of disciplines this entails, where some of the benefits of the religious life and religious teaching inevitably rub off.

I should emphasise that monks are also seen as sometimes being ordained for trivial and unworthy reasons: opting for a life of sloth while being supported by others, fleeing from a nagging wife, wishing to eat better food that that available at home, and so on (Terwiel 1979:103). Nevertheless the monkhood is seen as a vital institution and therefore worthy as a whole, and because of this importance each monk is treated with every sign of respect. As Mendelson points out, every monk is treated with respect for the saints who will occasionally emerge from the monkhood, but also as a sign of respect for what the monkhood symbolises, the embodiment of the continual practice and teaching of the dhamma (cf. Mendelson 1963:109).

There is, of course, a problem in regarding all monks with respect when purportedly most young men are likely to be monks at some stage, regardless of capability, and most monks are ordained only for a short time. The more sophisticated view argues that to really make a lot
of merit one has to be ordained with the right attitude of mind; but in Thailand this attitude is belied by the practice of cap buat, the seizing of a son to make him undergo ordination for the merit one makes as his parent or sponsor. The connotations of rite de passage of young men attaining to maturity, which writers on Thailand have noted, adds to the idea of merit automatically flowing to the monk. As such it is a rite de passage with no female equivalent, and the community which gathers to witness and share in the merit of the new monk, regards the maechii as having gone beyond normal social categories. It is ironic that the view of women being unable to cope is reinforced by those maechii who stay in the wat, while those monks who have the ability to remain monks are usually regarded with greater respect as men with the merit to be able to do so.

The concept of a strict life of religious practice for women since the demise of the Bhikkhuni-Sangha does not strike all Thais as a natural part of their Buddhist world-view. Some Thais are genuinely surprised to hear that there are women similar to maechii in other Theravada countries such as Burma and Sri Lanka, as if maechii were in fact either a unique Thai achievement, or a local Thai aberration, rather than a natural and inevitable outcome of women's religious inclinations.

The most obvious reason for the hostility of Thai Buddhists to women such as maechii lies in the anomaly of having women living in the precincts of a wat, created for the retreat of ascetic monks. Some Thais, even today, speak with disapproval of the fact that maechii are living in the same wat as the monks, echoing their former monarch. The perceived threat is of various kinds. Women living in close proximity might distract the monks from their vows, and lead to scandals which would cause the lay public to lose respect for the monks. They also,
by nature of their polluting sexuality, might weaken the powers of the charms and amulets which are so much a part of a monk's role as magical practitioner with regard to the laity, and which are correlates of the kind of power he is supposed to have amassed as a result of his practice. For this reason, women are forbidden entry to the most sacred hall of the wat, the bood, in parts of northern Thailand, and they will usually not enter it during menstruation in central Thailand. Interestingly enough, some northern Thais still believe that women who enter the hall will be ill (O'Connor 1978:72 fn.). To speak of these dangers in such a way, however, is to take a very pragmatic view, one that is not shared by all Thais, since some regard pollution as having to be avoided per se.

The power of, and consequently the respect which laity pay to the monk, are a result of his denial of those facets of life which are part of the householder's path. To have women enter the wat jeopardises the monkly role of renunciation of not only the household life but those who are part of it. The Thai male prerogatives of power over women are of two kinds: the secular and political powers they wield over women in the world, and the power of having women as theirs to renounce when they enter the sacred sphere (cf. Thitsa 1980:20). Women trailing into the wat to follow essentially the same path as men, and doing so without the Buddha's sanction, threatens the special rank of the Buddha's decreed following.

Most adult Thais who have a modicum of interest in Buddhism can be expected to know a little bit about the Bhikkhunī-Sangha. Many could point out that it was agreed to reluctantly by the Buddha and that the nuns had many rules; and that the Order has now ceased in Theravada Buddhism. To most Thais, both men and women, to whom I spoke
about this, there was an element of these three facts forming a sort of mutually reinforcing commentary on the demise of the Nuns' Order. Terwiel quotes a monk who nicely exemplifies this attitude:

> In the remote past there were indeed women in the Samgha but this practice has been given up long ago. The Lord Buddha in his wisdom never wanted women in the order, but when he was persuaded he put so many safeguards up that it became virtually impossible for women to enter. In the first place a woman has to go into a prolonged novitiate ... (1979:252)

A highly educated Buddhist man, who was also well versed in much Western thinking, pointed out that physically, psychologically and emotionally as well as socially, women would find it hard to practise the ascetic life, and that since they had so many rules it was even harder. What is important here is not women's opportunity and capacity to follow the Buddha's path in the shelter of the Sangha, but the limitations of women's nature and of the threat which this implied for the monks. On one occasion, I asked a young Northeastern monk what he thought of the idea of having bhikkhuni again, and he replied that he thought there would be problems: that perhaps they would not obey the monks, and that it would not be good for monks to have bhikkhuni living in the same place — indicating the row of monks' kuti. This monk lived in a large wat which had a small population of maechii who lived at some distance from the monks, and who did not seem to pose the same problem. This, in spite of the fact that the Buddha had thoroughly circumscribed the bhikkhuni and ensured their subordination to the monks. That the Thais wish the Bhikkhuni-Sangha to remain dead is illustrated by the case of a certain politician, Narinklung, who decided to 'revive' it by proclaiming his two daughters bhikkhuni (although, according to one report, they were merely maintaining the lay eight precepts). Whether for religious or political reasons, Narinklung was imprisoned
on charges of sacreligiously claiming powers that belonged only to
the Buddha, and thus the matter was suppressed. Despite the occasional
call for revival of the Nuns' Order through more orthodox channels,
i.e. through Mahayana nuns who have maintained an ordination line
derived from Theravada Bhikkhunī (e.g. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh 1973), most
Thais display no interest, and even strong disapproval, of the possibility
of reviving the Female Order.

The opinions on the question of the suitability of women for an
ascetic life are, of course, based on a complex of attitudes, some of
which have been discussed above. In Thai society it is, finally, only
men who can become members of the Order, part of the living tradition
of the Buddha, and revered as part of the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma,
Sangha). Only one maechii I spoke to referred to herself as hoping to
make enough merit in this life to be able to come back in the next as
a man, and therefore to hope to become a monk, but she represents a
certain portion of the population who see entry to the monkhood as a
necessary step to salvation, while being a maechii is only a means of
acquiring good merit, or simply a trouble-free life in the here-and-now.

In Bangkok, as I have stated, there is a very commonly held
opinion that the sort of women who would want to become maechii are
likely to be those of lower class origins, who with poor educational
backgrounds are likely to have very limited means of supporting them-
selves (Prakhọng 1973:4). The implication of the association of poverty
and maechii, however, is that the latter are presumed to be sheltering
under Buddhism in order to gain an easy living, and that in this way
they are no better than beggars. (This perception of maechii is rein-
forced, in Bangkok, by a number of maechii, or those appearing to be
such, who do solicit for money in the streets, and thus cast a poor
light on maechii as a whole.) Financial difficulties of maechii are also, of course, a reflection of the fact that, unlike monks and novices who have undertaken the observance of the tenth precept and do not thus accept gold and silver, maechii are not in the ritually prescribed position of being entitled to the support of the laity because of the restraints of their discipline. Since they do not usually receive the direct support of laity in the manner of the members of the Order, maechii are expected to support themselves, but not by the means available to those in the secular sphere who earn (or, illegally, beg) a living. Indeed, I have been told that maechii are sometimes referred to, in a derogatory manner, as phuuying haa kin ('women out for a living') which is an idiomatic way of referring to prostitutes.

Women who become maechii are still partially of the world, and attitudes towards them are much more likely to be based on secular considerations than are those towards monks and novices. That the women who become maechii are often poor and have few skills indicates that they have a low karmic status, and as such are not worthy of respect. Since unhappiness tends to be associated with low karmic status it is convenient to see maechii as either unhappy or poor or both, and as therefore needing not only the refuge of the wat, but also the merit that maintenance of the eight precepts can bring. Unlike monks, who by virtue of their status are considered to have moved beyond such needs, the maechii are still seen as being involved in the same path as are laity. The fact that they do maintain eight precepts, however, means that their path is superior to the laity who maintain only five, and in this sense maechii are often recognised as being worthy of respect and emulation.
That women are seen as becoming maechii for reasons of ill luck compounds the unhappy side of the image of ordination: that of the retreat from worldly problems, rather than its more positive, spiritual aspect. That Buddhism itself teaches mistrust and avoidance of worldly problems lends credence to the situation of such unhappy women. To a certain extent, however, their sexual status in itself works against maechii. Being a woman is commonly regarded as an indicator of bad karma, and hence poverty and unhappiness are not themselves inappropriate. The nature of the monk's path, however, indicates to many that being able to be a monk must indicate good karma. The idea of poor, unhappy women emulating the path, and therefore seeking to attain the status, of monks, is a contradiction in terms, and this contradiction must be seen as an important element in the ambivalent attitude of many Thais towards maechii.
Footnotes to Chapter II

1. Shulamith Potter, however, points out that at least in the north, there are firmly held views regarding the sexual division of labour with regard to some agricultural tasks (1977:56-57).

2. I am indebted to Dr C.J. Reynolds for kindly alerting me to this law, and for sending me his translation of this section, Law Eight of the Three Seals Code (1805).

3. I am using the then latest, unpublished figures given to me by the Department of Religious Affairs, according to which 209,099 (92.42%) of monks, 98,147 (93.29%) of novices and 8,255 (80.65%) maechii live in Mahaanikaai wat, in comparison to 12,347 (5.58%) monks, 7,059 (6.71%) novices and 1,980 (19.35%) maechii live in Thammayut sect wat. The percentages by sect of the monks' lay pupils, sit wat, are closer to those of the monks and novices, i.e. 86,064 (91.26%) live in Mahaanikaai wat, and 8,246 (8.74%) live in Thammayut wat.

4. Readers unfamiliar with the precepts and Vinaya code of the Theravada order are referred to the Appendix on this.

5. In Nakhon Pathom, for example, is found the establishment of a bhikkhunī ordained in the Mahayanist sect abroad, but who lives and works in her native Thailand. She is probably the only fully ordained Thai nun to do so. Having taken the Bodhisattva vows, Bhikkhunī Woramai spends time helping others as a curer. Using skills gained by meditation, she claims the ability to communicate with spirits who reveal the source of persistent maladies, and who suggest appropriate action which will remove the malevolent influence. This practice earns the bhikkhunī the respect and support of those who are the beneficiaries of these skills, but the bhikkhunī herself is all too aware of the disapproval with which most Thais regard her claim to religious status. She has a small, intermittent following of women who come to live and practise with her, but these yellow-clad devotees take only the ten precepts as well as some Mahayanist vows, and tend to follow the pattern of Thai maechii in their expectations of their own practice. This extraordinary woman, who began her 'ordained' life as a maechii before becoming dissatisfied with that, has been able to establish her own 'nunnery' with her own funds, and relies on the extravagant support of a few. She refers to her Mahayanist-influenced establishment as a watr ('tradition') which, although pronounced the same way as the monks' establishments on which it is based, does not receive the religious sanction of the Sangha.

There are a number of brown-robed nuns in Bangkok who also, according to some reports, are not approved of by many Thais. One of these groups appear to belong to the tradition established by a modern charismatic monk, Phra Phoothirak, who, I was told, had
gathered a number of like-minded, highly educated and Westernised Buddhists in a distinctive, but strict, practice. The women of this group take the ten precepts and, according to one report, refer to themselves as saamaneevi'i, i.e. novitiates of the Order of Bhikkhunī. This group as a whole seems to share in the disapproval given to their individualistic leader.

Another group of less conspicuous brown-robed nuns have their own samnak at a well-respected Mon wat in Bangkok, Wat Chanasongkhraam. This group of women obtained the special permission of the abbot to take the ten precepts on the condition that this was only for as long as the original members of the group as such remained. After the deaths or disrobing of the others, there remain now only two women. These women were commonly referred to by their white-robed sisters at the wat, many of whom are active members of the Nuns' Institute, as maechii, but distinguished verbally by reference to the colour of their robes.
Chapter Three

THE MAKING OF A MEDITATION WAT

In this chapter I introduce the reader to the Bangkok wat where my period of fieldwork was carried out. This is unusual and distinctive in ways which I shall elucidate in the following pages. I shall also relate the distinctiveness of this wat to the presence there of maechii since, as I have stated above, maechii are found at only some Thai wat, and are very rarely found in large numbers. Indeed, there are probably only seven or eight other wat in the whole of Thailand where more than, say, one hundred maechii live. No attempt was made in the field to choose what might be termed a 'typical' wat with a 'typical' maechii population, for it is to be doubted whether such an establishment could be said to exist in Thailand. Rather, the wat chosen was selected on the strength of its high reputation as regards the standards of the maechii living there, since I expected that the maechii would therefore be involved in more activities than might often be the case. As a result, the data obtained from this one wat must always be seen in relation to both the general features of practice of Thai Buddhists, and the particular facilities, orientations and status of the wat described.

Wat Paaknaam is a large and well-known wat which reputedly dates from the time of the Ayutthayan kingdom (Magness n.d.:11). It is situated on the edge of a canal in the older, Thonburi side of Bangkok. The wat is well-known among Bangkok Thai for the large number of maechii who live there, and in fact it has the largest population of maechii in
Bangkok, and one of the largest such populations in Thailand. The reputation of the wat, however, does not rest solely on the unusually large female component of its inhabitants; rather its major claim to eminence rests upon a former abbot who established the wat as a large and well-respected religious community over thirty years ago.

Local historians have traced the wat’s history over a period of several reigns, during which time it underwent several name changes before being given the local title of Wat Paaknaam, which simply refers to its position near a lock on the canal. Although several informants at the wat thought of it as a commoner wat, an official at the wat described it as Araam Luang chan trii saaman, i.e. belonging to the lowest category of the third class of royal wat. It is not clear to me when the wat achieved this status, i.e. was offered to and accepted by the King, but it is likely to have been quite some time after it was first established since the identity of the person who had the wat built is not known.

The wat belongs to the more popular of the two Thai sects, the Mahaanikaai.

Some fifty years ago Wat Paaknaam was a dilapidated residence for a dozen monks and novices, and was in need of a new head after the death of the former abbot. The monk who was sent to become abbot at this time is still referred to by the wat’s inhabitants, and is widely known throughout Thailand as 'Luang Phogg Wat Paaknaam' (the Reverend Father of Wat Paaknaam). Luang Phogg is a common term of respect used for any abbot or elderly monk, and 'Luang Phogg Wat Paaknaam' can also be used to refer to the present abbot. Nevertheless, the outstanding reputation of the former abbot, and his close connection with the wat in his later years of teaching, have led to this appellation being used as his popular title, in preference to the more usual use of an ecclesiastical title or personal name by which many famous monks in Thailand are known.
Henceforth in this work, therefore, 'Luang Phqq' will be used to refer to this earlier abbot, who late in life received the ecclesiastical title and name of Cao Khun Phra Mongkhon Theepmunii.

Luang Phqq Wat Paaknaam

Luang Phqq was born in 1885 to a village family in Suphanburi, a province a short distance to the northwest of Bangkok. From the age of nine until thirteen he received from monks the traditional education then available to most boys. When his father died shortly thereafter, however, he was forced to take responsibility for his family. According to his biographers, by the age of twenty-two he had taken a vow to be ordained as a monk and never to disrobe. This is said to have followed a profound assessment of the pattern of events that had occurred in his life hitherto (Magness n.d.:2-4). When he was ordained and could apply himself in earnest to the study of Buddhist scriptures, however, he found his fellow monks did not share his interest in, knowledge of and understanding of such works, and so he soon set off to study in Bangkok. Dissatisfied with his study pursuits there, he began to practise meditation. After failing one exam, he decided to pursue the study of Pali only until he was proficient in translating the scriptures, and thereafter turned his attention to the practice of meditation. When he had achieved some success at the latter he began to teach other monks, with good results.

The scriptural teaching of Theravada Buddhism classifies forty methods of meditation practice. The method taught by Luang Phqq is distinct from the most popular forms of meditation taught in Thailand. As it is most commonly practised, the method instructs the practitioner to repeat silently and constantly the words 'samma arahang', and to
concentrate on an imaginary sphere at the very centre of the body. Some thousands of people are said to have found this method efficacious in attaining a level of insight, and it is still popular among those who come to the wat, and among those who have been taught by pupils of Luang Phοο in other provinces. Some, however, find it restrictive and difficult. As a beginner in meditation practice, I was sometimes advised by outsiders to concentrate on a simpler word such as 'Phutthoo', and to aid concentration by breathing practice, the favourite aid to concentration in meditation in Thailand. An experienced European monk, who spent some years practising at Wat Paaknaam before finding a new meditation master, pointed out that the sphere at the centre of the body is exceedingly difficult for many people to 'see', and that as an object of concentration it is unnecessarily specific. The aims as well as the methods of an individual's practice are a matter for personal preference. Those who come to live or practise meditation at Wat Paaknaam are, ostensibly, those who have found, or expect to find, Luang Phοο's method the most efficacious for them. Besides method, however, skill as a teacher, and charisma as both a teacher and monk, play an important part in the number of followers a meditation master gains. Tribute was paid to these qualities in Luang Phοο by the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha after Luang Phοο's death when he named him as being 'the finest teacher in both Samatha Kammathana and Vipassana Kammathana, being without peer in this respect, combined with the personality of a great and compassionate sage' (Magness n.d.:51).

Luang Phοο's rise to fame as a meditation teacher is by no means unique. Despite official titles and praise from the Sangha, however, Luang Phοο's career reflects some of the ambivalence in relation to the Sangha which arises from the duality, which borders on institutionalized
rivalry in Thai Buddhism, between scriptural study and the practice of meditation. In her study of monks in Ayutthaya, for example, Bunnag found a low level of interest in meditation and, moreover, the attitude that it was an activity more suited to nuns [maechii], to saiyasat monks (i.e. those who are magical practitioners) and thudong (wandering) monks; each of these in their own way being members of marginal categories of religious personnel. Bunnag comments that the pursuit of religious knowledge, in that it is more easily assessable in terms of certificates, is an activity more highly valued (1973:54).

Nevertheless, there is an increasing interest in meditation (ibid.: 54 fn.), a movement in which maechii are often enjoined to participate. The lay meditation movement in Thailand started in Bangkok as long ago as the 1930s (Van Esterik 1977:135), but was revived more strongly in the late 1950s with an emphasis on the use of meditation 'to find relief from worldly cares and burdens' (Tambiah 1976:260). No doubt Luang Phq9's reputation benefited from the timing of his own career with the projects of Bangkok monastic leaders. At the time of the fifties peak, for example, nun followers of Luang Phq9 were proselytising in the village near Suphanburi later studied by Van Esterik (1977:154). In his biography, however, Luang Phq9 is said to have resisted the blandishments of the Supreme Patriarch who tried to tempt him away from meditation to administrative rank in the Sangha (Magness n.d.:12).2

The new attraction of meditation for Thai Buddhists3 is not easy to fathom. Kirsch tentatively ties this trend to the disappearance of folk Brahmanism, a phenomenon which leaves unmediated the confrontation of abstract Buddhism with the inevitable complex of

affirmation of the basic morality of the laity despite their involvement in the mundane world, legitimation of the formation of attachments in the world, and accounting for the moral implications of illness. (Kirsch 1977:266)
Van Esterik, in a study of a small central Thai market town, argues that some villagers 'who have failed relative to their self-perceived status in the community' use claims regarding their meditation practice as a way of improving their standing (1977:1). Of course, theoretically it is monks, in their retreat from the world, who have at their disposal the time to not only study Buddhism but also to practise the teachings, especially meditation. The fact that even the Sangha-inspired meditation movement gradually raised a following in which more laity have become involved than have monks (Tambiah 1976:260) may, however, indicate that meditation is still more strongly associated with the path of the layman than of the monk. Moreover, since there is such a strong emphasis on education of monks, and since this education is the prime means of social mobility open to monks (see Chapter 6 below), those monks who follow the educational path may more often be those of lower educational background, while those monks who emphasize the refined practice of meditation may have higher secular status backgrounds. Monks, therefore, may be involved in meditation in patterns which are the reverse of those of laity in this respect, but those participating in meditation are likely to remain a minority and not so involved in centralised activities as student monks. Nevertheless, personal ability and inclination undoubtedly play a part and this is accepted by many liberal Thais as inevitable. There is enough general acceptance of the importance of the correct practice of meditation, however, that the highly skilled practitioners like Luang Phọọ, will achieve wide respect as exemplars and disseminators of meditation techniques, whatever the variety of interpretation this respect can lead to.

Many stories are told of the various powers of Luang Phọọ which deal only partly with his skill in meditation practice. These stories
indicate very well Luang Phǒo's fitness to fulfil the roles he is still assigned at the wat. Some of these tales describe him as a sort of guardian angel of the wat community. On one occasion, for example, Luang Phǒo is said to have requested a boat owner to ride more slowly past the temple. The man travelled past the wat frequently, and invariably at a speed which created much noise as well as disturbance of the canal. The man rudely ignored Luang Phǒo's request, and continued his mad dashes past the wat. One day, however, when he rode past, Luang Phǒo was seated by the canal, and as the boat sped past him the engine suddenly died. The man was unable to start the engine until he realised that Luang Phǒo had managed to make the boat stop. Amazed at his powers, the man decided not to ignore Luang Phǒo's request and thereafter drove past the wat at a considerate pace. Peace and tranquillity were thus restored to the wat.

Those living at the wat who have renounced the worldly life are dependent on those who wish to make merit by supporting them. I shall argue below that at Wat Paaknaam the precarious nature of this dependence has changed, due largely to the influence of Luang Phǒo. Even today people speak of Luang Phǒo as providing the means of support for the large number of inhabitants at the wat, and this ability is also substantiated by anecdotes about the man's life:

Once, the rice supply in the [wat kitchen's] store had reached its dregs, and there seemed no prospect of a fresh supply for the meal next day. The bhikkhu in charge of the store was at his wit's end, and went to inform the Abbot. He was told not to worry and to be calm, there would be rice. The bhikkhu, however, had his doubts and returned to his cell to brood upon the problem. That evening, boats filled to the brim with rice came to anchor right in front of the Wat, and sackfuls of rice were unloaded and carried to the store, filling it up, to the amazement of those in charge. (Magness n.d.:7)

When it is remembered that Luang Phǒo had in his care several hundred people, as a result of his own organisation of the wat, the implication
of the powers attributed to Luang Phoq in this tale can be appreciated.

Another tale makes clear the uncanny insight Luang Phoq is thought to have achieved through long practice of mind control. An American visiting Thailand heard of Luang Phoq's powers and decided to test them out. He went to see Luang Phoq and the latter, with his ability to send his mind (cit) far away, was able to tell him how each of his relatives was occupied at the time. The American noted the time and the activities and places mentioned, and then phoned home to America. Luang Phoq had been right on every point. Such great mental powers are not confined to trivialities, of course. As is the case with most meditation masters in Thailand, Luang Phoq is credited with great beneficial powers of healing:

The Chao Khun was always being implored to heal layfolk, who did not have to do anything, not even come in person, but just post a letter stating name, time, date of birth, and the illness, and that was enough. There would be long distance healing by mind. No trouble and no fuss. (Magness n.d.:12)

The powers which were ascribed to Luang Phoq during his life have not diminished with either death or the passage of time. He is still considered to be saksit (having supernatural powers). These powers are still thought to be resources to be tapped by both individuals and the community living at the wat. I was told of the case of a man who, suffering from severe headaches, had sought the advice of a doctor, and been told that he needed brain surgery. Thoroughly frightened by this, he went to Wat Paaknaam to meditate (nang phaawanaa). He then went to the hall set aside for the coffin of Luang Phoq. He told Luang Phoq of his problem, and before leaving drank some of the water which is set near the coffin. This water (nammon) is supposed to have absorbed beneficial qualities through its close proximity to the corpse of Luang Phoq, and thus is thought to have medicinal effects. When the man next
visited a doctor the latter found that he had recovered. Other similar tales indicate the continued faith in Luang Phŏq's healing abilities.

Many people seek Luang Phŏq's help for more mundane problems of employment, domestic strife, or simply out of depression. Sometimes answers to questions are sought, perhaps more often calmness of mind is expected. Such visitors make offerings to Luang Phŏq, drink nammon for whatever beneficial effect they desire, or sit and meditate in his hall. Many visitors to the hall spoke of the psychological comfort such activity brought them simply by virtue of being close to Luang Phŏq. Throughout the day the hall is visited by dozens of people who come alone, in twos or threes, or in family groups, to pay obeisance. For laity, this visit may be an end in itself on weekdays, or it may be combined with social calls on monks or maechii if they have any contacts at the wat. On weekends such a visit is likely to be part of an extended stay at the wat, incorporating meditation practice in one of the group sessions held in the Meditation Hall or, more often, presentation of food to the monks for the pre-noon meal. Irrespective of other reasons for visiting the wat, a call to pay one's respects to Luang Phŏq is regarded as obligatory. Similarly, most of those who live at the wat visit Luang Phŏq's Hall one or more times during the day as part of their daily routine. Some of the maechii who live at the wat spoke of Luang Phŏq's presence as a major reason for coming to live at Wat Paaknaam, regarding him both as a guide and as a protector. One even spoke of a 'vision' of Luang Phŏq, then long dead, telling her to come and live at his wat. Among those who come to the wat attracted by the reputation of Luang Phŏq, some come to study meditation under his direction, and others still come in the expectation
that he will be helping them in their new life. For many of these Luang Phò's 'presence' is an integral part of the peace of mind which comes with being a maechii or a monk.

There are many levels at which Luang Phò still plays a very important part in the activities at Wat Paaknaam. Inhabitants of the wat speak of themselves as living by the munificence (baaramii) of Luang Phò. This can refer not only to the kind of active interaction with Luang Phò mentioned above, but also to participation in the more general ambience of goodness or merit (bun) which is a corollary of Luang Phò's achievement in the practice of Buddhist meditation. Both of these aspects are reflected in the activities which take place in Luang Phò's Hall.

When Luang Phò died, his body was placed in a coffin and carried to the top storey of the wat's Pali Institute, where it remained in state for more than four years. Here, where Luang Phò had so often taught, people came to pay their respects. For some time, on certain special days of the year, authorities even placed his body on view to the public in a glass coffin. Although Luang Phò's successor as abbot intended to cremate his body, his followers (luuksit) requested the abbot not to do so, and it was eventually decided that a special building be erected for those who continued to come to pay homage. Thus Luang Phò's Hall was built on the site of his wooden kuti (monk's dwelling). The hall is a small, two storey building at the centre of the wat, near the present abbot's quarters, in the general reception area of the wat. From the entrance, steps lead up to the single large room dominated by an alcove immediately opposite. In the alcove is a high stand atop which is the gold-painted coffin of Luang Phò. To the right of this is an elevated standing figure of Luang Phò, now
quite featureless because of the thick, spongy layers of gold leaf applied by reverent visitors over the years. To the left of the coffin is another, seated figure, this of Luang Phòg Lek ('little Luang Phòg'), a distinguished disciple of Luang Phòg. This statue is also covered in gold leaf. In front of the coffin, to the right, is a low couch seat, as if for Luang Phòg. On the front section of this a cloth has been spread, and trays are placed to receive offerings of flowers. Beside it is a donation box. On this couch, as on that near Luang Phòg Lek, trays of food are presented each day by a maechii just prior to the mid-day presentation of food to the monks. Next to Luang Phòg’s couch stands the urn of beneficial water (nammon). At the front, on the left, are the usual receptacles for lighted candles and incense. On the right are a common feature of Thai scenes of worship, Chinese fortune sticks and blocks. Many visitors shake the sticks to find a particular numbered fortune card, which will tell them their fortune for the day. The Chinese blocks, when thrown, reveal answers to more specific questions.

Just to the right of the alcove, on a long dais, is a small stand for a Buddha image. Over at the left hand side of the hall is a stand with a seated image of the former Supreme Patriarch, Luang Phòg’s successor as abbot at Wat Paaknaam. Most visitors to the hall make obeisances to the Buddha, Luang Phòg, and the Supreme Patriarch in turn, then make an offering to Luang Phòg, and address any further devotional acts to him. At Wat Paaknaam, as at any other wat, many requests are made for monks to chant by laymen seeking to make merit. At Wat Paaknaam this chanting is most often held in Luang Phòg's Hall. Throughout the day the voices of monks or maechii are heard rising in unison from the hall. On such occasions the monks sit on the dais on
the right hand side of the hall on which the Buddha image stands. As many as eighteen monks can be accommodated here. On the rarer occasions when maechii are invited to chant, they usually sit on the floor in front of this dais, or in front of Luang Phò's alcove. When both monks and maechii are invited to chant alternately, the maechii are seated over on the opposite side of the hall, near the image of the Supreme Patriarch. These chanting sessions in the hall were explained by one informant at the wat as occasions on which the laity request the monks or maechii to suat thawaay Luang Phò, or suat sawatdii Luang Phò (chant as an offering to, or as a greeting to Luang Phò). Laity feel that they can make extra merit if, on the occasion on which they are to make merit, they orient their activities towards Luang Phò rather than merely towards the Sangha as a whole. This orientation is a mark of respect for such an eminent and accomplished monk. On weekends such chanting is likely to be part of an offering of food to some of the wat monks held in the hall.

The hall is continuously staffed from early morning until evening. Laywomen sit by the candles and incense and accompanying donation box at the entrance. They endlessly thread onto wire the small white fragrant flowers that are used to make offerings to monks, and these are then offered rather than sold to the laity who are expected to make merit in the form of donations when they select offerings for Luang Phò. These women work shifts throughout the day, and, with a few maechii, companionably share the tasks of repeatedly sweeping, dusting, and tidying the offerings after the visitors. Early each day fresh flowers are placed on the stands of each of the revered personages. The hall is the last public building to be closed and locked at night.
Apart from the routine activities which laity choose to hold in the presence of Luang Pho, much public merit-making for specific occasions is held in the hall. During the period of fieldwork, several newly-donated Buddha images were given a place in the hall. Some weeks before the festival of Songkran three small images, one of the Buddha, one of Luang Pho, and one of the former Supreme Patriarch, each in a brass bowl, were placed in front of Luang Pho's alcove. For several months, laity visiting the hall incorporated into their ritual respects the act of pouring water over each of the three images in turn (song naam phra). Similarly, during Phansaa (Buddhist rainy season retreat), four of the large yellow candles (donated in order to be lit every wan phra of the season) stood in front of Luang Pho's stand. (A few more of these candles stood in the bood (ordination hall), several more in the abbot's kuti, and four others, two of which had been cast at the wat itself on the first day of Phansaa, completed the wat's tally.) Another wat which was to have a thoot phaapaa (fund raising ceremony) to which many of Wat Paaknaam's inhabitants and regular visitors were going, had the benefit of a 'money tree' standing ready for donations in Luang Pho's Hall. Wat Paaknaam itself collected donations for its own end-of-Phansaa Kathin ceremony in the hall.

