THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

MAKING MONKS, MAKING MEN: THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST MONASTICISM IN SHAPING NORTHERN THAI IDENTITIES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
JUNE 2017

For my parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am foremost greatly indebted to all of the district I have called Namsai, especially the monastics and lay supporters of Wat Doi Thong, Wat Ton Pai, and Wat Namsai. Thank you for letting me into your homes, schools, and allowing me to participate in the monastic life temporarily. I am grateful for the grace and patience with which you handled my presence, complete with sub-optimal language at first and the numerous social faux pas I surely committed. The lessons I learned in knowing and adjusting oneself will last lifetimes.

This project would not have been possible without funding. Research was supported by the National Science Foundation, the Society for Psychological Anthropology / Lemelson Pre-dissertation Award made possible by a generous donation from The Robert Lemelson Foundation, the Empowering Network for International Thai Studies at Chulalongkorn University, and the Rynerson Research Fund. Language training was vital to the feasibility of this project. This training would not have been possible without the support of the Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship from the US Department of Education and the Southeast Asia Summer Studies Institute at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Being able to devote time to writing was made possible by the William Rainey Harper Dissertation-Year Fellowship from the Division of Social Sciences, the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, the Committee on Southern Asian Studies, and a fellowship made possible by Lawrence & Susan Gianinno. Thank you to all.

Thank you to my committee members for their tremendous mentorship. Jennifer Cole was extremely generous with her time, carefully reading several drafts, always challenging me to improve my writing and hone in on my argument, and training me to think like an anthropologist. Steven Collins showed me how rewarding the academic study of Buddhism could be and pushed me to think about the social performance of monasticism. Nancy Eberhardt's work on Buddhism and the life course was foundational to this project. I am grateful for her careful readings and insightful comments that challenged me to think more critically about religious experience. Richard Shweder has been immensely helpful in getting me to think about the broader, "so what?" questions. I also thank all my committee members for being wonderful models for how to do research

at the intersection of the psychological and the anthropological.

A great number of people helped me in several ways to carry out fieldwork. Thank you to Sidhorn Sangdhanoo, Janpanit Surasin, Patcharin Peyasantiwong, Robert Bickner, and the sorely missed Kannikar Elbow for not only their language training but also their unwavering support. Wasan Panyagaew, Somwang Kaewsufong, and Apinya Feungfusakul at Chiang Mai University helped me frame my questions better and helped make sense of my observations. Thank you to Kuljira (May) Fonghame for assistance with transcribing my (often hard to hear) recordings. Thank you to those who helped me make contacts and navigate Thailand, including Pongthorn (To) Chanlearn, Thanomsing (Ta) Kosolnavin, Dave Poppe, Nid Peng, Kangwan (Jojoe) Fongkaew, Timo Ojanen, and Paiboon Chutchomchuen. Thank you to friends who helped me take breaks from fieldwork and digest what I was experiencing: Piyawit (Jiw) Moonkham, Hilary Disch, Brooke Schedneck, and Thongsuk Mongkhon.

Several people helped me frame this project and work towards completing this dissertation. Thank you to Julia Cassaniti for first directing my interest in gender identity development to Thailand. Thank you, also, to Jacob Hickman, Rebecca Hall, and Jessica McKenzie for being great models for doing research in Thailand. Putting together the dissertation proposal was aided by Kristen Schilt, Eugene Raikhel, Don Kulick, and the late, great Bert Cohler. Conversations with Katherine Bowie, Ian Baird, and Thongchai Winichakul greatly helped me frame my project in relation to broader themes in Thai studies. My writing groups helped motivate me to put pen to paper and think carefully about my argument. So, thank you to Colin Halverson, Lindsey Conklin, Kim Walters, Talia Weiner, Julia Kowalski, and Aaron Seaman. Thank you, also, to all those who have read and commented on various bits and pieces in workshops and conferences.

Finally, a big thank you to family and friends for their unwavering support. I appreciate my parents' love and encouragement during these nine years of graduate school, longer than they or I had expected. Thank you to Nathan, Karri, and Brett for providing much needed respite from work during the holidays. Lastly, I am grateful for the friendship of Vida Lux, Erin Moore, and Matt Griffin. Your willingness to always lend an ear is much appreciated.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Unless otherwise noted, I use the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS) throughout this dissertation to romanize Thai script. While there are disadvantages to using RTGS, such as lacking tone markers and not distinguishing between short and long vowels, I use it to ease readability by reducing the use of diacritics. Please note that the letter *h* in the digraphs *ph*, *th*, and *kh* marks them as aspirated while without the *h* they are unaspirated. So, *ph* in RTGS is pronounced like the *p* in the English word "pen." The *th* in RTGS is pronounced like the *t* in "two."

I make one small change to the RTGS. Normally, RTGS uses *ch* for two distinct sounds in Thai: 1) the consonant of the letter จ and 2) the consonant of the letters ฉ, ช, and ฌ. As such, both the word for "heart/mind" (ใจ) and "man" (ชาย) would be romanized as *chai*. To distinguish this, I use the letter *c* to transcribe the Thai consonant represented by จ and *ch* to transcribe the consonant represented by the letters ฉ, ช, and ฌ to render "heart/mind" as *cai* and "man" as *chai*.

Individuals' names and place names are romanized according to the person's or place's preference if known.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the co-transformation of youth and religious institutions. It looks at how religion socializes youth to embody particular gendered ideals about morality and how youth, encountering these ideals, reinterpret them. It focuses on boys and young men who temporarily ordain as Buddhist monastics for several years in northern Thailand. Locating the construction of monastic masculinity—what it means to be a morally good man and ideal monastic—within interpersonal moments among monastics and between lay and monastic communities, this dissertation makes three broad arguments. First, the internalization of religious ideals is not a linear development across the life course. While adult monastics may adjust their bodily behavior to effect changes to their inner state of mind, boys' bodily adjustment to temporary monasticism is about performing social cohesion. The longer youth remain monastics, the more difficult this performance becomes as maintaining strict adherence to their ascetic rules becomes onerous. At the same time, lay supporters, whose generosity monastics depend upon, have high expectations that monastics will strictly follow their ascetic rules. Monastic and lay communities develop "asymmetrical orientations" towards the rules to find a middle ground between expectations and obligations. Second, notions that only certain kinds of men are morally capable of ordaining demonstrates the co-construction of gender and morality in the reproduction of dominant masculinities. Finally, this dissertation demonstrates how religious institutions like Buddhist monasticism may be not only a force for social reproduction and nation building but for effecting social change.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of the co-transformation of youth and religious institutions, of how religion socializes youth to embody particular gendered social ideals, and how youth, encountering these ideals, reinterpret them. Typically, religious institutions provide rules and frameworks through which individuals transform themselves, adopting the ideals of the religion. A major question when beginning this project was: How do youth, whose life course status often puts them in a unique position to be transformed, actually take up religious proscriptions for self-transformation in their day-to-day lives? At the same time, how do young individuals transform—intentionally or not—gendered moral ideals that religious institutions perpetuate? To address these questions, I turn to the case of Buddhist northern Thailand where the monastic community plays a prominent role in youth's socialization. In fact, many boys and young men temporarily ordain, submitting themselves to the religious institution for anywhere from several weeks to several years. Monasticism's ascetic practices transform boys to be ideal moral men in Thai society. However, male youth who ordain for several years often cannot fully live by all the rigors monasticism entails. In this disconnect between ideal and lived experience, I trace how youth have different expectations for the monastic institution than others, such as the state's and laity's expectations. Subtle discrepancies in expectations often lead to changes in what it means to be morally good and masculine. Competing expectations of how monasticism transforms youth have become more evident in recent years as monasticism's role in boys' development has come under heightened scrutiny. The following vignette begins to highlight these concerns.

A large, bamboo-framed billboard caught my attention on the main highway between Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. On that day in 2013, I was traveling back to the district of Namsai[1] from Mae Sai, a town on the Thai-Burmese border. The billboard had been put there by a nearby Buddhist temple, advertising that boys could ordain there and study for free. In

1. Names of specific locations where I conducted fieldwork, such as districts, schools, and temples, are pseudonyms.

the middle of the billboard were two images (see Figure 1.1). The one on the right showed a row of young boys dressed in white, eyes closed, and hands in a *wai*, a gesture of respect with palms held together and often done when chanting. The imagery suggested the boys were going through a novice ordination ceremony. The image on the left suggested what they would become by going through the ordination ceremony and studying at the temple. This image depicted a novice dressed in the iconic yellow-orange monastics robes, reading and studying. In large letters above the image on the left, it read: "Ordain to study for your parents. Help solve the problem with Thai youth."

Figure 1.1: Billboard advertising free secondary education for boys who ordain as Buddhist novice monks

The billboard's message pointed towards the importance of a key institution in Thailand: temporary Buddhist monasticism. Ordaining for a while during one's youth has a long history throughout Thailand (Bunnag 1973; Eberhardt 2006; Keyes 1986; Tambiah 1970).[2] Many spend

2. Some northern Thai informants questioned this practice as pan-Thai. For instance, one young man from the city of Chiang Mai said he never felt compelled to ordain, and his mother never hinted that she felt he should ordain. He thought that people's belief that all boys and men should temporarily ordain for their parents was a central and northeastern custom that had more recently come to northern Thailand. Stanley Tambiah (1976) and David Gosling

some time in the monastic life for the sake of their parents who raised and cared for them. Ordaining as a monk or novice is one of the most auspicious ways to gain "merit" (*bun*).[3] By sponsoring and participating in their sons' ordination, parents gain a great deal of merit. Many Thais say sons temporarily ordaining "repays the value of their mother's milk" (*top thaen kha nam-nom khong mae*). The billboard reminded passersby of this purpose of temporary ordination when it asked youth to "ordain to study *for your parents*."

Temporary ordination in Thailand not only generates merit; it has been central to the education and reproduction of the Thai nation. Boys across the country, but particularly those in more remote areas or from poorer families, have long gone to temple schools as novices in order to receive a general education for free. The studious novice on the billboard reinforces this perception of monasticism's role in education. Besides a general education, novices also learn about Buddhist morality, which is indexed in the billboard by the novice looking neat and orderly in his robes, acting as his monastic duties dictate.

Temples such as the one that put up this billboard are directing this history of temporary monasticism towards an emerging issue in Thai society: to "help solve the problem with Thai youth" as the billboard put it. Thais are concerned that more youth—especially male youth—are becoming susceptible to "attachments" or "addictions" (*tit*). These concerns over addiction cover a wide range of things and behaviors. Newspapers often report about the latest gang of youth caught transporting *yaba* (methamphetamines) or the latest efforts to curb alcoholism. Youth's potential addictions go beyond drugs. The media reports stories of teenage boys suffering health problems because they are so addicted to computer games or neglecting their studies because they spend too much time on Facebook and other social media. By ordaining as novices during their teenage years, many Thais—including those responsible for the billboard—expect that

(1983) both note a similar difference among regional monastic practices in Thailand. Tambiah notes that historically in northern Thailand novice ordinations have been more emphasized than young men ordaining as monks. For more on the northern Thai emphasis on novice ordinations, see Chandrangaam (1980).

3. Ideas of what the most meritorious acts are vary across Theravada Buddhist societies. Stanley Tambiah (1968) notes that in northeastern Thailand financing the building of a temple is the most meritorious act followed by ordaining or having a son ordain. J. A. N. Mulder (1969) explores some of the various rankings of meritorious acts across Thailand.

monasticism will prevent or correct such addictions. Even though monasticism in Thailand is temporary, lasting just a few weeks to several years, Thais hope that the rigors of the training will transform youth.[4] This hope exists in large part because the Sangha, the monastic community, ideally separates itself from regular, lay society. Monastics (i.e., monks and novices) should eschew many of the comforts and freedoms of typical lay life.

Monasticism's attempt to address addiction is not entirely new. For many generations, older men who have suffered from alcoholism or drug addiction have temporarily ordained as monks in order to curb their addictions. Drugs have particularly been an issue in northern Thailand. The infamous Golden Triangle, which includes the mountainous regions of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, historically played a key part in the production and trade of opium. In recent years, opium trafficking has been replaced with the trade of methamphetamines. The increasing concerns over youth, in particular, and their attachments, though, appear to be a more recent instantiation of this problem. On the day I saw the billboard, I was accompanied by Kaeo,[5] whom I had known for a little over a year at that point. In her mid-twenties, Kaeo had worked at Charoensat School, a secondary school in Namsai open only to monastics who lived in the surrounding area. On several occasions Kaeo and Pai, another teacher at Charoensat, described an increasing number of novices who had ordained because of this "problem with Thai youth." For them, it seemed more Thai families concerned about their boys' development were turning to the monastery for assistance.

The local concern about youth and monasticism's role in developing morally good adults reflects larger concerns about the image of Thailand globally. On the international stage, Thailand's image largely stems from it being a major tourist site. While many aspects of Thailand such as its beaches, food, and Buddhist sites attract tourists, perhaps most emblematic of Thai tourism is its

4. I am reminded here of a Thai friend's story of ordaining as a novice when he was around 13 years old. He only ordained for a few days, but nearly two decades later he vividly remembers those few days every time he walks. During that brief stint of monasticism, a monk taught him the importance of being present and mindful of his feet while walking. Ever since then, he is often reminded of that teaching. Even though their time in the monastic community may be short, the experiences often last a lifetime. This may be because of the heavy emphasis on the body and embodying the rigors of monasticism.

5. Names of individuals are pseudonyms except in the case of public figures.

sex tourism. A major figure in sex tourism and the broader image of Thai culture is the *kathoei*, or "ladyboy," whose presence indexes a broad social acceptance in Thailand of transgenderism and homosexuality. The high visibility of *kathoei* on the world stage can at times lead to a stereotypical view of Thailand and Thai men as being effeminate. As we will see, many Thais reproduce this trope by suggesting there are fewer "real men" in Thailand today given the large number of *kathoei*. Thus, they express a concern over the state of men and masculinity in Thai society. Teachers and parents worrying about boys' development and their socialization into being men draws on the broader national concern about how Thai masculinity is perceived in the rest of the world.

Uncertainty over the image of Thailand in the world, in turn, draws on a long history. Having been the only country in mainland Southeast Asia to avoid direct colonial control, Thailand still occupied a semicolonial or "crypto-colonial" (Herzfeld 2010) position. Maintaining freedom from direct colonization required demonstrating to its neighboring British and French empires—in addition to the larger Western world—that Thailand could function as a self-ruling nation-state. For instance, in the late 1800s, the country reorganized its administrative bureaucracy to be more in line with its colonial neighbors. To be sure, it has not only been Western powers. At other times, Thailand has also had to contend with influences from China and Japan. Traces of this concern over self-image persist today. Many Thais I met commented on how they saw Thailand as not quite yet "developed" (*phatthana*) or would ask me if I thought Thailand was developed. They worried that the rest of the world may not see Thai society as "civilized" (*siwilai*). While aspects of Thai society such as its sex tourism industry or prevalence of "ladyboys" may attract visitors and their resources, many were anxious that these could negatively impact the image of Thailand in the eyes of the world. These longstanding concerns exacerbated more recent uncertainty about Thailand's future given contemporary social instability from political protests, a coup establishing a military junta government, and the transition of royal power after the passing of the beloved King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who reigned for over seventy years.

At this time, too, Thais were thinking about the country's place in regional politics and eco-

nomics because of the growing influence of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The regional cooperative of ten countries encouraged member states to foster mutually beneficial collaborations while also creating, maintaining, and promoting country-specific cultural identities. During fieldwork, ASEAN was preparing to open a common market that would allow for the free flow of goods, services, labor, and capital across borders. Ensuring Thailand's position as the major power in ASEAN was of central concern to many Thais. In schools across the country, classes included lessons on ASEAN and its member countries, and researchers assessed how well Thai students were prepared for this regional shift in political and economic dynamics. Informants expressed to me how much things would change once "ASEAN opened up." Even if they could not specify how exactly their lives would change, they knew Thailand needed to be a leader in the region. Part of ensuring Thailand's place as a leader was maintaining a unique Thai identity to distinguish it from its ASEAN neighbors whose citizens would soon be crossing borders more freely into Thailand. The need to maintain temporary monasticism's role in the moral development of youth stemmed in part from wanting to ensure the reproduction of Thai society and its unique cultural heritage. In doing so, many hoped Thailand would ensure its dominance in ASEAN. The loss of male youth to addictions or other problems could jeopardize Thai society and thus Thailand's standing in the region.

The burgeoning concern over the development of male youth and the central role temporary monasticism plays in addressing this concern opens up a number of questions central to this dissertation about youth, religion, and institutions' role in the reproduction of identities. As the teachers Kaeo and Pai noted, Thais increasingly want boys and young men to ordain in order to socialize them into particular ideals of moral masculinity. Although the institution of temporary monasticism has long educated youth and provided opportunities for making merit, the explicit focus on changing youth's potentially addictive behaviors seemed a more recent phenomenon to them. I began this project wondering how the institution of Buddhist monasticism shaped boys to be particular kinds of adults in Thai society. While the hope many Thais held that the rules of monasticism would transform young men who ordained, the everyday experiences of monastics

I witnessed would come to complicate this image.