The wat promotes its public image very much in terms of the reputation of its former abbot. At the levels of both everyday, informal, and small group merit-making, and official festival merit-making, Luang Pho's Hall is the major centre of activity at Wat Paaknaam. The wat provides every facility in the hall for such activity, and the opportunities are taken up by many people. Opposite Luang Pho's Hall, at the public reception area, images, lockets, and photos of Luang Pho are sold to casual visitors and wat inhabitants alike. The largest portrait
photo can be purchased for 900 baht. Laity who donate funds above a certain amount are given framed certificates as a memento, and these have Luang Phoq's portrait at the top, and are signed by the present abbot at the bottom. The wat also sells books and pamphlets on Luang Phoq's life and teaching in Thai, English, and Japanese. (Monks with native proficiency in the latter two languages have donated the translations.) The title of the wat's monthly magazine, 'Mongkhon-News' is a play on Luang Phoq's ecclesiastical name, Mongkhon Theepmuni: mongkhon means 'auspicious'. A large, well-attended festival is held at the wat each year to celebrate the anniversary of Luang Phoq's birthday. This close association of the wat with Luang Phoq, so long after his death, is due partly to the fact that Luang Phoq was not cremated, but still lies in state, still with the power to draw those impressed by his meditation skills.

Most Thais believe that the proper rites for the dead involve cremation of the corpse and collection of the ashes, which should, ideally, be kept somewhere in close proximity to a Buddha image. The other important elements of a Thai funeral ceremony involve various rites most of which are concerned with making merit, and most of this merit is then transferred to the dead. As Wells points out,

over the basic mood of gloom there has grown up a feeling that meritorious acts and the grace of the Lord Buddha can aid the condition of the departed. Not all the teaching of Anatta (not-self) can quite eradicate anxiety lest the deceased exist as pretas or as beings suffering torment. For this reason relatives do what they can to ameliorate their condition. (Wells 1975:214)

The most notable features of a Thai funeral are the chanting of monks, and the final-day rites performed by them prior to cremation. The family of the deceased have as many nights of chanting as their wealth and audience's time permit. For the rich, some time is likely
to be spent before the commencement of the funeral in making more elaborate arrangements, arranging funds, and allowing as many people as possible to come in time to pay their respects to the dead. In the case of Luang Pho Wat Paaknaam, however, these events have been entirely postponed for a range of reasons which have brought about the close relationship between Luang Pho and the wat as it exists today.

I asked a youthful member of the Wat Paaknaam community about the lying-in-state of Luang Pho. Her reply to the question of why he had not been cremated was simple and disarmingly pragmatic: if they cremated Luang Pho there would be no more of his supernatural powers for people to call upon. Asked to elaborate, she pointed out that once the body of Luang Pho was cremated his spirit (winyaan) would go to heaven (sawan), and from there he would not help people. While his spirit is forced to linger near his body in this world, its beneficial powers can still be made use of. The fact that these powers are believed to have scarcely diminished after twenty years is attested to by the large numbers of people who still come to pay their respects and to seek help from Luang Pho.

Keyes (1975:46) argues convincingly that there may be very great differences between the powers associated with the lingering spirit of a layman and those of the spirit of a deceased monk. The spirit of the former may become a malevolent ghost, and is feared as dangerous by friends and relatives of the deceased. For this reason an important part of paying one's respects to the dead is the act of asking for the deceased's forgiveness for any wrong done to him. This is not the case, however, with the spirit of a deceased monk of long standing who is believed to have accumulated great merit. Keyes points out that the corpse of such a monk 'is auspicious since it becomes a unique field of
merit' (ibid.:47) for those who come and make offerings to it. This field of merit is very much in evidence at Wat Paaknaam. Indeed it is rare, if not unique, for a monk to be kept without cremation as long as Luang Pho. Keyes mentions as outstanding the case of a Northern Thai monk, Khruba Siwichai, whose body was kept for eight years before being cremated (ibid.:45, fn.).

Of course, it is not only the visiting laity for whom Luang Pho has continued to be an unlimited resource. Another informant, a monk of over ten year's standing at the wat, had another reply as to why Luang Pho had not been cremated. He explained that the inhabitants of the wat were all living by the baaramii of Luang Pho; that because of his baaramii people continued to donate money to the wat; and that because of this those at the wat could construct the buildings they needed, and so forth. If Luang Pho were to be cremated, however, that would finally bring to an end the stream of merit-makers and their donations. Thus, until Buddhists showed signs of forgetting their respect for Luang Pho, it would not be beneficial to cremate him. What was at issue for this informant was the desire and need of the laity to make merit, and the importance of maintaining opportunities for them to do so. The point was not that the wat was making money out of Luang Pho but that it was a stimulus to the laity to make as much merit as possible, and that simultaneously, the wat has become the symbol of a meritorious and pious community. The pride of a Buddhist community can be measured in the support it gives to the Sangha, and the respect for the dhamma found among laity as well as monks. Although the inhabitants of, and the regular visitors to the wat are not a discrete community geographically, they have the common achievement of the successful perpetuation of a vital religious centre. The linchpin of Wat Paaknaam's
unusual degree of success is Luang Phq9. Luang Phq9's teaching is still highly respected and followed by many who regard Luang Phq9 as having an unusual degree of insight into the Dhamma and thus extra ability to help others attain insights and contentment as suits their individual capabilities. The living tradition of Luang Phq9 entitles those who so desire it, access to learning, help, and merit, all of which stem from Luang Phq9's quality of saksit and his baaramii.

The development of Wat Paaknaam

Luang Phq9 died in 1959 at the age of seventy-two. After his death a new monk was sent to replace him as abbot. This monk stayed for seven years at Wat Paaknaam. Some time after he left he became the seventeenth Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha (Sangharaja): Somdet Phra Vannarat, a position he held while abbot at Wat Phracetuphon. So we may deduce that by this time Wat Paaknaam was an important wat for advancement within the Sangha, a development which was probably due solely to the influence of Luang Phq9. This monk was replaced as abbot of Wat Paaknaam by the present abbot, a distinguished monk who has attained the highest scholastic standards and who continues to hold important ecclesiastical office. This abbot came to Wat Paaknaam to be ordained as a novice around forty years ago and has spent most of his subsequent monastic career at Wat Paaknaam.

Very little is left of the wat as it was when Luang Phq9 first arrived; only the old library and a few older residences remain. Since Luang Phq9's death a great deal of building has been going on, and the priorities of the authorities at the wat are clearly documented in the successive projects for which laity have been willing to donate funds. The wat is now a well-organised and aesthetically very pleasing compound,
and is a tribute to the collective efforts of its supporters. As I shall show a little later, the precedence of certain elements of the monastic life as set out by Luang Phq9 have been maintained, and it is for the achievement of many of his ambitions that the organisers of the wat's development have worked. Those in charge of such planning decisions have followed priorities of most urgent need as they see them, and as each new project comes up, further help for specific building projects is invited over and above the general funds which the wat obtains from the laity for upkeep. To encourage such support each specific donation is carefully recorded and publicly displayed on large noticeboards, signifying the merit each individual has made.

Of the modern wat as it exists today, only the large school (Pali Institute) had been constructed before his death to remain a memorial to Luang Phq9's leadership. The present-day inhabitants of the wat acknowledge that they have received the wherewithal for the recently constructed buildings through the munificence of Luang Phq9. It is because of his spiritual achievement and the donations of people who respected him and came to make merit by donating to him at the wat, that the wat could have the buildings that it needed. And it must indeed have needed them. Estimates by present-day inhabitants of the peak number of monks and novices who lived at the wat for Phansaa during the time of Luang Phq9 ranged between four and five hundred to over six hundred and the number of maechii was said, variously, to be about three hundred or to be about the same as the monks. In spite of the huge numbers, until quite late the wat's population was housed in wooden kuti (small traditional dwellings often accommodating only one monk); and wooden houses, some of them quite old. It was only after the death
of Luang Phō that three large, modern, two and three storey dormitory-style residences were built for the monks and novices. One of the first constructions after Luang Phō's death was the rebuilding of the old boon (ordination hall) accompanied by new sacred boundary stones (siima). After these were completed work was started on the Meditation Hall (Huggaroen vipassanaa), a lavish and graceful two-storey building which reportedly cost 6 million baht to complete, and which replaced an older hall. In the top storey of this all-white building, monks, nuns and laity gather to meditate each evening in air-conditioned cool and quiet, sometimes in numbers up to two hundred or more. Here, beside the large Buddha image, is a life-size image of Luang Phō seated in meditation.

The wat faces onto the canal, which presumably provided the original means of transport to the wat, but today almost all visitors arrive by car or on foot from the rear, past the monks' quarters and the school into the central section where the Meditation Hall, reception area, abbot's kutī, and Luang Phō's Hall are located (see figure 1). Running along one side of the wat is a large group of wooden houses, some old, some of fairly recent construction. Many of these, I was told, were originally houses of laity who donated them to the wat. They are built on wat land, and are now occupied by maechii and laywomen in some cases, and in a few by laywomen and laymen. The laypeople regard themselves as following the five precepts and as living 'in' the wat. On the opposite side of the wat another residence for maechii was built about thirty years ago, where formerly there were trees and open ground. This residence is a wooden two-storey building which houses over fifty maechii and some laywomen. Nearby is a large house for maechii and other houses for laypeople living within the precincts of the wat. The
communal washing area of this section borders on the canal, where many of the domestic tasks of the maechii are carried out. Like the other residents further along the canal, therefore, the maechii are subject to the gaze of all who pass in boats and ferries.

Among the boat passengers along the canal are foreign tourists on their way back from the 'floating market', a favourite tourist attraction in Bangkok. Each morning between eight and nine or so, a seemingly endless series of boats takes dozens of tourists past the wat, with commentaries given in a number of Western languages or Japanese. The wat is a point of interest on the journey for a number of reasons. On one occasion it was pointed out by a tourist guide as a wat where 'they have about two hundred nuns working for the monks'. More often, however, its impressive visual impact is referred to. One enthusiastic guide claimed it to be the 'most beautiful temple in Thailand'. Tourists are also escorted here for a brief walking tour in ones or twos, often in time to photograph the maechii chanting.

From the canal the main object of interest is the newly built saalaa kaaparion which replaces the original wooden saalaa. The old saalaa was used until a few years ago when it seemed in danger of collapsing. The replacement is a large and splendid two-storey building with wide steps leading up to a long terrace running the length of the building. In front of the entry path a large sign welcomes all believers. The open courtyard and the terrace in front of the saalaa is the gathering place for many of the wat's festivities. The length of the saalaa is divided by a series of bright red double doors of old Siamese design, each surrounded by a heavy gilt frame. These are repeated on the second storey by similar, smaller shuttered windows. White staircases lead up to the second storey at each end with grand
symmetry. This imposing facade was used as a set to shoot scenes from a melodramatic movie involving, as a climax, a woman's decision to become a maechii. Both this building and the Hoocharoen wipassanaa adapt characteristic elements of traditional Thai architecture in original designs.

The saalaa was completed in 1977. To make way for its construction houses belonging to laity had to be removed. Directly behind the saalaa is the kitchen where all meals are prepared, and where, by the edge of the canal, the dishes are washed by the maechii. Above the large kitchen is a dormitory for about thirty maechii, a modern and comfortable residence where the huanaa (head) of the maechii lives, and where many of the new maechii are accommodated for some time so they can be closely supervised. It is here also that overseas laywomen guests are accommodated.

The latest and most ambitious project of construction at the wat is a three-storey building which at the time of fieldwork was in early stages of construction. Signs inviting donations are erected at the wat for this large complex, which is to be a museum of Buddhism, a library to replace the rather crowded one now located in the wat school, and, on the third floor, superior accommodation for monks visiting from overseas. Senior monks of the temple have quite extensive contacts with other countries, especially Japan, and expect to offer hospitality to visiting monks. In contrast to some earlier buildings, where monks and maechii contributed quite a lot of labour, this building is being constructed entirely by lay builders, who sometimes work late into the night and who are housed at the wat during construction.

The library, moreover, is not the last of the wat's constructions. The next project, I was informed, is likely to be a modern two or three
storey dormitory residence for maechii. This is to be located behind the saalaa-kitchen where the many houses of maechii and laity at present stand. This is expected to accommodate more maechii than do the present buildings, and relieve the cramped conditions of many of the residence sections, where maechii are sometimes crowded in four or five to a room. It is estimated that construction is not likely to begin within four years at the present rate of fund-raising. When the present library-museum complex is complete, the laity will be asked to donate money specifically for the accommodation of maechii. Further still in the future, some of the wooden dormitories at present housing maechii will be torn down to make way for a badly needed carpark for weekend visitors.

The wat inhabitants also expect yet another rebuilding of the bood in the future, for the present structure is too small. During Phansaa not even a fair proportion of the monks can enter the bood at one time.

From this description of the layout of the wat, it can be seen that there is a clear separation of the living quarters of monks and novices from those of the maechii. It appears, also, that this has long been the case, and was probably so from the time that monks and maechii came to live at the wat. At the 'front' of the wat surrounding the kitchen-saalaa, are the houses of the maechii and laity, and at the back, away from the canal, and diametrically opposed to the spread of the houses of maechii, are the quarters of the monks and novices which surround the school. Between them stand, in the centre of the wat, the bood, Luang Phq's Hall, the public reception area, the abbot's kuti, the meditation hall, and now the museum. The residences of the monks are walled off and sheltered; the wooden houses of many of the maechii border the paths leading into and through the wat. Although
both populations are scattered each into several residences, they are not formally divided into different sections.

Many Thais pointed out to me that where maechii lived within a wat (and they sometimes live outside or on the fringe), the quarters of the monks and the maechii must be quite separate. Wat Paaknaam, in spite of overcrowding, certainly conforms to this rule. As later discussion will show more clearly, the spatial layout of the monks and maechii at the temple also clearly reflects the division of labour within the wat, and facets of wat life which provide a common ground to the two sexes in the temple.

In spite of all this recent construction the present population, although large, has actually decreased considerably from the estimated population at the time of Luang Pho. From around five hundred monks and novices, the figure has dropped to two hundred and eighty monks, seventy-six novices, and from roughly five hundred maechii to two hundred and forty-nine during the Phansaa of 1979. By some standards, and especially in the case of the maechii, the wat accommodation is crowded, most notably during Phansaa when the population reaches its peak. Some women at least, are turned away at Phansaa because of this problem. However, there is no room remaining for new building within the boundaries of the wat.

Luang Pho's rabiab: the tradition of Wat Paaknaam

At Wat Paaknaam there has been a good deal of attention paid to continuing the rabiab (set of rules) which Luang Pho first established. This established pattern emphasises both rigorous scholastic training (a feature of Thai Buddhism which has become a more common and explicit element of monasticism in Bangkok since Luang Pho was first ordained),
and the practice of Luang Phò's method of meditation. Facilities for both are amply provided and thus because of this tradition, Wat Paaknam draws both ordained and lay from a widely dispersed community, and no longer merely functions as the religious centre of a local community.

Luang Phò's teaching of meditation slowly gained support from the time he first began systematic teaching at Wat Paaknam. He established several classes at the wat. He gave a weekly class open to monks, novices, maechii and lay men and women, which was held on Thursdays at two o'clock in the afternoon. The tradition has been continued. At this same time monks, maechii and laity gather each week to practise meditation together. A tape of Luang Phò teaching meditation techniques is played at the start of the session, and the assembled followers sit with hands raised in respect, facing the tape-recorder as they would Luang Phò himself. Another tradition started by Luang Phò was the 'relay teams' of meditation. These consisted of groups of monks and laymen in one section, and maechii and laywomen in another, each of which maintained a twenty-four hour a day session of meditation in shifts, following each other day and night. These two relays have also continued up to the present time. Luang Phò also taught meditation every day to all interested in coming to practise, and this again is clearly continued at the daily evening meditation class. By means of these sessions, for which he was personally responsible, Luang Phò steadily drew to Wat Paaknam a large following as a great teacher of meditation.

Luang Phò also managed to establish a school for the study of the Pali language and the Buddhist scriptures. In 1939 the large, three storey school was built at the wat under Luang Phò's supervision, at the cost of two and a half million baht. By the early sixties an estimated one thousand monks and novices studied at the school (Magness
n.d.:13), making it a large learning centre which drew pupils from other wat as well as those at Wat Paaknaam. Luang Pho himself discoursed on the dhamma each full moon and quarter day, and Sunday (Magness n.d.:16). As I shall show later, the school is still an important centre, and the present-day authorities still maintain a high priority on the task of learning for the inhabitants of the wat.

Yet another feature of the way in which Luang Pho sought to create at Wat Paaknaam the conditions he felt necessary for the pursuit of the religious life, has had equally long lasting results. This is the establishment of a refectory at the wat. Luang Pho himself came from a humble rural family, and he is said to have been impressed by the implications of poverty at a very early age (Magness n.d.:1). More importantly, during his first few days in Bangkok as a monk he received very little or no food to eat when he went on his morning almsround. This traumatic experience is said to have led him to make a vow that, when he was able, he would establish a kitchen at his wat which would distribute food for the monks and novices, and this, eventually, he came to do at Wat Paaknaam. The kitchen he had built at the wat cost 360,000 baht (Magness n.d.:7), and at the beginning rice had to be supplied from Luang Pho's family's farm in Suphanburi. Eventually, however, donations of money and food from the laity supplied the needs of the wat, as they continue to do today. The monks and novices of Wat Paaknaam, then, do not go out on morning almsround, but have their food prepared for them en masse at the wat. The morning almsround is a rite whereby the monk leaves his retreat to venture into the world in order to allow the laity to perform their duty of support of the sangha by the presentation of food to monks who are by their vows prohibited from tilling the fields. This venturing forth is granted considerable moral significance by Buddhists, and is
one of the most important forms of interaction among ordained and laity. It is also, for the laity, and often especially for the laywomen who cook the food, a major opportunity for merit-making. At Wat Paaknaam, the food cooked at the wat is bought from the money donated in various ways by the laity. As Luang Pho decreed, the maechii and laywomen of the wat have the responsibility of buying and cooking the food. Of course, the laity still earn merit by donating money to provide food, but the process becomes less ritualised and more impersonal. Some informants at the wat also pointed out that this indirect sponsoring of meals was more convenient for the laity. Monks break their fast, which starts at noon, after sunrise the next morning. The almsround is usually begun at early dawn. The system of cooking food at the wat each morning thus saves the laity from having to cook very early in the morning, and, for the laity who live some distance away, as is frequently the case with the dispersed community who support this wat, from having to bring it to the 'rounds' of the monks. Indeed, laity who came to watch the monks eat their first meal of the day were very few. Nevertheless, there were always lay representatives present at pre-noon meals, and on weekends and wan phra their numbers were in fact very large.

The system of catering was not only convenient for laity in a modern urban setting, of course; it was primarily designed as being suitable for the monks and on these grounds the wat authorities do not encourage monks of the wat to go on almsround. Not only does Wat Paaknaam itself have a very large number of monks and novices to be fed every day, but the wat itself, located in the amphoe of Phasiicaroen, lies in the second most highly-populated amphoe in Bangkok both in terms of wat and monks (Raaingaan Saasanoa lae Wathanatham Praaampii 2520:279). There are perhaps ten wat in very close proximity to Wat Paaknaam. Authorities
at the wat argue that the laity in the surrounding districts cannot support so many monks on an almsround, and so it is better that they be fed at the wat itself. Wat Paaknaam is in a good position to rely on funds in that many lay visitors to the temple do not live close by but come some distance on weekends and donate money then and it is possibly because of the non-local nature of its supporters, which in turn implies superior status vis-à-vis neighbouring wat, that Wat Paaknaam likes to be able to provide for its own. Notwithstanding this support, a few monks from Wat Paaknaam do maintain the traditional almsround for symbolic reasons. An establishment of such convenience for monks and laity is, however, something of a mixed blessing for the maechii of Wat Paaknaam. Meals for so many monks require more than a few hands to organise, prepare and clean up and, as I shall discuss below, the work involved in the preparation of food becomes a major factor in the daily routine of a large number of maechii at the wat. Time and energy spent in this duty may mean less time for study or meditation for individual maechii. However, as I discuss in the following chapter, it in some part increases the status of the maechii population at the wat in allotting them a specific role which is justified in terms of Luang Phūn's vision of the wat community.

The heritage of Luang Phūn

As a wealthy and eminent wat, Wat Paaknaam has developed into a specialised wat catering to a dispersed community (cf. O'Connor 1978:112) in terms of both visiting laity, and those who come to be ordained there. Within the urban context, Wat Paaknaam does not have to meet the various needs of the local community as a social centre,4 and has indeed specialised in two areas of expertise, namely Buddhist scholarship and
meditation, which are of relevance to only some members of the general community. There are, however, widely varying degrees of sophistication in terms of religious understanding and knowledge at Wat Paaknaam, and all of these can be seen to be justified in terms of Luang Pho's life and teaching. Luang Pho himself established the wat's Pali Institute which has grown into a reputable centre of learning. More obviously, of course, he is responsible for the emphasis on the practice of meditation in which laity, too, are actively involved. More generally still, Luang Pho is the centre of a complex of beliefs about supernatural powers which places him in the role of supernatural guardian.

The image of Luang Pho, as a charismatic teacher and abbot, draws a select laity from within the Bangkok area to interact within a particular arena of Buddhist tradition within which, nevertheless, there is a distinct range of beliefs. On the whole, the laity at Wat Paaknaam are of a high social class which lends status and prestige to the institutions it patronizes. On the other hand the prestige of the wat itself increases the value of the merit-making performed there. While the laity are in a good position to support the wat generously, the high veneration in which Luang Pho is held is felt to enhance the merit made at the wat.

In establishing a Pali Institute of impressive scale and scope, Luang Pho made his wat attractive to the scholarly oriented monks who are able to use Bangkok wat to improve both their knowledge and their status, and thus places the monastic population within the hierarchy of wat which can produce highly educated monks and novices. This aspect of the wat facilities also appeals to a number of maechii for whom, in most other samnak chii, such education would not be available. Moreover, a wat with a population of scholastic and educated monks draws an
appropriately educated and orthodox community of laity who approve of the emphasis on Buddhist knowledge expected of the inhabitants.

As a meditation teacher offering a special method of meditation and having a formidable reputation concerning his own abilities, Luang Pho'9 attracts a large number of mae-chii since meditation is often of prime importance to such women. This facet of Luang Pho'9's leadership also attracts those monks and laity who are sophisticated enough in their understanding of the meditational side of Buddhism to have a positive preference for Luang Pho'9's method above others.

It is as a saksit being however, that Luang Pho'9 has his most distinctive, and least orthodox role: he is asked to help those involved in the problems of worldly life. Moreover, he becomes an agent superior to the forces of karma in that he can grant people who doubt the health of their karmic status their wishes, and can intervene in misfortune such as illness or continuous bad luck which might otherwise be regarded as the inevitable penalty of bad karma. In return for such aid, however, people make merit by donations or by deciding to become ordained, both of which are acts of support for the Sangha. Luang Pho'9 has thus become a sort of mediator between abstract Buddhism and the vicissitudes of daily life for both lay and ordained followers, as are the devata and spirits in Theravada societies elsewhere (e.g. Leach 1962). Interestingly, no informants mentioned the possibility of Luang Pho'9 going to Nirvana. Unlike routine Buddhist activity, however, the supplicant seeks help alone, and needs no contact at the wat to receive the magical aid and psychological comfort traditionally dispensed by a monk acquaintance.

There are other conclusions we may draw from the ample evidence of what Thai Buddhists speak of as the baaramii and the saksit power of Luang Pho'9. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, women are seen
as antithetical to the beneficial power of monks, and thus the presence
of maechii in wat is sometimes frowned upon. At Wat Paaknaam, however,
there are a large of maechii, almost as many as there are monks, living
within the precincts without apparently damaging the reputation of the
wat as a sacred place of power and good. It is possibly because of
the strength of Luang Phq's magical power, which is said to pervade the
wat, that this could be the case. More importantly, the very presence
of the women, without apparent loss of magical power, may indeed enhance
Luang Phq's reputation. Expressed less mystically, perhaps, the
strength of Luang Phq's reputation, and the status which he has
imparted to the wat, outweighs the unusual fact of the presence of a
large number of maechii at the wat. And indeed, we may suppose that
sophisticated urban Thai, particularly women, may in their possible
ambivalence towards Thai pollution beliefs, even be attracted by a
reputable Buddhist establishment with a large number of female religious
personnel.

In another sense also, the reputation of Luang Phq may bear a
direct relation to the population of maechii at Wat Paaknaam. As I
stated in the conclusion to the previous chapter, maechii are often
believed to be people of low karmic status, and indeed may be women who
seek the state of being a maechii in order to improve their karma. Since
Luang Phq has the power of changing one's fate, he may well be a focus
of some importance to those who belong to this disadvantaged group,
a fact which might well explain the heightened respect paid to Luang
Phq by many of the maechii.

Whether they seek peace of mind in spite of bad karma, or have a
more sophisticated view of the practice of meditation, for the maechii
at Wat Paaknaam, for most of whom meditation is their prime religious
activity, Luang Phūp is primarily a meditation instructor. It is possible that when maechii come to a wat for the practice of meditation, and that under a specific teacher, the population of maechii will be not only large but also 'to some extent integrated into the monastic community'. Certainly this was found to be the case in Ayutthaya (Bunnag 1973:88).

There is thus a more pragmatic reason why Luang Phūp as charismatic leader should have at his wat a large number of maechii followers. This is that the ability of Luang Phūp to attract such large sums of money to the wat means that there are enough of these funds to be used to support the maechii as well as monks and novices, whereas maechii are normally disadvantaged by having to be able to support themselves. As I shall argue later, it is just the sort of prosperous elite members of the lay public who are found at Wat Paaknaam who are likely to find it beneficial to include maechii as well as monks in their support of a religious establishment. Before discussing this however, I shall elucidate the nature of the interaction between monks, maechii and the public at a wat with the sort of facilities which Wat Paaknaam offers.
Figure 1

Sketch Map of Wat Paaknaam
Key to sketch-map of Wat Paaknaam

1. Ordination Hall (*Bood*)
2. Old Library (*Hgg Traipidok*)
3. Pali Institute
4. Luang Phoq's Hall
5. Reception Hall (*Prachaasamphan*)
6. Abbot's Kuti
7. Meditation Hall (*Hgg caroen wipassanaa*)
8. Bell-tower
9. Meditation Hall for monks and laymen
10. Meditation Hall for women and maechii Meditation Residence
11. Saalaa
12. Kitchen and maechii residence
13. Monks' dormitory residence
14. Monks' residence
15. Maechii's residence
16. Houses of laity and maechii
Footnotes to Chapter III

1. Samatha (or Samaadhi) refers to the pre-Buddhist meditational technique of one-pointedness of mind, a form of concentration which leads to mystic states and, in popular Thai belief, various mental 'powers'. Vipassanaa, in contrast, is 'essentially ... Buddhist mental culture'. It is an analytical method for those seeking insight 'leading to the complete liberation of mind, to the realization of the Ultimate Truth, Nirvana.' (Rahula 1967:68-69). Kammathana refers to either subjects of meditation or meditation exercises (Phra Raatchaworamunii 1977:291).

2. The leader of the Thai lay meditation movement, Phra Phimolatham was also subjected to pressure and was finally imprisoned in 1963 during a crisis in the Sangha. Tambiah argues convincingly that Phra Phimolatham was seen as a threat by secular authorities since his programme 'served as a basis for marshaling the support and loyalty of several monks and laymen. Most importantly, that political power was grounded theoretically in a monk's spiritual excellence and religious achievement. This source and basis of power were inaccessible to lay politicians and soldiers ...' (1976:260) We may speculate that this power is also inaccessible to those monks who, through their links to the formal administrative hierarchy, maintain a power more allied to that of lay politicians and soldiers, as the case of these rivalries which developed within the Sangha during Prime Minister Sarit's reign show.

3. This increased interest in Buddhist meditation is also found in Sri Lanka and Burma (Kirsch 1977:266 fn.).

4. This is in striking contrast to the role of the wat in Thai rural context. For descriptions of the latter see, for example, Moerman 1966; Kaufman 1960:113ff.).
Chapter Four

ROUTINE AND INTERACTION AT THE WAT

In the previous chapter I have shown what I take to be the most important features of Wat Paaknaam which make it a distinctive wat with a rabia of its own. In this chapter I intend to elaborate on the more routine activities of maechii, monks and laity which may be observed in most Thai wat: the basic daily and weekly routines in which Buddhists involve themselves. Once again, some of the features described relate principally to Wat Paaknaam but this leads to the opportunity for brief comparisons with other wat and some understanding of general features which are common to many samnak chii by virtue of their position within a wat community.

Bunnag claims that, except in a few cases, maechii though subject to the authority of the abbot as head of the community are outside the system properly speaking, and have little contact with the monks and novices in the wat. (1973:99)

In this chapter I shall show that at Wat Paaknaam this is not really the case: that the maechii are in fact, in everyday life, firmly integrated into the wat and its activities. As far as relations with the monks and novices are concerned, though, Wat Paaknaam might be better described as 'being together separately'; activities are not so much shared as occasions of simultaneous participation. Those activities in which monks and maechii do jointly participate, moreover, are those in which laity also participate: i.e. they are the activities which bring
the Buddhist community, lay and ascetic, together, in a religious rather than social sense.

Hierarchy

As is usual with a wat the size of Wat Paaknaam the hierarchy of authority is differentiated along specialist lines. The abbot is supported by a sub-abbot in many of his administrative tasks, and in his frequent absences from the wat. Two senior monks, Aacaan Yai, are responsible for the two fields of meditation (Faai Wipassananathura) and religious learning (Faai Khanthatthura) respectively. There are another half a dozen or more monks who have passed the highest levels of religious education (Parian 9). The abbot is an upachaa, a monk qualified to be the preceptor of new monks, as is one other of the senior monks. Such monks who receive their formal qualifications from the Sangha, are by no means present in every wat, and one or other of those at Wat Paaknaam is frequently called to ordinations held at other wat in the vicinity. The abbot himself is also the local Cao Khana Phaak (head of a region; a high ecclesiastical administrative rank), and the other upachaa is the Cao Khana Tambon (the local tambon head). The wat, therefore, is comparatively well staffed by qualified monks of rank within the Thai administrative hierarchy.