1.1 The Problem with Thai Youth and Becoming a "Good Child"

The problem of addictions or attachments was one iteration of a larger concern about children's development. The "problem with Thai youth" was a worry over the possible "bad child" (*dek mai di*) or "unruly child" (*dek kere*). Unruly children are those who do not know their duties and responsibilities in a particular situation, and they do not listen to those who are above them in the social hierarchy. In contrast, "good children" (*dek di*) listen to their parents, teachers, and elders; they know how to behave in whatever social situation they are in, and they perform their duties in a "neat and tidy" (*riaproi*) manner.[6] An "unruly child," though, as a teacher at a government school in Namsai described, often begins with a "broken family" (*khat khropkhrua*):

> In the case of children from a broken family—cut off from warmth—the children do not live with their parents. They are not looked after. Their grandparents are already old. Sometimes they may live with their father or their mother, but really that one person doesn't have time to guide their child. So, the child will go down a path that is unruly. Most will avoid studying [and] not want to go to school. Some associate with friends who are not good. They get addicted to drugs. Or, if they don't do drugs, they will go find something to make money. . . . Most unruly kids will get involved with friends who aren't good. They'll have friends or older peers who will take them out or invite them to do some little thing to get money. They will encourage them to sell drugs. . . . This is the problem with Thai children.

Thais worry about more than just drugs in this problem of "addiction." As the teacher continued: "Right now—after we've had technology come—we have another problem: game addiction. Some aren't addicted to drugs but addicted to games, so addicted they don't go home . . . they

6. What it means to be *riaproi*—especially within the monastic context—is the focus of Chapter 3.

stay at game stores." In addition to drugs and games, people often listed a series of dangerous attachments young people were susceptible to: alcohol, friends, the Internet, Facebook, cellphones, and going out at night to name a few.

The problem of "unruly" youth had a particular impact on schools like Charoensat. Pai, one of the teachers at Charoensat who noted the increase in boys ordaining to address problems with attachments, echoed the sentiments of the teacher quoted above: "unruly" (*kere*) students do not listen to parents or teachers, do not study, and are not interested in learning. In part, she blamed a change in the national education policies that prevented teachers from making students repeat grade levels. "Because that doesn't happen anymore," she explained, "[temple schools] get students who are unable to read, who are unmotivated to learn, and end up not being able to do any of the [national standards] tests." Some novices Pai taught were there because they could not succeed in other schools. The temple school was their last resort to gain a basic education.

Many Thais believe that Buddhist monasticism can directly address youth's attachments, turning "unruly" boys into "good persons" (*phu di*). A good person, or a good child, is morally upstanding. Good children know their social responsibilities such as listening to teachers, obeying their parents, and doing well in school. They put their familial duties above spending time with friends or dating. Their goodness is even evidenced in their dress and body as they make sure their clothes are clean and their hair is an appropriate style and length (i.e., short, crew cut for boys and about shoulder length and straight for girls). Monasticism provides even more stringent parameters on these markers. A "good" young novice performs all his monastic duties smoothly, listens to monks and his temple's lay supporters, and dresses appropriately in his robes.[7] The stricter parameters of being a "good monastic" make it easier for boys to fulfill their lay roles upon leaving monasticism. During their time as monastics, they ideally cannot develop addictions to alcohol, drugs, games, or other things. Instead, they spend their time properly performing their monastic roles. Temporary monasticism and their duties at monastic schools lead boys to adjust themselves to being more moral youth.

7. I look at the significance of the robes in indexing young monastics' moral standing in Chapter 6.

1.2 Reproducing the Nation? Problems with the Monastic Community

It is no coincidence that Thais turn to temporary monasticism to address youth's problems with addiction and to help boys develop into good Thai men. To develop into a "good person" means to be a good citizen of the Thai state who promotes national unity and who refrains from acting in any way that may jeopardize the nation. The Sangha has long been a key institution for the construction of "Thainess" as a national identity (Winichakul 1994). With around 95% of Thailand identifying as Buddhist and the significant role monks play in the moral and religious education of Thais, temples have historically been major community centers that bring Thais together around core Buddhist values. The key function Buddhism plays in reproducing Thai society has also meant the state has long tried to influence temples and monasticism in order to shape notions of "Thainess" to its purposes of nation building.

Much of the scholarship on Thai Buddhism casts the Sangha as a conservative institution that reproduces ideals of morality and gender (e.g., Ishii 1986; Smith 1978). As the political scientist Somboon Suksamran (1982) notes, the monastic community is "one of the main socializing, acculturating, and unifying forces in Thai society. . . . [It] is likely to help provide the integrative force in the social and cultural life of the Thai Buddhists, and help induce solidarity" (p. 6). The scholarly focus thus far has largely been on how Buddhism stabilizes Thai society from changes by reproducing the status quo. To reproduce Thai society, temporary ordination and other Buddhist institutions must socialize youth to inhabit traditional notions of morality and masculinity. This socialization reproduces Thai society.

The continued ability for Buddhist institutions to reproduce Thai moral masculinity, however, has come under scrutiny at the very same moment that many Thais turn to monasticism in hopes that it will help boys develop into good, moral men. In recent years, many have been questioning the moral fortitude of the Sangha itself. Frequent news reports of monks involved in scandals around money or sex have caused some to doubt the morality of the monastic institution.

1.2.1 Concerns over the Sangha's Morality

Take for instance the case of Luang Pu Nenkham, who caused a news frenzy during my fieldwork. The lay supporters of this monk's temple accused him of taking large sums of money from the temple and acquiring extravagant items for himself such as plots of land, houses, designer luggage, expensive sunglasses, and trips on private jets. This last detail gave him the nickname "jet-set monk" in the English-language media outlets that picked up the story.[8] Laity also accused him of fathering a child with a 14-year-old girl. While this story filled the news in 2013 for several weeks, similar stories of monks absconding with temple money or having sexual relations—including the sexual abuse of novices—appeared in the news regularly.

Such stories have led many Thais to wonder just how morally upstanding the monastic community truly is. When such stories, like that of Luang Pu Nenkham, were picked up by international media outlets, Thais also worried about national embarrassment. Online comments on such stories expressed concern that these monks' actions would lead to criticism of Buddhism. Some Thais worried that these wayward monks would spell the end for the Buddha's teachings. The world would neither respect nor listen to a religious institution that was so corrupt and flagrantly breaking their monastic rules.

The concern over the moral state of the Sangha connected with broader Buddhist understandings of the Dhamma, the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha himself declared that his teachings would not last forever; the Dhamma, like all things, would eventually pass away.[9] The understanding that Buddhism will not always exist can lead some to worry that people's actions in their current lifetime will cause Buddhism to decline. This concern is perhaps heightened given the continuing decline of the monastic population as a percentage of the total population in Thailand.

8. In CNN, for example: http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/18/world/thailand-corrupt-jet-set-monk/ (Last accessed May 4, 2016).

9. Buddhists often remember this when they enter the chanting halls of northern Thai temples. There are typically five Buddha statues on the hall's dais. As several monastic informants explained to me, the fourth of the statues represents the Buddha of the current age. The fifth statue represents Maitreya, the future Buddha, who will reawaken the teaching of the Dhamma after the current dispensation of the Dhamma by Gautama Buddha passes from knowledge and understanding in this era.

In 1937, a little over three percent (3.1%) of the male population in Thailand were in the Sangha. By 1970, that percentage had dropped to 1.8 percent, and it was down to just over one percent (1.1%) by 2010.[10] Because of the equal importance of all components of the Triple Gem—Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha—Thai Buddhists see a declining monastic population and moral improprieties of the monastic community as a harbinger of Buddhism's demise.

The seeming corruption of the Sangha was part of a larger concern about corruption across many Thai institutions. Such concerns helped precipitate and legitimate the latest military coup that occurred in May 2014 near the end of my fieldwork. Shortly after declaring martial law and suspending the constitution, the military junta established the National Reform Council (NRC) to root out corruption from Thai institutions. It was not long before the NRC set its sights on the seemingly corrupt Sangha and monks who were not comporting themselves in ways appropriate for their position.

Many reformists—the military, political activists in favor of the coup, and activist monks such as Phra Buddha Issara—saw temples as having too much wealth and resources and, thus, the monks of the temples as being inevitably corrupted by that wealth. For instance, at the time of this writing, the Thai Sangha is in the process of selecting a new Supreme Patriarch who oversees the entire country's monastic community. Somdet Phra Maha Ratchamangalacharn (or Somdet Chuang), the favored candidate among the majority of monks because he is the most senior monk and that is usually the criterion for selecting the Supreme Patriarch, has come under attack from Phra Buddha Issara and others. One focus of this attack has been a collection of cars Somdet Chuang has received through lay people's offerings, particularly whether or not Somdet Chuang properly paid the required taxes on the cars. Many also question the appropriateness of a monk having cars in the first place—they are expensive, luxury items in conflict with the ideal of ascetic poverty—and most Thais think having such items breaks the monastic rules as monks are not

10. Statistics for 1937 and 1970 come from Keyes (1984). Statistics for 2010 are based on data from Thailand's National Statistical Office, "The 2010 Population and Housing Census," available at http://web.nso.go.th/en/census/poph/cen_poph_10.htm (last accessed April 19, 2017) and the National Office of Buddhism's จำนวนพระภิกษุ – สามเณรทั่วประเทศ ๒๕๕๓, available at http://www.onab.go.th (last accessed April 19, 2017).

allowed to drive. Although Somdet Chuang does not drive them, opponents question why he even has them along with other expensive items and wealth. Many monks, however, believe Somdet Chuang has done nothing wrong and that in investigating him, Phra Buddha Issara and others leading these anti-corruption campaigns are trying to split the Sangha, creating a faction of monks to oppose the rest of the Sangha. The intentional splintering of the Buddhist Sangha is a serious offense in the Vinaya, the Buddhist monastic code and part of the Pali Canon, the main text in the Buddhist traditions of South and Southeast Asia. As such, there is great ambivalence about such anti-corruption campaigns within the Sangha.

1.2.2 Concerns over the Sangha's Masculinity

At the same time, the military junta must confront concerns about the masculinity of the monastic community. In Thailand, only men can ordain as monks. As many informants pointed out, monks performing an ordination ceremony explicitly ask the ordainee, "Are you a man?" For the ceremony to proceed, he must truthfully answer yes to this query. Because of the current understanding of gender and sexuality in much of Thailand, many presume that effeminate *gay*[11] men and *kathoei* (an umbrella term covering male-bodied individuals whose gender is not fully a man or whose sexuality is not fully heterosexual)[12] are not "real men" (*chai thae*). As such, many Thais think it is against the Vinaya (or at least inappropriate) for effeminate men, *gay*, and *kathoei* to ordain. Still, these individuals do ordain for the various reasons mentioned above (e.g., familial obligation, education, etc.).

Images of effeminate *gay* and *kathoei* monks and novices in news and online media are about as common as the money and sex scandal stories involving monks. People worry *gay* and *kathoei* monks corrupt the Sangha. This particular concern with the Sangha exists along with a broader

11. The English word "gay" is used in Thailand, although—as we will see in Chapter 5—it has slightly different meaning than in much of the English-speaking world. To acknowledge this difference, I will use *gay* in italics to denote the Thai meaning. I also maintain the English spelling rather than its romanization according to the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS), which would render it as *ke*, to improve readability and make clear its connection to the English word. In Thai, *gay* is a noun—both singular and plural. I will use it as such.

12. Here I maintain the spelling according to the RTGS. It is sometimes romanized as *kathoey*.

concern that there are fewer men in Thai society, and many of the remaining men are *gay* and, therefore, do not reproduce. People worry, then, about the reproduction of the Thai nation.[13] This concern plays out in demographic data, too, as can be seen in Table 1.1.[14] Such concerns over monastics' masculinity have led the junta government to attempt to pass a law banning *kathoei* and *gay* from becoming monks. By doing so, many hope monasticism will be strictly made up of *chai thae*, "real men."

Table 1.1: Sex ratio across Thailand and in northern Thailand, 1990–2010

	1990	2000	2010
National sex ratio (males per 100 females)	98.5	97.1	96.2
Northern Thailand sex ratio	101.0	98.2	96.2

SOURCE: Thailand's National Statistical Office, *The 2010 Population and Housing Census*, http://web.nso.go.th/en/census/poph/cen_poph_10.htm (last accessed April 19, 2017)

The concerns over the state of the Sangha itself put into question the ability for the institution to transform boys into morally good Thai men. Yet not all Thais share these concerns. For many, temporary monasticism remains the primary site for young men to develop into moral men, and counter the problems of youth's attachments and addictions. In contemporary Thailand, then, the Sangha inhabits an ambivalent role. For some, the monastic community remains the key reproducers of moral masculinity. For others, the morality and masculinity of the institution itself are dubious.

13. Many readers have asked: If demographics and reproduction of the nation are of concern, then why would Thais turn to monasticism to address this issue when monastics take vows of celibacy? It is important to remember that monasticism in Thailand is typically temporary. While the temporary ordination ideally transforms boys into good Thai men, most will leave the institution transformed to be morally upstanding citizens of the Thai state and then start families.

14. Census and other government data on gender only includes two categories: male and female. In government documents, *kathoei* are counted as male.

1.3 Can Monasticism Really Transform Boys? Laity's Conflicting Attitudes

From being a solution to male youth's problem with attachments to a corrupt institution that jeopardizes Thai Buddhism and masculinity, lay Thais hold many different attitudes towards the contemporary monastic community. Ordination can be a self-transformative experience and instiller of morality, protecting younger generations from the dangers of a globalizing, modernizing world that is increasingly filled with addictive substances and technologies. It can be an opportunity to get a better education, boosting one's own and family's socioeconomic status. Alternatively, it may be a lifestyle that is too "comfortable and easy" (*saduak sabai*) as some informants described monasticism, leading to corruption and individuals taking advantage of lay patrons' generosity without fulfilling their end of the social contract by being properly behaved monastics. This concern about certain individuals not being able to live up to monastic expectations is especially pronounced for *gay* and *kathoei* individuals whose gender or sexuality many Thais see as antithetical to monastic ideals. Those who enter into the monastic community must confront these different and ambivalent attitudes towards monasticism.

The expectations of monastics are not only determined by the state and the Sangha but in the complex interaction between lay and monastic communities. Laity sustain the monks' and novices' lives, providing them food, clothing, shelter, and other requisites. When lay Buddhists interact with monastics and make offerings to the Sangha, they bring with them particular ideas of how monastics should look and act. Not wanting to upset or disappoint the laity—and thereby jeopardize the laity's offerings—the monastics try to adjust to what their lay interlocutors think about monasticism. As the interactions between lay and monastic communities are pivotal for understanding the ways in which monasticism both reproduce and shift Thai society, it is necessary to look more closely at the tenets of Thai Buddhism and the lay-monastic relationship.

The relationship between the lay and monastic communities in Thailand is complicated in two ways. First, because monasticism is temporary, a great number of laity (more specifically,

lay men) who support the monastic community have spent some time as a monastic themselves. Second, in adjusting to laity's expectations of how monastics should look and act, monastics typically have an imagined lay community in mind rather than the actual laity with whom they most frequently interact. Let us look at these two complications in more detail and how the remainder of this dissertation further illuminates the lay-monastic relationship.

Because temporary monasticism is common and a large number of lay men have spent some time within the monastic community,[15] it may seem that the lay community's expectations of how monasticism shapes boys' and young men's lives would emerge from the common experience of having temporarily ordained. However, such a transmission of expected monastic duties is not so clear cut.

There are broadly two types of temporary monasticism, and the literature on Thai Buddhist monasticism often does not clearly articulate this distinction. Those who ordain because of custom or out of familial obligation often ordain for very short periods of time: a few days or weeks. Some young men may ordain for the three month "rains retreat" (Thai: *phansa*; Pali: *vassa*). Boys in this category often ordain for a three to four week "novice summer camp" (*buat samanen phak rueduron*). In these cases, boys and young men learn a rigid understanding of what Buddhism and the monastic code are all about. Other boys ordain in order to receive an education, ordaining for several years. Those who stay for several years develop a much more nuanced understanding of monastic rules and comportment. Because few Thai men spend this much time as monastics, the broader public perception of what monasticism entails derives from people's shorter period of monasticism.

The different sets of rules lay and monastic communities live by shape laity's perceptions about how monastics should act. This difference is clear in the number of precepts that members of each group should follow. As nearly all informants spelled out when I asked them about what it meant to be a novice or monk, they would explain that lay people have five precepts, novices

15. It is difficult to know exactly what percentage of men in Thailand have ever ordained; estimates range between 60 and 90 percent (Strong 2015).

have 10 precepts, and monks have 227. Lay informants further explained that a "good" member of each group would strictly follow these precepts. Laity recite their five precepts (in Pali) during most Buddhist ceremonies and often form the basis of many monks' Dhamma talks to their lay supporters:

1. Refraining from intentionally killing
2. Refraining from intentionally stealing
3. Refraining from sexual misconduct
4. Refraining from lying
5. Refraining from any intoxicants

The 10 precepts of novices are an extension of these five lay precepts:

1. Refraining from intentionally killing
2. Refraining from intentionally stealing
3. Refraining from any sexual activity
4. Refraining from lying
5. Refraining from any intoxicants
6. Refraining from eating at the wrong time (i.e., after midday)
7. Refraining from singing, dancing, playing music, or attending forms of entertainment
8. Refraining from perfumes and decorating the body
9. Refraining from sitting on high chairs or sleeping on high, luxurious beds
10. Refraining from accepting gold or silver (i.e., money)

While the 227 rules of monks are too numerous to list here, the general perception people have of them is as a longer list of what monks must refrain from doing. For instance, lay interlocutors, after listing the five lay precepts, would list monks' precepts in a similar fashion. They would say, for example, that monks must refrain from touching women or must refrain from driving vehicles. As I explore more in Chapter 4, what laity overlook is that, for monks, their 227 rules are meant

to smooth lay-monastic relations. That is, many of the monks' rules arose during the time of the Buddha because of lay people's conceptions of how ascetics should act (see, e.g., Wijayaratna 1990). Many monastics, then, approach their rules with a broader spirit of the rules in mind—to act in ways becoming of monastics in the presence of lay patrons—rather than a strict following of the letter of the rules as they imagine laity hold. It is in this space between monastics' approach to their rules and what they imagine laity expect that we can begin to see the reconstruction of what it means to be a good monastic in Thai society.

This space for reconstruction of monastic ideals is particularly true when it comes to the younger novices.[16] As noted in other Theravada Buddhist contexts such as Sri Lanka (Samuels 2010) and Sipsong Panna (Borchert 2013), expectations of young novices are more flexible. Laity and older monks often assume the novices circumvent some rules, especially the obligation to refrain from eating after midday. Many teachers and monks at Charoensat School said that novices were "children still growing" (*pen dek to yu*) and making them fast for 18 hours per day while going to school and doing work around the school and temple was just not feasible. Similarly, Nancy Eberhardt (2006) notes that in some Shan communities of northern Thailand strict adherence to the five precepts among laity shifts over the life course. Not until reaching late adulthood do Shan laity expect themselves to follow all five precepts by the letter.

Boys' circumvention of monastic rules is more than just being children who have not yet learned what is expected of them, though. Jeffrey Samuels (2010) argues that flexibility around the novices' roles helps to build affective and social bonds within Buddhist communities (see also Samuels 2013). I take this a step further to argue that in this flexibility around rules, communities—both lay and monastic—reconstitute ideals of monasticism and its connections with morality and masculinity. In this way, young monks' and novices' encounter with monasticism opens up pos-

16. Besides the distinction between monks and novices in terms of rules, there is also an age distinction. In order to ordain as a monk, one must be at least 20 years old. Anyone younger than that must ordain as a novice. While those 20 or older may ordain as a novice, it is typical for men in Thailand to ordain straightaway as monks. More accurately, the ordination process for becoming a monk includes ordaining as a novice and taking the 10 precepts first. So all ordainees regardless of age ordain as a novice (i.e., *pabbajjā* or "go forth" into the monastic community). Those who are 20 or older, then, usually go directly into the *upasampadā* ceremony wherein they "approach the ascetic tradition," becoming fully ordained monks (i.e., *bhikkhu*).

sibilities for changing Buddhism and gender.

1.4 Overview of Dissertation's Argument

Given the ambiguity of monasticism's role in contemporary Thailand, I argue in this dissertation that temporary ordination does shape youth's moral and masculine development, which at the same time allows young monastics to reshape what it means to be moral and masculine in Thai society. That is, the institution of temporary monasticism both reproduces and changes moral masculinity in Thailand. Young monastics are able to shift these concepts, albeit often unintentionally, because multiple actors hold multiple expectations about their monastic role at any given time.

There are many different expectations people have about what exactly monasticism does for boys and what kinds of young men are best able to perform the roles of monasticism. Different aspects of negotiating these expectations make up the subsequent chapters. Laity—whose support monastics depend upon—hold many different ideas of who should ordain and how monasticism transforms youth to act in particularly moral and masculine ways. Young monastics, in their day-to-day lives, must gauge in every circumstance what others' ideas and expectations for monasticism are and try to perform their role to fulfill the expectation. As it is difficult to know exactly what people's expectations are, most monastics develop a sense of what they imagine lay people expect of them. These "imagined laity" are in the back of young monastics' minds whenever they act. The extent to which monastics develop a sense of imagined laity's expectations depends upon how long they ordain for. Some ordain for a few weeks at programs like novice summer camps (the focus of Chapter 3). Others ordained for several years to attend schools like Charoensat. As they enter different situations, they must adjust how they present their monastic selves (I focus on this adjusting in Chapter 4).

In addressing the specific Thai concerns about the role of monasticism in shaping social life and the connections among religion, gender, and the state, this dissertation contributes to several broader issues of concern to social scientists working in divergent cultural and historical contexts.

These issues fall within three topics: religious institutions' role in social reproduction and the embodiment of cultural ideals; the life course, youth's moral development, and how they encounter cultural institutions anew, reshaping them; and how ideal forms of masculinity are constructed and reproduced within broader understandings of gender and sexuality.

1.4.1 The Embodiment of Religion, Social Reproduction, and Agency

Scholars have long noted the role of religion in social transformations, especially from childhood to adulthood (Briggs 1998; Malinowski 1987[1929]; Mead 2001[1928]; V. Turner 1995, 1967; van Gennep 1961). More recently, scholars have shown the ways in which individuals intentionally enter religious institutions in order to cultivate certain identities. Rebecca Lester (2005), for instance, describes how some Mexican women choose to become Catholic nuns and subject themselves to their convents' religious practices. Through these "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988), the women come to embody a particular Mexican Catholic identity they see as antithetical to Protestant American "modern" women. Through the convent, they develop an ideal way of being both Catholic and Mexican women. The religious institution of Mexican Catholicism socializes young women into its ideals.[17] Through the institution's transformation of individual women, it reproduces Mexican society and its Catholic notions of femininity.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that individuals transforming through religious institutions are passively being socialized. The fact that women in such circumstances often choose to subject themselves to processes of religious socialization, embodying certain ideals of womanhood, has called into question Western feminist notions of subjugation, resistance, and agency. Saba Mahmood argues that Egyptian women's involvement in the conservative mosque movement and their cultivation of Muslim piety pushes us to "think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood 2001, p. 203; see also Mahmood 2004).

17. For another study of Catholicism's impact on notions of womanhood, in this case Cameroon, see Johnson-Hanks (2006).

Subjecting oneself to the logics of a culturally entrenched institution can create inhabitable positions from which to enact change. While studies such as Mahmood's makes us rethink how seemingly marginalized groups inhabit positions of action through subjecting themselves to institutions, this dissertation looks at a group—young Thai men—whose agency would not usually be questioned. I demonstrate how for even non-marginalized groups, subjecting oneself to the logics of an institution can still transform the institution itself.

Thinking of subjecting oneself to religious socialization as agentive action has been utilized in Thai contexts, too. Joanna Cook (2010), for instance, draws on Mahmood in order to argue Thai women's choice to ordain as *mae chi*—eight-precept nuns—while unable to ordain as fully ordained female monks (*bhikkhunī*) must be seen through the lens of nonliberal forms of agency.[18] That is, instead of viewing women's limited ability to ordain as *bhikkhunī* as evidence of domination whose only point of resistance is to "empower" women to ordain, we should see women's capacity to agentively reshape culture through enacting available social roles (cf. Collins and McDaniel 2010). The focus of this scholarship, though, has largely been on Thai women, and how their seemingly marginalized status as being unable to ordain as *bhikkhunī* nevertheless enables other capacities for action such as being *mae chi* and Pali-language instructors.

By tracing the ways in which boys and young men subject themselves to the disciplines of monasticism and thereby work to embody its ideals, I suggest these youth also rework those very same ideals of monasticism and masculinity. This is as much because they are youth as it is because of the way in which they come to inhabit what I call the "Sangha body." I draw here on anthropologists' concern with the relationship among the physical, social, and political bodies (Csordas 1999; Douglas 1966; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). By "Sangha body" I mean the idealized body of asceticism that monastics come to inhabit, which represents the Sangha across all of time and place from the very first disciple of the historical Buddha to the just-ordained novice.[19] Young monastics embody the expectations of monasticism, participating in the "socio-

18. For a broader discussion of Buddhism and agency in Thailand outside the context of monasticism, see Cassaniti (2015b).

19. I explore the concept of the "Sangha body" in more detail in Chapter 6.

religious theatre" of performing ascetic ideals for lay Buddhists (Collins 1997). Fully inhabiting these ideals, however, is untenable. In their attempt to inhabit the Sangha body and the expectations embedded in it, young monastics experience the obligations inherent to the Sangha body. Young monastics work out how exactly to inhabit their individual monastic bodies that can approximate the ideal Sangha body. In this mismatch between the ideal and novices' attempts at comporting their own individual bodies, ideals of monasticism shift.[20] Socializing youth into embodying religion, then, sets the stage for changing the institutionalized process of embodying religion.

Feminist critiques of liberal notions of agency open up new ways of looking at religion, the body, and social reproduction. Scholarship has primarily focused on women's bodies and the reproduction of the nation (Chatterjee 1989; Rose 1999; Scott 2007; Thomas 2003). This dissertation, however, elaborates on how states direct attention towards men's bodies in raising concerns about the reproduction of the nation (cf. Creak 2014; Blom Hansen 1996; Tuzin 1997). Heretofore, young men's temporary ordination has typically been portrayed as an agentive act, deliberately doing something to improve their own lives: gain merit, receive an education, open up career possibilities, etc. Yet novicehood is also a form of subordination, boys subject themselves to the ideals and expectations others have of their monastic role. What "capacity for action," as Mahmood defines agency, does this subordination to the role make possible? I argue that novices' own uncertainty about how monasticism transforms them into particular kinds of men opens up possibilities for reworking the relationship between monasticism and masculinity in unintended ways. Novices' actions—whether intended or not—have the potential to change the role of monasticism in Thai society. Conflicting ideas about monasticism's role in Thai society makes possible novices' "capacity for action." Thus, this study illuminates how men's bodies and a seemingly non-marginalized group—Thai men—presumed to inhabit religious roles to reproduce the status quo in fact reshape the very institution that is supposed to stabilize society.

20. This process is delineated more fully in Chapter 4.

1.4.2 Youth, Moral Development, and Social Change within Institutions

Underlying much of the literature on religious institutions' role in socializing individuals to embody certain ideals has been a focus on youth and adolescence. In fact, it is no accident that religious institutions often target adolescents. Anthropologists have long noted how societies develop rites and rituals to aid in marking individuals as having transitioned into adulthood (Gilmore 1991; V. Turner 1967; van Gennep 1961). This anthropological work has in many ways paralleled psychological research that suggests adolescence is an important step in human ontogenetic maturation that must be made sense of and incorporated into cultural models of "normal" life course development (e.g., Schlegel 1995). While psychologists have long studied maturation from childhood to adolescence to adulthood in terms of moral development (Kohlberg 1981; Piaget 1997), anthropology's return to the study of morality as a unique domain of social life has been more recent (Cassaniti and Hickman 2014; Fassin 2008; Lambek et al. 2015; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1987; Stoczkowski 2008).

The emerging anthropology of morality has, in part, sought to better understand the ways in which other domains of social life such as gender intersect with and co-define morality (Shweder and Menon 2014). A key insight from the anthropological study of moral development in Thailand has been the relativity of what moral reasoning entails, especially at different stages of the life course (Eberhardt 2014a). Contributing to the resurgent study of morality within psychological anthropology, this dissertation not only elaborates on how the life course intersects with morality but also demonstrates how morality and gender work to define one another. The confluence of monasticism being ideally masculine and highly moral illuminates how changing notions of masculinity entail changing ideas about moral goodness and vice versa.

Anthropological work has also complicated the universality of life course stages themselves. Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002), for instance, suggests that individuals, regardless of biological age, can fluidly inhabit various life stage categories in order to accomplish certain goals. This focus on orienting towards particular futures has led to a particular concern in the literature about how individuals redirect transnational flows of capital and ideas for their own ends (Cole

and Durham 2008).

Scholars have been investigating how youth as cultural agents rework historical and emergent categories of age, religion, gender, and sexuality to actualize imagined futures in everyday life (Bucholtz 2002; A. K. Cohen 1955; Cole 2010; Ewing 2006; Hebdige 1991[1979]; Shaw 2007; Weiss 2002, 2009). Jennifer Cole (2004), elaborating on Karl Mannheim (1993[1971]), demonstrates how youth often experience "fresh contact" with the historically produced cultural material and practices around them. Within these moments of fresh contact, youth re-evaluate and inhabit changing social positions—like intergenerational relations or gender roles (see, e.g., Meiu 2014)—in novel ways, often to access resources, directing culture in new directions.

In many cases, institutions mediate the experience of fresh contact. For instance, schools and other educational institutions often play a key role in disseminating ideas about morality or childcare to young people who then return to their homes and villages with these ideas (LeVine et al. 1994). Other institutions such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may also try to reshape youth's notions of psychological well-being to be inline with global discourses about adolescence (Moore 2016). Youth encountering such institutions both reproduce and change entrenched cultural models.

Institutions, then, have a large influence on the uptake and internationalization of cultural models. Psychological anthropology has long been concerned with the reproduction of cultural models, or "cultural schemas" (Quinn 2005a), through processes of socialization. Of primary interest has been the ways in which broad symbolic systems within culture are internalized by individuals into cognitive models with which they engage and make sense of the world around them (D'Andrade 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987; Spiro 1987; cf. Bourdieu 1977). Given the complexity of these models, scholars have suggested that their internalization depends upon consistent reinforcement (Quinn 2005b) and that individuals often have to reconcile disparate models (Strauss and Quinn 1997). By focusing on the conjuncture of young men with the institution of Buddhist monasticism, this dissertation seeks to better understand how historically embedded institutions scaffold individuals' internalization of cultural models. At the same time, though, I highlight how

youth can be agents of institutional change because they must reconcile disparate models within the institution itself.

Youth may rework cultural models because of a mismatch between an institution's aim to impact youth and how youth themselves see the institution operating. Katie Hejtmanek (2016), for instance, shows that youth often have understandings of how institutions transform them that significantly differ from supervisors and workers within the institution. This discrepancy affects the ways in which institutions are actually able to effect change in the youth they supervise. How youth encounter cultural institutions themselves is a kind of fresh contact. What they see the institution doing for them does not necessarily match what the institution itself sees as its goal. Many Thais believe the institution of Buddhist monasticism will socialize male youth into moral ideals through its rules and the direction of older monks. However, as we will see in subsequent chapters, some young monastics do not hold the same view of the institution's goal. It is in such disjunctures of understanding an institution's role that youth's ability to enact social change becomes evident. Reconciling monasticism's various roles in male youth's development entails reconfiguring the institution itself along with historical understandings of Buddhist morality and masculinity.

Monasticism in Thailand provides an ideal case for illuminating processes of institutional and social reproduction as well as change. Anthropologists working in Buddhist contexts have noted the religion's important role in the moral development of children (Borchert 2013; Chapin 2014; Samuels 2013; Spiro 1982), understanding the life course (Eberhardt 2006), and the experience of emotions and personhood (Cassaniti 2015b; Obeyesekere 1985; Samuels 2010). The Sangha, in particular, plays an important role in the reproduction of Thai society (Bunnag 1973; Jackson 1989; Keyes 1986) as well as potentially changing it (Cassaniti 2015a). This existing literature has largely emphasized how monasticism socializes youth and teaches them how to be moral persons. In this dissertation, I highlight how young monastics, through this process of reproduction, also reimagine what it means to fulfill their monastic role that may differ from historical instantiations of monasticism's role.

1.4.3 Hegemonic Masculinity and the Reproduction of Gender

This dissertation's focus on youth's role in social reproduction and change incorporates concerns within the burgeoning field of critical men's studies, which seeks to apply feminist and post-colonial theory to the study of men, ensuring the study of gender is not only the study of women (Connell 1995). Following feminist anthropology's work on gender as a powerful system of social practices that give meaning to our everyday lives (e.g., Ortner 1972; Rubin 1975; Mahmood 2004; Scott 1986), scholars have increasingly sought to better describe and analyze masculinity as a complex, multifaceted domain of gender relations linked to nationalism (Banerjee 2005; Blom Hansen 1996; Costa 2008; Elliston 2004), identity formation (Gilmore 1991; Mageo 1996; Sinnott 1999), and kinship (Heng and Devan 1997).[21] How exactly critical men's studies and the study of men link up with feminism's critical look at the relation between gender and power has not been resolved (Ford and Lyons 2012). Much of this debate centers around R. W. Connell's notion of "hegemonic masculinity," defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995, p. 77). The emphasis here is on gender as "practice" rather than a stable characteristic that links masculinity to men and femininity to women.

A focus on the "configuration of gender practice" takes seriously post-structuralist critiques of sex/gender "systems" (Foucault 1978; Butler 1990). It also better deals with gendered practices that do not fit into a strictly binary of masculinity/femininity, allowing for "third genders" like that of *kathoei* (Herdt 1996; Totman 2003). At the same time, we must recognize the limits and problematic nature of classifying *kathoei* as a third gender (Towle and Morgan 2002). Recent work on gender and sexuality in Thailand has especially highlighted the need for using the analytic of gender not as a rigid system of two or three categories that individuals unproblematically inhabit (Jackson 2000). Instead, scholars such as Dredge Käng (2012) demonstrate the need to analyze the

21. See Matthew Gutmann's (1997) review article for various ways anthropologists have engaged masculinity as an analytic category.

ways in which gender, sexuality, and morality all coalesce to co-define each other within broader "genderscapes," which he defines as "the conceptual distribution of gender/sexuality forms in fields of uneven power" (p. 476). Bringing such a conception of gender to bear on the study of hegemonic masculinity suggests that to better understand how ideal forms of masculinity are reproduced, we need to pay attention to the ways in which such masculinities define themselves not only in relation to femininity but also other forms of masculinity. Again drawing on the rich literature about gender in Southeast Asia, we need to "analyze the contingent, internally dissonant, and ambivalence-laden construction of masculinity [which] will enhance our understanding of the multitude of ways in which hegemonies of all varieties are both challenged and subverted" (Ong and Peletz 1995, p. 10).

To look at the "internally dissonant" construction of ideal forms of masculinities, this dissertation explores the dialectical relationship between "manliness" (*khwam pen chai*) and "*kathoei*-ness" (*khwam pen kathoei*). I trace how individuals deploy these terms in making sense of gender, particularly when it comes to masculinity and the monastic community, in their everyday lives. My aim, then, is not to articulate what it means to be a man or to be a *kathoei* in Thai society but rather to explore how forms of *kathoei*-ness arise in relation to forms of manliness and vice versa. It is only because of the potential for *kathoei*-ness that the notion of "real men" (*chai thae*) can exist and be a criterion for legitimate monastic ordination as well as a locus for contemporary concerns over Thai masculinity.