Each residence section at Wat Paaknaam has a head monk. Several monks are assigned various responsibilities of care within the grounds of the wat. Each of the public buildings is under the care of an individual monk who is responsible for maintaining tidiness, opening and locking up at the appropriate times (for example the Meditation Hall), and for organising bookings for activities in the buildings (for example the bood). The public relations area, where images, lockets and photos
of Luang Phāo are sold, together with books of his teaching, is run by a roster of three or four monks who act as staff from early morning until about 8.30 p.m. each day. A laywoman also comes here to help with bookkeeping, and answering the wat telephone. Here also the donations for food for monks are received, and the certificates which are given to donors are framed each day. Such tasks of organisation within the wat are assigned to monks of long standing, who accept this responsibility individually.

The residence sections of the monks are largely undifferentiated, the monks and novices being accommodated as comfort permits; but during Phansaa as many neophytes as possible are housed in the residence block near the school. Here they are conveniently grouped for guidance in their new role, but by no means all neophytes can be included.

The monks who participate in the non-stop male meditation relay in the small hall near Luang Phāo's Hall are not a residentially distinct group; they come from all sections of the wat. Although each named residence block is familiarly known to many as a 'khana' or section, officially the wat no longer maintains different sections. In spite of the large numbers the entire community of monks and novices is one section. Similarly, the entire community of maechii is one (separate) section.

Hierarchy is expressed in a body of monks by strict rules of precedence established on a combination of three grounds, viz., length of ordination, scholastic attainments, and rank. Thus, whenever the monks are formally seated together, whether in the bood or in the saalaa, they must be seated in strict order of precedence. The various criteria of precedence differ according to time of year, i.e., whether it is in or out of the Phansaa period (cf. a simpler, rural ranking; Terwiel 1979:104).
The hierarchy of maechii at Wat Paaknaam is simple and functional and reflects less specialisation than that of the monks. This hierarchy of women is subservient to the abbot who maintains ultimate authority within the wat. The most important maechii is the huanaa or head. At Wat Paaknaam, in accordance with Luang Pho's wishes, the huanaa should be chosen by the maechii at the wat. The previous huanaa had been a skilled pupil of Luang Pho, and later a teacher in her own right at the wat, and combined her senior-most position with that of the headship of the maechii Meditation Residence. Since its establishment twelve years ago, this maechii was, until her death, also the huanaa of the national Thai Nuns' Institute. The present huanaa, however, was chosen by the present abbot. She has lived at the wat for over thirty years and was head of the maechii Kitchen Residence for some time before being chosen as overall huanaa. She still maintains her post in the kitchen residence. The huanaa and one of her sub-heads recently took a trip together to various pilgrimage sites in India.

It is difficult to tell how much influence over the tenor of the samnak chii the personal abilities and preferences of the huanaa has. Certainly the present huanaa of Wat Paaknaam displays little interest in the Institute, although her post requires her to send annual reports concerning maechii at the wat to the Institute, a requirement similar to that of the abbot vis-à-vis the Department of Religious Affairs. Hers is also the responsibility to issue each long-term nun with an official identity card of the Institute similar to that officially issued to every monk by the Department of Religious Affairs. It is the present head of the maechii Meditation Section who now follows in the footsteps of the former huanaa in terms of interest in the Nuns' Institute. This maechii is currently the Huanaa Khana Phaak, the
administrative rank designated by the Institute as comparable to the Regional Head level of the Sangha, and represented in the latter by the abbot of Wat Paaknaam. This maechii is an active participant in the Institute's activities and a former committee member. She is also a widely respected meditation teacher at the wat and is believed to have curing powers as a result of her achievement in meditation. The position of authority she is placed in at the wat is thus largely an informal one.

Within the wat itself it is to the huanaa that every aspiring woman must go to seek permission to become a maechii. The Huanaa, if favouring the request, then advises the abbot of the new admission, but the huanaa herself has the right to refuse those she finds unsuitable, or if conditions do not permit. The present huanaa is assisted in her duties by another maechii in the same residence who, although also senior in years, has been a maechii for only about three years. She is respected, however, as knowledgeable and clever. She records the details of each new maechii, and often supervises the new maechii in the Kitchen Residence, as well as leading morning chanting each morning when the huanaa is at the market.

Each residence has its own lesser huanaa, in each case a fairly senior maechii, who deals with the minor problems of the maechii in her residence and can keep an eye on comings and goings as reported to her by maechii who have business away from the wat.

Two of the nun residences may be regarded as functionally specialist. The first, that above the kitchen, houses, as well as a core of long-term maechii active in kitchen duty, many of the younger maechii who have just been ordained and some of those who intend to stay for only a short period. Here the latter are under the supervision
of the huanaa and her assistant, can be summoned to morning chanting held in the latter's room, and are handy to the kitchen. There are no cooking facilities in this the most comfortable residence. Those who decide to stay at the wat may be transferred to another residence after their period of supervision, but those who stay in this section over time often form the core of workers who devote most of their time to kitchen chores. The second special section is the Meditation Section. This is an enclosed section where the residents maintain a non-stop relay of meditation in their own small meditation hall. They may be joined in this by laywomen, but the door to the residence compound has a sign bearing the legend 'Gentlemen may not enter', a regulation relatives, and some monks, ignore. Residence in this section is officially restricted to those nuns who have attained certain skills in meditation, but in fact one newly-ordained relative of some residents, and during Phansaa even some maechii phraam, were residing here. The section seems to have been in existence since the time of Luang Phqo, and was formerly composed of traditional-style kuti accommodation. Now, however, these have been taken down and the thirty maechii are crowded together in a residual area of Luang Phqo's Hall. The daily chanting from upstairs is something of a distraction for those maintaining the meditation vigil. To preserve some measure of peace for meditation the door to the section is locked from four to five p.m. to ensure no distracting visitors for at least one hour each day. There are no cooking facilities here, and these maechii, together with the old and disabled, are exempt from the duty of preparing food in the kitchen to gain entitlement to eat food from there. This section alone among residences for maechii also had a large number of water tanks which had been donated to the wat; and the bathrooms here are in much better repair than those of the
older maechii residences. Several of the maechii in this section studied *Abhidhamma* at a leading Bangkok wat and one, alone at Wat Paaknaam, was studying for a Bachelor's degree at Ramkhamhaeng University. These were the only Thai maechii at the wat eager to speak English, and to some extent many of the maechii of this section could be described as forming a small élite of learning and skill among the maechii.

On the whole, hierarchy among maechii should ideally be represented by deference to those more senior and those with greater religious learning, and these general rules should be observed at chanting or in the bood. They are only loosely followed at Wat Paaknaam, however, and one elder maechii commented that there was little heed taken of such informal obligations.

In general, maechii are expected to be as respectful to monks as are laywomen. Within the wat respectful courtesies are often ignored, but maechii are often very careful to be polite to monks of other temples, at the same time treating them with less social restraint. The more outgoing among both monks and maechii have of course, gained friends among the 'other half', and quite a few maechii either as individuals or in small groups visit certain monks quite frequently to chat and to perform small services for them. A monk might also pay a visit to a maechii whom he knows well. In all such cases visits are restricted to daylight hours and conversation was held with the visitors fully in public view. In this way the monks' prohibition on talking with a woman alone is respected.

The need to maintain proper distance between monks and maechii reflects more than a simple concern for the maintenance of the monks' Vinaya rules. Those wat which have maechii in residence have to ensure
that the reputation of neither monks nor maechii suffers. This is partly achieved by the separation of living quarters. Nevertheless, there is a certain amount of disapproval attached to maechii in that they are (usually) women who choose to live in close proximity to the monks. As was discussed above, this did lead, in a time of lack of discipline in the Sangha, to the passing of a law forbidding maechii to live within wat compounds. Possibly, in the case of Wat Paaknaam, the large numbers of monks and maechii involved leads to enough impersonality to stem speculation about improper relationships between monks and maechii. Nevertheless in general there is little unnecessary communication between monks and maechii; one young maechii even went so far as to say that maechii are afraid to talk to the monks.

The daily routine of monks and maechii compared

The separation between monks and maechii is much more than purely a matter of etiquette. To a large extent, the sexes are, for the most part of the day, self-contained each at their own end of the wat. I quickly discovered the futility of asking a monk about any aspect concerning daily routines of the maechii at the wat. The maechii are aware of the time at which the monks chanted in the bood in the centre of the wat; but the chanting of the maechii in the saalaa is of no concern to the monks.

The daily routine of the monks of Wat Paaknaam closely follows the general pattern of monastic life in Thailand. Daily routines vary slightly from wat to wat depending on the general strictness of practice set by the abbot, the number of monks, the situation and facilities of the wat. At Wat Paaknaam certain elements of the day's routine have been continued from the time of Luang Phoq. For the monks and maechii
this involves the opportunity to and an expectation that they will, devote their time seriously to study and meditation. For the maechii, moreover, it means a time-consuming regime of food preparation and maintenance of the dining area as well as their 'personal' duties.

Figure 2 shows an outline of the daily routine of the monks and nuns at Wat Paaknaam. It shows the heavier involvement of the nuns in meal preparation and a certain degree of coincidence of demands on the time of the maechii because of their kitchen duties. However, the scheduled timetable is fully followed by only a proportion of the monks and nuns. The outline which follows is taken from that observed during Phansaa, as at other times of the year less strictness is required.

During Phansaa, morning chanting is compulsory for all monks and maechii. As the bood is so small this involves actually dividing the monks and novices into two groups, one chanting before breakfast, the other immediately after. For the maechii morning chanting is held communally in the saalaa at 4.00 a.m., but out of Phansaa it is held in the room of one of the senior nuns in the Kitchen Residence. Only those of this residence are required to turn up; and this session is largely held to ensure that those newly arrived or those there for only a short period learn the chants. As the room is small no more than twenty or so maechii can fit. It is left to individual initiative as to whether maechii in the other residences silently recite the chants to themselves as part of the morning discipline or not. In the Kitchen Residence chanting is followed by meditation, where the senior maechii in charge teaches meditation techniques together with the proper use of meditation practice. Similarly, monks may either join others in the bood or practise in their own kuti. Meditation and chanting are both expected to induce calmness of mind at the beginning of the day, and the chanting, as with
the monks' early morning dedicatory rituals, pays respect to the Triple Gem.

Even before morning chanting begins some maechii are already at work in the kitchen below preparing the food for breakfast; indeed the crackling of fires and the hiss of frying starts each day before most maechii have woken. The huanaa is responsible for the marketing each day, a task she performs first thing in the morning with the help of two assistants, leaving her deputy to lead morning chanting. The first meal of the day is a comparatively simple one, with rice porridge and a few cooked dishes for the monks, and salted fish, peanuts or boiled eggs with tinned pickles for the maechii. Some maechii supplement their meal with a more appetizing curry bought near the wat, or with leftovers from the previous day's lunch. While the monks file formally into the saalaa and eat together, the maechii in the kitchen behind eat as it suits them, and many take their food to their room to share it in a more informal atmosphere.

A maechii must decide at the time of coming to live at the wat whether or not she chooses to contribute labour to the daily communal preparation of food for the monks. If she wishes to do so, she is expected to fulfil her part in the roster system, and is thereby entitled to eat the food provided. As well as rostered times for cooking, the maechii who eat in the kitchen are expected to help wash the dishes, sweep and mop the kitchen and leave the area clean after each meal. Those who do not choose to work in the kitchen buy their own food each day at the nearby market and cook it on outdoor burners as it suits them. The wat kitchen has a refrigerator and a freezer, both donated by sponsors of the wat, where the food purchased for the monks is stored.
By the time morning classes are over at the school some maechii have already begun the preparation of the pre-noon meal. This more elaborate meal takes more co-ordination, and during the course of the morning absorbs more and more workers. Rostered maechii and those who work every day in the kitchen start preparing the huge amounts of garlic and chillies, meat and vegetables in small groups on the floor and benches of the kitchen. These twenty or so maechii are joined, once the first dishes have been prepared, by more who come to help ladle food onto trays and prepare the benches in the saalaa where the monks will eat. Several dozen maechii are finally ladling food into bowls, setting trays and carrying them in to be set on the benches quickly so that the saalaa will be empty when the monks arrive in response to the gong. The maechii in the kitchen are then able to eat, again in groups on the benches or at tables just recently the site of their morning's labours. As with breakfast, thanks in the form of a chanted blessing to the lay sponsors are given by each group at the end of the meal. A group of young, newly-arrived maechii sitting together may find this a problem as no one has yet learnt the chant. Sometimes the book of chants is produced and one maechii will read out the appropriate passage; sometimes the group, in some embarrassment, agrees to settle on everyone silently 'thinking' it.

When the monks have eaten and chanted their blessing to the lay donors who sit while they eat, they leave the saalaa, and the laity then seat themselves at tables in the saalaa and are served food and drink by the maechii. Most of the maechii are by now washing the huge piles of dishes, or cleaning the kitchen area. On days on which large numbers of laity eat at the wat the work in the kitchen is not completed until well after one o'clock. On these occasions those maechii on the work roster who wish to attend school go to classes very late. Sometimes
scholars stay at classes until after the afternoon chanting has begun, although most can leave in order to be ready for such devotions. As the monks have no commitments between noon and 5.00 p.m. their school hours are uninterrupted. Unlike morning chanting, evening chanting for the maechii is held in the saalaa all year round and is well attended both in and out of Phansaa. Occasionally lay activities force the maechii to the upstairs saalaa for this task. There are always at least a few lay women who come to chant with the maechii. In this chanting, some semblance of hierarchy is maintained, with those ordained longer generally sitting at the front, maechii phraam behind, and laywomen sitting separately at the back. As with the morning chants, the chanted text is in Pali with, in some sections, Thai translations.

Six thirty in the evening is the one time of the day when the monks and maechii gather for a joint activity, and this is shared also with laity. The evening meditation, held in the air-conditioned comfort and quiet of the Meditation Hall, is regarded as an obligatory part of the day's routine. Some of the maechii from the Meditation Section will choose to come to this, but for most this is the only occasion in the day when meditation is seriously practised. Eighty or so maechii, and usually slightly fewer monks attend this session, which lasts for about one hour and a quarter. After meditation, the congregation gathers downstairs in the hall for an evening drink which the maechii have prepared during the afternoon. As with most strict wat, milk and tonic food drinks such as Milo or Ovaltine are prohibited during the noon-till-dawn fasting, which applies equally to monks, maechii, and any laity who are maintaining the eight precepts on wan phra; but fruit juice is offered to all meditators each evening. After meditation most monks and maechii will go, as they may well have done before the session, to Luang Phôò's
Hall to pay their respects before retiring.

At the completion of the day's activities, as with the brief periods of pause, monks and maechii are free to tidy their quarters, wash their clothes, go on errands, complete homework, and perform any other personal tasks. Many sleep after lunch in the heat of the day. Many maechii spoke of having little time to spare apart from the requirements of the day's routine, and some regarded themselves as having much less leisure time than maechii at other wat who do not have the responsibility of such massive preparation of food.

It can be seen from the comparison of routines that the maechii are subject to more demands on their time than are monks. This not only occurs in terms of the demands of the kitchen roster which can interfere with classes, but also creates difficulties for maechii who must shop and cook for themselves. The involvement of maechii in the preparation of food not only encroaches on personal time at their disposal, but also structures the characteristics of their life at the wat in comparison to monks. Whereas personal duties such as minimal shopping and laundry are tasks in common (a few maechii at Wat Paaknaam regularly washed the robes of a monk as an act of merit, but by and large this was a duty of all), the preparation of food is for the maechii a time-consuming duty which must be performed within time schedules which have precedence over other activities. The work of the main kitchen, moreover, necessitates co-ordination and co-operation with others in an essentially communal activity. Even many of the maechii who choose to provide their own food and eat in informal groups, achieve something of a domestic note in this part of the daily routine. Both of these contrast to the public ritual of the monks' acceptance and consumption of food in the saalaa as a brief but important ceremony. Those monks who preferred not to eat in the
saalaa could send a dekwat (temple boy) to bring food to their rooms for them, or even for a small group of monks. At the wat monks must have food offered to them, while maechii must at least produce their own food, and perform the domestic chores which accompany such activity. Only those maechii officially designated as meditators by their residential privilege in the meditation residence were exempt from the necessity to perform such labour.

Relation of monks, maechii and laity in daily activities

A closer analysis of the entire sequence of the preparation and presentation of food involving monks, maechii, and laity, reveals the ambiguity of the position of the maechii which is masked by the similarity of their daily routine to that of the monks.

As noted above, it is the head of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam, the huanaa, who does the daily shopping for food for the monks. The present head is also the maechii in charge of the residence familiarly known as the Kitchen Section (Khana roongkhrua). It is she who has to manage the finances of the daily food bills. During the weekend of Phansaa, when perhaps three or four hundred laity may be present at the mid-day meal, the day's food requirements may cost between three and four thousand baht to feed the total of one thousand people. Judicious marketing in the early hours of the morning, however, does not end the huanaa's responsibilities. She may be found in the kitchen at many hours of the day, supervising not only the main meal preparation, but organising the small work groups who prepare food ahead of time.

Breakfast, held too early for most laity to be present at the wat, is a simple affair and can be prepared by fewer maechii than can the second meal of the day. As the monks' benches in the saalaa have been
set up the previous day, dekwat usually carry in the trays of food in readiness for the arrival of the monks. The food will also be offered by the dekwat. Lunch, however, has a more complicated sequence, due not only to the greater work involved, but also to the presence of the laity.

The maechii preparing the food for the monks are occasionally joined by a few laywomen who are frequent visitors to the kitchen. Occasionally laywomen sponsors will come behind to the kitchen to see the preparation for a few moments, but otherwise the kitchen is usually only occupied by working maechii until the food has been cooked. As the time for carrying the food from the kitchen to be arranged in the saalaa approaches, more maechii appear both to help with last-minute work and to wait for their own meal. At this time laywomen living in or near the wat may appear in small numbers, and the dekwat gradually begin to arrive, and thus human chains are formed to transfer the heavy trays up the line into the saalaa. When joining this human chain a laywoman or maechii may often wai before stepping in, and wai again when the work has been completed. The work of preparation of food for monks is believed to gain merit as is the act of transporting it for them. Some people seem to arrive in time just to perform this as an extra chance for merit. The human chains absorbed a great many women passing trays from hand to hand, and the end work of standing on the benches and distributing the trays was usually done by only one or two maechii and dekwat. Any service performed for monks is believed to gain the performer some merit, even indirectly. The laity who donated money to feed the monks gained merit, as did the maechii who cooked the food. Even though the monks were still absent from the area, something of the act of offering (thawaay) to the monks adheres to the very act of carrying the trays to where the monks would soon sit, and this part of the proceedings seemed to be more of a
specific religious act for some than did the rest of the morning's hard labour. One lame laywoman who was quite elderly would, each day, take a chair and sit in the middle of the doorway of the kitchen so that each tray of curries, and each tureen of rice was perforce carried to either side past her to the saalaa. She was then in position to raise her hands to touch each vessel as it passed, and gain merit by touching what was to be offered to the monks. In Thailand merit (bun) is endless, and no woman was barred from any help offered in the preparation or carrying of food; but some maechii were not overly scrupulous about pausing, heavy tray in hand, for the idle hand to touch and gain merit. In addition to the official presentation, a very small minority of maechii at the wat regularly offer food to monks from neighbouring wat on morning almsround. Some of these monks passed the wat, while a few have a route through one of the maechii residences.

While the last of the trays are put in place the gong is rung to summon the monks and novices, who are by now waiting in the nearby bood courtyard. The monks remove their sandals in the courtyard and proceed to the saalaa barefoot, entering in strict order of seniority. Monks sets themselves in their assigned places according to this hierarch, on the bench along the long wall which runs parallel to the kitchen. The novices sit at one end extended at right angles, facing the abbot and three or four other of the most senior monks are seated separately, close to the saalaa's Buddha image. The majority of monks sit with their backs to the kitchen, facing the lay audience who are surrounded on three sides by the members of the Sangha. After an initial homage to the Triple Gem led by the abbot or his deputy over a microphone, the laity respectfully ask permission to give food to the monks. After this the dekwat, of whom there might be about thirty present, swiftly move to
present the food to the monks. This they do simply by pausing for
the monks to lift the high flat cover from the trays, lifting the tray
of food and 'handing' it to one or more of the four monks who share
the tray. It is now accepted and may be placed on top of the replaced
cover, which now forms a 'table'. This operation, as is that of clearing
away, is done with great swiftness and efficiency, while the laity sit
on the carpeted floor towards the abbot's end of the hall.

Once the food has been taken out for the monks the maechii leave
the saalaa and begin ladling out food for their own groups. Most can
sit and eat, while a few are often still preparing the last of the
desserts which will be carried in when the first trays have been finished.
Many sit in small groups around the benches, while a few eat at the
smaller tables. It is the dekwat who must fetch and carry, and refill
water jugs for the monks, making sure that every item brought is presented
to a monk. It was explained to me that, according to the laws of maechii,
maechii are forbidden to eat in the same place as monks, and so this is
why they remain out of sight and eat in the kitchen. Only once, when
one maechii at the wat had issued a private invitation as an act of merit
to maechii from other centres to eat lunch at Wat Paaknaam, visiting
maechii ate in the saalaa. This they did at a table ordinarily used
by laity, the monks' benches being full. As maechii also adhere to
the precept of not eating after noon, the maechii eat at the same time
as the monks, starting just after the presentation to the monks is
complete. In Thailand those highest in status should eat first, but
as a matter of practicality maechii and those observing eight precepts
must eat as soon as food has been offered to the monks.

After the monks' meal the senior monks at the end of the hall
signal for the monks to face the laity again. Then, over the microphone,
the names of the day's lay sponsors are announced, together with the amounts donated. Names of the lay donors are also displayed on the notice board, and all sponsors who donate over a certain amount receive a certificate from the abbot as souvenir. After this the monks chant the standard blessing to the laity, some of whom will ritually pour water (kruat naam) in order to transfer some of the merit gained to others. Behind in the kitchen most nuns will also wai to acknowledge respect for this chanted blessing. After announcements of the day's activities the monks quickly leave the saalaa. After they have left the laity move to seat themselves at the tables set upon the floor, or on the benches vacated by the monks, or remain seated on the floor, while dekwat and maechii bring in food and plates for them. At this point several maechii will see that all wants are satisfied, and circulate, chatting with laity known to them. Sometimes a few lay people will give small amounts of money to maechii they know well as an act of merit, and receive a brief anumoothanaa blessing in return. As soon as the first trays with the food left by the monks are brought back in, the dekwat start their meal at the long table with benches reserved for them in the kitchen. After their meal laity leave and the maechii and dekwat clear the tables and finish off the huge washup which may have begun while the monks were still eating, if the dishes had to be re-used because of large numbers of people. Finally the monks' eating area is cleared, the place mats hung up to dry. This will later be swept and reset by maechii ready for breakfast.

The money used to buy food each day is taken from the funds received constantly for the support of the monks. The food cooked in the wat kitchen is divided into three conceptually distinct amounts. There is that prepared for the monks, that for the maechii, and a third amount for
the laity. That served to the monks first is later served again to the dekwat who have presented it on behalf of the laity. The maechii fetch enough for their purposes when the monks have been served. When both groups have finished, more food is ladled out for the laity, and this is served by maechii and dekwat. It is a common tradition in Thai wat that any food left over by the monks can then be given over by the abbot, if he wishes, for the laity to eat, and thus many lay people offering food to monks eat their meal at the wat as well. At Wat Paaknaam the maechii make sure that there is enough extra food for however many laity are expected each day. On Saturdays and Sundays, for example, a few hundred laity are likely to attend, and the numbers always rise during Phansaa. Whatever food is left over is stored or distributed to laity living in the wat, such as those involved in the construction of wat buildings and thus temporarily housed at the wat.

Provided they work for it, the maechii see themselves as entitled to food bought with the money donated to the monks by the laity. The moral obligation to earn food is taken quite seriously. There are a number of maechii too old now to be able to work in the kitchen, or even walk the short distance to the kitchen for their meals, and for these maechii meals are brought from the kitchen. A senior maechii was at pains to point out, however, that these same maechii had worked in the kitchen for many years before they became too old, and thus are now entitled to food after their long service. Preparation of food in the wat kitchen has for the maechii the double benefit of making merit at the same time as earning their keep. Moreover, while the laity are usually spoken of as offering food to the monks, or monks and novices, one informant was sure that, as it was the maechii who performed the service of preparing food for the monks, laity, in donating money, 'present it
(thawaay) to maechii too'. Whatever the plausibility of this argument there is no explicit act of presentation of the food to the maechii. The fact that maechii give thanks for food given takes into account the fact of gratitude for a gift, but it is unheard and unacknowledged by the laity. It might be seen as more a point of discipline for maechii than a form of religious interaction.

In contrast to the public meal, laity might, on rare occasions, supply a meal for a maechii they knew well in the latter's residence. In this case the blessing given by the nun is acknowledged by the lay donor with the traditional polite phanom mu gesture. Among the maechii themselves, especially those who cooked for themselves, there was quite a deal of giving of food, a curry or some fruit, especially by younger maechii to the elder, and in this case too a blessing is given. Donations of cash, given at any time, or even simply a visit, were occasions for the maechii to give a short blessing, in the latter case at least, partly in Thai.

The idea that the work a maechii performs for monks on behalf of laity earns her a specific return of food can also be seen in the small groups where food is presented to monks outside the saalaa. This occurs when a group of laity wish to receive the exclusive benefit of the chanting by a smaller group of monks to whom they make a special offering of food. In effect this involves donating a specific designated amount for the occasion, and being exclusively entitled to the merit gained thereby. Food prepared in the kitchen is then taken by a small work-group of maechii to the chosen site of this presentation; usually Luang Ph99's Hall or, on the occasion of rites for the dead, the courtyard of the bood. On this occasion the laity themselves present the food served by the maechii. While the monks eat, these same maechii will seat themselves
at some distance to eat. In Luang Phò's Hall, for example, the maechii huddle at the top of the stairs, out of the main area of the hall.

The availability of food for maechii at Wat Paaknaam is a feature of some significance. Many comments were made about the convenience for maechii who did not have to provide their own food as they are often expected to do at other wat. The fact that at Wat Paaknaam food was also provided for the maechii who wished to help prepare it was part of the benefit of living at the wat, part of the plenty ensured by the piety of the wat's many supporters. Nor, of course, is the production of so much food an insignificant factor in terms of responsibility. One senior maechii referred to the huanaa as the *maebaan wat* (wat's housekeeper) and claimed her to be a very important person in the wat to be in charge of the daily marketing and preparation of the food for all the monks. Moreover it is maechii who, each day before the presentation of food to the monks, carry trays of food and present them before the images of Luang Phò, Luang Phò Lek, and the former Supreme Patriarch in Luang Phò's Hall, an important symbolic rite on behalf of the wat community.

Arrangements for food at various wat where maechii are resident vary from wat to wat, according to local wat abbots, relative size of population of monks and maechii, and the amount of food donated to the monks of the wat. At wat where maechii are quite secluded, the maechii prepare their own food, or, if food is sufficient, may be given the remains or a portion of the monks' food as are the dekwat. On the other hand, some maechii, according to means and inclination, may choose to offer food on the monks' morning almsround. At a temple with a large number of maechii in a meditation wat in Suphanburi, the monks ate breakfast first, from the morning's almsround collection, then the
maechii and laity ate the remainder simultaneously. The maechii then prepared food for the monks' second meal, bought with money donated to the temple by laity.

The presentation of food to the Sangha is the most important symbolic support by laity for the Buddhist religion. It is an actual and necessary support of those who wish earnestly to strive for the higher goals defined by Buddhist teaching. The Buddha called for support of the Sangha, and in Thailand it is to these ordained members that food is presented. It is expected that others who live at the wat and work for the monks, as well as those who have contributed the food, may, if conditions permit, benefit from this meal once the monks have been given their due. It is to the former category of wat dwellers that maechii usually belong. At Wat Paaknaam the right of maechii to a share is provided for by the generosity of wealthy laity, and the labour of the caterers, the maechii; with, in addition, the support of the abbot, and the protection of the ideology of service rendered to the monks. In the ritual presentation of food, the main group other than the monks is the laity. Their share of the food is also separately guaranteed in this case by their own generosity. At Wat Paaknaam the present rate of donations ensures a balanced sharing of food and merit.

In a Buddhist community, each should contribute to the maintenance of his religion according to his abilities. Not everyone is in a position to leave the worldly life, nor are all laity able financially to contribute material things to those dependent on lay support. These latter then, should contribute labour (Boribal Buribhand and Griswold 1973:3), performing services for the monks or helping to maintain the wat. It is as poor laity that the maechii make their contribution to the welfare of the Sangha, for they contribute not materially, but through their
labour. They are at this level inferior to the laity who donate food so generously, and whom the maechii then serve at table.

The maechii also, of course, perform tasks that might otherwise be performed by lay supporters. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the system of food preparation at Wat Paaknaam is in part a result of the dispersed nature of the lay supporters of the wat. Moreover, it is possible that laity of a certain social status prefer to be, virtually, ritual observers of the results of their generosity, rather than themselves producing food to directly present to the monks, and in this sense there is a necessary intermediary between monk and laity.

The larger urban wat have always sought to rely on organised, even prescribed amounts of lay labour in order to be able to function smoothly and, at least at royal wat, the King had the responsibility of assigning 'temple slaves', and conscripting corvée labour for this purpose. After successive legislative changes in the nineteenth century ended both forms of labour, larger monasteries have been in difficulty, both financially and in terms of willing manpower, to maintain the services essential to their upkeep (see Reynolds 1979). In present-day Thailand much of the personal services for monks, and the daily chores are performed by dekwat, the lay boys who, in return for shelter, food, and education from or patronage of the monks, have the responsibility of seeing to the monks' needs. At Wat Paaknaam the maechii have taken over some of this role. It is quite common, for example, for dekwat to have the task of preparing any extra food required by the monks and novices, but here that task is the sole responsibility of maechii. The preparation of the seating and utensils which the monks will use is also a task usually carried out by men; either dekwat at the wat, or the male hosts at a household ceremony. Here this task too, tends to be done by the maechii, while the main responsibility of dekwat is the actual presentation
of the dishes to be accepted by monks. One anthropologist has mentioned that the larger Bangkok wat often have very large numbers of these dekwat, often even more than monks and novices (Ayabe 1973:40) and indeed, the total number of dekwat recorded in 1977, 94,310 indicate that the ratio of these lay dwellers to monks and novices is more than 1 to 4. At Wat Paaknaam, however, there are less than eighty dekwat in comparison to the three hundred and fifty members of the Order, and it is not difficult to see why the more major tasks have been assigned to the samnak maechii. Reportedly Luang Phō himself decreed that maechii and laywomen would be responsible for food preparation when he had the refectory built, and it is plausible that this particular arrangement has always been associated with the presence of the nuns at the wat.