Like most issues surrounding monasticism, the state often tries to insert its influence on the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Accusations of corruption and the emasculation of the Sangha by seeming threats of too many *kathoei* monastics and a dearth of "real men" legitimates the state's attempt to exercise greater control over monasticism. For instance, shortly after the most recent coup, the military junta's National Reform Council proposed legislation that would outlaw *gay* and *kathoei* monastics. Similar to how the Indian state has attempted to reproduce its legitimacy through the regulation of sexuality in what Jyoti Puri (2016) calls the "sexual state," the sexual and gender panics facing the Sangha encourage a Thai sexual state that controls notions

of masculinity through its attempts to strengthen monastic masculinity, countering monastic corruption by gender and sexual minorities.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest that hegemonic masculinity is part of a "world gender order" that "has been shaped by the emergence and reconstitution of masculinities of . . . neo-liberalism and post-colonialism" (Ford and Lyons 2012, p. 9). Following this notion, Michael Kimmel (2005) argues that globalized hegemonic masculinity interacts with local masculinities and the everyday lives of men. The idea that globalization has led to an overarching configuration of normative masculine gendered practices has been critiqued for missing the importance of local understandings of gender (e.g., Louie 2003). This dissertation addresses the need for research that "foreground[s] the specificities of the local while also taking into account sites of engagement and interaction with the global" (Ford and Lyons 2012, p. 12). Such accounts are especially needed today as globalization's impact on the interconnectedness among youth across the globe, a "global youth culture," is more pronounced than ever (Gidley 2002; Schlegel 2000).

In Thailand, the concerns over boys' moral development is very much tied to technological changes that many Thais see connected to processes of globalization (McKenzie 2014). As Thai youth take up new technological commodities (e.g., video games, Facebook, etc.) and ways of engaging the world (e.g., identity politics, human rights activism, etc.), more Thais worry about the development of young boys into traditional notions of Thai manhood. In the context of northern Thailand, these shifts in what threatens boys' development interact with local ideas of temporary monasticism and its role in reproducing hegemonic forms of masculinity. By tracing the ways in which the role of temporary monasticism adjusts to address the concern over the reproduction of masculinity, I illuminate how hegemonic—or dominant forms of—masculinity adjust to changing social conditions.

I locate this process of how hegemonic masculinity redefines its borders to exclude or include other forms of masculinity within a context where ideas of gender and sexuality more broadly are constantly in flux. At any given time there is not a single form of masculinity at play and available to social actors. Instead, there are various forms of masculine and quasi-masculine subjectivities.

Shifting conceptions of gender and the transnational flow of "gay" and "transgender" identities influence these gendered subjectivities (Boellstorff 2007). In many contexts around the world, Western concepts of "gay" and "transgender" have often been taken up and reworked by subcultures and individuals with local conceptions of gender and sexuality to create new gendered and sexual ways of being (Altman 1996; Boellstorff 2003; Carrillo 2003; Elliston 1999; Jackson 2000; Knauft 2003; Sinnott 2004; Weston 1993).[22]

For instance, Tom Boellstorff (2004) notes how violence or threats of violence at public events for Indonesian gay men—what he calls "political homophobia"—renders same-sex male desire an increasing threat to normative masculinity in Indonesia. However, he does not look at how traditionally embedded institutions linked to normative, or dominate, masculinity mediate this "threat" from emerging forms of masculinities or other gendered and sexual subjectivities. The Sangha in Thailand has been a site tied to normative, if at times ambiguous, notions of masculinity.[23] There has also long been collaboration between monasteries and local gay/transgender rights organizations, collaborations which emerged out of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Thailand (Jackson 1995). This history makes the Sangha an important institution for not only reproducing dominant forms of masculinity but also reshaping it and legitimating other forms of masculinity and genders. How it reshapes masculinity, though, has received little scholarly attention.

In contemporary Thailand, notions of effeminate masculinity, being *gay*, and being *kathoei* are forming at the confluence of local and global understandings of gender and sexuality. These categories not only impact individuals on the periphery who take up these categories but also dominant categories like monastic masculinity. While attempting to shore up moral masculinity and its connection with monasticism, forms of effeminate masculinity and *kathoei*-ness vie for legitimacy vis-à-vis acceptance into the Sangha. The important role monasticism plays in the Thai imaginaire of ideal masculinity means that acceptance of effeminate men and *kathoei* within the monastic community highlights how dominate forms of masculinity are not always

22. The transnational flow of sexual and gender categories is closely tied to flows of capital, particularly in relation to sex work and forms of sex tourism (Hoang 2011; Kulick 1998; Lancaster and Di Leonardo 1997).

23. For more on the ambiguous relationship between masculinity and monasticism, see Keyes (1986).

reactive, trying to foreclose the possibility of changing the status quo. Instead, monastics play a key role in the broadening of what moral masculinity can encompass and, thus, demonstrates how hegemonic masculinity blurs its own boundaries.

1.5 Overview of Fieldsite and Methods

This dissertation draws on two years of ethnographic research conducted between 2010 and 2014. I began fieldwork in 2010 when I visited Thailand for the first time, spending much of that four-week trip traveling around northern Thailand talking with abbots of temples in the area. Along with a Thai-speaking research assistant—I had just started learning Thai the previous year—we asked abbots what kinds of boys and young men would make good monastics. I was curious about both general characteristics as well as what abbots thought about *gay* and *kathoei* monastics. I was inspired to inquire about such topics by posters I saw around the country that encouraged boys to be "real men" and temporarily ordain. I was also curious about news reports in international media that described a temple in northern Thailand that required effeminate-acting novices to take classes on how to act more masculine and thus more appropriately monastic.[24] In these discussions with abbots, I was struck by the range of answers. Rather than mirror the larger national discourse about monks and novices needing to be "real men," they held many different and competing thoughts. Some felt all boys could ordain and learn to "adjust themselves" (*prab tua*) to monasticism. Others felt that only certain individuals who already had characteristics that were becoming of monastics would really be able to ordain and stay as novices for several years. The rest would quickly leave the Sangha. Several abbots said under no circumstances should *kathoei* youth ordain; just as many said it was not a problem, again so long as they adjusted to the expectations and rules of monasticism. To better understand this variety of attitudes and to see how young monastics adjusted to their role, I knew I would have to spend much more time within temples.

I began this more in-depth fieldwork in 2011. That year I spent three months (June–September)

24. For more on this temple and the role of monasticism in training boys to be more masculine, see Chapter 5.

at Wat Namsai, the main temple in the district of Namsai,[25] and Charoensat School, a secondary school at Wat Namsai open only to monastics who lived there or at surrounding temples. I volunteered at the school as an English teacher and lived on the temple grounds. I taught the novices of Charoensat School during the day. In the evenings, I sometimes tutored monks and novices who lived at Wat Namsai; other times I joined in the evening chanting with the monks and novices and informally chatted with them afterwards about their backgrounds and experiences as monastics. Such interactions allowed me to begin to better understand the daily lives of monks and novices and how schools like Charoensat trained novices to adjust to their roles in the Sangha.

In September 2012, I returned to Namsai to conduct long-term field research until July 2014. While I visited Wat Namsai and Charoensat School frequently for the first several months, I did the bulk of research at the beginning outside of the temple. I volunteered at several government schools—both primary and secondary—in and around Namsai, and I visited secondary schools—both government and private—in the city of Chiang Mai. At these places, I spoke with principals, teachers, parents, and students about what life was like for contemporary Thai youth. This allowed me to begin to see the anxieties present concerning youth and attachments. Many teachers and parents talked about the importance of Buddhism in teaching youth about morality, and they frequently discussed the role temporary monasticism could play in boys' moral development. This broader discourse about what monasticism should be teaching boys led me back into Wat Namsai and Charoensat School to see how the monks and novices' daily lives did and did not match these expectations expressed by lay teachers and parents. In April 2013, I followed boys who ordained temporarily for Namsai's one-month-long novice summer camp (the subject of Chapter 3) to better understand what short-term monasticism was like.

In June 2013, I ordained as a monk at Wat Namsai. While I ordained there, I spent most of my nine months as a monk at another temple nearby called Wat Doi Thong. Right around this time Charoensat School was moving from Wat Namsai to Wat Ton Pai, another temple in Namsai district a few kilometers from Wat Namsai. (I explain this move and its reasons in more

25. "Wat" in Thai means temple. All temples are prefaced with the word "Wat."

detail in the next chapter.) The abbot of Wat Doi Thong was a teacher at Charoensat School and one of several monks in charge of the move. Wat Doi Thong at that time had 14 novices (ages 12–17) and four monks, including myself (ages 22–65). All the novices and the youngest monk were students at Charoensat School. The oldest monk was originally from the area and a bit of a recluse, preferring to stay in and around his *kuti*—a monk's personal dwelling—rather than join in activities with the other monastics.

The abbot of Wat Doi Thong and ten of the novices were from Karen villages in either the district of Om Goi or Tak province to the west of Chiang Mai. The youngest monk and the other four novices were from Shan villages in Wiang Haeng to the north of Chiang Mai. Lay donors in the area wholly supported the temple. The lay supporters were evenly split between those who were from the Namsai area and civil servants who moved to the area from the northeastern and southern parts of Thailand to work at the nearby government-run dam. This variety of backgrounds and regions of origin led to many different perspectives on the role of monasticism and how monastics should act, which forms the basis of my study on how the monks and novices navigated these various expectations in the enactment of their monastic selves. In March 2014, I disrobed from monasticism. I left monasticism and Wat Doi Thong so I could travel more easily into Chiang Mai city and to surrounding areas, schools, and temples to finish final interviews. Monks' travel is limited and difficult as they cannot drive themselves.

While a monk, I experienced many aspects of monastic life that the novices of Charoensat School did, although I do not want to suggest informants ever forgot my position as a white American anthropologist. I was the first *farang* (the Thai word for "Westerner") to ordain at Wat Namsai. Being a *farang* meant most Thais assumed I was Christian. Even if that were the case, it still would have not been a problem to ordain. (In fact, some novices come from Christian families but ordain as Buddhist novices to get an education.) Monks, novices, and lay supporters who knew me better, though, knew that I considered myself Buddhist, having begun studying and practicing it over ten years prior to beginning research. Being the *farang* monk meant I got invited much more frequently to funerals, house blessings, and other religious ceremonies than

some of the non-*farang* monks. The reason for this was likely twofold: First, the presence of a *farang* monk at these ceremonies would like draw more attention and more celebration. Second, many organizers, knowing I was doing research about Buddhist monasticism, wanted to invite me to various religious ceremonies so I could see more closely these aspects of Buddhist life. It is part of Thai hospitality to invite others, particularly foreigners, to take part in Buddhist events, which are part and parcel of Thai life.

Wat Namsai represented a microcosm of the broader region of northern Thailand I had traveled around during my 2010 trip. The temple and Namsai district were large enough that there were many different perspectives about the role of monasticism in the socialization of boys to become moral men. The district of Namsai itself was in a unique position. Located about 20 kilometers outside the city of Chiang Mai, the city and its urban residents influenced but did not completely dominate its socioeconomic landscape. Rice fields largely covered the district. Agriculture made up a large portion of the area's economics, not only in rice but also small patches of vegetables, a few orchards in the area, and some who raised chickens or hogs for slaughter. The market within the town of Namsai,[26] along with other markets on the highway into Chiang Mai, offered space for these farmers to sell their produce. Another large segment of the population worked as civil servants, mostly either as teachers at the numerous primary and secondary schools in the area or at the government-run dam. The latter brought engineers and bureaucrats from all regions of Thailand to live and manage the dam and surrounding watershed. There was also some light manufacturing in Namsai: a lumber yard that also made some furniture, an ice factory, an industrial dry cleaners that serviced linens from hotels in Chiang Mai, and a brewery that supplied not only the immediate area but some parts of the city of Chiang Mai, too. An expanding middle class, increased tourism, and a growing number of expats have led to more resorts, coffee shops, and restaurants offering foreign foods along with the standard Thai fare.

About half of the novices who attended Charoensat School considered themselves *khon mue-*

26. The principle town within the district of Namsai—like most districts in Thailand—shared the same name. So, Namsai is the name of both the district and a town in the district.

ang (northern Thai) and came from Namsai or neighboring districts. The other half of the novices came from ethnic minorities of northern Thailand. A few were Tai Lue, an ethnic minority with a relatively large population in the district of Namsai. Most of the novices from ethnic minorities, though, came from other parts of northern Thailand. About 25 percent of all the novices at Charoensat School were Shan (*Tai Yai*) from the Thai-Burmese border district of Wiang Haeng. Most of these Shan novices came because the monk who was the principal of Charoensat School was himself Shan and from the Wiang Haeng area. The rest of the novices were split among Karen, Lisu, and Lahu from "hill tribe" villages in the mountainous regions of Chiang Mai, Tak, and Mae Hong Son provinces.

The novices from these ethnic minorities largely came from families where the parents were either subsistence farmers or day laborers. As such, these novices came to get an education. The schools in their villages largely went only to *mathayom* three.[27] To complete a general secondary education they would have to move from their villages to a larger town, one which had a school with classes up to *mathayom* six. Such an arrangement was expensive. Many families could barely afford such costs for one child, let alone several. In situations where a daughter wanted to further her education, parents would pay the necessary school and living expenses for her while a son would ordain to study for free as a novice. Like the case with the Shan novices, there were monks who taught at Charoensat School or who lived at nearby temples who were from the same ethnic groups and often the same villages as the novices. Every year these monks would travel back to their home villages to invite boys to come ordain as novices, get an education, and improve their families' situations by being less of a financial burden on the family.

As discussed above along with the teachers Kaeo and Pai, finances were not the only reason boys ordained. Economics played a large factor for nearly all the ethnic minority novices and the

27. Education in Thailand is divided into primary (*prathom*) and secondary (*mathayom*) schooling. Each of these divisions contain six grades. Compared to the United States' education system, *prathom* one through six is equivalent to elementary school grades one through six. *Mathayom* one through six is equivalent to grades seven through twelve in the US system. Grades up to *mathayom* three are compulsory. After that students may continue with *mathayom* four through six. Such students often go on to university as *mathayom* four through six are typically more general (*saman*). Alternatively, students may go to a vocational or trade school after completing *mathayom* grade three.

majority of *khon mueang* novices. Roughly fifteen percent, though, and mostly among the *khon mueang* novices, had ordained because of problems around attachments or addictions. For some, it was because their parents were unable to adequately provide for them because their parents had drug addictions or were in prison on drug-related convictions. Extended family members did not have the resources to raise the boy, so they encouraged him to ordain as a novice. For others, it was the boys themselves who were doing badly in school or whose parents felt they were becoming too attached to things like video games or spending too much time with friends or girls. In these incidences, parents would encourage their sons to ordain to study.

I knew of no novices who were forced to ordain. Whenever asked why they ordained, all novices I spoke with said they chose to ordain themselves. After asking a bit more about their motivations or familial situations, though, it became clearer what underlying forces compelled them to ordain. Novices' statements that they themselves decided they wanted to ordain likely, in large part, came out of the logic of merit. Doing something good like ordaining with good intentions generates *bun*, or good merit. Having good intentions is important. For their ordinations to be most meritorious—regardless of the broader reasons that guided their decision to ordain—novices needed to frame their ordination as their own intention to do something good for their family and for themselves. Their expressing that they chose to ordain was likely meant to make evident their good intentions.

Regardless of their background, life for the novices at Charoensat School was pretty similar. For most who ordained to complete their *mathayom* education, they ordained between the ages of 12 and 14. A couple new novices each year were between 17 and 19 years old because they had taken longer to decide they wanted to further their education. About one half would disrobe after *mathayom* three to either go to a vocational school (to learn a trade, e.g., welding or auto repair) or to return to their home villages to work on the farm. The other half would generally disrobe after *mathayom* six to find work or go to university as a lay person. A few would stay on to complete a bachelor's degree at the university for monks in Chiang Mai city.

Novices usually visited home once or twice a year, typically during the break between school

terms. During the term, parents or other family members would visit maybe once a year unless requested to come by the principal or the temple's abbot. This was the case regardless of whether a novice came from the surrounding area or from a small village hundreds of kilometers away. While there were no rules concerning family visits, many monks I spoke with said it was best if novices did not visit their families too often lest they wish to disrobe and return home before finishing school.[28]

1.6 Chapter Outline

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I situate Wat Namsai, Charoensat School, and monastic education more generally within a broader historical context. Through focusing on the history of Charoensat School, we look at how historically temporary novice ordination in Thailand has been about increasing education and the socioeconomic benefits that came with it. Given the role of monasticism and temples in providing education to particularly poorer families in remote regions of the country, some scholars have suggested that temporary ordination works to construct and support nationalist identities and a nationalist Thai Buddhism (Ishii 1986; Jackson 1989). Others, however, have suggested that charismatic monks can challenge the central Thai state (Bowie 2014; McDaniel 2011). The chapter argues that while the Thai state may attempt to construct nationalist ideas about Buddhist morality through monasticism, the shifting role temples are playing in people's daily lives at times undermines the nationalist narrative of monasticism's social role. The shifting role of temples is demonstrated through a focus on Charoensat School, which moved from Wat Namsai to Wat Doi Thong in large part because the two temples had different ideas about what purpose temples should serve in Thai society.

Chapter 3 traces how particular programs socialize new young novices into monasticism and teach them the general expectations lay Buddhists have of them. I draw on ethnographic data

28. The frequency of family visits was markedly different for novices who ordained for a short period of time like at novice summer camps. During such times, parents and other family visited their monastic kin several times a week if not everyday. Throughout the dissertation, we will see many such instances of contrast between short- and long-term monastics.

from a novice camp held over summer break from school when many boys ordain as novices for a few weeks. The primary goal of these camps is for boys to learn to "adjust themselves" (*prab tua*). They adjust to living up to the expected role monastics fulfill: being *riaproi*, a particular aesthetic way of presenting oneself that is neat, orderly, and instills in others present feelings of calmness and pleasantness. While previous scholarship has largely looked at how being *riaproi* indexes an internal state of calmness, I argue that being *riaproi* demonstrates a novice's commitment to his social role as a monastic regardless of his internal state of mind. In this way, temporary ordination can socialize boys into being ideal Thai men by getting them to perform being *riaproi*.

To examine how young monastics can shift ideas about monasticism through their "fresh contact" with novice ordination, Chapter 4 follows those boys who stay on as novices to complete their education after the novice summer camps are over. These boys who ordain for several years shift focus in their goals for monasticism. With the demands of schoolwork and monastic duties, novices quickly learn that too strictly following the monastic rules—the very rules meant to transform them into moral Thai men—can be detrimental to their monastic lives. At the same time, being too lax, such as not following the rules at all, can potentially alienate their lay supporters by breaking their expectations. By learning at what times they need to be strict in their disciplines and in what places they can be more lax, both monastics and laity negotiate just how strict monastics need to be. In this way, novices develop an orientation towards the monastic rules that is asymmetrical to the way they approached the rules during the novice summer camp and the way they imagine their lay supporters approach the monastic rules. I argue that learning to negotiate "the middle" (*panklang*) between being too strict and too lax builds locally specific conceptions of monastic ideals. It is here that counter-nationalist ideas of Buddhist morality emerge.

Chapter 5 shifts from the moral and nationalist concerns around monasticism to the connected issue of gender. As noted above, many Thais have described an increase in the number of *kathoei* or effeminate *gay* and a decrease in "real men" (*chai thae*). The monastic community has been a lightning rod for this concern about the dearth of "real men." Dredge Byung'chu-Käng (2012) shows how the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics elicits anxieties about the current lack of

"real" Thai men and a weakening of Thai masculinity. A defining characteristic of nationalist Thai Buddhism is that only boys and men can ordain. Similar to negotiations of what is too lax or too strict regarding monastic rules, Buddhist communities must also negotiate what gendered ways of being mark one as masculine enough to be a monastic and what the appropriate response is to *gay* and *kathoei* monastics. While some are critical of such monastics, bolstering ideas that gender and sexual minorities are inherently immoral, others actively work to include *gay* and *kathoei* monastics as capable of enacting ideals of monastic morality or work to reshape the possibilities of monastic morality itself, reshaping dominant conceptions of masculinity, morality, and the relationship between these two domains.

Chapter 6 explores the materiality and embodiment of ideals about masculinity and monasticism. The chapter looks at the ways in which monastics' robes represent their morality and masculinity. Because the robes are so closely associated with Buddhist monasticism, laity have very strong ideas about how monastics should look in their robes. Wearing them all day, every day, monastics become attuned to minor variations in how they wear the robes. Wearing them too tight or too loose can bring into question a monastic's moral discipline and gender identity. This negotiation around robes demonstrates the boundary work around masculinity at play in northern Thailand. At the same time, the chapter explores the connection between individual monks' and novices' embodiment of monastic ideals as metonymy for the social body of the Thai nation and the individual monastic body. Because of laity's strong ideas about what the robes represent, monastics come to embody what I call the "Sangha body," a broader social body the encompasses the entire Buddhist monastic community from the time of the Buddha to the present. Like notions of being *riaproi* explored in Chapter 3, individual monastics' ability to represent this Sangha body both reproduces and changes conceptions of monasticism and masculinity. At the same time, I question the theoretical purchase of representation, suggesting that it does not fully capture the relationship between an individual monastic's body and the larger Sangha body. Instead, I put forward a notion of multi-bodied selves to better explain what individuals' embodiment of monasticism is doing.

CHAPTER 2

THE MANY ROLES OF THE THAI SANGHA: A HISTORY OF MONASTIC EDUCATION IN NORTHERN THAILAND

Buddhism has long played a key role in the formation and reproduction of Thai society. It was central to the rise of the notion of a Thai nation and the national identity of "Thainess" in the early 20th century (Winichakul 1994). Prior to the creation of "Thailand" as a nation-building project in the 1930s to coalesce the various regions and ethnicities within the country's borders, Buddhism was also pivotal in most of the former kingdoms that came to make up Thailand. These kingdoms included Siam (present day central Thailand) and Lan Na (present day northern Thailand). The histories—real and imagined—of these past kingdoms remain relevant even today as people across Thailand often speak of different regions of Thailand each having their own unique form of Buddhist practices. At the same time, though, people speak of a more general Thai Buddhism that spans regions, defining Thailand as a distinct nation. Central to Thai Buddhism is the Thai Sangha, the monastic community, who inhabit the thousands of temples across the country. For most Thais, having a local temple with monks and novices whom they support and learn about Buddhism from is paramount to their identity as Thai Buddhists.

The centrality of Buddhist temples and monastics in Thai life makes the Sangha a key site for state intervention. By centralizing the Sangha's administration under the government in Bangkok and regulating how Buddhism is to be taught across the country, the state attempts to define Thai Buddhism and coalesce the notion of Thai Buddhism around its definition. As the main moral teachers and exemplars in Thai society, monks have a lot of influence in defining what it means to be a "good" Thai Buddhist and, thus, a "good" Thai citizen. When the Sangha goes along with state-sponsored Buddhism and state-directed notions of moral goodness, the monastic community legitimates the political power of the ruling state. This has been the case both before and after the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. Throughout the 20th century, Thailand experienced numerous military coups. In nearly each of these coups, gaining the support of

the Sangha was key to legitimating the coup. The latest coup in 2014 reinforced this connection between the Sangha and state as the military junta moved to reform the Sangha. By going along with these reforms, the Sangha would tacitly approve of the junta government's legitimacy in directing state-sponsored Buddhism.

Yet at the same time, the Thai monastic community has played a key role in resisting state attempts to centralize control over peripheral regions like northern Thailand. As mentioned above, many Thais—lay and monastic—still identify strongly with their regional heritage. Claims of regionally distinct Buddhisms continue to challenge the state's notion of a pan-Thai national identity centered around a cohesive Thai Buddhism (Bowie 2011). The centralizing narrative of the state's control of the Sangha relies upon an assumption that state-mandated changes to the Sangha hierarchy and to monastic education will trickle down to the local level and individual village temples. Such a smooth-operating bureaucratic mechanism, though, is untenable given the amount of independence local temples have (McDaniel 2008).

The relationship between the institution of monasticism and the Thai state, then, is an ambiguous one. The Sangha has a dual nature in which it can support or delegitimate rulers; aid in "modernizing" the religion or work to maintain its traditions, especially its supernatural elements; and centralize and flatten notions of national Thainess or reproduce regional distinctiveness. This ambiguous relationship continues today, which will be highlighted later in the chapter by the case of Charoensat School moving between temples because of the abbots of two temples, Wat Namsai and Wat Ton Pai, holding different ideas of what the contemporary role of temples and monastic education should be in Thailand. Regardless of what a temple's specific role in Thai society is, nearly all Thais agree that monks should play a major role in the moral education of Thais.

In this chapter, I trace the history of this ambiguous relationship between the monastic community and the state. Setting up this history will allow us to better understand the important role Buddhism and temporary monasticism play in the moral education of Thai children. Despite the centrality of Buddhism's role in Thai children's moral development, broader changes in Thai education are reducing temples' long-held prominence as sites of education. Contemporary Thai

society continues to figure out exactly what role temples are going to perform. Differing roles of temples is made clear in the case of Charoensat School as it moved temples during the course of my fieldwork. Knowing the background of the Sangha's various roles in Thai society will help us better understand the competing expectations young novices must negotiate in their everyday lives, which is the focus of this dissertation's remaining chapters.

2.1 An Ambiguous Relationship: A History of State-Sangha Relations

The late 16th–early 17th centuries saw a radical shift in the political landscape of Lan Na, the ancient kingdom that included what is present day northern Thailand. According to the historian David Wyatt (2003), Lan Na during this period from 1569 to 1688 "became a weak subordinate of a more powerful Burmese state" (p. 104). Over the next hundred years, Chiang Mai, the capital of Lan Na, was largely a source of resources and soldiers for the Burmese campaigns against the Ayutthaya kingdom of Siam. Despite several revolts, Chiang Mai remained under Burmese control until 1775 when the general Chao Kavila of Chiang Mai's neighbor Lampang with the help of Siamese forces—Ayuttaya having fallen to the Burmese to 1767—retook Lan Na. Chiang Mai became a vassal state of Siam, then, with Chao Kavila as its viceroy.

Within this political and military fighting, Buddhism and Buddhist monastic education was a key part. Even prior to the Burmese conquest, Chiang Mai was the main site of monastic education in Lan Na (McDaniel 2008). The style of Buddhist practice brought by Phra Sumana to Lan Na via Sukhothai and Lamphun distinguished Chiang Mai Buddhism from the Buddhisms of surrounding regions. A student of the Sri Lankan and Mon traditions, Phra Sumana established the Lankawong school in Chiang Mai. This lineage had a substantial impact on the three main temples in Chiang Mai that were (and continue to this day to be) key centers of monastic education: Wat Chedi Luang, Wat Phra Singh, and Wat Suan Dok. Even today, many of the monks I knew at Wat Namsai and Wat Ton Pai identified as being a part of this Lankawong lineage of monastics rather than the Siamese tradition.

The temples of Chiang Mai and the monastics who studied there were also key supporters of

the shifting rulers in Chiang Mai over the centuries. Most rulers would continue to support the key temples while also bringing in monastic communities from where they came and enacting changes to monastic education. For instace, the Burmese king Sudodhamma "gave gifts to Wat Suan Dok and invited monks from the Wat Suan Dok training and ordination lineage to give sermons" (McDaniel 2008, p. 73). He also tightened regulations on the examinations of monks, threatening to disrobe those who failed the exams. As such, "results were used as a way to gain more direct control over religious affairs in the city" (ibid.). In controlling monastic education, those in political power could also maintain power over religious doctrine and practice, in large part controlling the religious practice of the area. The relationship between kings and the Sangha would continue beyond the time in which Lan Na was under Burmese control.

The state control over religion via control of monastic education was a recurrent theme in much of the history of northern Thailand, especially as Lan Na became a Siamese vassal state after the defeat of the Burmese. As King Taksin (r. 1767–1782) wrested control of Siam back from the Burmese after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, he also moved to shore up control of the vassal states such as northern Thailand, which came under his control. According to historians, this control of regions was in large part enacted through the control of their monastic communities. For instance, King Taksin defrocked and punished any northern monks associated with Ruan, a popular and powerful monk who controlled the northern Kingdom of Fang. Additionally, "monks from the south were then sent to the north in an effort to raise the standards of monastic life there and to ensure that the northern monks did not again become involved in political activities opposing Taksin" (Butt 1978, p. 36). Much like Burmese kings had moved to shore up monastic education to strengthen their control over regions of Lan Na, so did Siamese kings. The "fostering of Buddhist education and scholarship and the purification of the Sangha were traditional expressions of a king's religious piety and devotion; for that very reason they represented effective means of legitimating royal power" (p. 38).[1]

The relationship between the monarch and the Sangha could work both ways. The reign of

1. For more on traditional ideas of Buddhist kings, see Ishii (1986) and Winichakul (1994).

King Taksin made this co-dependence evident. His attempts to adjust monastic education led to his own study of various meditative practices. These practices convinced him that he would become a divine being, becoming a "stream-enterer" (*sotāpanna*) on the path towards enlightenment. Such a status, he claimed, meant that both lay and monastic persons should bow before him. This claim created a backlash from many monks who held that no monastic should subject himself in such a way to any lay person. Taksin reacted by "replacing the Supreme Patriarch. . . . The remaining dissenters were removed from the monasteries, flogged, and sentenced to perform menial labor at the monastery of the new Supreme Patriarch" (Butt 1978, p. 39). This conflict between the Sangha and Taksin ultimately led to the king's demise. "Instead of serving to legitimate his rule, as he had hoped, his excessive involvement in the religious sphere became the path to his undoing" (p. 40). The monastic community can also keep the state in check, pushing against kings who are not living up to the ideals and expectations of a Buddhist king.

Taksin's eventual abdication, however, did not spell the end for the monarchy's involvement in reforming Buddhism and monastic education. Chao Phraya Chakri, also known as Rama I (r. 1782–1809), became the king after Taksin's ouster and established the Chakri dynasty, which continues to rule Thailand today. Rama I began what many of his successors would continue to do: attempt to reform and "purify" the Sangha. Rama I issued several decrees regulating monks' activities and behaviors. For instance, he ordered civil servants and lay persons to report "unseemly" monastic behavior to officials. He also "prohibited the giving of extravagant presents to the monks and reminded his subjects that the purity of the Sangha was essential for acquiring religious merit" (p. 43). Pressure for lay persons to report misbehaving monks remains today as the National Office of Buddhism encourages Thai citizens to make complaints about any behavior they see as unbecoming of monastics. At the same time, Rama I attempted to shift Buddhists away from magical and supernatural practices.

Many historians have characterized this period as the first attempt to "modernize" Thai Buddhism. After Rama I, his grandson King Mongkut, Rama IV (r. 1851–1868), continued attempts to reform the Sangha. Believing that the Thai Sangha had become too relaxed in their monas-

tic practice, he created a reform movement culminating in the creation of the Thammayut sect, which was to return the monastic community to the practice of asceticism as the king believed it to have been practiced at the time of the Buddha. While still in existence today, the main sect, Mahanikai, remains dominant, and lay persons notice little difference between the two. Besides the attempt to change monastic behaviors, Mongkut attempted to make Thai Buddhism compatible with Western scientific empiricism. In large part, this meant making less visible the supernatural aspects of Buddhist practice that had been and that remain common. These attempts to shift the monastic community had a broader impact on Thai society. As Thomas Kirsch (1978) points out, "one can make a case that Mongkut's efforts to upgrade the Thai Sangha facilitated subsequent efforts to modernize the nonreligious spheres of Thai society" (p. 63). By changing the Sangha, the king tried to also change civil society.

The attempts to reform the Sangha by Mongkut came to a head when Chulalongkorn, Rama V (r. 1868–1910), enacted the first of several Sangha Acts in 1902. This act attempted to transform the Thai Sangha into a more ecclesiastical structure that mimicked the transformation of the Thai state into more bureaucratic forms with centralized control and a provincial administrative system replacing the vassal state status of areas like northern Thailand. This shift in administration of the Sangha was also tied to the spread of primary education. King Chulalongkorn recruited Phra Wachirayam "and through him the Sangha and its monks to implement the program. This task was considered appropriate because the monasteries had traditionally run not only monastic schools but imparted the 3 Rs to village children" (Tambiah 1978, p. 119). According to Stanley Tambiah (1978), the Sangha Act of 1902 also set the stage for a nationally controlled Sangha that would work to homogenize Thailand and its peripheral regions like northern Thailand, which still had its unique Buddhist practices and texts since before the Burmese invasions. We see from this history the close relationship among the state, the Sangha, and education—both monastic and general.

More recently, scholars have questioned this "modernizing" narrative of Mongkut's and Chulalongkorn's reigns, especially the Sangha Act of 1902. For one, as we also saw above, "from the

earliest thirteenth-century records to 1902, Siamese kings and high-ranking monks had seen it as their duty to collect and edit Buddhist texts, rewrite Buddhist history, purge the Sangha of corrupt persons, and rein in renegade, independent-minded practitioners." (McDaniel 2008, p. 100–101). There is nothing particularly modern about the monarch or Thai state trying to reform wayward monastics. However, this is not to say the Sangha Act of 1902 and similar subsequent acts had no effects on provincial monastic communities. It did begin to formalize and nationalize monastic education and "make those residing in a monastery 'in service to the nation' and to deflect criticism from European missionaries and Japanese envoys who denounced . . . Thai Buddhist education and organization" (p. 101). Such effects remain today where schools like Charoensat teach novices Pali and Buddhism from standardized Thai textbooks, and novices take nationally standardized tests to acquire certain rankings within the Sangha. There remains, though, a lot of flexibility in the everyday management of each monastery. National regulations of the Sangha are often not systematically enforced.

Another way in which scholars have questioned this "modernizing" narrative is in the continued flourishing of the so-called magical or supernatural aspects of Buddhism (see, e.g., Fuengfusakul 1993; Kitiarsa 2005, 2012; McDaniel 2011). The control of Buddhism through control of monastic education is also questionable given the low percentage of all Thai students who attend temple schools as monastics (see tables below). As such, one historian concludes that "the reforms of 1902 took decades to reach the North, and even today they are relatively insignificant" (McDaniel 2008, p. 113). Places like Chiang Mai have in large part maintained their forms of monastic education. Controlling peripheral areas like northern Thailand through dictating monastic education, though, is not the only influence the Thai state attempts to wield. This becomes particularly apparent if we jump ahead a few decades past the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 to the long series of military coups in Thai history, especially that of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1957. First, though, let us look at the Revolution of 1932 and its impact on the state-Sangha relationship.

The coup in June 1932 was instigated by the Khana Ratsadon, a group of military and civil of-

ficers, because of destabilization in the Thai economy, a burgeoning middle class—particularly in Bangkok—demanding more rights, and continuing threats of colonization from the surrounding British and French empires. The shift from absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy had a tremendous impact on how people perceived Thailand as a nation. It was a watershed moment that shifted Thai polity from a model of mutual support between a Buddhist king, a *dhammaraja*, and the Sangha to a tripartite model where the emergent "Thai nation" worked to maintain and uphold both the monarchy and the Sangha (Ishii 1986). In return, these institutions would support the Thai democratic nation. The monarchy and Sangha became a defining characteristic of "Thai-ness" (Winichakul 1994). Rallying around this nationalist identity would further bring in peripheral regions like northern Thailand under the auspices of promoting Thai-ness. We must keep in mind, however, that, as mentioned above, just because central powers in Bangkok tried to enact policies and campaigns to centralize their control over peripheral regions does not mean they were actually taken up by northern Thais.