It is not only in contemporary Thailand that female ascetics are enjoined to help look after the monks, however. As we have seen in Chapter One, Bhikkhunī, ordained in the Order though they were, were still expected to sweep the monks' compounds and to leave food prepared for them (Horner 1930:272). It is possible that in the early days of the Order there was no tradition of laity working for the comfort of the monks. It is doubtful whether Thais today are aware of the historical antecedents of the role of providers of food that maechii fulfil, but there remains the obvious fact that in both cases the women, in spite of their religious role, are expected to continue, to some degree, their domestic sexual role as nourishers and housekeepers. This very housewifely cast to the role of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam also fits in nicely with their social status relative to the laity who come to the wat and who are its material supporters. It is to the participation of the last group, the laity who visit Wat Paaknaam, that I now turn.

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Lay participation at the wat

The most obvious condition underlying ability to attend the presentation of the pre-noon meal is time free from the workaday world. During the week usually only the elderly would come to make merit in this way, although on the weekends large family groups formed the majority of donors. Usually women are in the majority at the lunchtime gathering. Occasionally one of the maechii of the wat would donate money as part of celebrations for a special occasion such as a birthday. Such donations by laity would often be five hundred or a thousand baht, or even more, although more usual sums were a few hundred baht and, of course, any amount is acceptable.

The other daily activity which sees a large representation of laity is the evening meditation class in the Meditation Hall. This begins promptly at six thirty, by which time monks and novices have seated themselves on the mats laid out on the left hand side of the hall towards the front, and maechii have placed mats for themselves at the right hand side towards the front. The laity place mats for themselves towards the back, men towards the left and behind the monks, women in the centre and towards the right. Attendance varies from night to night, with from perhaps twenty to sixty laity arriving, although weekend sessions attract even more laity, and often fewer wat inhabitants. Monks and maechii are usually represented in roughly equal numbers, perhaps eighty or more maechii, and almost the same for monks. Proportionately, therefore, it seems that more of the total number of nuns attend this session than do those of monks of the community. Among the laity, however, there is a marked disproportion between the sexes. Women always outnumber men by at least two to one, often by four to one. Some dekwat are in attendance, often present with other youths, and older men make up
the rest of the small number of men present. The ages of the women usually range more widely over late twenties to fifties or even more, but only occasionally will a young daughter of ten or so be brought along. The capacious hall is not infrequently filled to overflowing. At such times the huanaa maechii is at pains to persuade constantly arriving laity that they could not sit in the free space as it may be in the path of a possible late-arriving monk.

The session is called to order with a tape played of Luang Pho99 reciting standard chants, each phrase being repeated by those present who are kneeling with hands in a respectful posture. When these preliminaries have been completed, the lights of the hall are slowly dimmed while those present arrange themselves in the proper meditation position prescribed by Luang Pho99. The tape then proceeds with a lecture by Luang Pho99 on the practice of the method of meditation for which he became famous. The tape played each night is the same (only very occasionally varied on special occasions). It is one of a few recordings made while Luang Pho99 was alive, and deals with the practical basics of the meditation. It is intended as an aid to concentration and to help those present settle down. I am not sure how many people more than half-listened to what to many must have been a lecture known by heart; each night the same pauses, the same little jokes. Indeed its main effect may well be mesmeric rather than instructive. Overall the group sits in darkness for about one hour.

After meditation, announcements are made of the names of those who have donated money for the evening drink which is available to those who attend evening meditation. These donations are usually of a much smaller order than those made at lunchtime. Usually no more than ten or twenty baht are handed to the monk in charge of the Meditation Hall
before the session. When I first lived at the wat there was a joke among a few of the maechii about a couple of donors who, between the two of them, contributed 5 baht per day. It was a small amount, but I never knew them to miss a day. There are almost always donations from maechii for this collection, especially maechii phraam who perform this, as other acts of merit, to ensure maximum benefit from their short stay in the wat. More rarely, contributions from monks are received. Usually the total comes to a few hundred baht, although it can go over the thousand baht mark on some evenings.

Wan phra also sees a very marked preponderance of the number of women over men in the laity who come to participate at the wat. Unlike evening meditation, this is likely to be due to the fact that during the day men are called to jobs, whereas among the laity who patronise Wat Paaknaam quite a few wives would be free from this economic necessity. Many of those who participate in the morning attendance at the bood, however, are very elderly, among both men and women. Among the women, again, there is also a number of younger women, perhaps mostly in their forties. The number of women who join the morning ceremony to take the eight precepts could rise to two dozen or so, although there are usually only five or six men.

In the bood after the monks have chanted, the laymen, laywomen and maechii, each in their separate seated groups, chant together. While the monks are seated on their platform, the laymen sit alongside the Buddha image facing the rest of the congregation and thus maintain segregation from the women. The maechii sit behind and to the right of the monks' platform, and the laywomen sit in the back left-hand corner. I was once informed by a well-educated monk of another wat that on occasions such as wan phra where there are maechii present,
they should lead the lay congregation, but at Wat Paaknaam when maechii and laity chant together, they are led by a layman. It is this layman also who requests a sermon from the monk designated to give it, speaking to the monks on behalf of all the rest.

In spite of the fact that maechii at Wat Paaknaam already maintain the eight precepts, many went every week to request these again. A few even wait solely to do so, leaving as the sermon begins. Of the laity, however, not all those who requested the eight precepts maintained them at the wat. In fact men seldom if ever slept at the wat. A small group of laywomen would make their sleeping place in the upstairs hall of the saalaa. A few bare necessities such as large mosquito nets, mats and a few pillows are available. When I enquired where the laymen slept, a senior maechii informed me that they did not choose to, although they might request to sleep in the monks’ quarters. She explained that the wat did not yet have facilities for laity to sleep the night, and that, moreover, very few men considered it necessary to perform the religious duty of maintenance of the precepts at the wat. She mentioned as exceptional a couple of major wat where many laity stay over on wan phra, and pointed out that on the whole men in Bangkok do not follow this observance. The women who do stay over at Wat Paaknaam are invited to chanting with the maechii next morning, which they dutifully attend, and eat breakfast with the maechii in the kitchen where they have taken their pre-noon meal the day before. Their observance of the eight precepts is thus performed with the maechii.

In terms of the regular activities held at the wat, lay participation is at its height in the weekend presentation of food to the monks; that rite where the social standing of individual lay people is most strongly affirmed by the merit-making publicly demonstrated. This
activity, which also underscores the basis of the wat's operation, the continued support of the laity, places the maechii in an ambiguous role whereby they perform an essential service on behalf of laity for the monks, and yet are themselves placed in a low status relative to both groups.

That activity which next attracts the laity in terms of numbers is the regular meditation teaching sessions, the distinctive speciality of the wat. In the formal sessions monks, maechii and laity participate together on a common basis — that of seeking understanding of the method and the opportunity to practice. Here the nuns are spatially placed opposite the monks — as members of the wat — yet their position is also possibly strengthened by the fact that this activity is one where women have an acceptable role, as is shown by the high percentage of laywomen present.

On wan phra, the occasion of religious observance which attracts the least laity, the nuns are unequivocally placed with the laity, with a layman placed in a position higher to them. In a context where all maintain the eight precepts, the maechii participate on a footing equal with the laity vis-à-vis monks, and their constant personal reaffirmation of a ritual state belies their everyday distinction from the laity. Nevertheless, this is again an activity in which it is mostly women who participate.

Thus it can be seen that within the regular activities at Wat Paaknaam, the position of the maechii in relation to both monks and laity varies enormously from context to context. This is the case, although they are always seen as fulfilling a role suitable to women. In the next chapter a wider range of ritual activities is examined which takes this discussion further and points to some of the factors related to this variation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a.m.</th>
<th>Maechii</th>
<th>a.m.</th>
<th>Monks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Rise</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.00-5.00</td>
<td><em>Tham watr chaw</em>: morning chanting</td>
<td>4.00-5.00</td>
<td>Individual meditation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.00-6.30</td>
<td>Preparation of food in kitchen</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td><em>Tham watr chaw</em>: morning chanting in bood (younger monks and novices)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.30-7.00</td>
<td>Breakfast in kitchen</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>Breakfast in saalaa</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.30-8.00</td>
<td>Dishwashing, cleaning of kitchen</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td><em>Tham watr chaw</em>: morning chanting in bood (older monks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.00-9.30</td>
<td>Pali classes for advanced scholars</td>
<td>8.00-9.30</td>
<td>Pali classes for advanced scholars</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>Preparation of pre-noon meal in kitchen</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-11.15</td>
<td>Serve monks food in kitchen and saalaa</td>
<td>11.15</td>
<td>Assemble in saalaa, accept food</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>Pre-noon meal in kitchen</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 noon- 1.00 p.m.</td>
<td>Serving of food to laity, washing dishes, cleaning kitchen</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>Monks chant blessing and leave saalaa</td>
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<td>p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>General classes</td>
<td>1.00-3.30</td>
<td>General classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>Cleaning of saalaa</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>Afternoon chanting: <em>tham watr yen</em> in saalaa</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Preparation of evening drink in kitchen</td>
<td>5.00-6.00</td>
<td><em>Tham watr yen</em>: evening chanting in bood</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.30-8.00</td>
<td>Meditation in Meditation Hall</td>
<td>6.30-8.00</td>
<td>Meditation in Meditation Hall</td>
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*Figure 2*
Chapter Five

RITUAL PRACTICE AND RELIGIOUS STATUS

This chapter is concerned with those aspects of the lives of maechii which I shall roughly term 'ritual practice'. On the one hand this includes activities the maechii perform among themselves, thereby expressing group solidarity and commonality of purpose; and on the other those activities where they perform certain rituals on behalf of the laity.

Within the framework of Thai Buddhism, there are two ritual manifestations of elevated religious status: that derived from understanding of and behaviour according to the model laid down in the canon for members of the Sangha, and that derived from participation by religious specialists in rituals which occur at significant points in the lives of the laity.

It is the emphasis on the many training rules of the monks which marks them out as persons fit to fulfil their specialist roles in the rituals necessary to the laity. These spheres of activity are closely linked, though in theory monks need not have more than the barest minimum of contact with laypeople. In this way has the monks' path of self-improvement been interpreted by and adapted to the needs of the laity.

In maintaining a ritual status distinct from that of the laity, maechii seem to emulate the monkly roles in both these spheres, monastic and pastoral (cf. Bunnag 1973:52). The 'monastic' role of the monk is
encapsulated in the Vinaya: the discipline of the monks, incorporating the ordination, the rules and their enforcement within the Sangha as a whole. A number of regular activities are directed towards the maintenance of these as prescribed in the canon. Maechii have adopted the responsibility of adhering to a similar, derivative code, and to some extent maintain regular observances to signify this. The 'pastoral' role of the monks, by which they are called upon to enhance and embellish lay ritual occasions is defined very much by what the laity see as their own requirements, and hence the maechii too are placed in a position whereby their similar and derived pastoral role is created by the demand for their services expressed by the laity.

Although the maechii at Wat Paaknaam are used as a point of reference for this chapter, the discussion necessarily moves beyond the wat community to the group most influential in the two spheres mentioned. In the case of the monastic aspect of the maechii role, the concept subscribed to by the samnak chii at Wat Paaknaam, as at other wat, is influenced by that of the national Thai Nuns' Institute. In the case of the pastoral spheres of course, the maechii respond to the specific needs of the lay groups with which Wat Paaknaam is most likely to come into contact.

The monastic sphere

The ordination ceremony for monks is a highly ritualised and precise event which forms one of the most important occasions for making merit in Thai society. As mentioned in Chapter Two, it is still the ideal in Thailand that every man will be ordained for at least a short period, preferably in his early twenties. Anthropologists have portrayed this ordination as a form of rite de passage (Rajadhon 1961:68-69; Tambiah
1968:58), which marks the beginning of adult maturity and responsibility for men. It is also an occasion when a son is said to repay his parents for their care by allowing them to gain merit at his ordination. Relatives and friends are also drawn in at the ordination ceremony, both to make merit themselves and to help contribute financially to the ordination. An ordination ceremony can be an expensive occasion, as both requisites for the ordained and offerings to the quorum of monks are needed. This may be a barrier to the poorest, though in theory the opportunity for ordination is open to all Thai men. Conversely, the degree of elaboration with which an ordination is carried out serves to indicate the socio-economic status of the sponsors.

Doctrinally the ordination ceremony for a monk must be seen to maintain the purity of the Sangha, and involves acceptance of the ordinand by a quorum of monks within sanctified bounds. This quorum may consist of only five monks, but twenty-five is more common in urban centres. Much of the ceremony is conducted in Pali, and requires rehearsal by the ordinand. The ordination itself is often preceded by an animistic rite during which the ordinand's khwan (guardian spirit) is called to strengthen and encourage the ordinand in his new endeavour, and the officiant, a lay 'khwan doctor' (moo tham khwan) gives a sermon on the new duties of the ordinand. The ordination and accompanying rites have been described in detail elsewhere (Vajirananavarorasa 1963; Wells 1975:136-152; Rittenberg 1978). The first part of this ceremony forms the ordination of a novice. No minimum quorum, but only a senior monk, is necessary for this ordination, but again a quorum of twenty-five monks is frequently used in Thailand.

In contrast to the restrained performance of the ordination itself, the procession to the ordination hall (bood) and the triple
circumambulation of the bodd is often a noisy and festive one, with anything from Thai dancing by the ordinand's male peers to a more frenzied and spectacular performance by hired female drum dancers. Lévy notes the parallels between this pageantry and the spectacular temptations which surrounded Gautama during his departure from the way of the world (1957:14). At Wat Paaknaam however, this part of the ceremony is always quiet and sedate. This is one of the occasions on which Luang Phqo's ban on music, films and other forms of entertainment at the wat is noticeable, and indicates the seriousness with which the wat expects ordination and what follows to be taken. In keeping with this seriousness, some ordinands listen to a sermon on their new life given by a monk in Luang Phqo's Hall the night preceding ordination. The often large group of friends and relatives who have come to make merit walk quietly, carrying elaborate offerings for the monks. With smaller groups, maechii from the wat might be requested to perform this task of leading the procession with the offerings. One informant explained that poorer people who had few friends to help sponsor the ceremony would invite maechii on this occasion.

Becoming a maechii involves two unpretentious processes. One is to request the group of eight precepts from a monk. The other involves the shaving of the hair and eyebrows, wearing the designated white clothes, and seeking the permission of the abbot or the huanaa of the prospective residence. For a young girl it is also necessary to gain permission from parents or other guardians, while a married woman must have permission from her husband. These requirements are similar to the prerequisites for monks. In contrast to the socially oriented and merit-focused ordination of monks, however, the 'ordination' of maechii at Wat Paaknaam is an often purely individual act, or at most witnessed
by a few friends and relatives who have no part in the ceremony. Shaving of the hair and eyebrows is done matter-of-factly by an experienced maechii, without the shared participation of relatives as is sometimes the case with monks. Sometimes the clipped locks are placed in a bowl of water and then thrown in a river, to ensure a calm, cool mind for the new maechii. After this the new maechii dresses herself in her white 'robes' and is escorted by the huanaa or a senior maechii to the kuti of the monk who is to give her the eight precepts. Although this may be done by any monk, a senior monk is preferable, and at Wat Paaknaam one of the two upaoha (monk preceptor) usually perform this task. After the precepts have been given the monk explains the precepts in Thai and gives a blessing to the new maechii. The maechii presents an offering of flowers, incense, candles and money to the monk, then later to the huanaa and finally to Luang Phq99. The simple ritual is then considered complete.

In many other wat this ceremony is performed with five or more monks, theoretically as many as the new maechii would like. In this case the maechii is given the benefit of some chanted blessing by the monks, and gains merit from her offerings to each monk. An informant from another wat pointed out that as a monk may not be alone with a single woman, he needed a monk companion to preserve the precepts during the ceremony. When I enquired why at Wat Paaknaam only one monk was preferred, I was informed that that was the way that Luang Phq99 had established. One monk giving the precepts is apparently quite common. The Nuns' Institute has as a rule that a minimum of five monks must be present unless in some areas it is not possible to find this many, in which case as few as two monks suffices. This preference for a minimum five monks is obviously related to the common Thai
requirement of such a quorum of monks in any ritual in which monks participate. Maechii, however, are not ordained in any sense of entering an Order. The Pali-based Thai words for ordination of monks and novices (upasombot and banphachaa respectively) are not applicable to chii, with reference to whom there is only the common phrase 'buat maechii' which means just what it says 'to become a meachii', or 'to attain the status of maechii'. 'buat', a word which can be also applied to monks and novices, appears to be of mixed Sanskrit and Pali derivation entering Thai through Khmer usage. It has been suggested that it is composed of the first syllable of the Sanskrit pravrajya (going abroad, migration, leaving home), and the final syllables of the Pali pabbajja (ordination of novices).¹

It is thus evident that the 'ordination' of maechii is simply an elaboration of a basic Buddhist lay ritual regarding the taking of precepts. The lack of formal recognition given to the status attained thereby is reflected in the comparative lack of interest and support shown by lay relatives of the woman involved. The ceremony is not accompanied by the general activity normally associated with merit-making or its transference to others, and this contrasts strongly with the ordination of monks.

The procedure for leaving the state of being a maechii (kaan syk) is also a simple one, involving formal abrogation of the eight precepts, again in the presence of a monk or monks, and the taking of the five precepts. Most maechii have their horoscope read by a monk who chooses an auspicious time and date on which to perform this rite since, as is the case with monks on this occasion, maechii feel that they are leaving a secure state of living in the wat and maintaining precepts for the less protected secular state of ordinary laity. Hence the
officiating monk or monks chant some protective stanzas for the woman in order to give her good fortune in the future. At Wat Paaknaam respects are then paid by the woman to the officiating monk (who may well have 'ordained' her), then to the abbot, to Luang Phoq and to the huanaa.

The bhikkhu has 227 highly specific rules of training which he must learn and try to follow. These are rules designed to ensure the bhikkhu's disciplined striving in the Path the Buddha taught, and also to ensure that monks individually and collectively command the respect of the laity by their harmonious and proper conduct. There are also rules for the Sangha to maintain discipline of and by its members, and regular recitation of the training rules and confession of faults form a constant reminder of the importance of the self-discipline binding upon all monk members of the Sangha. The ostensible reason for becoming a monk is to learn about dhamma, and, freed from worldly responsibilities, try to attain to the freedom from suffering that the Buddha espoused. The rules of the monk are seen as a means to this higher goal. Thais attach a great deal of importance to the fact that monks have as their goal so many rules. The large number of training rules taken by the monk, in comparison to the five precepts of the layman, is the most common reason given for the relatively high ritual status of monks accorded by laity. It is interesting to remember in this regard that, as noted previously, the members of the now obsolete Order of Bhikkhunī maintained a very much larger number of rules than is the case for monks.

The Vinaya, the highly elaborate code of discipline with its accompanying set of regulations concerned with infringements and penalties for members of the Order, are contrasted with the stilāa
(morality; precepts). These precepts are more general guidelines to behaviour than the Vinaya, and fall into three groupings of ten, eight and five (see Appendix). The first part of the monks' ordination ceremony — i.e. that which forms the ordination of the novice — involves taking the ten precepts. Hence these are restricted to members of a particular group defined by age and sex. Of course, those men who proceed through the entire ordination ceremony to become monks, are also bound by the ten precepts, and are seen as following these as well as the Vinaya.

Though novices, in contrast to the monks, have only ten precepts to maintain, they are members of the Sangha proper. Though not fully ordained members, novices are regarded as being in training for the monks' greater responsibilities. Hence, student novices study all the rules of the Vinaya, not merely their own precepts.

The group of eight precepts has been elaborated from the basic group of five mentioned in the Canon (Terwiel 1979:183) and has remained unchanged since early Buddhism (ibid.:210). Some laypeople take these eight precepts, for this step is one open to all laypeople who wish to follow a level of practice which is more restrictive than that of the ordinary layman. This is most often done for twenty-four hours on wan phra, but may also be done for special occasions or by those who wish to put into practice greater piety. The eight precepts can be observed at any time anywhere, and may be maintained at home, although most Thais prefer to take them in the presence of a monk, and, if possible, to stay at wat to maintain them. Terwiel notes that those taking the eight precepts undertake to do so for a definite period of time by repeating, after the eighth rule, a Pali sentence limiting observance to 'this day and this night' (ibid.:197). He
thus stresses the difference between this set of precepts and the set of ten precepts, canonically reserved for members of the Sangha, which carry no time limit with them (ibid.:211-212). He also notes that the Pali/Sanskrit-derived terms 'ubaasok' and 'ubaasikaa' are used to refer to these laymen and laywomen for the period for which they maintain these precepts (ibid.:198). These terms are not, therefore, used generally for laity, or even for the very pious, except on such occasions.  

When women who choose to become maechii undertake to maintain the eight precepts, they do so for an indefinite period. Maechii phraam decide upon the duration of their period of observance prior to ordination. In both cases the handbook of Wat Paaknaam advises that while the officiating monk (phra aacaan) summarises the precepts for them, new maechii should inwardly agree to maintain the precepts in purity and completeness indefinitely (tqq pai) (Kh.uum ubaasok ubaasikaa: 1978:49). There is no reference to the qualifying time limit clause in this case. Hence the intentions of the maechii, like those of the novices, are not subject to that verbalisation of the time limit of observance which allows laity to return home without further ceremony at the end of twenty-four hours. Like monks and novices, maechii must formally sqk before they may consider themselves ordinary laypeople. The same word is used with reference to monks and novices leaving the Order. Thus, on the one hand, maechii maintain a set of lay precepts that are in general practice made clear to be of temporary duration, while on the other, the indefinite nature of their commitment requires them to formally rescind it much as monks and novices leave the membership of the Sangha. They are therefore in an ambiguous position between the lay and the ordained in these regards. When
some maechii choose regularly to repeat their taking of the precepts on wan phra each week, they are indicating an insecurity about their position, and may be seen to be needing to reaffirm their commitment precisely because the eight precepts are not usually taken or maintained for more than twenty-four hours.

However, the practice advocated by some members of the Nuns' Institute, though not invariably adhered to, that of maechii mutually confessing to misdemeanours the day before wan phra, heightens the similarity between maechii and monks, since it resembles the canonically prescribed confession of faults prior to their fortnightly recital of the *Patimokkha* by the latter (Nyanamoli Thera 1969:43-47).

All maechii at Wat Paaknaam are familiar with the meaning and implications of each of their eight precepts. The first five precepts closely correspond to those taken and maintained by any ordinary Buddhist layman, except that the third precept for maechii forbids any sexual activity at all, whereas laity are forbidden only illicit sexual activity. The last three precepts of the group of eight mark off those who have given up the pleasures of lay people, and maechii share these with novices. Thus novices, although they are said to maintain ten precepts, in fact differ from maechii in only one precept they maintain, for the seventh precept of the group of eight is split up into two precepts for them, and they thus exceed maechii only in that they undertake to observe the tenth precept of not accepting gold or silver. The maintenance of this tenth precept by novices is indeed important, for, as previously mentioned, in Thailand it is only to members of the Sangha, which includes novices, do the laity properly and regularly give alms and other support. The symbolism of not handling money and thus expressing one's dependence on those still
concerned with worldly matters is, however, lessened at Wat Paaknaam by monks and novices openly handling money to purchase their needs as indeed is quite common in modern Thailand.

Although novices maintain only ten precepts, their social position is in some measure commensurate with their status as members of the Sangha. They wear similar robes to those of monks and usually go out on almsround, although they are subservient to the monks. As Terwiel points out, the daily behaviour of novices 'is more an imitation of monkly comportment than a direct result of carefully analysing the portent of the ten precepts' (1979:212). Nevertheless, novices are excluded from such formal duties of the full members of the Sangha as the Patimokkha recital and decision-making meetings, and of course, they do not participate in the ritual ordination of a monk (ibid.:70). Maechii, who are even further removed from the status of monks than are novices, also follow the path of the monk in many ways which go beyond the requirements of their eight precepts. This is evident in a variety of ways, from details of clothing and behaviour, through ritual observances, to willingness to participate in household rites in a role similar to that of monks. There is, undoubtedly, a large range of variations in all of these; many of the factors discussed below apply only to some maechii at Wat Paaknaam while others remain oblivious or indifferent to them.

One of the first things impressed upon a new young maechii at Wat Paaknaam is the strict attention to deportment and politeness expected of her. Bunnag (1973:34) has noted the sudden change in behaviour with the change of status of a rowdy young man when he becomes a serene and restrained monk. Monks are expected to dress, speak and eat with decorum and deliberation. Such a transformation, and the system of
social reinforcement, is also in evidence among maechii. At Wat Paaknaam the lack of ornamentation in dress includes no wearing of watches. Nails have to be cut short, which, together with the shaving of head and eyebrows, is the requirement for monks. Like many monks, maechii adopt plain, simple sandals at all times, and sombre umbrellas and bags for business trips outside the wat. New maechii are reminded not to shout, laugh immoderately, or indulge in rowdy play, and ill-tempered behaviour meets with disapproval. Maechii are expected to sit modestly and speak politely, and never to run, and most try to maintain an immaculate appearance, no small feat in the polluted atmosphere of Bangkok when wearing white.

Other maechii adopt a more direct imitation of some of the stricter Thai rules for monks, such as speaking little to men, especially unknown laymen, and refusing to touch or accept anything from the hand of a man. This corresponds to the monks' avoidance of physical contact with women and girls, and with objects which women are touching. This latter is sometimes very difficult to maintain for maechii since this code is not generally accepted in Thai society. Thai men do not always give maechii polite berth, nor do they expect to have to use an intermediary when handing things to a maechii. Indeed, in the absence of such an intermediary, some maechii will reluctantly take the proffered object, an action unthinkable for a monk, for the woman concerned would do the utmost to help him to preserve what is regarded by Thais as an essential rule of the Vinaya. Other maechii are more pragmatic on this point, and accept the necessity of buying from male shopkeepers and so forth without fuss. In contrast to the rigidity of the monks' code, very few maechii would regard male children as taboo to touch. A few very strict maechii refuse to touch money, and like strict monks and novices,
will only accept donations in an envelope, and will enlist the aid of a laywoman in financial transactions. None of these elaborations are prescribed for maechii in the same way as the Vinaya prescribes the code for monks. Maechii in Thailand have only vague tradition and the example of the monks as guidance, and strict avoidance of touching men can be seen as an imitation of the Thai monks' ritual avoidance of women, even though, in fact, the Vinaya itself does not forbid monks to touch women. In Thai society deliberate touching between the sexes is not considered appropriate, and thus maechii behaviour towards men is little more than an elaboration of polite social form. This might, of course, also be said of the code for monks, except that the rigidity of this code also reflects beliefs of magical powers and pollution. Those who do wish to explain this aspect of a maechii's deportment, however, do so in terms of 'we must do this, just as monks do this, just the same'. Maechii recognise their special responsibility to behave with mindfulness at all times. Even among themselves reprimands for unladylike behaviour are made in such terms as 'What are you saying? You are a maechii now!' 'Maechii are not like laity,' an elder maechii told me, 'they are not free like laity to do as they please; they always have to be better behaved.' The prime model for this superior behaviour is the conduct of the monks.

In contrast to the deportment of maechii, however, the maintenance of precepts is not subject to such strict scrutiny. Little importance is attached by others to the private maintenance of training rules or precepts held over and above the minimum required of maechii. In general, however, any precepts maintained in addition to those actually requested are a matter of private practice of an individual, and those maechii who choose to do so are regarded with respect but little
interest. Laity generally are aware of whether particular monks or maechii are lax or strict about maintaining their rules or precepts, but with the generalised precepts of the maechii, overt behaviour is more indicative of a proper frame of mind than is the voluntary subscription to aspects of the monks' code.

The Order of Monks has a number of observances (e.g. the fortnightly Patimokkha recitation) intended to safeguard the maintenance of the monks' rules. When I asked if the maechii at Wat Paaknaam had any similar observances, I received the reply that the maechii take the precepts in the bood on wan phra. This is at the weekly congregation of monks, laity and maechii referred to in Chapter Four. At eight o'clock on the morning of each wan phra the laity and maechii listen as the monks perform their morning chanting. The laity and maechii then chant, and then take the eight precepts from a monk, before listening to a sermon given by a monk. The maechii at Wat Paaknaam are encouraged to attend this ceremony, and in fact a large number regularly do so. For the laity attending this is an opportunity to observe extra precepts as an act of piety, and for both maechii and laity, the ritual taking of the precepts may be seen as something of a magical act which heightens the sense of entering a beneficial state as the result of undertaking religious modes of conduct.

Each maechii should be encouraged to be mindful of not only her eight precepts but the right performance of all her actions. The confession of faults by maechii is a system of enabling discipline to be maintained, for maechii do not have prescribed rules which direct action to automatically be taken for various offences. If a maechii has been justly criticised for wrong behaviour she is expected to admit the fault; if she does not do so stronger action should be taken by
the huanaa of her residence. I heard of only one case where such
punishment was called for, at Wat Sanaam Phraam in Phetburi. The
offence concerned unkind speech by one maechii toward another, and the
offender was considered to compound her guilt by refusing to admit to
the incident. As a result of her recalcitrance, she was expelled but
refused to leave, so the huanaa imposed the only other effective sanction
at her disposal: the other maechii at the wat were forbidden to speak
to the offender. After a period of such isolation the maechii admitted
her fault and was treated normally by her peers. I found no evidence
of such action ever having been taken at Wat Paaknaam.