The push for policing wayward monastics and immoral behavior within the Sangha during the Chakri dynasty extended into the lay community as well. Under Prime Minister Sarit, who seized control of the Thai government in the military coup of 1957, the whole populace was subject to programs aimed at social and moral purification. Sarit cracked down on prostitution, opium dens, petty criminals, and even rock-and-roll music (Chaloemtiarana 1979).

Sarit's attempts to foster particular moral sensibilities within the Thai populace largely centered on making every aspect of life "neat and proper" (*riaproi*). He tried enacting this sensibility of propriety in his personal lifestyle as "he was described by a former fellow-officer as a person who valued beauty, who dressed in clean and well-pressed clothes, washed his face many times a day, had his hair always combed, and acted with social properness ([*riaproi*])" (p. 189). This personal attempt to cultivate the appearance of being clean and proper extended to how Sarit wanted to see all of Thailand. To that end, and to bolster his "paternal" (*phokhun*) image, he "directed the municipal authorities to crackdown on houses where clothes were dried on balconies and plants grown in an unkempt and untidy fashion. . . . New laws were passed to allow the police to arrest

and fine offenders against the Sarit campaign for cleanliness" (p. 192). By looking and acting "neat and proper," he wanted Thais *to be* neat and proper, displaying a modern, regimented image to the world.[2] As the primary models of moral respectability, monastics were especially subject to the ideal of being neat and proper in their comportment and to make their temples clean. Under Sarit, many religious ceremonies and the royal patronage of Buddhism through lavish offerings increased to show the "development" (*phatthana*) of the nation. A wealthy Sangha was a sign of a wealthy nation.

In more recent times, the lavishness of the Sangha became an object of ridicule in need of correction, again rendering the Sangha as a major site for reforming Thais' behavior. The monastic training of the recently desceased King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX (r. 1946–2016), partly informed his "sufficiency economy" program that emphasized a Buddhist "middle path" (*matchima patippatha*) to economic development and encouraged rural rice farmers to be mindful of their environmental impact and not be greedy but produce just as much rice as was sustainable.[3] This view of Buddhism as encouraging living a simple life that monastics should live by as an example for laity connects to an increasing popularity of "modernist" monks like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and other famous mid–20th century monks. These popular monks tried to distill the Buddha's

2. The role of learning to be *riaproi* and its connection to Buddhist monasticism is further explored in the following chapter. There we will also look more closely at the distinction between *looking* neat and proper and *being* neat and proper as an internalized characteristic.

3. Such economic policies have also been criticized for legitimating and perpetuating increasing economic disparity between rural farmers and urban laborers and professionals. This growing economic disparity was a major contributing factor in the election of Taksin Shinawatra as prime minister in 2001, whose populist economic policies to reduce rural poverty and establish a universal healthcare program were popular in the poorer peripheral regions of the country like the north and northeast. Even though Taksin won an unprecedented majority of votes in the 2005 general election with the highest voter turnout in history, a military junta staged a bloodless coup in 2006 overthrowing Thaksin and dissolving his party in parliament under accusations of corruption, tax evasion, and lèse majesté. The overthrow of such a popularly elected prime minister led many to the conclusion that the military were the ones truly in charge of the Thai government. Such beliefs were further supported when Taksin's newly reorganized political party overwhelmingly won the 2007 general election only to have the party and newly elected prime minister later disqualified. This disqualification was partly in response to "yellow shirt" protesters of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) made up mostly of middle- and upper-class professionals in Bangkok. The "red shirts," or the National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), conversely, were made up primarily of lower class Thais from the more rural regions of northern and northeastern Thailand. After the yellow shirts' victory in 2008, the red shirts staged increasing protests and demonstrations, culminating in violent clashes with the military in May 2010. Ultimately, these clashes led to the requalification of Taksin's political party and the election of his sister as the leader of that party in the 2011 general elections, who was soon after accused of corruption and impeached, leading to yet another military coup and the dissolving of parliament in 2014.

teachings, the Dhamma, to its core essence and encourage people to live by that simple teaching (Jackson 2003a).

Throughout the centuries and into the present time, the relationship between the state—from kingdoms to democracy to military dictatorships—and the Sangha has been an ambivalent one. An incoming political authority, through conquest or coup, has tried to reform the monastic community and its role in the education of both monastic and civil societies. The state often justified reforms through claims of wayward monastics. The Sangha, though, has not always gone along with such reforms, challenging the state or simply not implementing changes. What has remained consistent, though, is the basic idea that the Sangha should be a source of moral education for Buddhists.

2.2 The Role of Buddhism in the Moral Education of a "Good Child"

So long as the Sangha's moral standing is not entirely corrupted, monks continue to provide moral education for Thai society. The ability for monasticism to teach boys how to be moral Thai men is critical to its ability to address people's concerns about boys' attachments and potential addictions. In conversations with informants, most people saw temporary monasticism as a way to address the problem of boys' possible unruliness. This has to do with two expectations they had from monasticism. First, when a boy ordains, he removes himself from regular, lay society and enters into a restricted environment devoid of many of the temptations that can lead to attachments or addictions. The Vinaya, the monastic code, prohibits the use of any kind of intoxicants such as alcohol or addictive drugs. The Vinaya also prohibits forms of entertainment such as music. Even consumption of food is restricted: Buddhist laity expect monastics to fast between noon and dawn of the next day.[4] As one 17-year-old novice at Charoensat who had been a novice for almost six years said:

4. As we will see in Chapter 4, many of the Vinaya's rules, including the rule about eating after midday, are not so clear cut.

> [My parents] may have wanted me to ordain because if I studied outside [the temple] I might have become friends with people who aren't good. Then I would have gone down a wrong path. I wouldn't have studied. Maybe I would have played more, and then I wouldn't be interested in studying. Or maybe they thought that by living within Buddhism [*yu nai phra phutthasasana*] and ordaining as a novice I would get good moral principles, have thoughts and do things that were good, and get a higher education.

He was not alone in this sentiment. Many expressed similar ideas that becoming a monk or novice and living in a temple would separate boys from bad influences and improve their chances of getting a better education and becoming a morally good adult.

This novice also points to the second expectation people have of monasticism that will help address the problem with Thai youth: Monks and novices "living within Buddhism" will become moral individuals. Ordaining temporarily is a prominent way for young Thais to develop into the ideal "good person" (*phu di*). For many Thais, becoming a good person begins with being a "good child" (*dek di*). Thus, monasticism both removes potentially troubled youth from lay society, placing them within the constraints of the Vinaya rules, and it teaches them how to become morally good persons.

What is a "good child" and what is the moral ideal parents, teachers, and youth expect temporary monasticism to instill? In much of Thailand, a good child is a child who knows her responsibilities (*ru khwam rapphitchop*), duties (*na thi*), and position (*thana*) in the social hierarchy (Eberhardt 2014a; N. Mulder 2000). Thai children are reminded of these duties and their position in a number of ways, including through their schooling (Bolotta 2016). In varying circumstances from school, home, or at the temple, good children are those who know what others expect of them in any given situation. It may be *wai*-ing to their parents, standing up and saying thank you to their teacher at the end of a lesson, or being sure to make an offering to a monk using both hands. Comporting the body to act in these ways is reinforced through different kinds of lessons, including in songs. The popular song "Oh Child, Good Child" (*dek oei, dek di*) composed

in the 1990s and played especially around the annual National Children's Day celebrations spells out the ten duties Thai children should learn and practice in order to be good. These duties are:

1. Respect the religion (i.e., Buddhism)
2. Maintain customs
3. Listen to parents and teachers
4. Speak courteously and sweetly
5. Adhere to being deferential
6. Be a person who knows and loves their chores
7. Must study to be skilled and persevere, not being lazy or idle
8. Know to save and be thrifty
9. Must always be honest and helpful
10. Behave oneself to be beneficial and know one's merits, demerits, faults, and status in life

Being a morally good child involves knowing and enacting one's duties within a given relational context. Expected comportment shifts according to whom the child is interacting with. A child behaves towards his parents differently than towards his teachers, older siblings, peers, or younger siblings. The "good child" knows the "time and place" (*kalathesa*) she is in—and who is present—and adjusts accordingly. Being morally good according to this list is also heavily tied to religion, particularly Buddhism. A Thai child should ideally be Buddhist.[5] In being an ideal Buddhist child, he should know the basic tenets of the religion and know Buddhist moral concepts such as "making merit" (*tham bun*) and avoiding "demerits" (*bap*).

Temporary ordination provides an ideal context for children—although only boys—to learn and practice these duties. Knowing one's duties makes for "unity" (*khwamsamakhi*) and a calm social environment. As the English teacher at Charoensat School put it: "If you know your own duties, then duties will be shared correctly. There won't be a problem in society. [People] won't

5. There is currently no official national religion. However, over 90% of Thailand identifies as Buddhist, and Buddhism is generally what the state and individuals have in mind when talking about religion in Thailand. Following the military coup in 2014 and dissolution of the constitution, the drafting of a new constitution has included language making Buddhism the national religion.

get upset. Things will be fun. We'll be happy." By ordaining, young boys learn how to be morally good children thus promoting many of the ideals of Buddhism, monasticism, and Thainess cultivated in the past.

The difference in moral education between novices and lay students is one of degree rather than of kind. Novices similarly learn what their duties and responsibilities are as monastics. In their everyday school lives, monks and teachers frequently remind them that their monastic duties are paramount, more important than their duties as students. For instance, one morning at Charoensat School the students were scheduled to begin the term's final exams. The novices of Wat Doi Thong had spent their usual free time the previous evenings doing extra study sessions, preparing for the exams. Just as they began the exam, the abbot of Wat Doi Thong arrived in a minibus and told the novices to stop their exams and get in the minibus because he had forgotten they were supposed to go to the hospital that morning for a merit making ceremony. The teacher whose exam they were now going to be skipping was not at all flustered by the interruption of her class or that some of the novices' exams would have to be postponed giving them additional time to study compared to the other novices in the class who were not leaving. As the novices crowded into the minibus, their teacher called out to them, "Go do your duty first, novices. Then you can can come back and do the exam later." It was several days until they had the time to make up the missed exam. Such adjustments were common at the school. Lessons and exams were frequently rescheduled or entirely cancelled so novices could attend ceremonies, do maintenance on the temple groups, or do other monastic duties. In such instances, the importance of their responsibilities were emphasized and they were reminded that their role as novices trumped their role as students.

Because the responsibilities of monasticism are more stringent than those of lay students, successful adjustment to being a novice suggests these boys will be able to better adjust to the responsibilities of other roles after they disrobe. Like much of the recent history we saw above, the Sangha is expected—and often regulated by the state—to be the exemplar of moral behavior for civil society. With this in mind, parents and families expect that boys who ordain will learn

to fill that role as exemplar, embodying the ideals of a good child more thoroughly than one who did not ordain. In the process, they will transform themselves more quickly and more completely to be able to know their duties and live by the responsibilities appropriate to their social status.

How exactly temples try to get boys to adjust to a novice's duties vary greatly among temples. This difference is in large part because of the history of monastic control we have seen above. Regardless of the laws enacted regarding monasticism such as the Sangha acts, the enforcement often comes down to individual temples and their abbots enacting changes according to regulations. At the same time, there have been different focuses of reform. Some have emphasized Pali studies, others the moral training monasticism provides, and still others think providing education—especially for those unable to afford it otherwise—is the main purpose of the temples and their schools. What functions monastic education should perform in Thai society have undergone increased scrutiny in recent years because of broader shifts in education throughout Thailand. Turning to the particular case of Charoensat School will highlight these shifts in education and how they have led to temples having competing ideas about what their role in contemporary Thai society should be.

2.3 The Future of Temples' Roles: The Case of Charoensat School

In 2013, several months into my fieldwork, the principal and teachers of Charoensat School decided to move from Wat Namsai, the main temple in the district, after having been located there for over a decade. They moved to Wat Ton Pai, another temple in Namsai district just a couple kilometers away from Wat Namsai. The case of Charoensat School's move from one temple to another highlights the changes in Thai education and the role of temples in society. Uncertainty about what exact role temples should continue to play in Thailand's education system stemmed in large part from shifting reasons for why boys were ordaining as novices. The following vignette begins to demonstrate the perception of this shift.

Phra Mai was a 28-year-old monk from a Karen village in the district of Om Goi west of Chiang Mai. He had ordained as a novice at Wat Namsai when he was 19 years old. While he had

always enjoyed studying and going to school, he dropped out of school at age 15 after finishing *mathayom* three in order to help on his family's farm. At 19, though, he decided that if he was going to complete his high school education, he needed to ordain as a novice. Nine years later he had finished not only his secondary education but also a bachelor's degree and was contemplating continuing on to do a master's degree. Following his own success as a monastic, he often traveled back to his village in Om Goi to encourage boys to come ordain at Wat Namsai to also finish their education.

He was also constantly concerned about not only these boys from his village who came to ordain but also his family back home. One afternoon, we ascended the stairs in front of Charoensat School that led to Wat Namsai's *vihara*, the main chanting hall, so he could light a candle in front of the main Buddha statue as a blessing and small act of merit making for his father who had been ill. The candle lit and blessing said, Phra Mai and I strolled down the main path of the temple to a coffee shop that sat just outside the temple's main gate. As we sat drinking our sweet iced teas, we struck up a conversation about the future of Wat Namsai and monastic education.

"What do you think Wat Namsai will be like in 10 years?" Phra Mai asked me. I said I did not know, but he clearly had something on his mind he wanted to express. For him, Wat Namsai was turning into too much of a tourist temple and turning away from its original purpose as a place of education. In fact, Charoensat School was soon going to be moving from its prominent place at Wat Namsai to Wat Ton Pai, a smaller, quieter temple because of this change in Wat Namsai. The specific circumstances of Charoensat School led us to a larger discussion about the state of education at temples across Thailand. Phra Mai described how in the past a temple was the pinnacle of education (many informants—monastic and lay—expressed this sentiment to me, too) but today the temple as a place of education had dropped substantially in prestige below that of government schools. I asked if it was the students, teachers, or schools that were getting worse. He said it was all of them, although it was ultimately up to the leaders—the abbots—who set the direction their temples would go in. He said even in the several years he had been there he had noticed the quality of education slipping. He explained it this way: Even though he had gotten

to level seven in Pali studies,[6] there was no way he could teach someone to reach that level. For him, this was because the first group of a system are the best teachers; each group after that is not as good as the first. It was like a copy of a copy, he explained. Each copy would not be as clear as the previous iteration. I asked if the solution then was to start a whole new system, but he did not seem to know a good solution.

Discussing the various reasons novices had for ordaining, we talked about the three main reasons he thought boys ordained as novices: 1) Those who ordained for financial reasons; 2) Those whose parents or families wanted them to ordain to change the boys' behavior; and 3) Those who actually wanted to be a novice or monk and ordained in order to study Buddhism in particular. Phra Mai said he thought the majority of novices fit into the first group even though many will say they belonged to the third group because it was the "right" thing to say. It was the "right" answer because it is what many laity expected novices to ordain for: primarily to learn about Buddhism with their general secondary education as a bonus by government requirement. In actuality, as Phra Mai indicated, the vast majority of novices flipped these priorities. They were glad to learn about Buddhism, memorize chants, learn Pali, and study other aspects of religious life, but their main focus was their general education.

Like the lay teachers Kaeo and Pai in the previous chapter, Phra Mai similarly saw an increase in the number of boys who ordained for the second reason: to correct potentially addictive behaviors. The shift in what kinds of boys were ordaining and for what ends is in part a story of growing concerns about youth and attachments. It is additionally, though, a story of broader shifts in Thai education that has reduced the country's dependence on the temple to be one—if not the only—place of education.

6. In the religious education of monastics there are two main subjects which they can test into different levels of: *nak tham*, the religious curriculum, and the Pali language. In *nak tham* there are three levels a monastic can test into. The tests assess a monastic's general understanding of the Dhamma and his ability to describe a particular teaching of the Buddha. In Pali, there are nine levels a monastic can test into. A monk testing in Pali must learn a great deal of vocabulary and grammar. After passing the test for level three of Pali, a monk may add the honorific *maha* to his name. Having passed level seven in Pali, Phra Mai would more formally be referred to as Phramaha Mai. As a monk progresses in his Pali studies, he receives a new fan (*phat*) on which is embroidered the level of Pali he has tested into. A monk will use his fan at funerals, blessings, and other public ceremonies. As such, it is an important marker of the amount of time and energy a monk has devoted to his religious education.

2.3.1 Changing Landscape of Education in Thailand

My interlocutors returned repeatedly to the state of monastic education and education more generally in Thailand. Broader changes in education requirements and access to education across Thailand have been making monastic education less relevant and, thus, making monasticism less relevant. In 1999, the National Education Act guaranteed twelve years of education (six years of primary and six years of secondary), which the government extended to 15 years in 2009 (adding a year of pre-school and two years of kindergarten). Nine years of schooling (six years of primary and three years of secondary) are compulsory. Laws mandating and guaranteeing a certain level of education have led to an increase in the percentage of children and young adults attending school even as the size of younger generations in Thailand decreases. This trend is evident in the census data in Table 2.1, which shows the large jump in school attendance even as the population of Thailand is aging. The schools that educate these students, though, are often not temple schools like Charoensat School. They are a combination of public and private schools open to all students, not just those who ordain as monastics.