Another area of general observance pertinent to maechii is the
observance of the period of Rainy Season Retreat (Phansaa). Whenever
possible men who are able to ordain even for just a short time do so
for the three month Phansaa period. For monks the amount of time spent
as a monk is reckoned in terms of the number of such periods one has
been in the wat, and those who do not spend this period as monks, even
though ordained for many months, do not appear on the National Register
of the Department of Religious Affairs (Bunnag 1973:37). Ideally all
ordained monks and novices remain at the wat for the full term, not
disrobing before the end of Phansaa has been ritually acknowledged.
At Wat Paaknaam, however, those who want to be ordained briefly at a
time which would coincide with Phansaa but not outlast it can do so as
long as they make their intentions clear before ordination. Among the
maechii at Wat Paaknaam the observance of the full term of Phansaa
received wide recognition. To the chagrin of some of the senior maechii,
women do continue to come and be ordained for brief periods regardless
of the Retreat, but the numbers of these have to be limited to some
extent by the limited accommodation at this time. There are also quite
a number of women who come to be ordained specifically for Phansaa as
do men. Some did this out of respect for the general tradition of
maintenance of the Retreat, while others added that during this period
of intensified activity of the wat courses of study started for the
newly arrived, a benefit for both men and women who had a limited time
to spend at the wat. In provincial Ayutthaya Bunnag also records a
'slight increase' in the number of maechii during Phansaa (1973:89),
indicating perhaps less general acceptance of this observance outside
Bangkok.

The maechii at Wat Paaknaam also celebrate the commencement of
Phansaa as a body. This ritual largely consists of a sermon given by
the abbot in the bood in the afternoon of wan khao Phansaa (the first day
of Phansaa). The abbot explained the meaning of each of the eight
precepts taken by the maechii for the benefit of new maechii. He spoke
of an intensive period of study during which all are confined to the wat.
He also stressed that they had all come together to learn under the one
Luang Phq9 and that they were, with the monks and novices, like Luang
Phq9's children. After this maechii were bidden to go to Luang Phq9's
Hall and pay respect to him, which they did in unison to conclude the
ceremony. On this day monks have a ceremony of chanting a proclamation
of entering Phansaa, part of which stresses the importance of harmonious
relations between monks and novices who will have to live in close
proximity for three months (Wells 1975:166-7). It can be seen that
similar themes are stressed for the maechii. Nevertheless it is
significant that the ceremony for the maechii is led by the abbot as
head of the wat, rather than by the head of the maechii. During Phansaa
at Wat Paaknaam the religious practice of maechii is emphasised more
strongly than at other times, and the routine chanting and lessons are
adhered to more rigorously, as is the case with monks. Similarly both maechii and monks are required to have an urgent reason, such as serious illness in the family, for permission to spend any length of time away from the wat since at this time members of the Order are canonically proscribed from going forth from their retreat. Despite the disinterest of some maechii, therefore, the general tenor of life in the samnak chii reflects that of the wat as a whole, and of the expectations of lay supporters of the wat community.

To mark the commencement of khao Phansaa some of the members of the Nuns' Institute held a ceremony of their own at Sanaam Phraam which was based closely on that required for the monks that day. Similarly, at the end of Phansaa when the monks held a ceremony where they ask forgiveness of each other for any grievances they may have caused their fellow monks during Phansaa, maechii at the Institute informed me that on this day maechii at many wat perform their own ceremony of this kind among themselves. At Wat Paaknaam, however, I was told, in answer to queries, that each maechii should think of these things in her own mind, but that the maechii had no such collective ceremony. I have no comparative data from other wat on these issues, but it seems clear that the interest and knowledge of the huanaa and possibly the abbot of each wat will influence the degree to which maechii maintain a corporate discipline based on the monks' example. It is possible that the Nuns' Institute example is not followed at smaller, less well organised and less autonomous samnak chii.

At Wat Paaknaam I witnessed another ceremony connected to the Phansaa period which deserves mention. This ceremony apparently occurs each year on the birthday of the head of the maechii's Meditation Section at the wat. During the period of my fieldwork this event fell on the
first day of Phansaa. On the day preceding Phansaa the wat held a ceremony of thawaay phoa aapnaam fon, an offering of rainy season bathing clothes often held at this time of year, and even on this day. Bathing clothes and other goods are distributed by lot to all the members of the Sangha at the wat. Maechii do not receive such gifts at this time, although some informants said that some laity donate thosit kathin (End-of-Phansaa) clothes to maechii. In this latter case, I was told, it was not appropriate to offer to the maechii without having offered to monks first. Nevertheless, the event of the first day of Phansaa must be seen as a symbolic gesture of recognition of the observance of Phansaa by the maechii.

Those who celebrate their birthday in Thailand do so by making merit on the day, usually by offering food to the monks. The head of the Meditation Section accordingly offered food to the novices of the wat in the early morning of her birthday, the first day of Phansaa. For the pre-noon meal she invited a number of the most senior maechii of the Nuns' Institute, of which she is herself an active member of long standing. These maechii ate the offered meal in the Sangha during the monks' meal. At about one o'clock the maechii of the wat gathered in the Sangha and seated themselves on the benches where the monks had received their bathing clothes the previous day. About half of the laity who had been present at the midday meal, most of them women, had remained behind, and they now presented offerings to all of the maechii. The offerings consisted of white handbags, white bathing clothes, candles and incense. When all the sets had been distributed, the laity prostrated themselves, as is done with presentations to monks, and the ceremony was completed with chanting by the maechii. I was told that at Wat Paaknaam this presentation has been made to the maechii on this occasion every year.
for 'many years'. The laity who made the presentation together had helped purchase the large number of offerings through their donations to the meditation head for this purpose. The maechii concerned is a well-known, well respected member of the wat because of the skill in meditation she has attained, and this no doubt helps her to amass enough support for this occasion which bears obvious resemblance to the ceremony of offering to monks for the Rainy Season. Although this ceremony is inspired by an individual it received the support of that individual's followers.

The pastoral sphere

In the pastoral sphere the basic and most important function of the religious specialist is to provide the opportunity for the laity to make merit (tham bun) by their support. This arises out of the lay duty to provide support for the Sangha, and is elaborated in many ways to enable individuals to tham bun according to inclination and means. As we have already seen, the act of offering to monks and novices does not often extend to offering to maechii as well, although there are individual exceptions to the rule which are explained in a number of ways. Most people would acknowledge the plausibility of offering to maechii as an alternative to, or rather, in addition to offering to monks. The majority of those who discussed this also acknowledged that such an offering was meritorious. Such offerings may often be made to maechii of one's acquaintance who receives support through previous ties. One regular to Wat Paaknaam, however, volunteered that he offered clothes to the maechii throughout the year because he sympathised with the maechii who were in the same financial position as monks but to whom nobody offered things as they did to monks. Others who agree with his point of view
rarely put this into action. Nevertheless maechii do act to stimulate donations to the Sangha without themselves becoming the focus of such activity.

The maechii of Wat Paaknaam often pass on news of thaat phaapaa of other fund-raising activities of their own and other wat. They solicit contributions for these amongst their fellow maechii and laity and friends, using an extensive network based on their position as members of a wat community. In this way they take it upon themselves to remind the laity and each other of their duty to support the Sangha, usually phrased in terms of opportunities to tham bun. This role is similar to that mentioned by Pallegoix (1854:II:43) in the nineteenth century when chii collected alms on behalf of their wat. On receipt of such donations the maechii would usually offer a short blessing either in Thai or Pali. At Wat Paaknaam the maechii were also organised to help on occasions of fund-raising at the wat. For the beginning of Phansaa ceremonies mentioned above, for example, the maechii spent several hours seated upstairs in the saalaa surrounded by cartons of soap, toothbrushes and candles which they transformed into hundreds of sets of offerings of bathing clothes and other suitable requisites. These sets were then sold at the wat on the day by laywomen for a fixed charge. Preparation of such sets at the wat ensured that plenty were available for the wat's large population, and also lead to a certain level of uniformity of offerings, although some laity had bought commercially available sets. The labour of the maechii also possibly raised revenue for the wat, as it is likely that the charge of sixty baht more than covered the costs of the component offerings. In this case the maechii's work to enable laity to make merit was indirect only, and served the general needs of the wat itself.
So far in this chapter I have considered aspects of status and ritual which are largely based on specifically Buddhist activities. The maintenance of Buddhist monkly observances largely serves to maintain the Sangha as a distinct and ritually superior body, and in this the laity have only a small part to play. Other ritual aspects of the monks' role however, concern the laity much more, for they are concerned with the occasions on which the laity invite monks to participate in rituals based on activities in lay life. Life crisis rituals and ceremonies held to celebrate and create bun for new ventures form the bulk of these. In Bangkok the occasions on which monks are invited to enable laity to tham bun have become extremely diverse, from the commencement of all sorts of business ventures to official government functions. For the majority of lay people, however, monks are invited on such occasions as weddings, housewarmings, and funerals. The role of monks is not uniformly recognised at all of these functions. Some Thai feel, for example, that it is not proper to invite monks to such a worldly ceremony as a marriage. On the whole such views are also extended to the idea of inviting maechii; nevertheless monks and maechii are invited to such ceremonies by those not bothered by such niceties. Unlike those aspects of the comparison between monks and maechii considered so far, where differences can be seen to exist between various samnak depending upon leadership, lay sponsored events, and the role of monks and maechii in them, are to a large extent the creation of laity themselves. Such variation reflects not only beliefs and tastes of the laity concerned, but also economic means and social standing, and it is because of this that a different sort of perception of the status of maechii can be seen in operation. Maechii at Wat Paaknaam reported that they went quite frequently to chant at weddings, and housewarmings, or to accept
a meal at the house of sponsoring laity, but the ritual I was most aware of in terms of their time, and the only ritual I witnessed their participation in was funerals, and it is to these rites that I therefore wish to confine my discussion.

As Wells has pointed out, for Thailand, 'Funeral rites are the most elaborate of all the life-cycle ceremonies and the ones entered into most fully by the monks.' (1975:214) By their nature, they are not auspicious rites, but are concerned with the maximum possible amount of merit-making for the deceased as well as for those attending. Because of this every monk is expected to learn the funeral chants so as to be able to honour this obligation to the laity. The participation of monks at funerals is held to be essential. The participation of maechii is by no means essential, or even common. Maechii are invited to chant at a funeral only if the lay host desires it, and when they do so they form an addition to the chanting of the monks. On only one occasion did I witness a night of chanting to which only maechii, and no monks, were invited. Only the wife of the deceased and two monks from the funeral wat were present as audience. This was the one occasion on which their decorum failed the maechii and the start of the chanting was marred by their nervous giggles.

Among the maechii at Wat Paaknaam there are six groups who regularly chant at funerals. Each group (chut) consists of four maechii who chant together where possible. There are also a small number of maechii who are able to chant but prefer not to do so regularly who are called on in emergencies. Almost all of these maechii are young, their ages ranging from late teens to early thirties. Only one senior maechii, a residence head in her fifties who had been a maechii for about twelve years, had recently decided to learn the chants and attend funerals.
The huanaa herself does not chant in this way. Several different chanting works are used for funerals, and each requires a lot of practice to commit to memory.

The different chants may be ranked according to difficulty and degree of sacredness. The longest and most highly esteemed chant is Abhidhamma. The condensed commentary version of this, known as Sangkhaha, is regarded as being equally sacred (Wells 1975:225). Another chant popular for funerals is Phra Maalaay, an account of the adventures of a famous monk who visits the various heavens and hells (Terwiel 1979: 193, 258). A fourth style, Klook is to be used only by maechii. Klook is chanted in Thai as is Phra Maalaay. Sangkhaha is often chanted in Pali and in Thai translation, and Abhidhamma can also be chanted in Thai if the lay host so desires. Only two groups of monks at Wat Paaknaam can chant Phra Maalaay: monks usually chant the Abhidhamma or Sangkhaha, while maechii usually chant Klook or, if not that, Phra Maalaay. Only one group of nuns at the wat have bothered to master the most difficult, Abhidhamma texts. Thus, although the monks and maechii chant the works requested by the lay host, there is a general tendency for the monks to be requested to chant the holiest Pali chants, while the maechii chant the more prosaic Thai sermons on the effects of karma.

This general division is increased by the fact that on any occasion the maechii may not chant the same work as the monks, but must perform a complementary set of chants. According to one informant, this complementarity arises so that maechii, whose voices are regarded as more pleasing, do not embarrass the monks with their superior rendition.

As Wat Paaknaam is not a funeral wat, the bulk of invitations for monks to chant at funerals may well arise out of the lay host's ties with the wat. However there are also those who choose to invite
residents of Wat Paaknaam simply on account of the wat's reputation, and this is especially true of the invitations to maechii. As it is a Bangkok wat known to have a large number of maechii in residence, many lay hosts invite maechii from there without any previous contact with the wat, and more often than not maechii from Wat Paaknaam attend a funeral with monks from another wat. On occasion, though, the host will invite monks from the wat and request them to invite maechii on their behalf, and maechii are sometimes requested to do likewise. Such invitations are often simply telephoned through the public relations section. Those maechii who chant regularly can often receive invitations to do so four or five times a week, sometimes at different funerals. When it is remembered that only a very few maechii are involved in this activity, however, the comparative rarity of invitations for maechii emerges. For those few who do chant frequently, however, they have access to a means of income which is common to most monks, but rare for maechii, and some maechii are motivated to learn the chants for just this reason.

The nights of chanting held prior to the day of cremation may be divided into two parts: the first, the period of chanting of texts mentioned above, which is followed by brief chanting with the chanters holding the sacred cotton thread, the saaysin, and during this part of the evening merit is made and transferred to the dead. During the first part of the proceedings the monks are seated on an elevated platform near the Buddha image, in a position of ritual superiority vis-à-vis the laity. Maechii are usually also seated on a elevated platform at some distance from the monks and the Buddha image. Each group have candles and incense lit on the altar before them by the hosts. During the chanting the laity sit attentively facing the chanters with their
hands held in a position of respect. Many of the laity, especially men, are often noticeably less attentive during the chanting of the maechii, which alternates with that of the monks. Also, the light supper provided is often served before the maechii have finished their chant. This is not related to a wish to speed up the proceedings, as the length of the interval of playing by the small orchestra is often considerable. Lay hosts, who sit nearest the chanters, usually resist any open displays of inattentiveness. Nevertheless on one occasion, one of these hosts, an elderly man, sat indifferently with his back to the maechii when they chanted. This particular night of chanting had been sponsored by financial firms and business associates of the deceased, and this man was not only one of the chief organisers but also the person who decided that maechii were to be included in the evening’s proceedings. Yet his reception to the role of the maechii during the ceremony lacked the formal respect and attention paid to the monks.

This ambivalence towards the place of the maechii within the funeral rites is also in evidence in the second portion of the ceremony, although this is revealed not in terms of individual reactions, but by the limits placed on their role by the host. At this stage the monks chant in order to confer merit on those present as well as for the deceased. For this they hold a magical thread, saaysin, which is attached to the corpse. The laity also receive this merit, and often transfer it to the deceased by the ritual pouring of water. This is also the time when offerings are made to the monks and maechii. After the offerings have been made the monks then briefly chant a blessing. During these two chants the laity are at their most attentive, and it is clear that most consider this the most important part of the ritual. In some cases the maechii are expected to follow the monks in first chanting with the
saaysin, and then, again following the monks, chanting a blessing. On other occasions the host does not request them to do so. When maechii do follow the monks in this part of the ritual the lay guests invariably acknowledge the act as they do that of the monks. It appears therefore that the merit and blessing conferred by the maechii is accepted to a greater degree than is the preaching involved in the earlier chanting. Nevertheless some hosts felt that it is inappropriate for the maechii to perform this final task at all.

Monks are traditionally expected to learn and understand Pali, and to be of the status appropriate to the 'magical power' of the words they chant (Tambiah 1968b). They may be held to be in a position to 'expound matters of Buddhist doctrine, the noble truths of detachment and conquest of life, [and] victorious episodes in the Buddha's life', which have no direct relation to the everyday concerns of laity (ibid.:180), by virtue of their avowed path. Maechii, on the other hand, are not expected to be masters of the sacred texts, and being closer to worldly concerns, discourse not on such elevated topics, but hold forth on more worldly, karmic concerns to laity, which is more fitting to their lesser religious status. The latter role, while perhaps edifying, does not command the respect accorded the more mysterious and inscrutable chants of the monks. Since monks tend to chant in Pali, and maechii in Thai, laity would be aware of the difference in the status of the chants as well as that of the chanters, for the general themes of the various discourses are common knowledge. Moreover, although the lay host chooses the chants for the evening, he is likely to be advised by monks more knowledgeable than himself and this may also influence the role expected of the maechii. For some, the very chanting of the maechii automatically confers the blessings and good fortune which, at a more magical level, is
believed to flow in such a ritual, in spite of the lesser standing of the maechii themselves. The role of the maechii, then, is selectively accepted at lower levels of religious understanding. Possibly one reason for this difference lies in the fact that these chants follow the act of offering to the maechii and that some of the benefits accruing from this act are believed to apply as a matter of course.

The presentation of offerings is an integral part of any Thai ritual involving monks. Together with the taking of the five precepts at the commencement of most rites, which defines the ritual status of the laity for the duration of the rite, the offering is the occasion of the completion of the rite whereby the monks enable the laity, as those not on the monks surer path, to make merit. As I have pointed out earlier, funerals are occasions on which the making of as much merit as possible is of primary importance. The prime focus of this merit is the deceased, and for this reason a person's entire fortune can be spent by relatives on his funeral (Plion-Bernier 1973:36; Wells 1975:217). The offerings made to monks and maechii on such occasions can vary from simple traditional offerings of flowers, incense and candles, to more elaborate gifts. The offerings made to monks must always be uniform, as must those made to maechii, although the same offerings need not necessarily be made to both groups. Sometimes distinctions are made in the presentation of gifts to be offered, in that the monks' gifts, wrapped in traditional yellow paper, contrast to the maechii gifts, which are wrapped in colourful gift wrappings. Almost inevitably a distinction is made between the donors to the respective groups. On some occasions the closest relatives of the deceased present offerings to the monks, while less close relatives offer to the maechii. Sometimes the elder, parental generation offers to the monks while the members of the next generations
subsequently donate to the maechii. Often monks receive offerings from the male laity, while maechii receive from the women. Thus, superiors are given precedence in donating to the ritually highest people, and their inferiors offer to those of only marginally higher ritual status than themselves. In all three cases, the numbers of those who actually make an offering is theoretically expanded, and in the same way the chanting of the holy mantras to the corpse and for the laity may also be increased.

Maechii can also be invited to attend the final rites held on the day of cremation and are invited to eat a meal at the same time as that offered to monks. The meal offered to the monks on this occasion, just prior to the cremation, is in part offered as food for the preta, the spirits of the dead (Wells 1975:220). According to Wells, gifts intended to reach the preta must be offered to the members of the Sangha. From the three cremations I attended, it seems that maechii are not always expected to join the triple circumambulation of the funeral tower led by monks. This would seem to indicate that although their role as religious specialists is limited, they are not seen as wholly sharing the needs and concerns of the lay friends and relatives present. However, they are given precedence over laity in the procession to place their bundle of incense and candle on the funeral pyre. Indeed, maechii from Wat Paaknaam are sometimes invited to the nearby cremation wat to perform just this service. On one such occasion about forty maechii arrived to sit briefly, before passing before the coffin and returning home. Before the lighting of the pyre, monks who have officiated at the funeral each chant over a cloth draped on the coffin of the deceased. The monks then keep these robes (Pangsakuula), this ritual being a reference to the early tradition of monks taking rags from corpses as their robes.
At one funeral attended by maechii from Wat Sanaam Phraam, of which I saw photographic documentation, maechii also received white clothes in a similar manner. On another occasion maechii from this wat, one hundred in all, were invited to chant at the house of the deceased after the monks had departed, and to appear, again briefly, at the cremation. This was the funeral of the mother of a monk at the wat, at which several male relatives of the deceased were ordained as novices. Large numbers of novices from the wat had also been invited on the final day, attesting to the large amount of money spent on the funeral, the importance the sponsor attached to the ceremony and the way in which he utilized both kin and wat ties to enhance the merit made.

Funerals are subject to many forms of elaboration, and to a large range of expenditures, and as I have shown, the role of the maechii can be seen to be part of this elaboration of the basic ritual. Elaboration is usually a function of wealth and the necessity to reflect status by those hosting such a function, and indeed, most of the funerals attended by maechii from Wat Paaknaam seemed to reflect a certain degree of wealth. At the one funeral I attended for a poorer group of people, the role of the maechii was accepted rather ungraciously by the laity; there even seemed to be some public debate on their presence. In this case the maechii had been invited by a monk who had been invited by the family of the deceased to be the host/sponsor of the evening. In casual conversation I was once informed by a newly-ordained monk that maechii did not chant at funerals: despite his wealthy background, the speaker had genuinely not heard of such an occurrence within his experience of wealthy, and presumably elaborate, ceremonies. In funerals involving a series of hosts taking turns to be sponsor, no attempt is made to ensure uniformity as to whether maechii are invited on all nights.
or not. In short, the role of maechii at such functions is by no means universally accepted or even conceived in identical ways.

It has often been noted by observers of Thai society that the Thai language contains within it a highly complex and important system of placing persons within the hierarchy which is an ubiquitous aspect of Thai social life. A clear example of this is the special vocabulary used to refer to monks. This vocabulary identifies their higher ritual status classifiable as *ong*, 'mana-filled objects' or by use of the term *maep*. Such terms are usually regarded as being used exclusively for monks, and are always substituted for common words with reference to monks. However, there is no such uniformity with reference to maechii, and the shifts and alternatives reflect the ambiguous perception of them by those around them and by the maechii themselves. There has crept into the language used with reference to maechii, usages analogous to that used for monks.

Many people, including monks, point out that the use of sacerdotal words with reference to maechii is not correct, while others, including some maechii, argue that it indicates respect towards religious personnel and is therefore correct. Yet others, when speaking to maechii will hesitate or stumblingly change from an ordinary to an elevated word (or, rarely, the other way) in mid-sentence. Men are more likely to use common forms of a word for maechii than are women, and are more likely to refer to them as 'chii' without the polite prefix. All this represents a strong contrast to the case of monks, where all unhesitatingly use the higher status words.

Greetings provide an instantaneous clue to relative status in Thailand. Monks must not return the respectful *wai* of any other than a fellow monk. Maechii usually return this greeting to maechii and
laity alike, using the codes of status based on age, sex, and social standing common to all laity. The most common titles for monks, Luang Phop and Luang Phii have no counterpart among maechii. Maechii may be addressed by strangers simply as Maechii, although laity known to the maechii will usually address her by a kin term of honoured status, possibly with a prefacing polite Khun (e.g. Khun Mae, Mother; Khun Paa, Aunt). Many of the words used with regards to actions of or towards maechii show a tendency to reflect a dependence on context for decisions as to appropriate use. 'To give', with reference to the action of laity in relation to monks, is commonly thawaay, or another sacerdotal word (e.g. thaan), no matter how perfunctory the act. With maechii however, this word is used only for the formal act of offering in ritual contexts, while the common hai is otherwise used. Similarly nimmon, the term used to invite monks in a formal or informal manner, is restricted to those occasions when maechii are invited to participate in ceremonies such as funerals, and even then many people use the common term choen. The special word chan is rarely used for eating by maechii except when they are invited to do so as a part of a ceremony. The monks' word for bathing is not considered appropriate for maechii. Even the dwellings of maechii are cause for contention: some referring to them as kuti, while others suggest they should best be regarded as baan (house). There is also disagreement about the use of classifiers for maechii. Some people use ong or mup, sacerdotal words for Buddha images and monks respectively, while others use the ordinary khon, or modified this to a more polite thaan. Sometimes dispute arises over the use of such terms, especially in the last-mentioned case. By no means all maechii are prepared to abrogate for themselves the words more conservatively restricted to monks, although a few are inclined
to argue that, as a person's respect for religion is reflected in their respect for maechii, so a person's choice of words is his own.

The monastic and pastoral roles: implications

From this brief description of the use made of the possible ritual activities of maechii a number of points emerge which must be clarified with reference to the fact that the phenomena I have been able to record takes place primarily within an urban framework in Thailand.

The 'monastic' role of maechii is likely to be most elaborate in those centres where there are a large number of maechii practising together. As I have shown, the most highly developed practice I am aware of is that advocated by one of the more sophisticated samnak chii with a large number of maechii from the Nuns' Institute, where over one hundred maechii have worked out a complex of observances, similar to those of monks. Even at a large samnak chii such as that at Wat Paaknaam such a complex is by no means as evident, and those observances required are attuned to activities at the wat, and we may conclude that the Nuns' Institute itself has perhaps been the formative influence, and then only recently, of the explicit emphasis on maechii observing rituals which emphasise their own separate identity.

The pastoral role of maechii, however, may well have been one which has received some acceptance for a much longer period of time. This role is intimately tied to the needs of the laity, and the requirements of the Thai social hierarchy which is expressed so clearly in the levels of merit-making using religious specialists. In this capacity, maechii approximate to the 'chanting monks' category of the Sangha, a category formally recognised in the last century, although only residually, vis-à-vis meditating and scholarly monks. This category of religious
personnel is, as O'Connor suggests, 'more clearly a Thai embellishment' (1978:133) on the canonical forms of monkly path and therefore more likely to be subject to change. Similarly, although we know from Gervaise (1688:88) that maechii were active in some funeral chanting three hundred years ago, O'Connor reminds us that a great deal of the elaboration of Thai cremations has been created only since the Fifth Reign, i.e. the late nineteenth century (1978:259), so we may suppose that some aspects of maechii pastoral services may have undergone quite substantial change.

The pastoral role of religious personnel is often the most time-consuming aspect of the life of monks in Thailand (cf. Bunnag 1973:59). Although in urban areas it is likely to be more specialized in scope, given the range of trained administrative, medical and other specialists which the rural monk might be called upon to substitute for, in urban areas there is nevertheless more occasion for merit-making activities on the part of laity (Bunnag 1973:49). Since maechii do not seem to take on many of the magical skills of the monks, nor the other skills such as horoscope-reading which even their urban monkly-counterparts maintain, therefore, we may still expect that maechii are able to share some of the more specifically merit-oriented pastoral activities of monks, and this appears to be the case from the data presented.

The most pertinent feature of urban religious activity which serves to bolster the role of maechii in such pastoral activities, however, is the greater concern with hierarchy in urban centres, and most of all in Bangkok. O'Connor highlights some of the reasons why, although their own ritual status is comparatively unstated, maechii may nevertheless play a distinctive part in the ceremonies of laity when he points out that ... 'in ordinations the Sangha is the center of both the
ritual and the initiate's life. In cremations the Sangha is peripheral and serves only as ritual specialist.' (1978:258-9) Thus it is that 'In Thai terms cremations display wealth and social connections with an elaboration and subtlety unknown to ordinations.' (ibid.:259) for the special nature of the monkly status is more peripheral to the concern of those present. Whereas the ordination ceremony is very much a part of rural ceremonial life, 'urban society and especially the élite emphasise cremations and almost leave ordinations out of their urban ritual world.' (ibid.:258) It perhaps matters less, therefore, in the urban context, that maechii are themselves entitled to no ordination as such, while they can still allow the laity adequate elaboration of the expression of their own social status in funeral ceremonies. This fact is shown quite clearly in the different use made of terminology with reference to maechii, whereby they are conferred a ritually elevated status only on those occasions on which they are ritually useful to the laity. It is likely that maechii in rural areas are not subject to the same flexibility of ritual status as those in urban areas. It is possible, therefore, that the Nuns' Institute, in attempting to effect a more strongly emphasised monastic role, might have more influence on the status of rural rather than urban maechii, if its leadership is successful.
Footnotes to Chapter V

1. I am grateful to Dr Gehan Wijeyewardene for alerting me to this possibility and to Dr Michael Vickery for his extremely useful insights on the matter.

2. There are of course a few laypeople, usually resident at wat, who maintain the eight precepts continuously. Often these laypeople are not marked out in any way from their fellow laity in terms of dress. There are also men who dress in white during their indefinite observance of the eight precepts, and as such are sometimes referred to as chii.

3. For this, as for other Buddhist festivals, the specific requisites which laity must provide as offerings to the Sangha are found on sale in all sorts of shops. Since such offerings may be individually inspired to some extent, there can be a wide range of elaborateness in the accompaniments to the basic requirements, which in this case are the bathing clothes.
Chapter Six

LIFE AS A MAECHII: PERCEPTIONS AND DECISIONS

In this chapter I will examine some of the more salient features of the 'personal' aspects of the lives of the monks and maechii at Wat Paaknaam. Using material based on the results of a survey taken at the wat, I shall discuss the main emphases which the monks and maechii individually place on the use they make of their time at the wat, and the ways in which they perceive their roles, as well as the way in which time spent at the wat relates to the secular careers of the men and women involved.

Since Wyatt's pioneering work (1966), attention has been focused on the relation between membership of the Sangha and social mobility in Thailand. During the rapid changes taking place in nineteenth century Thailand, the Sangha provided one means of establishing standards of scholarship and administrative ability which could be used not only within the Sangha hierarchy, but also in the expanding and developing government hierarchy in the secular sphere. Recently, the educational and administrative machinery within the Sangha has diversified to keep pace with outside developments, and it is possibly even more the case today that membership of the Thai Sangha provides monks and novices with opportunities for geographical and social mobility that rival other institutions such as the army in this regard. By providing a network of links between wat which allows monks to move from their local area to more urban wat with higher educational institutions, and which wat are associated with higher social and political levels of society, the Sangha enables monks
to make important contacts with influential laity they would otherwise not encounter and to gain experience and qualifications not open to all. In this way the Sangha reflects the social and political hierarchy of Thai society while ostensibly remaining apart from it.

Cross-cutting the Thai tradition that every young man should be ordained as a monk, even for a short time, are the potentials for advancement which are available to long term members of the Sangha. Since the poor, rural men who form the bulk of those who take advantage of these opportunities are necessarily drawn toward the larger, urban centres and the facilities provided there, Tambiah contrasts rural wat with urban wat in terms of not only the smaller size of the former, but also the shorter length of time spent as monks of the rural wat personnel. In contrast, urban monks 'tend to be those who have had many years of service as novices first and then monks later' (Tambiah 1976:269). Thus, those who rely on religious avenues of access to education tend to start monastic careers young and, if the monk then wishes to use these qualifications in the secular world, he is likely to disrobe between the ages of twenty-five to thirty-five (ibid.:294). Monks who are successful in improving their situation are also very useful contacts for other boys who can join them, as either novices or lay dekwat, and make use of the benefits of living at the wat in the same way. On the other hand, since such social opportunities are available to men of higher income families, these latter tend to be ordained only for short periods, and Bunnag has noted that

There appears in practice to be a kind of religious division of labour in operation whereby the members of the Sangha are recruited from the lower levels of society, and the wealthier individuals tend to demonstrate their interest in religious affairs by presenting substantial donations of money and material goods to the wat. (1973:48)
In order to attempt some comparison between monks and maechii on such factors as patterns of ordination and scholastic pursuits, I administered a questionnaire to a large proportion of the Phansaa population of Wat Paaknaam in July 1979. The questionnaire, which was quite long, was sometimes filled in by the respondents themselves, but the majority were filled in by university students who 'interviewed' the respondents in as informal manner a manner as possible. In total one hundred and seven monks, twenty-two novices, and one hundred and thirty-one maechii responded to the survey, although a small proportion of these did not complete the questionnaire. The Phansaa period was chosen deliberately in order to be able to contrast the opinions of temporary and long-term residents, but since the survey had to be completed close to the beginning of this retreat many respondents had little experience of their new role.

Of course, Wat Paaknaam falls into the category of urban wat which, as we have seen, offers good facilities for both study and practice, with influential links with the higher status laity who form a large part of the wat's wider community. The wat is not a functionally specialised wat on the ritual side, however, since it does not have facilities for, for example, cremations, which might otherwise structure quite tightly the nature of monk-lay interaction at the wat. Since the following at Wat Paaknaam is geographically dispersed, we might also expect that those who come to live at the wat have diverse geographical origins rather than being recruited solely from the local neighbourhood. Moreover, since the wat's lay support is so generous that those at the wat do not need personal sponsors, we might suppose that residence at the wat is theoretically open to rich and to poor alike. These features of Wat Paaknaam indicate some of the variable factors which must be taken into
account in assessing the results of the sort of survey undertaken. Moreover, one of the most important factors relevant to the question of social mobility of the residents is a fairly unusual rule at the wat: that which requires that those wishing to live there will come as laity to be ordained there. This refusal to accept those already ordained from elsewhere effectively excludes Wat Paaknaam from some of the channels of social mobility through monastic networks which Tambiah has discussed, although in fact, a few maechii, and slightly more monks have been accepted from other wat or may have been ordained and then disrobed elsewhere prior to their decision to come to Wat Paaknaam.

Monastic careers

The wide geographical basis of support Wat Paaknaam receives is as true of maechii and monks at the wat as it is of the lay community which supports it. Those monks, novices and maechii at the wat between them represent forty-one of Thailand's seventy-two provinces, as well as several other countries. There seems to be no pronounced geographical bias in terms of those who come to be ordained at Wat Paaknaam, unless it is that of the Central Thai provinces surrounding Bangkok from which many monks and maechii come. There are, however, small numbers from the other three regions, especially the North and Northeast, but relatively few from the South. There is some difference, however, between monks and maechii in this respect in that while around a third of the monks and novices surveyed had originally come from Bangkok itself indeed a large number of these from the same area, only a fifth of the maechii were from the metropolitan province. This is possibly due to the fact that the wat is well known as a wat housing many maechii and having good facilities for them, and thus attracts maechii from other areas where such facilities
are lacking: a situation less relevant for monks and novices. It seems, then, that the monks at the temple are more likely to regard it as a convenient and reputable local wat at which to be ordained, while the women who become nuns there are more likely to have come further in order to stay at Wat Paaknaam in particular, even to come from another province to do so, although this may simply reflect a scarcity of wat which will accept maechii as residents.

A more significant difference between the monks and the maechii is that concerning socio-economic background. Since one of the predominant images of Thai maechii which I discussed in Chapter Two above is that of a background of poverty and ignorance, it is interesting to note that there is some difference in this regard (see Tables 1 and 2). Reflecting the fact that more of the maechii have originated from rural areas, some forty-four per cent of the maechii interviewed claimed that their parents were farmers, while this applied to some thirty-nine per cent of the monks and novices. While only a quarter of the monks and novices were themselves farmers, however, thirty-eight per cent of the maechii had the same agricultural occupations as their parents. About one-fifth of both male and female inhabitants at Wat Paaknaam had parents involved in commerce in some capacity, but while twenty-two per cent of the maechii continued this occupation only fourteen per cent of monks and novices were themselves involved in this occupation. On the other hand, while twelve per cent of the monks and novices had a parent who worked as a government servant, a prestigious if not always well paid position, only one maechii had a parent in such a position, and only one maechii herself had given up such a position to join the wat compared to some seventeen monks (13%) who had done so. It is necessary to remember here that men working in government jobs are entitled to three months
leave of absence in order to be ordained as monks for one Phansaa. Almost all of the monks in this category were ordained for such a period only. The same official encouragement does not apply to women. Twice as many monks and novices had mothers in a position to be able to be housewives as had maechii, and only one out of ten maechii described herself as having no other occupation besides this role. There were twice the number of monks and novices involved in labouring work as there were maechii. It seems fair to surmise, therefore, that there is a fair degree of difference in the socio-economic background of monks and maechii, that of the monks being more urban-oriented, and often wealthier than that of the maechii. This may be a reflection of the greater cost of ordination of monks as compared to that of maechii, especially at a prestigious wat such as Wat Paaknaam, and may also partly reflect the fact that the maechii at Wat Paaknaam do not have to have much in the way of independent means, since food is assured them at this wat.

This difference in the levels of society from which monks and maechii are recruited is borne out even more strongly by the educational background of the monks and novices, as compared with that of the maechii (see Table 3). While just over half of the monks and novices had not gone beyond primary education at the time they had come to join the wat, over eighty per cent of the maechii had not gone beyond primary education, while thirteen per cent of these reported having had no formal education, or just enough teaching at home to be able to read and write. Moreover, while six of the monks interviewed had completed or started a Bachelor's degree, none of the maechii had progressed to university education. Although from time to time university educated women did come to the wat, they usually became maechii phraam, and stayed only a number of weeks
without shaving their hair. While the maechii are, therefore, clearly less well educated than the novices and monks, this may well to some extent reflect not only a rural background, but also lower educational expectations of women in Thai society which is perhaps still prevalent at least in the countryside. Nevertheless it does indicate lower career expectations of the population of maechii prior to ordination than are reflected in the qualifications attained by monks and novices at the wat.

Another factor to be taken into account in considering the educational background of the maechii compared with that of the monks is the relative ages of the two groups. Although maechii like novices may join a temple at the age of twelve or so, and there is no retirement age, there is a wide spectrum of ranges on both sides but the average age of the maechii is significantly greater than that of the monks and novices combined (see Table 4). On average the age of the maechii is some thirteen years more than that of the monks and novices, and this reflects not only a wider range of ages of the maechii but also the predominance of young men in their early twenties among the monks. While the oldest monk interviewed was aged seventy and there were only two such monks over the age of sixty, the oldest maechii interviewed was ninety years of age and there were twenty-five recorded maechii (19% of sample) over the age of sixty, and this latter despite the fact that Wat Paaknaam will not admit women already over the age of sixty as maechii. On the whole the youngest maechii were fifteen to seventeen, comparable to the novices, although occasionally young girls become chii for a short time. The pattern of almost all of the monks being in their twenties and early thirties, is also found by Bunnag for the teaching monasteries of Ayuthaya (1973:87). The maechii, on the other hand, tend to be fairly representative of all
age groups except perhaps that of the early thirties. These distinct patterns remain substantially true of both groups if the ages of men and women at ordination are considered, bearing in mind that the elder of the maechii tend to have been ordained for quite long periods (see Table 5). Thus it can be seen that a large number of the monks and novices are of an age which corresponds not only to the established male pattern of ordination at a young age, but also reflects the tendency to stay at the wat to receive the type of education, both monastic and secular, which is useful to younger men. The ages of the maechii, in contrast, reflect no such established patterns or likely orientations, and it does not appear from these figures that the women at the wat have any common aims vis-à-vis ordination as an institutionalised part of their life careers. Although a large group of the maechii correspond by age to the vast majority of the monks, moreover, we shall see that this does not imply that maechii of this comparable age-group are engaged in similar activities to the monks to nearly the same extent.

In the light of different age configurations of monks and maechii, and of their different educational backgrounds, we should next investigate the use each group makes of the educational facilities of the wat and indeed, of Bangkok in general. Answers to the survey show that the monks and novices together have a far greater level of participation in Buddhist education after ordination than do the maechii at Wat Paaknaam (see Table 6). While two-thirds of the monks and novices reported studying some level of the course of Buddhist study since ordination, less than half of the maechii had done so, and of these the vast majority were studying the elementary course of Buddhist studies, with only a few persevering with the more difficult study of the Pali language and scriptures. While a third of the monks and novices surveyed were
currently studying the elementary *Naktham* course, another seventeen per cent were studying the advanced *Parian* grades from the third to the highest or had completed them. Yet another sixteen questioned were starting with the course specially designed for those staying just for Phansaa which enables the student to take away a certificate after success in his three months’ study. This latter course was not taken by any of the maechii surveyed, even those similarly at the wat for the Phansaa period only; and appears not to have been offered to them.

In connection with the study of Pali, a few maechii commented on the renowned difficulties of the course, and said that clever monks were usually capable of such study but that they did not expect to be. There is also another possible reason for the low degree of study of the scriptures by maechii in terms of lack of incentive. Not only are the monks given certificates from the Religious Affairs Department and referred to respectfully by the title *Phra Maha*, but such educational qualifications have become increasingly regarded as prerequisites for promotion to administrative positions within the Sangha as well as for positions outside it for those who leave the monkhood to take up such positions. Maechii, on the other hand, are given recognition of success in their exams at a secular level, and no formal title or other benefits apply. Moreover, their courses of study are given different names, as is the case with laymen, so that while monks and novices study *Naktham* (‘skilled in Dhamma’) and *Parian* courses, maechii and laity study *Thammasyksaa* (‘Dhamma studies’) and *Baliisyksaa* (‘Pali studies’) even though both courses in Pali are precisely the same. Since few maechii would expect to teach, moreover, the more specialised study of the scriptures would be regarded by many as unnecessary. Of course, the fact that many of the maechii are beyond the age where the formal study of Buddhism is
regarded as useful or appropriate also accounts for such low participa-
tion in this activity.

Another related reason why fewer maechii would choose to study
may be as a result of the lower educational expectations of women
already seen in their educational background prior to ordination, for
there is also a marked difference in the pursuit of secular education
among maechii and monks at the wat. Some twelve per cent of monks and
novices interviewed mentioned having improved their secular qualifications
(see Table 7). This advancement was usually from primary to secondary
levels of qualifications, which entitle them to significantly improved
academic and job opportunities. However no maechii interviewed had
chosen to improve their secular qualifications at all. Since most of
those monks and novices who had studied further in secular subjects
had also progressed quite well in Buddhist subjects, there seems to be
little indication that the two are mutually exclusive. Thus, many maechii
were of the opinion that it was their duty as maechii to study, at least
in general terms, on Buddhist lines while at the wat (a view propagated
and supposedly enforced by the wat authorities), and restricted themselves
to this, while monks and novices saw ordination as an opportunity to
advance in both secular and Buddhist knowledge and used this opportunity
much more actively. Most of those monks and novices who pursued secular
qualifications during their time at the wat, however, were those from
other provinces, a pattern we are already familiar with from the research
of Tambiah and Bunnag. Moreover, since less than a fifth of the
predominantly young monks and novices do pursue such education, it is
obviously not the main attraction of the majority of those living at
the wat.
The view of maechii concerning their education while at the wat is not as negative as formal qualifications or lack of them would indicate, however, for when questioned on whether they were studying, a great many maechii replied that they were studying meditation. Rather than formal courses on Buddhism, in other words, they saw their time as most profitably being spent in the practice of meditation, which at Wat Paaknaam more often than not implies the formal group practice in the evening with the taped instructions of the former abbot as guidance.

The maechii at Wat Paaknaam are not the only ones to stress the importance of meditation. Meditation is seen by some as the most important facet of Buddhist practice, while others in Thailand as elsewhere maintain that meditation without a proper understanding of the scriptures would not be a proper path, and some of those inclined to the latter opinion tend to emphasise study rather than meditation.

In Thailand, with the increase in availability of Buddhist education and the increasing emphasis being placed on achievement of accepted standards of learning which followed the centralisation of the Sangha over the last one hundred years, scholarship may well have become increasingly divorced from meditation as its companion activity. For example, Bunnag found in Ayutthaya, itself a centre of religious and secular learning for monks and novices, that in contrast to the latter activity 'meditation was regarded as an activity more appropriate to nuns ... to [monks] who were saiyasat (magical practitioners), or to those monks who doen thudong (who go on pilgrimages to Buddhist shrines)' (1973:54). It is, she reports, now being encouraged among laity and maechii as a religious activity 'as it is felt to be easier for them than scriptural study'. The maechii at Wat Paaknaam tend to follow, then, this more lay-oriented, less prestigious activity.
The relation between skill in meditation and magical power is well attested at Wat Paaknaam in the career and reputation of Luang Phq9, and many of the most eminent monks in Thailand today are renowned for their meditational powers. There is little evidence at Wat Paaknaam, however, that maechii saw themselves, or were seen by others, to have increased powers because of their meditation practice. Rather, the vast majority of maechii who discussed their enthusiasm for meditation mentioned only the effect of calm and peace of the mind which it brought. While some of the maechii thought to be better at it were no doubt more involved with more esoteric problems of stilling the mind and of insight, and many were acknowledged to have reached a high stage of achievement in a formal sense, to most meditation was simply a difficult but rewarding part of the daily routine which contributed towards the psychologically beneficial state of being a maechii.

It should be noted that a few people at the wat are regarded as having considerable magical (saksit) powers, powers gained through the skilled practice of Luang Phq9's method of meditation, among whom are a laywoman who has lived at the wat for some forty years, and the present head of the maechii Meditation Section. These women are called upon as healers for some physical ailments. As healers of this kind, they are more readily available to women and to maechii, than are monks, and women form the majority of their visitors. Rather than using spells or other 'magical' practices which can be obtained from books on the subject, their treatment involves concentrating their mind upon the affected part of the body, but also requires similar co-operative concentration from the patient. It is thus firmly linked to the concentrative power of the meditatively-trained mind rather than of the wider range of spells and charms so commonly acquired by monks and used in lay life in their
subsequent secular roles as male ritual and magical specialists.

Just as there is little interest on the part of the maechii in learning Pali, the language which helps to maintain the monks' powerful ritual role as chanters of the dhamma and users of the 'magical power of words', so also the maechii show little interest in acquiring those esoteric magical skills which are in theory available to all but which in practice tend to be learned by young monks. One maechii assured me, in fact, that among both monks and maechii at Wat Paaknaam there were no magical practitioners of any sort; that, in other words, only orthodox Buddhist practices were maintained at the wat. Indeed Wat Paaknaam is in this presumably like many other Bangkok wat, encouraging learning of the dhamma and its practice. To some extent, then, we can see such an attitude of the maechii to magical practices as reflecting a conservative orthodox view. Nevertheless, we may note that this is also a view of their role compatible with a little-developed pastoral role vis-à-vis laity. Maechii at Wat Paaknaam tend more to share the lay-client view of magical practices rather than attempt to develop such skills themselves.

I mentioned above the peace of mind which was for many the distinguishing feature of their time as maechii, and it is now time to examine this more closely. I mentioned that large amounts of merit are held to be passed on to the parents of a young man at his ordination, and in lesser amounts to others who come to help in the ceremony. In the meantime, of course, the new monk sets himself a new path of Buddhist practice which rises above that of merit-making, the way of the householder, to that of study and meditation: the practice of the teachings in a concentrated form. Thus, the social and religious ritual of ordination into the Sangha perpetuates the body of specialists who
maintain strict practice apart from the community, and yet allows
the lay community to make merit by its support for the Order. Merit
(bun) is a central concept in all Buddhist activities, but especially
in those involving support of the Sangha. Furthermore, one's ability
to be a good monk and to stay in the Sangha depends upon one already
having a good karmic state, i.e. having much bun acquired over one's
lifetimes, so that although the prime orientation of monks is that of
having moved beyond the stage of making merit, becoming a monk implies
gaining merit, and remaining a monk is a visible manifestation of the
merit one has accumulated.

Maechii who are not members of this recognised Order, however, are
not regarded in such a clear light. In the questionnaire used at Wat
Paaknaam, I attempted to assess in some fairly open-ended questions
how monks and maechii saw their own ordination and the purposes and
meanings behind it. One question, asked of both monks and maechii, as
to on whose behalf they had been ordained, met with only a low level
of response. The opinions of those who answered seem to be indicative
of one of the aspects of differentiation between monks and maechii.
A fifth of the monks said they were ordained on behalf of their parents
or other relatives, while some others maintained the view that they were
ordained on their own behalf. Only six of the maechii thought that their
becoming maechii was of benefit to their parents. Indeed, one young
maechii maintained that maechii may not say that they buat on behalf
of their parents as do monks and novices, but that any merit involved
could accrue only to the maechii concerned.

Informally most maechii agreed that becoming a maechii involved
the gaining of some personal merit, just like monks, although many
thought that the merit was somewhat less, while others argued that it
was the same. Some also thought that those who helped them to become maechii, such as parents or sponsors, shared in some of the merit, but there was much less assurance on this point in the case of maechii than in the case of monks or even novices. As remarked above, moreover, the lack of social ceremony involved in the ordination of maechii indicates its comparative lack of importance in terms of merit for others. As with many monks, however, many maechii interpreted their liking of the way of life at the wat and their inclination to stay on as indicative of a good karmic status, one enabling them to practice at the more advanced and esoteric levels of withdrawal that contrasted with the householder's life, even if their path was not as strict and highly disciplined as that of the monks.

Most maechii would regard the life they are expected to lead as involving sacrifice of some of the comforts of lay existence and therefore as being in some senses difficult. This attitude is elaborated in a concept which is almost as telling with regard to the position of maechii as is the concept of bun. One of the main categories of maechii is that of those who buat kae bon. These women make a promise to a spirit or deity that they will become a maechii if they have their wish fulfilled. The wish could range from success in an exam or a business venture, to a cure for illness. Such vows can involve a number of duties to be performed, of which becoming a maechii is only one. Many of the possible vows which maechii cited involved other forms of merit-making: making a donation to a temple, giving food to the monks for a set period, and so on. Less religiously inclined deities, however, like that at the popular Indra Shrine on the grounds of the Erawan Hotel, are more likely to be repaid by a commissioned performance of dancing and music.
One quarter of the maechii surveyed mentioned that when they came to the wat they came in fulfilment of such a vow. The majority of these had made a vow because of illness, often a protracted illness. These maechii have in common a number of features which serve to make them a distinct category in some senses. There are specific incidents or circumstances which propel them towards becoming maechii, and they come with the intention of staying at the wat for a limited time. Above all, their reasons for being maechii are not necessarily connected with the study or practice of the dhamma and are based on beliefs which some would argue are not totally in accordance with orthodox Buddhist teachings, i.e. the power of deities and spirits to intervene on one's behalf to effect changes in circumstances which might be held to reflect one's karmic state. It is probably because of the last-mentioned aspect that many maechii dissociate themselves from such practices. But those who buat kae bon come from all age groups and while some buat for only seven or fifteen days, many remain maechii for a month or a three month Phansaa, or even for something like three years, usually depending both on what they can afford to do, and how grave the crisis that has been averted.

In not a few cases, however, those who came originally for one month or one Phansaa liked what they found at the wat, and with this 'birth' of attachment to the dhamma (koet sattha) they stayed on and on, some planning never to leave. In this way belief in the powers of deities changes to confidence in the practice of Buddhist doctrine, although this process is not spoken of as disjunctive. Some maechii at Wat Paaknaam had stayed three or four years, or even twenty years beyond their intended promised period.

A related concept to that of buat kae bon is that of buat sadq Khrg (buat 'to ward off an evil constellation'). Although, as with
the kae bon, the person's ordination is precipitated by unlucky or unfortunate events or circumstances, unlike the former, buat sadq khrq does not involve a supernatural cure. Those who feel that their luck, and possibly therefore their karma, is bad, can choose to become maechii in a hope that the bun made will improve both karmic status and present lot in life. Only two maechii in the survey were ordained for this reason. Again, illness is a common factor here, although even forecasts by monk-astrologers of a period of bad luck can send people hurrying to buat in the hope that the misfortune will be averted. Although this is in a sense a retreat from the world, and a seeking of refuge in the precincts of the sacralised wat amidst the sacred chanting of the monks, it is also, as with the fulfilment of a vow, a conscious attempt at merit-associated activity.

While a significant proportion of maechii were at the wat in fulfilment of a vow or because of misfortune which they had no other way of counteracting, only seven of the monks and novices claimed to have done so, which seems to prove the popular view expressed by maechii that although men, too, can buat kae bon, very few, in contrast to women, would do so. Moreover, of those who did report having done so, three were novices.

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that the length of time spent as a monk implies correspondingly advanced karmic status. Despite this, many simply ordain for a limited time, such as three months, since to do so still brings merit and prestige for young men. Not unnaturally, therefore, most wat have inflated populations of short-term monks during Phansaa. Almost fifty per cent of the monks surveyed, however, had been at the wat for over one year, as had eighty-two per cent of the novices there. Contrasted to that of the monks, the proportion of maechii who
had been maechii for more than a year was slightly higher, just under sixty per cent of those from whom information was forthcoming (see Table 8). While less than half of the maechii said that they had chosen to enter at the beginning of Phansaa, however, most of the monks chose this customary time to be ordained. Those maechii who did so often commented that it was the Thai custom to do so, and they thus followed the tradition, or that they wanted to 'chalk up' a Phansaa, the traditional way in which men like to be able to speak of their experience and length of time as monks. Irrespective of time of entering the wat, however, those who find themselves suited to the life can choose to stay beyond their original intentions, as we have seen in the case of those maechii who came for a specific period in fulfilment of a vow. In the same way, many young men are ordained for one Phansaa with an idea of seeing if they really like being monks. On the whole, however, of those who stay longer than one year, more maechii prefer to stay, and for longer, than do monks at Wat Paaknaam as can be seen in Table 8.

Another significant difference between the monks and the maechii at Wat Paaknaam concerns their respective monastic networks. The teacher-pupil relationship between senior monks, and younger monks and novices, is an important one in Thailand, although as Tambiah notes, the character of the role of the aacaan tends to change from that of mentor in rural wat to that of patron in urban wat (1976:321). At Wat Paaknaam forty-six of the monks interviewed had been the luuksit of a monk at some stage in their career, whether as dekwat or as members of the Order, and thirty-two described themselves as having had luuksit themselves. The figures are, significantly, much higher for novices. Thirteen novices of the twenty-two interviewed described themselves as luuksit to an aacaan, and ten of them themselves had dekwat as their own luuksit. Seventy-five
per cent of the novices had themselves spent time as dekwat prior to ordination, but only thirty-eight per cent of the monks had done so (see Table 9). However, in contrast, only twenty-one of the maechii had ever been a luuksit of a maechii, many of these describing their relationship (as both laywomen and maechii) to the huanaa or the head of the Meditation Section in this way. Furthermore, only six maechii interviewed had themselves had a luuksit stay with them at the wat. This kind of relationship, therefore, seems comparatively undeveloped among the maechii.

One maechii I spoke to, who had herself been a luuksit of her elder sister for some years, said that about ten years previously the wat authorities had decided that maechii should not have luuksit living with them, and that the luuksit had either had to become maechii or leave the wat, a ruling which she tentatively attributed to the influence of the Nuns' Institute. Unfortunately, I was not able to elicit information on this point from others. It may well be that conditions at the wat were rather crowded at the time, or that the luuksit were thought to lower the standards of the samnak (since they seem, in this case to have been female equivalents of the lay dekwat). Most maechii, however, did not show any great experience of luuksit relationships amongst maechii, and we may conclude that, at least at Wat Paaknaam, maechii are not influential in sponsoring younger women to come to the wat. Although many maechii said that they had come to be ordained on the advice of a maechii relative, this relationship seemed to have little formal importance, and only the most eminent and respected of the maechii at the wat were seen as worthy of the role of aacaan.
Life at the wat in relation to lay life

As I have mentioned in an earlier chapter, one of the popular ideas about maechii is that they are the young and unsettled or the old and obsolete. This tends to fit neatly with the expectation that since women must be engaged in the care of children and the home they cannot really be choosing a life in the wat as a form of religious behaviour, but must be satisfied with other forms of merit-making. This generalisation, however, is not borne out by the figures obtained from the survey carried out at Wat Paaknaam, for while 16 monks (15%) in the survey are or have been married, fifty-three of the maechii questioned (40%) are or have been married, and in both cases the clear majority have children. Nevertheless, Table 10 shows that there is a significantly greater number of maechii than monks with children, but while most of the monks who described themselves as married with children were under 50 years of age, and were in the wat for only a short time, the vast majority of maechii in this category were over fifty, with adult children. Those who had separated from their spouses before becoming ordained were on the whole much younger, and had younger children, and in this case, too, there were more maechii than monks. Most of those maechii who were widowed were over sixty, and many of them said that they did not intend to leave, as did the one elderly monk in this category. It is interesting to note, though, that of the four elderly maechii whose husbands were also monks, three had chosen to spend their last years in a wat before their husbands had made a similar decision.

The greater proportion of women who have been married when compared with that of monks is scarcely surprising when the different range in ages of the two groups is taken into account. And although few women in the
busiest child-rearing years of marriage had become maechii, quite a few had, whether still married, separated or divorced, decided to leave children in the care of relatives and become maechii, occasionally for long or indefinite periods of time. It therefore is not entirely realistic to accept the popular view that women do not become maechii because of their duties as wives and mothers. While some women did not actually ask permission from husbands after marriage, no one reported that they had been forbidden to buat chii. Indeed, their family patterns in rural areas have been described as fairly flexible in terms of the care of children by relatives or neighbours, and this aspect of Thai kinship is of use to the maechii. Some seven women who described themselves as still married left pre-teen children or a pre-teen child in order to become maechii, but in four of these cases they were actively supported and sometimes encouraged by their husbands. Most of these women expected to return to their families, although in two cases of elderly women, their husbands had since become monks and obviously regarded their state as the one in which they intended to end their days.

On the other hand, there were some women who openly stated that they came to be maechii because of the problems they had with their families – husbands had deserted them, or they themselves suffered continual discontent with their lot. Some women, old and young, sought peace of mind at the wat, while others regarded it less as a specialised centre but simply as a place where one could have time to oneself. One rather melodramatic instance illustrates this. One young woman came to Wat Paaknaam one day with an older female friend, and although she wanted to stay for only ten days, she shaved her head to become fully a maechii, not just a maechii phraam. Hers was a dramatic story of being in love with one young man while her mother wanted her to marry a more
suitor. The girl had nowhere to go to avoid her mother's plans, but became a maechii to get away for a time to pull herself together. On occasions the man she loved would call to see her, but she maintained an air of calm and performed her daily tasks dutifully. I did not hear that she expected her situation to have improved during her period as a maechii, but she probably gained time for herself to sort out her thoughts and perhaps have the satisfaction of overtly protesting against her mother's authority. A more common sense of 'retreat' is that of simply getting away from the pressures of family and workaday troubles. To such women the wat provides a place of quiet with simple duties, where the confusions of their lives can be pushed away for a time, and the disciplined life of religious activity blends appropriately with the sense of calm and satisfaction they are thus able to restore to their lives.

Irrespective of their marital careers, some women tended to speak of always having wanted to become maechii, or of having been curious as to what it was like to be maechii since their childhoods, and then having finally got around to finding out what it was like. Some had chosen to do this before getting married, but others found opportunities later. Some, like the bhikkhuni of the Canon, had to wait until the deaths of the parents they cared for, or for their husbands to retire to a monastery, before they could achieve their ambition. In some cases this ambition to join a monastery is a constant but psychologically complex one. One maechii, for example, had believed since childhood that she would become a maechii. Her parents, however, forced her to marry but she still intended to buat. She started to keep the eight precepts on a permanent basis and then discovered that she had cancer. She decided that if she recovered she would become a maechii and
eventually did so indefinitely, leaving a ten year old son. Now that her son is twenty-eight her husband has been ordained as a monk for the third time in his life. Yet another said she had sometimes chatted with maechii and had wanted to know what it was like to live at a wat. At one stage she dreamt that she met her dead mother and asked her permission to become a maechii, and her mother told her to do as she wished. After that she felt that one day she must buat. She eventually did so at the age of sixty-four. Another fifty-six year old woman who had buat kae bon for one Phansaa after an illness had since felt unable to leave because a fortuneteller had told her she might die if she did. She had been in a state of not knowing whether to leave for four years. Yet another maechii, who had looked after her mother for some years before finally becoming a maechii had had a vision in which Luang Phọt had told her to come to his wat to buat, and she thus realised a long-standing inclination to become a maechii at Wat Paaknaam. The above-mentioned women could largely regard their family responsibilities as being over; but in other cases there were usually relatives to take care of younger children, or the eldest child was of an age to look after the others and support them. Less than half of the maechii who had been married had come to the wat without supporters, either parents, spouse, or children, and most of the younger married women said that their husbands or children visited them frequently.

Some women choose to eschew a lay life and become maechii for life at an early age. Sometimes these women, like older women, use the phrase bya thaang look (tired of worldly life) to describe their state of mind. Some choose life in the wat for more tangible reasons such as a reluctance to spend their lives engaged in the same taxing work as those around them. Many people think that some monks opt for life at
the wat for just this reason. Nevertheless, some women add a note of protest to accounts of their decision to become maechii. One maechii well advanced in Buddhist education, the only maechii at the wat to be studying at a secular university, offered to tell me why she had become a maechii. She was from a rural family and pointed out to me that, unlike the West where women were already liberated, women in Thailand had to work hard both on the farm and in the house, and in addition still had to care for a husband and rear children. A Thai woman's secular lot, she argued, is particularly hard, and for this reason she had decided she was not going to waste her life in such a way.

The way of the maechii

In this chapter I have attempted to assess the potentialities inherent in becoming a maechii, the motives of the women concerned as judged from the population of one wat, and the degree to which these potentialities are realised.

Social mobility is now very much a part of the reality of the urban monastic lives of many long-term monks in Thailand, and rural, poorer, and less well educated sections of the male population take advantage of it. At Wat Paaknaam the maechii were mainly from poor and rural families, even compared to the monks at the same wat. However, they showed little or no inclination to spend time improving their social position during their time at the wat. Thus, while many maechii came from rural environments to the urban wat, they did not make use of the facilities offered to gain further secular education, nor did many of them envisage taking up an occupation when they left the wat which was radically different from that which they had had before entering it.