Table 2.1: Changes in population and education across Thailand, 1990–2010

	1990	2000	2010
National population	54,548,500	60,916,400	65,981,700
Population 0–14 years old	29.2%	24.4%	19.2%
Average years of education	5.7	7.2	8.1
Population 6–24 years old not attending school	54.5%	38.9%	29.4%

SOURCE: Thailand's National Statistical Office, *The 2010 Population and Housing Census*, http://web.nso.go.th/en/census/poph/cen_poph_10.htm (last accessed April 19, 2017)

While primary and secondary education in Thailand is nominally free, in practice there are still costs involved. The mandate for "free education," for instance, does not include the cost of school books and uniforms. Additionally, transportation is often a huge barrier for families in

more rural areas of Thailand. Many of the students of Charoensat School came from regions of northern Thailand where their villages had primary and lower secondary (*mathayom* 1–3) classrooms but did not have upper secondary (*mathayom* 4–6) classes. Also, oftentimes in smaller villages all levels were combined in the same classroom. Getting to an upper secondary school or a better lower secondary school than what was in their home village required paying for daily transportation to larger towns tens of kilometers away. Many of the roads between the smaller villages and larger towns were steep dirt roads that would washout, becoming impassable, during the rainy season. So, in some instances, it would be better to rent a place to stay in town rather than pay for daily transportation. The cost of transportation or lodging during the school year was often the overly onerous cost for many families whose sons attended Charoensat School.

Migration can be another hurdle to receiving a free education. Schooling is tuition free for those students going to school in the district in which they have proof of "house registration" (*thabian ban*). If a family is unable to produce such proof, they must pay tuition to even attend government school. This was the case for at least one novice at Charoensat School. His family had moved from Khonkaen in northeastern Thailand to Namsai in hopes that the parents would find sustainable employment somewhere in Chiang Mai. They were still technically registered in Khonkaen, though, and therefore had to pay tuition for their children to attend school. The onerous cost of this tuition was one of the main reasons this novice had ordained to study at Charoensat School.[7]

While there were many social and economic factors that encouraged boys to ordain to complete their education, the concerns Phra Mai and others expressed about the number of monastics and declining status of monastic education bears out in data produced by the government's National Office of Buddhism and Ministry of Education. Between 2010 and 2014, the number of novices across Chiang Mai declined (Table 2.2). While the trend for monks is not so straightfor-

7. An alternative to ordaining is "expanded opportunity schools" (*rongrian khayai okat*), which provide primary and lower secondary education to students—both male and female—who are unable to afford other schools. These schools often work with orphanages, Christian missionaries, and NGOs that provide room and board at reduced prices or for free to students who attend such schools.

ward, I am primarily interested in the number of novices here since that number represents those monastics less than 20 years old and, therefore, those most likely going to school at temples.

Table 2.2: Monastic population across Chiang Mai province, 2010–2014

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Monks*	6,540	5,630	6,250	6,698	6,373
Novices	6,607	6,248	6,222	5,922	5,610

* Includes both Mahanikai and Thammayut sects.

SOURCE: Thailand's National Office of Buddhism, จำนวนพระภิกษุ – สามเณรทั่วประเทศ, http://www.onab.go.th/ (last accessed April 19, 2017)

The reduction in the numbers of novices in Chiang Mai seems to also be reflected in broader national shifts in temple school attendance. There has been a precipitous decline in the number of students, particularly lower secondary education students, at temple schools. Between 2010 and 2014, there was a 10.6% decrease in the number of monastic students across the country (see Table 2.3). This may be in part, though, because of the general population becoming older: the younger generations are smaller, so there are fewer students over all (see Table 2.1 and Table 2.4). However, it seems that the number of monastic students may be decreasing more quickly than the broader student population (a 10.6% decrease among monastic students compared to 8.8% among general students), giving some empirical justification for people's perception of a declining number of monastics and fewer boys receiving their education at temple schools.

Table 2.3: Number of secondary education students at temple schools across Thailand, 2010–2014

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Lower secondary students	41,487	39,511	37,423	36,223	34,882

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Upper secondary students	14,622	13,970	14,603	15,224	15,303
Total students	56,109	53,481	52,026	51,447	50,185
Change from previous year	–	−4.7%	−2.7%	−1.1%	−2.4%

SOURCE: Thailand's National Office of Buddhism, ข้อมูลพื้นฐานทางพระพุทธศาสนาตั้งแต่ปี พ.ศ. 2548–2559, http://www.onab.go.th/ (last accessed April 19, 2017)

Table 2.4: Number of secondary education students across Thailand, 2010–2014

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Lower secondary students	2,802,213	2,662,270	2,494,827	2,391,390	2,354,395
Upper secondary students*	2,070,566	2,109,873	2,136,783	2,144,118	2,090,165
Total students	4,872,779	4,772,143	4,631,610	4,535,508	4,444,560
Change from previous year	–	−2.1%	−2.9%	−2.1%	−2.0%

* Upper secondary students (*mathayom plai*) includes students receiving their Diploma in Vocational Studies (*prakatsaniyabat wicha chip*).

SOURCE: Thailand's Ministry of Education, ข้อมูลสถิติ, http://www.mis.moe.go.th/statistic (last accessed April 19, 2017)

Charoensat School reflected this shift in the number of novices (Table 2.5). The upswing in numbers during my last year of fieldwork (the 2013–2014 academic year) was in large part because of a huge increase (56%) in the number of *mathayom* one students between 2012 and 2013. These new novices came mainly because of a strong push by many monks who were teachers at—and former students of—Charoensat School to recruit more boys from their home villages to come ordain and study as novices. This campaign coincided with the move of the school from Wat

Namsai to Wat Ton Pai.

Table 2.5: Number of students at Charoensat School, 2009–2013

Mathayom Level	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1	31	30	27	25	39
2	34	29	32	17	24
3	24	26	24	20	18
4	14	18	15	9	12
5	14	6	13	11	10
6	4	11	5	12	8
Total	121	120	116	94	111

The overlap of the school's move to another temple and the push for more novices was not mere coincidence. Both were part of a strategy by Phra Mai and other monks to reinvent Charoensat School and what monastic education was all about. Larger demographic, social, and economic shifts outlined in the tables above and that many saw threatening the institutional prestige of monastic education motivated this change in temple schools. The perceived shift from temples' strictly educational role to familial hopes that monasticism would correct boys' and young men's problems with attachments or underdeveloped morality also motivated this move in temples.

2.3.2 Two Potential Organizing Models for Temples

The decline in the number of novices because of other educational opportunities available led the monks and teachers of Charoensat School to reconsider what its purpose was. In addition, the increasing number of boys ordaining to address behavioral problems made the abbot of Wat Namsai doubtful about keeping the school at that temple. He worried that the increasing number of tourists to the temple may lead to incidences of lay Buddhists seeing misbehaving monastics, which would jeopardize the standing of not just Wat Namsai but the Sangha more broadly. The

abbot of Wat Namsai had also opened Charoensat School primarily as a place for Pali language learning. However, the majority of novices ordained at Wat Namsai to get a general education or a Buddhist moral education, not necessarily training in ancient languages. During my fieldwork, these tensions around the school and temple going in different directions came to a head as the following vignette shows.

Phra Mai and I were walking around the grounds of Wat Namsai in the evening as the day's heat finally began to dissipate. Joining us was Panit, a 14-year-old novice who had once lived at Wat Namsai but had recently moved to a different temple. "I heard Phra Yaa was being kicked out," Panit told Phra Mai. Phra Yaa was the principal of Charoensat School who had lived most of his monastic life at Wat Namsai. There had been rumors circulating among novices and teachers of Charoensat that their principal would be leaving and possibly taking the school with him.

"Where did you hear that?" Phra Mai asked Panit. He would not give Phra Mai the name of the specific novice from whom he heard the rumor, but said there was a private Facebook group of the Charoensat novices where they discussed things going on at the school among themselves.[8] A few of the novices in the group had said the abbot of Wat Namsai was going to make Phra Yaa leave the temple (but not leave monasticism). Not giving a direct answer, Phra Mai merely responded that it would be up to the abbot of Wat Namsai to decide to kick out Phra Yaa if he felt it was necessary.

Phra Mai asked me what I thought about the possibility of the school moving. I said I thought it would be good because "the teachers would have more space to develop the school in the direction they wanted." When I returned the same question to Phra Mai, he agreed. He felt the abbot of Wat Namsai wanted to move the temple from being a place of education to a place of tourism. For him, this was antithetical to the goals of the school, which had been at the temple

8. While it is beyond the scope of the current chapter, we can begin to see here the discrepancy between the ideals of novices' monastic role and their actual lives. Many who worried about their sons attachment to computers and video games also presumed that monastics abstain from things like Facebook and other social media. In actuality, though, most of the monks and novices in and around Namsai use smartphones, Facebook, and messaging apps like Line to stay in touch with one another and with lay supporters. Since some laity would not approve of such flagrant usage of technology, though, many monastics used such technologies discreetly to give the appearance of strictly abiding by laity's expectations. I look at this discrepancy in more detail in Chapter 4.

for about 13 years at that point. It was probably "time for it to move elsewhere," he said.

And, indeed, the move did come to pass. The abbot of Wat Namsai not only dismissed Phra Yaa from Wat Namsai. A few weeks after this conversation among myself, Phra Mai, and Panit, Phra Mai received a phone call from the abbot. He told Phra Mai he did not want to see him "step inside *his* temple again." While Phra Mai felt it was inappropriate for the abbot to refer to Wat Namsai as "his"—temples belong to all Buddhists, not to abbots, Phra Mai insisted—he complied with the request without protest. Phra Udom, a monk a couple years younger than Phra Mai who had ordained at Wat Namsai in the same cohort as Phra Mai, was also dismissed from Wat Namsai.

What led up to this splintering of the Wat Namsai monks was differing visions the two sides had for the school. The abbot of Wat Namsai had been telling the monks and teachers of the school for years that he wanted the school to go somewhere else. The abbot was still interested in keeping the Pali language school, which is what Charoensat School had started out as 13 years prior. However, he did not want the general education school there.

The reasons for why he wanted the general education part of Charoensat School to move elsewhere were never entirely clear; he did not tell me or any of the monks and teachers at the school his exact reasons.[9] However, from what I and informants could gather, it seems the abbot was concerned about the image of Wat Namsai. The temple had many famous features such as a gold-leafed stupa holding a relic of the Buddha, a giant Buddha statue, and nationally renowned murals. The abbot was also well-known among Bangkok elite. As such, the temple attracted a number of tourists from around the country and around the world. The temple also had a number of additional attractions in the works such as the construction of another large Buddha statue they had begun fundraising for.[10]

9. Such prevarication was common during fieldwork and is common in Thailand. It is more common to "speak indirectly" (*phut omkhom*) than it is to "speak directly" (*phut trong-trong*). The former is typically the unmarked way of speaking, as most will preface a bold, perhaps controversial statement with something like, "If I may speak directly. . . ."

10. This new statue became a point of contention in the area. The statue was to be built on a hill right next to the hill Wat Namsai was built on. The building site's location would put the new statue at a level higher than Wat Namsai's golden stupa. The stupa contained a relic of the Buddha. According to many northern Thai Buddhists,

Charoensat School was right in the middle of the temple compound. Any disheveled-looking novices whose robes were untidied after a day's worth of school or the young, newly ordained novice who decided to quickly run somewhere in plain sight of tourists (both of which could be met with looks of disapproval by laity) were points of concern for the abbot. He was worried those boys who came to ordain primarily for a general education would not act appropriately monastic, which might give people a negative impression of Wat Namsai and cause it to lose its status as a temple worthy of being visited. The abbot wanted to make sure the novices who were there completely fit the role outlined by lay expectations, which had been shaped by the state for centuries.

The three ousted monks had a different vision for the school and the novices who attended. They all came from poor, remote areas and were ethnic minorities: Phra Mai from a Karen village in the district of Om Goi, Phra Yaa from a Shan village around the district of Wiang Haeng near Burma, and Phra Udom from a Karen village in Tak province. While all three had later become very committed to their Pali education—all having received the title of *maha* by passing at or above level three in their Pali exams—as well as meditation, they originally came to Charoensat School merely to finish their secondary and post-secondary education. They wanted to extend this opportunity to the boys from their home villages. While not all the boys may have taken an interest in Pali or meditation to the extent the three of them had, the general education was just as important. They saw it as a way to help their home villages.

Embedded within this emphasis on general education was a slightly different emphasis on how novices should enact their monastic role. These monks and the lay teachers of Charoensat School wanted to move, in part, because the novices would be more removed from the frequent comings-and-goings of lay tourists at Wat Namsai. At a different temple, the novices would not have to be as concerned about their appearance and whether they were looking the part the lay

a Buddha relic is most sacred. Therefore, when looking out at a temple, the highest point that catches one's eyes should be the stupa. The new statue, which was to be higher, went against that notion. Many worried the statue would attract people's attention before the stupa. Some monks used this as an example for why they thought the abbot had grown too focused on tourism and the temple making money. He was literally putting wealth above a relic of the Buddha.

visitors expected of them. This is not to say they thought it was okay for novices to look sloppy in their robes or that the novices did not need to be mindful of how quickly they were moving. Rather, it was that they did not want the emphasis on making the temple attractive to tourists by fitting perfectly the monastic role to be a hindrance to the novices' education. This sentiment led the monks and lay teachers to seek out another potential location for the school.

With no home temple, Phra Mai and Phra Yaa moved to Wat Ton Pai to begin constructing the new school. Not all the novices the three monks had recruited that year would be able to stay at Wat Ton Pai because there were not enough rooms. So, Phra Udom moved to Wat Doi Thong, an even smaller temple constructed in a wooded area a few kilometers away from Wat Ton Pai. It had been constructed in the 1960s at the request of local villagers who had moved to the area from all regions of Thailand to work at the government-run dam. Wat Doi Thong, though, had become nearly empty in recent years as the previous abbot moved to the United States to help with the establishment of a temple in the Los Angeles area. Phra Udom, then, went to take up the vacancy and re-establish Wat Doi Thong as a temple for novice students of Charoensat School. These temples—Wat Ton Pai and Wat Doi Thong—with less tourists and less demands for novices to perform their monastic role according to such tourists' expectations allowed the novices to focus more on their general education. At least, that is what the monks and teachers of the school hoped for in their move.

2.4 Conclusion: Charoensat School's Move as a Refraction of the Thai Sangha

The move of Charoensat School from Wat Namsai to Wat Ton Pai and the monks' visions of what the purpose of novice ordination and temples served are heavily informed by the long history of monastic education in Thailand. Since their founding nearly half a millennium ago, the two temples have been intertwined in their role. Yet the two temples represent two aspects of Buddhist monasticism that have been developing in Thailand and came to a head in how the two

temples saw their role in monasticism's future. On one side has been temples as sites of education, including general education like reading, math, and science. Growing out of the history of monasticism being a tool of nation-building in which temples, under the direction of the state, served to develop the nation by developing the education of its populace. On the other side has been temples as sites of tourism and the display of ascetic idealism. Stemming from the history of reforming monasticism so that monks and novices lived by the ideals of monastic comportment, temples like Wat Namsai draw lay people to come see the splendor of Buddhism. This splendor is evident not only in the impressive statues and buildings but also in the monastics performing their role as moral and religious exemplars. To be these examples, the monastics must conform their behavior and appearance to match what the lay visitors expect lest the laity decide not to financially support the temple.

What I have tried to show in this chapter is that the long history of monastic education and its relation to the state has produced many different ideas of what boys ordaining as novices is all about. The overarching theme is largely the moral development of youth, particularly boys. The moral child is one who knows his or her duties and social role, performing it with ease. While many different contexts provide this education from the home to school, the temple, its apparent separation from much of lay life, and the state-mandated adherence to the ascetic ideals of monasticism make monastic education a heightened environment for the development of this Thai Buddhist morality. How novices are taught to adjust to their roles differs between temples as Wat Namsai and Wat Ton Pai demonstrate. The former sought a more rigorous adjustment that the abbot did not feel could be accomplished by boys who came to ordain primarily for a general education. The latter, however, sought to be more accommodating, providing a more secluded environment where novices could largely focus on their general education—even though their monastic duties still trumped their educational duties—without worrying too much about their appearance to visiting laity.

These varying approaches to novices' monastic education demonstrates that state control over temples and monastic education is not clear cut. Individual temples must figure out among

themselves how they are going to approach monasticism and to what degree they are going to follow state-sanctioned ideals of monastic comportment. It is this process of negotiating and figuring out how novices adjust and to what ideals they are adjusting that we now turn to.

CHAPTER 3

"THEY WILL BE LIKE DIAMONDS": NOVICES ADJUSTING TO THE MONASTIC PERFORMANCE OF BEING *RIAPROI*

Every evening around four thirty when school is nearly over for the day, the novices at Charoensat School, like most students across Thailand, go to "line up" (*khao thaeo*) for evening announcements. At this time, the novices also do their evening chanting and ensure that the necessary chores have been done for the day. Finally, on some days, the oldest novices and lay teachers inspect how the younger novices are wearing their robes (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Evening lineup with younger novices fixing their robes while older novices inspect

One evening as the call for the evening line up spread throughout the school,[1] I saw a 13-year-old novice having an animated conversation with one of the lay teachers. I watched from

1. There was a bell system at Charoensat School. However, the timing of the bells and the actual time of school events were often not in sync. School would start later than expected, classes would run shorter or longer, and a multitude of unexpected events and activities would cause the day's schedule to shift. So, a more flexible way of delineating the day's schedule was used: word of mouth. For instance, at the end of the day, when a teacher or older

several yards away as the teacher pointed to the novice's robes and said something. (I was too far away to hear.) The novice didn't respond verbally but just rolled his eyes and walked off. The next day when I had a chance to ask the novice what had happened, he said the teacher had been chastising him for wearing his robes too long. His robes draped down over his ankles, while most monks and novices wear their robes to the middle of their calves or a bit longer.