A more startling contrast to the monks of the same wat can be seen in the attitude of maechii towards religious education. While the
participation of monks and novices in the Buddhist school's classes, particularly in Pali grades, was quite high, very few maechii showed any inclination to pursue the advocated study, particularly the advanced study of the scriptures. This lack of interest may be related to several factors, among them the lack of official recognition given to lay qualifications either within the wat or outside it; the general lack of interest in attaining qualifications for reasons of status among the maechii; the comparatively meagre use of Pali scriptures in chanting at lay ceremonies; and the common view of the scriptures as requiring the status of a monk to acquire mastery thereof. There was, however, a strong tendency to emphasise meditation as an important religious duty and form of achievement.

The status, occupation or condition of being a maechii was found to be attractive to a far wider range of women in terms of age and marital and family status than the case of the men who become monks. Possibly partly because the maechii at Wat Paaknaam do not need to be very financially independent to be able to stay there, women from all age ranges could stay for quite extended periods, and marriage and children were not necessarily a hindrance, at least to a short term period of residence.

Although a significant number of women saw the wat as a retreat from either personal trials or a general disillusionment with the society around them, and took a short-term break from the outside to recuperate, many others saw the wat as an appropriate place to perform the religious tasks suited to their age, or for them personally in terms of a special calling. Beyond these are the many women who wished to practise according to their understanding of the doctrine at a remove from worldly concerns. A significant feature of women's conceptualisation
of the condition of maechii is related to the incidence of disabling, dangerous or chronic illness, and many women at this particularly comfortable wat are there either as a refuge from illness, or as a result of their vows to supernatural agencies which cured them. This does not mean, of course, that being a maechii is automatically held to be a protection against illness, for some maechii complain of constant discomfort or illness. Nor is the relationship between being a maechii or becoming a maechii and immunity from such hazards clearly defined. It may well be that those who are cured of sickness through the spirits and then exposed to life at the wat become convinced of a more karmically oriented explanation of personal experience and that this is why several maechii who buat kae bon initially then spoke of the birth of belief as an explanation for their continuation as maechii. This is consonant with the contempt shown by some maechii for the practice of kaan buat kae bon, and the implicit insistence upon proper understanding of, and commitment to, a strictly Buddhist concept of ordination, one which is more reclusive, and possibly even more orthodox, than the contemporary role of most modern Thai monks. There is, in fact, a tendency for many women to regard becoming maechii as an end in itself. Theirs is an understanding of the role which emphasises its passive aspects. Merit-making and meditation are the prime features of the lives of many of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam, and while these stem from different understandings of the purpose of ordination for women, they share a common assumption that retreat from the worldly life is useful in more ways than one.

While the maechii in their behaviour and orientation to retreat are imitative of monks, they do tend to in effect maintain a distinct if not independent form of practice and lifestyles. Most of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam see themselves as secondary in ritual status terms to
monks, and very few aspire to emulate, much less rival, the monks' command of sacred learning and pastoral role vis-à-vis laypeople.

Tambiah, in trying to assess the attractions of monkhood for so many permanent monks, lays great stress on the allure of the immediate acceptance of the monks' superior ritual status by others who may well otherwise be indubitably socially superior. As I have mentioned previously, this high status is not accorded to women who become maechii, least of all by men. While many girls are taught to respect and do indeed admire the dignity and reserve of maechii, such an attitude is true of only a certain percentage of those whom maechii are likely to encounter. Some maechii have internalised notions of the superior ritual status of maechii, but this is not universal, and is therefore certainly not the main reason for ordination of women, which it may be in the case of monks. Rather than the social advantages enjoyed by monks, maechii emphasise the personal and psychological features of their condition as ends in themselves.

The tendencies of practice that maechii develop within their role are partly responsible for the attitudes of laity towards them. Bunnag points out that monks who do not have a known residential base, and who are not distinguished by either their formally achieved scholastic standards or widely recognised powers, are treated with little respect or even with suspicion. Concomitant with the more reclusive, and non-lay oriented practices of maechii is a widespread ignorance of their conditions and practices—even to the number of precepts they maintain, or details of their daily routine. The obscurity in which maechii dwell, rather than commanding respect, invites suspicion and even contempt from those who perceive religious figures as invariably very public figures, who set a moral example, and vouchsafe aid in lay ritual. In
a setting where monks are seen to be pursuing a path of standardised
learning and publicly consuming the food which laity give them,
reclusive maechii are held to be both ignorant and parasitic, neither
part of nor responsible to the laity, neither supportive of nor responsible
to the monks. Along with this obscurity and lack of an exclusive role
or social place, maechii do not have open to them, nor do they aspire
to, the social mobility which the monkly role has offered their male
colleagues.
Table 1
Occupation of parents of monks, novices and maechii at Wat Paaknaam, July 1979
Population: 107 monks, 22 novices and 131 maechii

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<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>Trader</th>
<th>Government employee</th>
<th>Labourer &amp; hired worker</th>
<th>Housewife</th>
<th>Retired</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
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<td>36</td>
<td>22 24</td>
<td>14             1</td>
<td>10 5</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>5 5</td>
<td>1             -</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>31 31</td>
<td>1             -</td>
<td>3 2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3 5</td>
<td>16 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Occupation of monks, novices and maechii
Population: as for Table 1

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<td>Monks</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Secular education of monks, novices and maechii prior to ordination

Population: as for Table 1

Grades completed in ascending order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No formal education</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prathom 1-3</td>
<td>Prathom 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Of the seven monks who had attended university, six had completed degrees while the seventh had not.
### Table 4

**Present age of monks, novices and maechii**

Population: as for Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>10-14</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70-79</th>
<th>80 over</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monks</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Novices</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maechii</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5

**Age at ordination of monks, novices and maechii**

Population: as for Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>10-14</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70-79</th>
<th>80 over</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monks</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Novices</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maechii</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Buddhist education of monks, novices and maechii since ordination

Population: as for Table 1

Grades attempted in ascending order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nuak (Phansaa course)</th>
<th>Naktham III</th>
<th>Naktham II</th>
<th>Naktham I</th>
<th>Parian 3</th>
<th>Parian 4</th>
<th>Parian 5</th>
<th>Parian 6</th>
<th>Parian 7</th>
<th>Parian 8</th>
<th>Parian 9</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>-*</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This Phansaa-length course for neophytes does not appear to be offered to maechii at Wat Paaknaam.
Table 7
Secular education of monks and novices since ordination

Population: 13 monks and 3 novices = 12.40% of male respondents.

Grades attempted in ascending order*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to Ordination</th>
<th>Monks</th>
<th>Novices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Prathom 4</td>
<td>Prathom 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Mq9</td>
<td>Sq9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Monks' university</td>
<td>Secular university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Since Ordination</th>
<th>Monks</th>
<th>Novices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Only those grades achieved prior to and since ordination are included.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 1 year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>26-30</th>
<th>31-35</th>
<th>more than unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9
Experience as dekwat and as luuksit of monks, novices and maechii

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>At Wat Paaknaam</th>
<th>At another wat</th>
<th>Response negative</th>
<th>Response unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Those who have been dekwat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who have been luuksit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who have had or are presently responsible for luuksit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 10
Age at ordination of monks and maechii with children

Population: 14 monks = 13% of monk respondents.
40 maechii = 30.5% of maechii respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>Over 70</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monks</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maechii</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Footnotes to Chapter VI

1. It is interesting to note that the author describes the last mentioned category as being 'frequently regarded as being on a par with tramps, beggars and other kinds of social derelicts', and that because of this lack of respect only 'those monks with little interest in earning the good opinion of society' will take on this role (pp.55, 57).

2. This teacher-pupil relationship is not, however, as important in Thailand as it is in, say, Sri Lanka, where monasteries are much more oriented towards the teaching and patronage of influential abbots. See for a comparison of the two cases, Evers 1966.
Chapter Seven

MAECHII AND THE POLITY: THE THAI NUNS' INSTITUTE

Throughout this thesis I have had cause to make frequent mention of the Thai Nuns' Institute (Sathaaban Maechii Thai), the national body which represents maechii, and in this chapter I shall describe this institution, its activities and sorts of changes in Thai religious thinking which its creation represents.

History and nature of the Institute

The Thai Nuns' Institute was formed only very recently. According to one account, on the occasion of an International Buddhist Association meeting, it was realised by the Thai representatives that they had no one to represent maechii, and that the latter were so lacking in organisation that no one could hope to represent them. The then Supreme Patriarch (Somdet Phra Ariyawongsaaakhatayaan) ordered the Secretary of the Mahamakut Education Council to co-ordinate maechii, and as a result a meeting of maechii from various samnak was called to discuss the issue in late August 1969 (Prakhêong 1973:5). Since 1972 the Institute has received the nominal patronage of the Queen, who often opens the annual meetings and takes some interest in the activities of the Institute. The interest and support of high-ranking Thammayut sect monks has continued, and today the Institute has its headquarters at Wat Bowonniwet, under the auspices of the current abbot, who is widely expected to be the next
Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha. As I mentioned above, the Thammuyut Buddhist University runs a special course for maechii. Thus this stricter, more 'aristocratic' sect seems to provide the prime supporters of the Institute by way of some of its senior-most monks. There are also a number of high-status women involved in the government hierarchy who work closely with the Institute in some matters.

The Institute basically consists of a small core of maechii with headquarters in Bangkok. It receives small annual sums of money to run its activities from such bodies as the Department of Public Welfare, but on the whole the maechii have to rely on their own resources and on the generosity of lay supporters.

One of the first steps undertaken by the Institute was the establishment of a nationwide hierarchy of offices through which a recognised central authority and clear lines of communication could be maintained. At the highest levels this consisted of positions at head nun, assistant head, secretary and advisory committee levels. As further organisation was made possible, the administrative hierarchy developed into one expressly parallel to the national centralised hierarchy of the monks, with heads parallel to those at all levels, regional, provincial, district and so forth. The titles of the maechii offices, however, derive from the strictly secular administrative nomenclature. While monks are referred to as 'rulers' (cao) of their areas of jurisdiction, the maechii are known merely as 'heads', huanaa. The ultimate leader of the Institute, the Huanaa, is the maechii counterpart of the monkly Sangharaja. This nomenclature emphasises the strictly bureaucratic nature of their hierarchy, rather than carrying the connotations of respect, merit and power which are contained in and conveyed by the monks' official titles.
It is also a reflection of the fact that the system of attainment to office in the Institute emphasises election to office much more often than is the case for the Sangha. Thus, the Huanaa at each level is elected by fellow maechii, while the Sangharaja is appointed by the King and he in turn appoints some members of the Council of Elders, and certain titles and ranks which entitle monks to certain offices are also bestowed. Indeed, the most recent Sangha Act of 1962 'constituted a denial of the idea of democracy' (Tambiah 1976:253) in the centralisation of Sangha authority and its closer alliance with state institutions. While successive Sangha Acts have firmly established the separate powers of legislation, execution and adjudication within the Sangha (cf. ibid.:253), however, these functions are much less developed among the offices of the Institute.

Although membership of the Institute is voluntary, the Institute aims to gain enough co-operation and participation in each samnak chii so that eventually every group of maechii can have a head through whom the Institute can maintain contact. Representatives of samnak also attend the Institute's annual general meeting in Bangkok: in 1979 these representatives totalled almost seven hundred. The Institute also publishes what is virtually a rulebook, though it has no official sanction, about such matters as the procedure of ordination, and correct forms of dress and behaviour. Until now, maechii, like all those who live in a wat, are subject to the authority of the abbot of each wat. However, since the abbot is primarily responsible for monks and novices in the Order, many abbots take no more interest in the affairs of the maechii resident in their wat than to record their numbers for the annual census of the Department of Religious Affairs. Moreover, while
some abbots see that the samnak chi is has some sort of head, 
in some wat the maechii are not so organised. The rules pertaining 
to samnak chi, therefore, are varied and rather arbitrary, and so the 
Institute has felt the need to achieve some form of standardisation 
for maechii by establishing overt, codified bases for discipline, and 
by supporting the position and authority of the head of each group of 
maechii. The Institute now provides the maechii with their own organisa­tion which takes responsibility for them, at the same time attempting 
to ensure a uniformity of practice which will unify maechii of all areas.

One of the more significant features of the Institute's rules 
concern the procedures of becoming a maechii. It also stresses the 
importance of the community in which maechii should live and practice, 
the samnak chi. The rules state that a maechii should take the eight 
precepts from a chapter of five monks or more, unless it is difficult to 
find as many monks together, in which case two monks will suffice (Rabiab 
Patibat 1975:2). Having stressed the importance of this ceremony and 
the religious importance of the presence of monks, the rule book then 
points out that the maechii will be part of a samnak chi, bound by the 
rules of the samnak, and be in the charge of a maechii well versed in 
those rules (ibid.:1). In this way the Institute stresses the independ­ence and cohesion of discipline, and the lines of authority of the 
maechii as a group, while maintaining a dependence of the status of 
maechii on the sanctification of the minimum quorum of monks. While 
neither feature is likely to be innovative, it is the codification of 
such practices in a systematic way which is the main contribution of 
such rules.

By ensuring conformity in such matters as these, the Institute 
is creating, presumably for the first time, a distinct category of
religious women in order to further their status in both the local community and in relation to the organisation of monks. To emphasise the specific identity and status of the women whose practice conforms to their standards, the Institute favours the use of the Thai word maechii as distinct from the Pali word ubaasikan. In Thailand the latter can refer to any devout laywoman who may follow less stringent devotional practices than those involved in the prolonged maintenance of eight precepts.

The Institute is taking as its standard what is arguably the middle range level of Thai lay religious practice, requiring a distinctive level of competence and dedication to the withdrawal from a purely secular existence. At the same time it is avoiding the extreme of allowing women the ten precepts which would place them on the same ritual level as novices to the Order. In distinguishing this as a distinct level of religious practice, the Institute justifies the need for itself as a lay organisation to maintain standards of fellowship and discipline for women. In disseminating such a distinct code the Institute has a similar role to that of the Sangha in its publication and emphasis of the Vinaya code for monks, upon which the special path of the monk rests.

Activities of the Institute

In such a modern centralised state as Thailand, the role of an organisation like the Nuns' Institute would necessarily go beyond the dissemination of information and the publication of books of chants. Hence the Institute has increasingly involved maechii in social and political spheres above and beyond those implied in their traditional religious role. This parallels the situation in which the role of monks
has become increasingly secularised and involved in the processes of a complex nation-state. Thus along with increased interest in Buddhist and secular education on the part of the nuns has come an official emphasis on their duty to act as leaders and teachers in the larger community. Maechii thus have a dual orientation in seeking to attain their own specific religious status: they have to work towards the conditions, training and morale of the sort which monks have always enjoyed, and also to deal with particular problems which do not affect members of the Order. One of the most obvious problems facing the Institute is the question of the Buddhist education of maechii and its relation to their religious status.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis it was noted that at Wat Paaknaam the emphasis on religious education was not marked among the maechii resident there. This is particularly true of the more advanced study of Pali which is traditionally the special preserve of the monk. Not only is the study of Pali, and hence of the sacred texts, an integral part of the monk's path of practice of the dhamma, it is also associated with, although not essential to, the memorization of the Pali chants which form a focus for many of the rituals which monks perform for the laity. Since the knowledge of Pali is difficult and esoteric, the monks who are known to be proficient at it receive the respect of the laity for their scholarship. Yet, while the modern proliferation and organisation of Buddhist and particularly Pali studies date back to the mid-nineteenth century, the history of the involvement of maechii in such study is very recent, and as yet very limited.

The Nuns' Institute's attitude towards education of maechii, though enthusiastic, is limited by the fact that it basically relies on
maechii organising it for themselves. One senior maechii in the
Institute, however, told me of the difficulties she and some fellow
maechii had to persuade the senior monks at their wat to allow them
to study Pali. This occurred at the same Phetburi wat from which many
of the founders of the Institute originate. At that time, about twelve
years ago, it was not expected that maechii would be studying the
scripture and there was some hesitation on the part of the monk teachers,
who were finally persuaded only by the persistence of the maechii. Of
the small number of maechii who started to learn Pali, only a few were
successful in the first year but with perseverance some progress was
made, and one of the maechii was finally successful to the level of
Parian 6, while others attained the fifth Parian grade. These events
took place at approximately the same time that the present abbot of Wat
Paaknaam was beginning to encourage the maechii there in the study of
Pali. It is possible to suppose that there was at this time a new
awareness of the need for maechii to be better versed in the scriptures
and chants around which their lives centred. Nevertheless the numbers of
maechii involved in Buddhist education today remain very small. There
is as yet only one maechii in the whole of Thailand to have reached the
highest level, and comparatively few maechii have persevered in the
same way. Maechii have, on occasion, been involved in other areas of
Buddhist scholarship, however. Two maechii, both influential in the
pioneering of maechii studying Pali at Phetburi, and who have reached
Parian 6 and Parian 5 grades respectively, have gone on to study at a
Buddhist University in India at postgraduate and graduate level. In
both cases, however, they have had access to private sponsorship. Lack
of such access has limited the number of maechii scholars, for the
Institute is not able to give more than small grants to maechii who are able to pursue their study. This contrasts with the position of monks who, although they receive comparatively meagre amounts from the Thai Government for education (Tambiah 1976:465), are nevertheless entitled to be considered for scholarships from either of the Buddhist universities. Mahamakut University regularly provides two or three annual scholarships for scholar monks to attend Buddhist university in India (ibid.:470), for example, and with the system of monk patronage as it exists in a highly developed state in Bangkok, ambitious monks have some hope of finding support for such study from private sponsors, especially influential monks (cf. ibid.:314). As a result, the number of monks who have travelled to India and other centres is quite considerable.

The Buddhist universities in Thailand have also apparently been open to maechii for some time (Heinze 1977:33-34), and Tambiah reports that at the Thammayut sect university, Mahamakut, about seventy maechii were participating in a special educational program devised for them in 1971. The course, held at Wat Bowonnivet monastery, includes subjects ranging from Pali and English through science to home economics and first aid (Tambiah 1976:471). At the time of his study approximately six hundred monk students were enrolled at the same university. Of course, since they are not members of the Sangha, maechii are not entitled to study for the Bachelor degrees which the Buddhist universities are entitled to confer.

Within the formal Buddhist Institutions, therefore, maechii have made some limited progress, but at the same time they are segregated and given not only separate conditions but qualifications distinct from
those which are widely recognised for monks.

A very recent development is the establishment of an educational institution belonging to the Thai Nuns' Institute in Ratburi. At present this establishment is no more than dormitory accommodation for about twenty or thirty maechii who study Pali, English, and secondary level secular subjects in the open air near their open-air image hall. The property for this establishment was donated by a wealthy maechii in 1971 and includes over 23 rai of land which is cultivated by the maechii in an effort to maintain self-sufficiency. Their day is thus divided into chanting, agricultural work, breakfast, study, the final meal, study, more agricultural work, and finally evening chanting for the small community. The maechii drawn to this samnak are, therefore, usually interested in making use of the study opportunities offered rather than the more mundane routine of a normal wat and its relation to monkly ceremony and lay activities. The present plan for the area is to develop it, as funds are donated by laity, into a fully-fledged university for maechii offering both Buddhist and secular subjects in similar vein to those now available to monks. Most of the sponsors of this institution seem to be wealthy Bangkok urbanites, mostly laywomen. It is likely that the interest in the facilities offered will grow with, if not more rapidly than the Institute itself. The Institute's programmes are specifically designed to cater for those with little educational backgrounds, and there is an acceptance of the fact that some women will become maechii simply in order to be able to have access to the education provided, as is the case with a certain proportion of monks. Improvements in the opportunities of education of maechii has been emphasised by the Institute however, for a number of reasons. The Institute is well aware
of the poor educational background of many of the maechii for whom they are responsible. This low educational level reflects badly on the image of maechii themselves, and thus to some extent the Institute plans to improve the image of its members by encouraging their self-improvement through education. The Institute also recognises the benefits of giving maechii some training which will allow them to earn a livelihood should they leave. While encouraging Buddhist studies in general, and the knowledge of Pali in particular, the Institute hopes to increase the number of maechii who have levels of religious knowledge equal to that of monks, and which will earn them the respect of the laity as knowledgeable and scholarly religion specialists. Maechii sometimes meet resistance from monks in this religious endeavour, although as the case of Wat Paaknaam shows, they can also meet with practical encouragement.

The pursuit of secular education and the acquisition of formal qualifications by maechii is a more complex question. At one level it simply reflects the increasing need of religious specialists to be well educated in secular subjects to maintain the respect of educated laity. This indeed is the argument for the establishment of Buddhist universities for monks, and the same argument could also be applied to the maechii. At another level the availability of education for monks has led to the attraction of poorer men, especially from the Northeast, to join the Sangha and thus seek self-advancement within the ranks. Secular education for women usually has, however, the less ambitious role of attempting to instil in maechii only the basic skills suitable to their position. This is especially true in the case of a group which forms a noticeable proportion of the maechii in metropolitan Bangkok, the so called 'begging maechii': maechii khog tham.
The problem of begging maechii is one which greatly concerns some members of the Nuns' Institute. A speaker at the general meeting of the Nuns' Institute in 1979 dealt with the subject, and in the discussion which follows, I have analysed the data afforded by this speaker at some length because it contains within it many of the conceptual difficulties involved in the controversy about maechii begging.

One of the tasks that the Institute has taken upon itself is to eradicate the phenomenon of women who publicly solicit financial support. This practice is not related to the almsround of the monk (binthabaat) but resembles more the phenomenon of begging by lay beggars from members of the public which, though common enough, is nevertheless illegal. These women are found in Bangkok and in other provincial centres. Their number appears to be on the increase according to officials of the Institute. Their existence is a problem not only for the Institute but also for the civil authorities who have the responsibility to prevent begging. The difficulties of enforcing the law which has characterised the recent history of this group, brings out in sharp relief the ambiguities in their status. It is possibly partly for this reason that the Nuns' Institute, which is trying to establish a uniform level of acceptance of maechii, is determined to put a stop to their activities.

Maechii who 'beg' are a common sight in certain areas of Bangkok. Some Thais told me of maechii who actually entered shops and pestered customers. The maechii I observed tended to take a more passive approach and sit on the pavement with an ordinary bowl set out for donations. There are in fact many ways in which maechii seek the support of passers-by: most do not go about holding out their hands, some sit or stand quietly, some even bear signs proclaiming their state of distress, and pointing out that thus those who give to them will make a good
deal of merit. I have seen one maechii holding out what was unmistakably a monk's almsbowl in an early-morning market. She seemed to be ignored by all around, and it was not clear whether she expected donations of money or of food. The 1979 speech outlined a number of issues involved in begging maechii. According to the speaker, those maechii who claim that they are going out 'on almsround' (binthabaat) go out 'at the wrong time and wrong place' (cf. Kaan prachumyai pracampii khogg Sathaaban Maechii Thai 1979:71). As I mentioned above it is not generally accepted practice for maechii to go out on almsround in Thailand, and the maechii referred to are often regarded as begging, since they do not observe the proper almsround conventions. This would imply that though the Nuns' Institute is not prepared to go as far as formally condemning maechii going on almsround, the practice is severely frowned upon if not carried out strictly in the manner of the monks. 'Begging' is presumably distinct from the practice of maechii seeking alms on behalf of their wat which, as we have seen, is a common activity of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam.

The difficulty in controlling these begging maechii, in the view of the speaker, is that they are able to argue, when arrested by the police, that as they are nakbuat, to arrest them and make them go hungry is an act of demerit (baap). This seems effectively to inhibit some of the police in the pursuit of their duties since, not knowing better, they are afraid to involve themselves in demerit (klua baap). These maechii then, ostensibly both encourage public donations leading to merit on the basis of their special status as nakbuat, and caution the police against arresting them for the same reason. Rather than dealing with the issues of the rights and wrongs of their argument,
however, the speaker to the Institute on the subject comments only that officials who were led by the arguments of the maechii did not know whether maechii were nakbuat or not, and refused to act because of ignorance and fear. She thus skirts the issue of whether maechii are nakbuat, and whether or not merit and demerit are indeed involved.

One of the obvious problems in allowing maechii to seek support in this fashion is that if it is a successful means of gaining a living there is nothing to stop other beggars donning white and shaving their hair in order to reap the financial benefits. This in effect, suggests the speaker, is what happens in some cases. Thus, not only are some laity led to don the robes of the religious for base motives, and known to be doing so, they also do not live as maechii should, and thus create a bad impression for maechii as a whole. In both senses, begging maechii tarnish the image of the rest of the maechii; and while the rest of the maechii allow them to continue to operate, argue some maechii in the Institute, their own reputation is damaged.

It is interesting that in her speech the maechii talking about begging maechii sometimes uses a classifier, *khon*, which places them at a secular level, as opposed to the classifier *ruup*, which makes unequivocally clear the religious status of proper maechii.¹ This possibly unconscious distinction underlies the speaker's tendency to regard begging maechii as 'beggars who dress as maechii' rather than as genuine maechii at all. The speaker urges maechii to turn against those who beg. The speaker claims that some maechii who beg are known to have large amounts of money in the bank (tens of thousands of baht) or children studying overseas. She concludes from this that the maechii concerned choose to beg as a stable (*khlong*) means of income, almost as a
profession, hence that they are not begging out of necessity. This, in her view, is supported by the fact that they appear to have ignored 'support' offered by the Institute.

The approach taken by the Institute, according to the speaker, is that begging maechii should be trained not to beg. Of what this training consists is not clear. Six groups of maechii who have been apprehended by officials are said to have undergone seven-day 'training' sessions at a branch of the Institute, asked not to beg and warned that if they are caught a second time they would be punished more severely. However, some maechii appear to have been apprehended more than once, and it seems fair to surmise that these sessions have thus far not been successful.

The speaker concludes that even if demerit is involved in apprehending begging maechii, they do cause a deterioration in standards, 'blemish the nation and religion', and that they therefore must be eradicated.

The views in the speech are rather strongly expressed, and the possible reasons for this are worth consideration. I would argue that the significance of the Institute's opposition to begging maechii goes beyond the obvious reason that beggars are not respectable members of society and any maechii who beg partake of their stigma. It is a significant fact that maechii maintain only eight precepts. Since they do not take the precept which bids them to refrain from receiving gold or silver, they are doctrinally not in a position to depend upon the laity for their support. In this sense it is difficult to argue definitely that making donations to them is indeed an act of merit as begging maechii claim. Conversely, in that maechii ought to imitate the behaviour and moral orientation of monks, it reflects badly on them
as religious personnel to be seen actively soliciting funds from the laity. Monks are forbidden by the rules of the Vinaya to handle money or to put the laity in the position of being obliged to donate to them, since it would bring the Order into disgrace.

In the case of the almsround, the householder, symbolically, donates only that which is strictly necessary for the physical support of the members of the Order: food. Maechii begging for money thus goes against two essential elements of the tradition and nature of lay support for religious personnel whereby the initiative of giving only that which is strictly necessary allows the giver to make merit as a result of this. Moreover, a begging maechii asking for a donation for her individual use. Very few would construe her request as being for her group, especially when personal distress is emphasised. This contrasts with the notion of impersonal donation to a member of the Sangha rather than to an individual monk, which detachment is thought to heighten the merit made by such giving. Finally, as I have mentioned earlier, in Thai society a direct relation is assumed between the low social status of the poor and destitute and their assumed poor karmic status. Since this is the case, maechii who are seen to be helpless and who indeed advertise their destitution are assumed automatically to have poor karma. This is at odds with their religious status, and casts a poor light on their calibre as people. It is a small step from this to suspecting the motives of all those who assume the outward semblance of maechii.

It would be mistaken to assume, however, that the official attitude of the Nuns' Institute on this issue is unanimously held. One official of the Department of Religious Affairs, for example, who regarded as
dubious some of the other activities of the Institute, felt that it was a sign of social well-being that people responded to this symbol of their religion which the maechii presented, and gave in piety. He told me that he did not concur with the arguments of the Institute. At the same meeting of the Institute at which the arguments of one of the Institute maechii were presented, a lawyer presented his case in support of his attempt to introduce an Act of Parliament whereby maechii would be exempt from the laws relating to beggars. He seemed to be greeted with unanimous opposition by the maechii at the meeting. As far as I am aware there was no other defence of the position of the begging maechii at the meeting. It would appear from their lack of representation at this meeting that the beggar maechii are not an organised force, able to counteract the officials of the Nuns' Institute. The latter have in effect thus unilaterally assumed the right to decide that beggar maechii have no right to continue as maechii, that is, arrogated to themselves on behalf of the Institute the choice of criteria as to who are and who are not acceptable in the role of maechii.  

It remains to be seen whether the officials of the Nuns' Institute have enough actual power to put into effect their decisions on such matters as begging maechii. Although the training sessions the Institute ran for the first time in 1978 appeared to have no effect on the maechii concerned, they were a salutary exercise in that as a project they enabled the Institute to gain the co-operation of officials of the Department of Public Welfare and of the police. It was thus informally recognised as an institution in its own right, having power of authority over a limited category of persons. Yet the Institute does not yet have the formal recognition of the government level institution with which
seeks to ally itself: the Department of Religious Affairs. To understand its emerging identity in relation to such bodies as the Department of Public Welfare and the police, it is necessary to consider its further activities in such realms as community development of various kinds.

Just as there is an increasing official tendency to judge the state of the Sangha by its relation to the state and the community, many at the top levels of the Institute hold that well-respected maechii should most properly be involved in useful work in the community. From the accounts given to me it appears that this point of view is actively supported, even suggested, by the Queen, and the present huanaa of the Institute is one of its chief proponents within the Institute. The huanaa, therefore, organises some of those maechii interested in such work to be trained. The community development work in which the maechii have become involved ranges from work in educating villagers (especially women) in such areas as sewing, handicrafts and ethics to more specialised tasks such as child-care and those of nursing aides. The work thus ranges from that of an overt ideological nature to the use of more practical skills. Maechii are also expected to help the poor such as those in homes for the aged and orphanages.

The nineteenth century Thai élite responded to Western Christian criticism of the role of religion in Thai society by a number of conceptual changes which went hand in hand with other instruments of modernisation. Thus it was that, for example, in 1899, the then Minister of Finance, Prince Mahisgn, began to write of the monkhood as an institution with assets: of the monk as a unit of manpower, as productivity denied to the society (see Reynolds 1979:226-227). By this time, monks had already begun to form the backbone of what is now
the modern educational system in Thailand. As the only section of people in Thai society with access to sources of learning, the monks became the original teachers of the general public until such time as secular teachers could be trained. The resources of the Sangha, both in terms of wat used as schools and monks used as teachers, were then the only means by which Government could put its educational aims into effect (Wyatt 1969). Today use of the Sangha for the government's political, social and economic objectives has increased, and lies behind the formation of, for example, the Thanmathuud ('emissary of dhamma') and Thammacarik ('wandering dhamma') groups (see Tambiah 1976: 434ff.).

The ideological justification of maechii working for the community is similar to that which today operates in the case of the monks, although I would suspect that the particular range of work thought suitable for maechii is inspired by perceptions of the roles of Christian nuns, both in Thailand and abroad, familiar to Westernised Thais. Rather than leaders who are seen to endorse the ways of the government to the people, and who thereby inspire them to new and useful forms of action, the maechii have less formative, more nurturing emphases in their involvement in the community. Their work is also oriented towards women's activities, whereas monks tend to deal with the community as a whole.

The maechii who go out to village centres teach the village girls ethics, deportment and handicrafts in those hours of the day when the girls are free from their work in the fields. Often they live in the village wat or separate accommodation is provided for them. Ideally, they are supported for the duration of their stay by the villagers. They stay in the village for a set period, returning to the training
centres or their residents where they may undergo further training
during the rainy season (Phansaa). Work by maechii in villages has
been established in several provinces, mostly in central Thailand.
This probably reflects easy accessibility to and from Bangkok and
contrasts with the community work of the monks which has been strongest
in the areas of political sensitivity, such as the north-east. The
sort of village work in which maechii are at present involved is
also carried out by the more promising local girls, who are trained in
the same schemes and have the advantage of familiarity with local
conditions. Nevertheless, the maechii have a unique dual role in that
they not only teach women skills such as sewing which help the economy
of their families but combine this with moral instruction. They might
thus be seen to be extending the pastoral role of the monks in areas
which the monks do not reach.

The dual role of the maechii can also be seen in some of the
other areas of work for which they are deemed to be suitable. Their
work with the aged, for example, should not only involve the alleviation
of distress of illness and need, but also include reminders of the
Buddhist principles which will give moral support to those who, being
closest to death, are often regarded as being most in need of them.
Similarly, maechii who are able to teach young children should not only
take the burden of pre-school education off the shoulders of working
parents, but 'help promote an interest in religion at an early age'

Prakhong mentions maechii working in two other main areas:
reform institutions and hospital orphanages. Hence it is not stretching
the point too far to say that, in these specialised fields, the maechii
tend to be associated with those on the fringes of society, and the
destitute. With all of these people the ostensible task of the maechii is not only to comfort but also to remind them of their duties to religion and the community.

The Institute faces something of a dilemma in that the programmes mentioned, although designed to help improve the public image of maechii, require a high standard of training and comportment which, in the view of many associated with the programmes, most maechii do not have. It is for this reason that it organises training programmes designed, among other things, to inculcate this standard. Since, however, at least in some fields, higher secular education is also required, the Institute hopes to begin to attract better-educated, more committed women to its ranks. On the other hand, as many of its members have only a basic education, the Institute also offers facilities for the training of its members in such fields as nursing to enable them to act as nursing aides. Many such areas, in which maechii may of course potentially be employed later in lay life, require formal qualifications and hence, so far, only a small number have been able to participate.

The maechii trained to participate in such programmes are very much in the public eye as representatives of all maechii. One lay informant told me, commenting on nursing aide training programmes, that the maechii chosen had poor educational backgrounds, and despite their brief training, are not really equipped for the responsibilities which they have undertaken. As a result, they have given maechii a bad reputation, contrary to the original intention. Possibly because of this type of problem, Prakhong points out that in specialised areas only those maechii who possess the qualifications and dedication should be selected (1973:182). While I was in the field, there were violent protests in an Engineering School in
Nonthaburi, where the students were demanding, *inter alia*, the removal of a maechii sent as a Business Administration teacher (Bangkok Post, June 20, 1979, p.5). Although I could not find out the causes of their dissatisfaction with the maechii, the fact of such violent opposition shows that maechii are not everywhere welcome in this teaching capacity. The maechii I spoke to, however, assured me that they felt that members of their number were well-received in village teaching, and they were optimistic about expansion of their activities.

There are those who claim that the proper duty of maechii is not to be found in such work and that this work will not improve their status in the eyes of the general community. Such people argue that maechii should keep to their traditional religious path which is one of retreat and especially meditation. The laywoman who criticised the poor results of the nursing aide programme also maintained that maechii as religious personnel should strive for the sort of respect appropriate to their religious aims. She held that those who practised according to the tenets of their religion automatically attracted to themselves the respect of the laity. This is the case with the famous meditation monks in Thailand to whom people flock to pay respect and in some cases to study with. She felt that the same could be the case with maechii. To go out seeking publicity and expecting the respect of the laity was improper for religious specialists and could only earn them disrespect. This argument is also presented in relation to the new involvement of monks in the community, but while monks are regarded as always having had a significant social role apart from the new developments, the arguments against the new social involvement of maechii reflect the fact that their role has been one more of retreat, and perhaps obscurity, than has that of the monks.
The authorities who have taken responsibility for the involvement of maechii in social responsibility seem to partake of the view whereby there is a strong element of tolerating maechii as a distinct group only if they cease to be a group living 'off the charity of the people'. This places them in the category of an underprivileged group rather than of those deserving the support of the community, and reinforces the notion that they must be willing to work for both financial support and social acceptance. This view does not lend itself to the expectation of several paths being possible for maechii. For this reason the study of dhamma is not carried to an advanced level during the training programmes and the practice and teaching of meditation remain little developed. Within the monkhood these traditional paths (khanthathura and wipassanaathura) are still regarded as respected and necessary in spite of the new emphasis on social work. One of the dangers of the determination to make maechii useful is that it will force maechii, who are not financially independent and do not receive support at a wat, to be involved in working for the community which is then obliged to provide their needs. In other words the Institute does not provide support for maechii who adhere to their traditional role, and at the same time their status and self respect is linked by these authorities to their duty to their country in a secular rather than a religious sense.

While monks are able to use their acknowledged role and high status in the community for secular purposes, maechii engage in such work with the intention of raising their status in the community. This makes the attitude towards such work very different in the case of monks and maechii.

It is also important to note, with regard to the attitude that maechii should not be so destitute as to be asking the community for
support, that the samnak chi'i attached to the Institute endeavour to remain economically self-sufficient. At that belonging to the huanaa of the Institute all the resident maechii seem to spend some time engaged in making cloth flowers. Arrangements of such flowers are supplied by the Institute to Wat Bowonniwet for special occasions and are also sold to the public. This indicates the emphasis laid on the need of the maechii to make some material contribution to their upkeep, which is also the case in the Ratburi School for maechii mentioned above.

Directions

In the foregoing I have discussed the nature of the activities in which the Nuns' Institute has chosen to involve itself: broadly, improvement of religious understanding and secular qualifications among maechii; eradication of begging maechii; and involvement of maechii in community work. It now remains to examine what we may make of the Institute's very existence in this way at this time.

The most obvious feature about the Institute is its apparent similarity in structure and role to that of the Buddhist monkhood in Thailand. The Institute, although it does not have a tradition of ordination to protect, does seek to define and control membership in ways similar to those which have been developed for the monkhood over the past century. Census-taking of residences and the issuing of membership cards for example, allow for some degree of surveillance and control. It takes upon itself the role of arbiter in defining what constitutes a proper ordination, along principles laid down by itself, although in this matter it requires the co-operation of monks. This action
resembles the traditional act of *sanghakamma par excellence*, that of sanctifying entry to membership of the Order. The case of the begging maechii demonstrates not only the desire of the Institute to take on Sangha-like powers of punishment and expulsion, but also the difficulties involved in realising these. Unlike the Buddhist Sangha, it has no canonically defined set of rules which establishes clear categories of offence and appropriate penalties, nor indeed any canonically sanctioned authority. However, given that historically, Thai kings have been in a position to make new laws which directly affect the Sangha, governmental authorisation may well prove to be desirable. The institution of maechii, however, is not made legitimate by any historical connection with the life and teaching of the Buddha. The Institute's appeal to common Buddhist morality and the model of the role of the monk in order to set standards and make rules for maechii, therefore, still leaves it without any real authority to function in a way analogous to the Sangha.

It is pertinent to note that, as the hierarchy of the Sangha was elaborated and sanctioned by successive Buddhist monarchs, so also were clear lines of decision-making authority. However, the relation between Sangha and monarchy was always kept explicit. Thus although the Nuns' Institute has created a hierarchy explicitly paralleling that of the present Sangha, this hierarchy has no formal links with structures of authority above and beyond itself and exists in a virtual vacuum.

That the Institute has not based its stand in such an important matter as that of the begging maechii on strictly doctrinal grounds would suggest that its concerns are primarily with the real exigencies of the position of maechii in contemporary Thai society. This contrasts with the Sangha, which continues to focus on such points of issue as
have sacred precedent in the scriptures and tradition. The sacred
tradition of the monks cannot be contradicted by the monarch or
government and can in theory at least be used to justify or protect
the position of the monks in relation to the government. Since maechii
have no tradition, they have no such recourse.

On the other hand the Nuns' Institute is isolating maechii from
too strong a connection with scriptural precedent by maintaining the
eight precepts as their correct level of practice. As we have seen,
this places them in a unique position whereby they renounce the right
to be supported in alms, but take upon themselves the responsibility for
their own upkeep, and this makes them vulnerable to the potential manipula-
tion of the government should it impose conditions on their means of
self-support. Nevertheless this ensures that they have the right to be
ideologically supported by the government, without doctrinal issues
causing criticism of the government as protector of the religion.

This avoidance of any reference to doctrinal precedent is crucial to
an understanding of the ambiguous position of maechii in Thai Buddhism.
The issue of whether the Nuns' Institute will be recognised by the
Sangha and the Department of Religious Affairs, according to my under-
standing, hinges upon a problem of definition: are maechii nakbuat or
are they not?

Nakbuat is difficult to translate but the bound stem nak refers
usually to an expert or authority, and, as I have already pointed out,
buat is used in the colloquial sense, to refer to the process of
becoming, in the sense of moving into a new (higher) position. The
maechii therefore, in their use of the word, are emphasising that they
have moved to a new path, and hence position, vis-à-vis the laity, who
do not make a prolonged observance of the eight precepts.

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It is significant that the maechii who seek official recognition refer to themselves with this Thai word nakbuat while some of their opponents accuse them of aspiring to be bhikkhunī, with all its doctrinal implications of reviving a dead order. On the one hand then, maechii are emphasising the validity of a contemporary Thai religious practice, and are met with suspicion based on a firm and exclusive adherence to the accepted interpretation of what was laid down as correct. The maechii are, therefore, basing their claims on a non-doctrinal concept, supported by the general teachings of the Buddha, rather than the laws laid down in the texts. They are nakbuat, as one informant held, because they leave the lay life to study and practise the teachings of the Buddha to the exclusion of all other activity. It is this dedication to the pursuit of this higher path, traditionally associated with the monk, which requires their special treatment and consideration as a group. The opposing view posits that a group not sanctioned within the Buddha's own conceptual framework has no right to claim for itself the characteristics and status of the special community created by the Buddha. The two sides thus justify their positions by different sorts of interpretations of the basic canon. As Kemper points out (1980:29) sectarian differences in Theravada Buddhism usually focus on details of the Vinaya rather than on deeper problems of interpretation of the doctrine. The clash of opinion discussed here, also follows this tendency.

Those dubious of the intentions of the maechii, justify their position on the potential religious role of women by claiming that all that a monk can do, a woman can do at home if she so chooses, since indeed it is known that some people are reported in the canon to have reached the highest stage of enlightenment without, or prior to, becoming
members of the Order. However, there is a common association in many minds between becoming a monk and advancement to higher spiritual planes, and thus at a less sophisticated level, women, who cannot become monks, are prevented from reaching such planes. The status of maechii, in this view, since it does not entail entry to an order, cannot elevate women who become maechii above the status of laity in any way at all and claims for special attention are not justified.

According to an official of the Department of Religious Affairs, the recognition of maechii as nakbuat and as falling within the jurisdiction of the department is ultimately the purview of the Supreme Council of the Thai Sangha, the decision of which will be accepted by the department. The decision, naturally, will not rest purely on the doctrinal views or folk beliefs mentioned above, but will reflect other social and political pressures on the Sangha.

It is possible that the Thai Sangha might be influenced in its decision by the waves of discussion concerning women's rights which are reaching Thailand from the West as they have done for over a century. These influences have always been more powerful among the upper echelons, which are those most called upon to provide solutions to many of the social problems burgeoning in Thailand today.

As the institution through which religious groups are often organised, the Sangha may also be under pressure from government departments to accept responsibility for a group which, in showing itself capable of some degree of centralisation, may be used to deploy 'woman-power', of a cheap and trainable sort, in those areas where the government may best use it. This is particularly advisable since the monks' programmes run by the Buddhist University, Mahamakut, have emphasised
the low-level community development work similar to that to which the maechii have been assigned (Tambiah 1976:441). This contrasts with the more politically motivated activity for monks developed by the Department of Public Welfare, under whose jurisdiction the maechii might otherwise fall. Although there is no formal affiliation between the maechii and the Sangha, seventy maechii were studying in a course specially designed for them at the University in 1971 (ibid.:471). PrakhQpng (1973:181) points out that most of the monks she interviewed did not object to maechii involvement in such programmes, although they lacked knowledge and experience. This view was shared by the majority of government officers. The dual emphasis (on both religious and secular development) of the Institute's own education programme for maechii means that the Institute itself is opting for particular forms of possible labour deployment which would most suitably ally them with the Sangha-based programmes.

It is possible that moves for the organisation of maechii, conceived in terms of establishing authority over poorly educated unemployed, is a social response to the economically deprived group which has swollen the population of Bangkok in recent years. The assertion mentioned above, that such women as begging maechii are on the increase, certainly seems to indicate that this possibility may well be the case. It is a nice point than an increasing social problem can find partial solutions under the rubric of a this-worldly Buddhism. This responsibility too, is one already familiar to the higher ranks of the Thai Sangha. This must be balanced against the Sangha taking responsibility for women who are not universally respected. As I have already indicated there are sufficient doctrinal grounds for disapproval of the recognition of maechii as nakbuat. If there is disagreement on this issue at the higher levels,
the question, it is said, must not be allowed to cause a schism in the monastic community since causing such an occurrence is a grave offence against the Sangha. In this regard it is useful to remember that there is in any case some dissension within the Sangha as to whether the status of monks is not already jeopardised by the Sangha's political functions (Mulder 1977:41). To take maechii under its auspices for reasons related to this government-inspired aspect of monastic life, therefore, would be to increase the Sangha's commitments in that direction. Heavy commitment by the Sangha to the needs of the government in its social programmes has in the past proved very onerous for the Sangha (Tambiah 1976:456). The issue of the Sangha's recognition of maechii is thus a complex and very delicate one.
Footnotes to Chapter VII

1. I am grateful for the keen insight of Dr Anthony Diller who made this observation.

2. The Thai Sangha, of course, often has similar tasks itself in relation to members of the Order. See, for example, Tambiah 1976: 388.

3. One high-ranking laywoman very much involved in sending maechii out to villages also had as another socially useful interest the reformation of prostitutes.
Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

Summary

In this study I have attempted to show the ways in which various related aspects of the lives of women and religion have come together in one specific instance, that of female Buddhist ascetics in Thailand, and I have set out the pertinent factors which influence the peculiar status of such a group.

In Chapter One I briefly reviewed the original role of female ascetics within Buddhism to show that, during the early development of the Buddhist Order, the Order of Monks was 'recognised throughout to be the more important of the two Sanghas' (Horner 1930:270) and that, due to their dependence on the male Order, women were deprived of 'the power to define their religious obligations along norms that they themselves established' (Wilson 1979:80). I also discussed the fact that, over time, the emphasis of the Canon tended increasingly to devalue the role of women within the ascetic tradition.

In Chapter Two I showed that the later prejudice against the role of women in Buddhism has been largely accepted by many modern Thais, especially in view of the demise of the original Order of Nuns, and that some of the more general explanatory features of Buddhist thought, especially that of Karma, have tended to be used to justify the inferior...
status and role of women in religious life. Equally important, however, is the fact that these views are also reflected in the strong hierarchical tendencies in Thailand which are closely allied with the centralised political control of the state which extends over not only the secular but religious spheres of Thai society. Within this unified hierarchy the Sangha has not only continued as a highly popular institution for temporary ordination for a majority of Thai men, but has also played an increasingly vital role in the political centralisation of marginal spheres on the geographical and ideological borders of the Thai polity. Control over the Sangha is therefore of great importance to the Thai government.

In Chapter Three I introduced the reader to the community in which my research was carried out. It was shown that Wat Paaknaam, with its large population of maechii, was not only a meditation centre with a charismatic leader, which in part explains the presence of the maechii, but also a wat which has become important within the urban-based hierarchy of wat associated with high-ranking monks and the sort of élite lay community this tends to involve. The type of interaction between monks, maechii and laity at the wat, which I described in Chapter Four, can be seen to be appropriate to the urbanised setting of Wat Paaknaam, and to cater to the convenience of a dispersed lay community and a large number of monks. At the same time a high standard of facilities is available to the maechii, with the concomitant subordination of the samnak chiit to the overall activities of the wat. The maechii are called upon to provide a large number of services for the wat which may not be necessary in a smaller wat more closely dependent on its surrounding population. The provision of these services, however, has meant that the maechii are
more closely integrated into the wat's residential community than has been reported by other writers (e.g. Bunnag 1973:88). For this reason some of the more prominent maechii of the samnak at Wat Paaknaam have drawn to themselves lay followers in their own right, and the samnak as a whole has contributed to the attraction of the wat among lay outsiders, especially laywomen.

In Chapter Five I delineated the sorts of ritual activities in which maechii may be involved, and the implications of these with regard to their ritual status. On the one hand, some maechii take upon themselves some of the ritual equivalents of the more regular of the monks' collective monastic observances, while maintaining elements of lay ritual life. On the other hand, maechii can also become involved in the rituals of laity as religious specialists, although this pastoral role is always secondary to that of the monks, and does not in any way replace it.

This sort of ritual activity brings rich rewards to the monks who participate as religious specialists, and can form part of the wealth which some monks amass. Maechii who choose to participate in such activities also have available to them a means of income for their personal use. While some of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam relied on this kind of income, however, on the whole it seems little exploited by most of them, which is possibly a reflection of the material support the samnak chii receives in terms of food.

In Chapter Six I pointed out that, according to the data obtained at Wat Paaknaam, another potential asset of their status, free access to education and therefore to potential improved social status, was not taken advantage of at Wat Paaknaam. Almost the only
training that a few of the maechii mentioned pursuing, dressmaking, was of an informal nature, and reflects a low level of advancement expected by the maechii, who are largely of lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds than are the monks and novices. In this chapter I argued that the religious role of the maechii at the wat seemed to be more involved with meditation and retreat than with education, advancing social status, or with interaction with laity as religious specialists.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I discussed the national body of the Thai Nuns' Institute, the sorts of people who lend it support, and what they hope to achieve through its operation. In this chapter I argued that the standardisation of maechii in terms of behaviour, ordination, and the strict observance of precepts is linked to moves to improve their education and participation in community affairs; to make them more useful members of the social community. Linked with this trend is the attempt to have maechii accepted as nakbuat, as religious personnel, rather than as a socially and administratively anomalous category.

Further Considerations

The principal argument of this thesis is that ideologically, ritually and economically, maechii in Thailand occupy an ambivalent status in most respects, poised somewhere between monks and laity. The claim of the Nuns' Institute, that maechii should be both recognised as nakbuat and worthy of this status, is, as I see it, an attempt to resolve some of the difficulties inherent in such a position, and to establish a means by which the women concerned can develop their own role.
Nevertheless, as I have also shown, the status of maechii is redefinable according to context and situation, and recognition of their role is a complex matter. This is very clearly seen in the denial by the Department of Religious Affairs of their status as nakbuat on the grounds that it is not clear that they have made the same sort of contribution to Buddhism as the monks have made (Phiis 1978:20). Indeed, as I pointed out, the claim for recognition as nakbuat is frequently adversely interpreted as a claim to the status of bhikkhunī. This is not surprising in an institutional framework allied closely with the state, where the monarch and the government have come to be seen as maintaining the purity and legitimacy of the Order of religious personnel from which, in turn, it receives support and legitimacy. One of the crucial elements in this relationship is the authority of the Buddha's sanctioning of the Order, and the authority of the State is not such that it can be seen to go beyond this ultimate sanction. Conversely, by 'reinterpreting' certain Buddhist doctrines — and with them the role of religious personnel — for its own purposes, the State is able to establish ways in which it is able to redefine the parameters of existing sanctioned categories. If the orthodox religious status of the monks is threatened by the re-emergence of bhikkhunī, the orientations of government are not disturbed by a new, more 'religiously' oriented classification of maechii which allows them to be brought under the purview of the programmes of the Department of Religious Affairs.

In the case presented by the Institute itself, 'nakbuat' can be seen to be a term, the use of which is based on a modern, Westernised concept of the role of religious personnel, whereby correct practice
and motivation rather than formalistic ritual sanction are seen as the defining factors. Hence, the more vocal members of the Institute are allied with those members of the Sangha, and indeed those Thai lay Buddhists, who have come to see true Buddhism very much in terms of the social and national role played by its representatives in opposition to more conservative points of view (cf. Mulder 1978). This modernised Buddhism has its roots, in Thailand, as far back as King Mongkut, who in the nineteenth century, started the socially oriented, strict, intellectualist and élite Thammayut Order (Kirsch 1975b), and it is therefore suggested here that current changes in the status of maechii are allied with the increasing use made of the Sangha by the government for its own purposes. It is ironic that, while they have not received recognition as a religious group when they have been associated with 'retreat', maechii are now closer to being recognised as such a group with their increasing involvement in secular affairs. While their role as ritual experts vis-à-vis laity remained secondary to that of the monks, and they did not have a specific role which led the laity to accord them special status, their new role does have a limited religious as well as non-religious utility for laity, and they are thus finding for themselves an improved, but less specialised status. This new status is, however, more clearly associated with everyday conceptions of feminine qualities and skills than was their former image.

To some extent, many of the maechii at Wat Paaknaam represent a group with concerns different from those of the leading figures of the Nuns' Institute. While the latter are actively seeking to change some of the factors relating to the status of maechii, the maechii at Wat Paaknaam appear to accept their given conventional role. This
role allows them to practise and study their religion as best suits their individual inclinations, and simultaneously requires that they support by their services the monks who are fully and unequivocally religious personnel, entitled to lay support and enabled to confer merit in return for it. This difference in attitude between the maechii at Wat Paaknaam and those active in the affairs of the Institute is perhaps due to the fact that the former have comparatively good facilities at their disposal, while the Institute is working on behalf of many who do not.

Some of those at Wat Paaknaam who differ most from the leaders at the Institute are simply those who, like traditional 'good Buddhists', regard religious practice as providing 'protection and security in a world of flux ... [as] a thing to cling to, not for the sake of a religious way of life, but as an identity and a means to harness power' (Mulder 1978:44). In their performance of these practices, the maechii are tolerated but not honoured. They practise in ways linked to those of laity. The activist maechii who claim distinction as nakbuat threaten the complacency of this order in that they imply that strict adherence to a certain level of practice takes one beyond a ritualistic understanding of religion and that those who do not maintain this level are yet another step below them. The concept of relatively open access to the status of ascetic nakbuat disturbs the traditional reciprocity of the dichotomous monk-lay religious status. The emphasis of the Institute on the observance of rules and practices which call a higher path to mind reinforces the need for understanding of the dhamma rather than its observance. As such it has its roots in urban sophistication based on scriptural knowledge,
at a level which is not shared by all, just as it is more often associated with higher soteriological aims than is accepted by the majority of Thai Buddhists.

Since this research was based on one very delimited study, several questions arise from the conclusions here presented. One of the most pertinent areas which invites further research is that of rural-urban differences in the status and activities of maechii. As I indicated in Chapter Five, ritual roles are most highly elaborated in the urban setting, and the findings presented here regarding this aspect of the role of maechii may not apply equally well to rural wat. Moreover, in the rural wat, where the wat community is much less internally differentiated, and the activities of monks is less highly specialised, the opportunities for any special role available to maechii needs to be examined. Since beliefs concerning ritual pollution of women and magical efficacy still appear to be strongest in rural areas, it is likely that at many rural wat the role of maechii is much more likely to be restricted to the retirement of elderly women, as is the case with the ubaasikaa mentioned by Terwiel (1979:208). If this is the case, then we may suppose that there are very significant differences between maechii in rural and urban areas, for Prakhong found, albeit on a limited survey, that 'most of the Buddhist nuns in Bangkok [are] between the age [sic] of 20 to 29' (1973:181). Needless to say, the orientations of these younger maechii are quite different from those of retired elderly maechii. They may share some orientations in common with the younger monks, and, since historically there seem to have been no young maechii, there must have been some factors at work to enable wider acceptance of this role for younger women. The factors leading to such changes would appear to repay further examination.
This thesis has attempted to study the nature and characteristics of an hitherto unstudied group, and must necessarily be partial and incomplete. Nevertheless, it is hoped that in examining the position of maechii in Thailand, the resulting clarification of the ambiguities in and potentialities of their status and role have helped to illuminate some aspects of the dialectic and interaction of the religious and secular spheres in Thailand, and the nature of the evolving monk-lay relationship in modern Theravada Buddhism.
APPENDIX: THE LAY PRECEPTS

The Five Precepts

In presenting the set of five lay precepts, I am following Obeyesekere's suggestion that the precepts are not Commandments associated with the 'monotheistic notion of sin' and the alienation from God which follows violation of the rules in the Christian tradition in contrast to Commandments, the Buddhist precepts are 'not rooted directly in the Salvation ideology ... of the religion, but were framed with 'the control of drives and the orderly conduct of social life' in mind (1968:26-28). The original Pali versions of the precepts makes clear that they are generalised:

1. Abstinence from the destruction of life.
2. Abstinence from taking what is not given.
3. Abstinence from fornication (i.e. any sexual misdemeanour).
4. Abstinence from speaking falsely.
5. Abstinence from spirituous, strong and maddening liquors which are the cause of sloth.

(cf. ibid.:27)

The Eight Precepts

The Eight Precepts, as a more ascetic regime, involve the first five precepts, but in this case the third precept requires abstinence from any sexual activity whatsoever. Celibacy is thus one of the distinguishing features of the observance of the eight precepts. The additional three precepts may be expressed:
6. Avoid eating at unsuitable times (i.e. after 12 noon).
7. Abstain from witnessing displays of dancing, singing, music and avoid the use of garlands, unguents, scents.
8. Avoid the use of a high or big bed.

(cf. ibid.:32)

These additional precepts obviously involve the avoidance of sources of sensual pleasure and of ostentation.

The Ten Precepts

Finally, the ten precepts again encompass what has gone before; in fact, there is only one point of difference between the 'Eight' and the 'Ten' precepts, since the seventh precept of the Eight is made into two precepts in the last group. There is, however, the final precept which signals a most important step to withdrawal from normal society. Thus, as well as the modified five precepts, the ten precepts proceed:

6. Avoid eating at unseasonable times (i.e. after 12 noon).
7. Abstain from witnessing displays of dancing, singing, music.
8. Avoid the use of garlands, unguents, scents.
9. Avoid the use of a high or big bed.
10. Abstain from receiving gold or silver.

The last of the ten precepts involves the withdrawal from the economic life of lay society which, together with the renunciation from sexual life signals total renunciation from the secular world.
Thai words are spelled according to the system used by Mary Haas in her Thai-English Student's Dictionary (Stanford University Press, 1964) with the following exceptions:

The final consonant 'd' is here written as 't' and the final 'g' as 'k', the initial glottal '?' is omitted; 'j' is written as 'y' and 'q' as 'ng'. Some of Haas' vowel symbols have also been changed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Haas</th>
<th>Equivalent in thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>๒ (yy)</td>
<td>y (yy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๔ (ae)</td>
<td>oe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๖ (aw)</td>
<td>ao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๗ (e)</td>
<td>ae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๘ (aj)</td>
<td>ai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One exception to this change is the spelling of the word 'bood' which, for obvious reasons, was not changed. Words which have a common currency are spelt in the usual way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>๔ (baaramii)</th>
<th>teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>๔ (bood)</td>
<td>munificence; goodness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the uposatha hall; consecrated hall where ecclesiastical ceremonies (such as ordinations) are held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๔ (buat)</td>
<td>to become; (commonly) to be ordained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๔ (buat kae bon)</td>
<td>to be ordained in fulfilment of a vow made to a spirit or deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>๔ (buat sadg khrg)</td>
<td>to be ordained 'to ward off an evil constellation' which results in bad luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bun</td>
<td>merit (in the Buddhist sense); goodness, virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dekwat</td>
<td>monastery boy, lay boy living under the supervision of a monk at the wat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huanaa</td>
<td>head, chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kathin</td>
<td>an annual ceremony to present 'end-of-Phansaa' robes to monks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kuti</td>
<td>monk's dwelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luuksit</td>
<td>pupil, student; follower, disciple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nakbuat</td>
<td>ascetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patimokkha</td>
<td>the 227 fundamental disciplinary rules of the monks; fortnightly recitation of these rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phansaa</td>
<td>the Buddhist rainy-season retreat (Vassa) which runs for about three months; in 1979 from early July to early October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rabiab</td>
<td>set of rules; regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saalaa (kaanparian)</td>
<td>the pavilion where at Wat Paaknaam the monks are presented with their meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saysin</td>
<td>sacred thread; sacred cord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saksit</td>
<td>to be holy, sacred; possessing sacred power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>samnak chii</td>
<td>residence for maechii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangharaja</td>
<td>(Thai: Songkharaat) the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siimaa</td>
<td>the boundary of a consecrated area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syk</td>
<td>(a sacerdotal term) to retire from the priesthood; to disrobe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than bun</td>
<td>to 'make merit'; perform meritorious deeds to improve one's karmic status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
thoot phaapaa: a ceremony to prevent 'forest robes' to monks: a fund-raising festival

upacha aan: monk-preceptor: a monk qualified to be in charge of the ordination of new monks

Vinaya: the code of discipline for monks

wai: the Thai gesture of respect and greeting, with raised palms pressed together

wan phra: the Buddhist holy day, held on the day of full moon, the eighth day of waning moon, new moon, and the eighth day of waxing moon

wan khao Phansaa: the first day of the Buddhist rainy-season retreat

wat: a Buddhist 'monastery' which houses not only monks and novices, but maechii and laity
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