In informal interactions like this between the novice and teacher and in more formal inspections of novices' robes during evening line up, teachers were not just concerned about the length of the robes. Teachers were also checking to make sure the novices wore other parts of the robes correctly, too. I asked a lay teacher about the evening line up and why they were so particular about the novices' robes being worn "correctly." She explained that the abbot of Wat Namsai, which housed Charoensat School, told the teachers they needed to be more strict in how the novices were wearing their robes.[2] As discussed in the previous chapter, the temple was a popular tourist destination among Thais. A popular form of tourism in Thailand involves traveling to different well-known temples throughout the country to make offerings. Being a popular destination for Thai tourists from throughout the country meant that the novices would interact with all kinds of laity who had different ideas about what novices should be like. Also being a school for novices meant the lay visitors would frequently see the novices going about their daily schedules of study and work. How the novices looked was a part of the temple's overall aesthetic and so had an influence on how visitors judged the temple.

The abbot had heard complaints from lay visitors about the novices not looking *riaproi*, or orderly. He told the teachers the novices needed to do a better job of making sure their robes were neat and that they were tying their belts at the proper place. The belt, or *rat ok*, is an elastic piece of cloth about a foot wide and several feet long. As the word *ok* (chest) in its name implies, monastics wrap and tie it around their chests. It has a tendency, though, to slowly slip down a

novice determined it was time to line up, he would tell those around him to "*khao thaeo*." A series of "*khao thaeo*!"s echoed across the school as students who had heard the call to line up would tell other students they encountered to *khao thaeo*.

2. This was before the school moved as discussed in Chapter 2.

monk's or novice's torso the longer he wears it, especially if it's a young, energetic novice who is playing around and moving a lot throughout the day. The chest belt often becomes a waist belt, which many see as an incorrect way of wearing it. Laity often see a novice or monk who has his *rat ok* down around his waist as being sloppy. The abbot worried about this sloppiness. Hence, he told the teachers that the novices needed to be *riaproi*, orderly, in how they looked.

In this chapter I explore what the orderliness of being *riaproi* means, how novices learn to embody it, and what it says about the monastic self's place in Thai society. Being a key marker of one's ability to adjust to monastic life, the meaning of *riaproi* comportment helps us better understand how monasticism socializes boys and young men. Monastics place a great deal of importance on appearing *riaproi*. One's ability to appear in such a way ultimately allows young monastics to adjust not only themselves but also the rules of comportment that shape them. (This will be the focus of the next chapter.) Here, I trace how novices learn to be *riaproi* through the early stages of novicehood prior to becoming students at Charoensat School, when boys "adjust themselves" (*prab tua*) to monasticism.

Learning to adjust oneself often occurs during popular "summer novice ordination programs" (*khrongkan buat sammanen phak rueduron*) held across Thailand during the weeks of summer break from school. Since they are similar to summer camps in the United States, I will refer to such programs as "novice summer camps." For the vast majority of boys (usually around ages 10–17) who participate in such camps, these few weeks will be their only exposure to temporary monasticism. They will leave the camp thinking that how they spend that time of asceticism is how monks and novices who ordain for years or lifetimes always conduct themselves. That is, they will learn the ideal comportment expected of monastics.

In many ways, then, such programs work to instill particular "cultural schemas" about the importance of being *riaproi* in Thai society. As Naomi Quinn (2005b) notes about cultural schemas, consistent reinforcement is vital for children and youth to internalize them (see also Strauss and Quinn 1997). Novice summer camps are largely organized to provide consistent reinforcement for novices on the ideals of monastic comportment. As part of this reinforcement, the camps

teach novices to adjust themselves to these ideals, including appearing *riaproi*. But what exactly are they adjusting about themselves and how is being *riaproi* indicative of this adjustment?

Scholars of Thai Buddhism have addressed this question in part. In a meditation-focused temple in northern Thailand, Joanna Cook (2010) notes, "[D]etachment is evidenced through the level of sartorial neatness exhibited by the monastic practitioner. The 'mindful awareness' (*sati*) developed in meditation is evidenced in '*riap roi*' behaviour" (p. 119). Cook demonstrates how the appearance of being *riaproi* reflects an inner state of tranquility and inner orderliness.[3] The outward presentation indexes the mental state and spiritual progression of the individual practitioner. That is, in the monastic community Cook participated in, there appears to be a desire to gauge others' and one's own level of *sati*, or mindfulness. To render the inner state of mindfulness visible, individuals cannot just say how mindful they are; they have to *show* their mindfulness through *riaproi* behavior. One's outward appearance tells others and oneself the state of his or her mind.

If we apply this understanding of being *riaproi* as indicative of one's inner state to the case above, in which the teacher criticizes the appearance of the novice's robes, it would suggest the novice was failing to cultivate *sati*, mindfulness, and that his improperly tied robes made evident his inability to adjust his internal self. However, there is something missing in this understanding of what *riaproi*-ness indicates. The abbot of the temple tells the teachers to be more strict about the novices' appearances not merely because he worries about the novices' state of mind. He is largely concerned about how lay visitors will perceive the temple and what kind of message about Buddhism they will read in the comportment of the temple's novices. So, the "sartorial neatness" of monastics does more than just show each individual monk's or novice's level of mindfulness.

I want to suggest, then, an alternative understanding of what being *riaproi* indicates to others, which circumstances like novice summer camps highlight even more. Namely, young novices are adjusting themselves to fulfill a particular social role (cf. Pagis 2015). Their orderly appearance is

3. Michal Pagis (2010) notes a similar process of embodying knowledge through mindfulness meditation at Buddhist meditation retreats held in Israel and the United States.

not necessarily indicative of their minds also being orderly or mindful but of their commitment to patiently endure performing their role as monastics for lay and other observers during their time as novices. This need not require a substantial change in one's inner self as in other monastic contexts like Cook's. This is not to suggest the two are mutually exclusive. Indeed many monastics attempt to do both, to have their actions, minds, and social commitments all line up with one another. Instead, I want to suggest that this process of "adjusting" draws on different conceptions of interiority and the ability for words and actions to reflect inner states or construct them performatively. Thus, it will also be necessary to look at "language ideology," the underlying assumptions people have about what meanings words can convey and what things words can do and enact in the world.

This duality in what being *riaproi* shows others—as a reflection of interior states of mind and as a reflection of one's commitment to performing a social role—is in large part because of the different life stages the relevant actors are in. For the adults who have largely committed much, if not all, of their remaining life to monasticism or other ascetic endeavors, as many of the monastics Cook focuses on, developing *riaproi* behaviors and bodies may indeed be a practice to develop and show orderly minds and a mindful interior self. For adolescents, who spend a few weeks, months, or years within a monastic role before seeking lay jobs, marriage, and families, the purpose of developing *riaproi* behavior and adjusting oneself is different. The difference in what being *riaproi* indicates to others also draws on different language ideologies: particular understandings of what speech—both verbalized speech and body language—can convey about individuals and is able to produce effects in the social world. For meditation-focused adult monastics, their language of *riaproi* bodily comportment can convey an internal state of mind. For education-focused adolescents, though, a similar *riaproi* comportment is more "performative," (Austin 1978; Butler 1997) effecting social unity and reinforcing laity's conceptions of how monastics should act through enacting the expected role of novicehood within the particular context of adolescent-focused programs like novice summer camps. Before delving into how adolescent novices draw on certain language ideologies to adjust to being *riaproi*, though, it is important to understand what it means

to be *riaproi* more generally in Thai society.

3.1 What It Means to Be *Riaproi*

Riaproi is difficult to translate yet an important concept associated with local understandings of what it means to be a moral person. While I have so far translated it as "orderly," *riaproi* entails ideas of politeness, neatness, and completeness. *Riap* alone is an adjective meaning smooth, flat, and even, while *roi* means to string together. *Riaproi*, then, has the connotation of making something smooth or describing something put together in a smooth and even way. Like similar classes of words in Thai, *riaproi* may function as verb, adjective, or adverb depending on the context (Haas 1964, p. xx *ff.*). For instance, when asking someone whether or not she has eaten (a very common greeting in Thai), she may respond, *riaproi laeo*, meaning she has eaten already and is full.[4] It can also be used as an adjective to describe someone as in: Dek_1 ni_2 $riaproi_3$ mak_4 ($This_2$ $child_1$ [is] $very_4$ $polite_3$). As I am mostly discussing *riaproi* in the context of people's dress and behavior, I will treat it as an adjective. Unless otherwise noted, I will refer to "being *riaproi*" or "*riaproi*-ness" rather than using it as a verb.

Being *riaproi* has a very strong positive valence. As the anthropologist Niels Mulder (2000) describes: "Thailand is a society of . . . people who appreciate the predictability and quietness—the security—of a well-ordered (*riaproi*) social life" (p. 49). This positive valence means it is a characteristic that parents and teachers encourage in children from an early age. Because of its association with moral goodness, laity particularly expect monastics—the living exemplars of Buddhist morality—to act *riaproi*. I often posed the question, "What is a good monk or novice like?" to friends and informants. Nearly all would describe a "good" monastic as one who is *riaproi* and clean (*sa-at*)—both clean in appearance and in helping keep the temple clean. Goodness and *riaproi*-ness are strongly intertwined.

Being *riaproi* has an aesthetic quality; it is about looking a certain way and conjuring a particular feeling about that look. To be *riaproi* is to look neat and orderly. Many professions in

4. The word *laeo* after a verb indicates past tense and emphasizes completion.

Thailand have some kind of uniform. Government schools have uniforms for certain days (e.g., the standard uniform, sports attire, and scouting uniform; see Figure 3.2). As civil servants, teachers have similarly styled uniforms they must wear. Making sure one wears the right uniform on the right day, keeping clothing clean, and making sure one has tucked in his or her shirt neatly; these are all parts of being *riaproi*. As mentioned above, it can also have the meaning of being complete. When purchasing an item, a cashier may say *riaproi* to indicate the transaction is all complete and the customer may go on his or her way. As such, it invokes a feeling of satisfactory completeness. Not to be *riaproi* has a feeling of not being quite right, not finished, and—as Mulder states—not well-ordered.

Figure 3.2: Students in school uniforms at a government school

The appearance of an environment and persons associated with it can have a tremendous impact on how individuals think and feel about that place. It is for this reason the abbot wanted the teachers of Charoensat School to pay closer attention to how the novices were wearing their robes. Novices with a non-*riaproi* appearance could give the temple's environment an unappealing appearance, too, and negatively affect visitors' feelings. The extra emphasis on monastics

being *riaproi* and conjuring positive emotions for visitors means novices must learn how to be *riaproi* to a greater degree than they would at home or school as a lay person.

3.2 How Novices Learn to Be *Riaproi*

A good deal of training is required to get young novices to embody this *riaproi* aesthetic, and monks often expressed difficulty in getting novices to fit this aesthetic. As one monk put it, "It's difficult looking after the novices. . . . We tell them that they must remember this or that breaks the rules [*rabiap*]. . . . If they're not following those rules, we have to discipline because we need to live together." During the summer break from school, in the hottest months of April and May, temples across the country host novice summer camps. These programs serve two main purposes: First, they provide an opportunity for young boys to briefly experience monasticism. Second, they prepare the boys who are going to stay on as novices to study at schools like Charoensat how to be novices for the next several years. They spend these weeks of the program memorizing chants, learning to tie their own robes, how to live together relatively peacefully, and some of the basic rules of being a monastic. Most of the novices who go to school at Charoensat School ordained in such programs. After the four weeks of the program, most of the novices (about 75%) return to lay life and their lay schools.

In April 2013, I followed the novices who ordained for such a program in the district of Namsai. On the warm and sunny day of April 6, a little over 100 boys filled one of Wat Namsai's large meeting halls, or *sala*. In the presence of their parents—who also offered robes and alms bowls to their sons—and other participants, the abbot of Wat Namsai had the ordainees recite after him the 10 precepts of being a novice. With this and their robes and bowl having been received from their parent or sponsor, they were now novices.

While many came from Namsai district itself, there was also a large presence of boys from other districts. Some came from the nearby city of Chiang Mai, and some came from the city of Chiang Rai further away. There were some who came from small Karen villages in Om Goi district or the province of Tak. In this way, the camp reflected the makeup of Charoensat School

as discussed in Chapter 1. While for some their home villages had similar summer programs, they came to ordain at Namsai like their brothers, uncles, or cousins who were now monks in Namsai district had done.[5] In the weeks leading up to this program, monks such as Phra Mai and Phra Udom, who were from these more remote villages, went back to their home villages to invite boys to come ordain at Namsai and complete their education. Others had come from Shan villages in Wiang Haeng near the Burmese border. Like their Om Goi peers, they had come following older relatives or friends of relatives. One novice even traveled from Laos to take part in the summer program and remain at Wat Namsai.[6]

Having come from different areas, the newly ordained novices began to learn how to live together the next several weeks with "unity" (*khwam samakkhi*). Such unity is a way of living together that is smooth and orderly. In other words, learning to be *riaproi* is an important mechanism for novices' socialization into greater unity regardless of their ethnic or socioeconomic background. To this end, the daily lives of the newly ordained novices were structured around learning the *riaproi* ideals of monasticism that would allow monks and novices to live together harmoniously. As they often interacted with laity over the course of the camp, too, it was also a way to foster unity between the monastic and lay communities with both learning the ideals of monastic *riaproi*-ness. To see how monks taught these ideals to novices, let us turn to what a typical day at the camp was like.

3.2.1 A Day at a Novice Summer Camp

A few days into Namsai's camp as the novices took their afternoon break to escape the summer heat, I also escaped the hot sun under a blue tarp that had been propped up on several metal poles to create a makeshift shelter. I sat alone for a while bathed in the soft blue light from the tarp

5. Students at Charoensat School who came from other areas sometimes ordained at novice summer camps in their home village and then moved to Namsai after the camp to attend school.

6. With the upcoming opening of ASEAN, many abbots expressed an interest in establishing or strengthening networks among Burmese, Thai, Lao, and Cambodian temples. The movement of novices between these countries was part of this plan. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the impact of ASEAN on networks of monastic communities across borders would likely be a fruitful area of future research.

and the scent of sun-heated plastic until one of the monk leaders, one of the *phra witthayakon*, joined me. The lanky monk in his 50s pulled up a chair next to mine. Over the previous few days, I had seen him several times advising and directing the novices, at times affectionately holding a novice's arm or hand, and at other times scolding a novice for not paying attention to a lesson or directions.

"Are you going to be helping teach or looking after the novices everyday?" I asked.

"I'm here every day," he answered with a wide grin, showing his teeth, a few of which were missing. He gave me an update on the novices' ability to tie their own robes without the monks' assistance: "They can fold the robes OK, but when they need to wrap them they have to ask for help; it [the robe] is not tight." That the robes weren't being tied tight enough indicated the novices were still not fully *riaproi* in their monasticism. They were still very much in the process of learning how to compose their appearance. The monk went on to explain what the novices' day usually looked like in order to demonstrate how they were disciplining and teaching the novices to become *riaproi*.

The bell waking up the novices rang at half past four in the morning. After a quick splash of water on their faces, they got their robes on for the morning chanting. One or two of the monks led the chanting with the chants projected on a large screen at the front of the chanting hall (Figure 3.3). The novices sat in straight lines as they chanted, although the early hour led some to doze off for a little more sleep. Such actions led to a nearby novice gently prodding the sleeper, who quickly awoke and straightened his body. This dozing and prodding would often happen several times over the course of chanting until the sleepy novice had fully awaken. It was not just a nudging to wake up, though, but a reminder that at the current moment they were all to be chanting in unison. It was a reminder to act as a monastic should: sitting up straight and *riaproi* and chanting along with the other monastics present. As the temple was often in the middle of a village and a loudspeaker amplified the novices' chanting, novices performed their chanting in unison for the laity to hear—even if they were not present at the temple to see. As such, putting on a good show was important.

Figure 3.3: Novices during morning chanting and trying to stay awake

Figure 3.4: Novices developing unity and *riaproi*-ness at breakfast

Morning chanting was followed by a small breakfast of usually rice porridge (*khao tom* or *cok*) at six o'clock. Like chanting, novices ate breakfast together and in neat, *riaproi* rows (Figure 3.4). They then went out on alms rounds, or *binthabat*. As there were over 100 novices, they broke up into five or six groups and went to different neighborhoods in the area so as not to overwhelm one village in particular. The lay villagers filled the novices' steel begging bowls with food: rice, small bags of prepared curries, boxes of milk, cartons of soy milk, and lots of *kanom*, the Thai word for all kinds of treats—chips, candy, cookies, dried seaweed, and all things sweet and savory to snack on—along with bottles of water. The monks steered the novices as they collected alms, making sure they did so properly (Figure 3.5). After receiving the laity's offerings, the novices chanted a blessing for their lay supporters. As the laity sat or crouched on the ground, the novices stood in front of them in straight lines (Figure 3.6). The performance demonstrated to the laity that the novices were learning and becoming appropriately *riaproi*.

Figure 3.5: Novices on *binthabat* with a monk guiding them on where and how to walk

When they returned to the temple around eight o'clock, they had about 45 minutes to relax

Figure 3.6: Novices giving a blessing to lay supporters

and enjoy some of the food they collected that morning. At eight forty five, the bell rang for the novices to assemble for their morning classes.

Until eleven o'clock, they studied. For the first several days this studying mostly consisted of memorizing chants, particularly the chants used when blessing their lay donors and the chants they said before a meal. Being able to recite chants without any aid such as a book is a prized skill for monastics as they think laity prefer monks and novices who are able to recite chants from memory. It was an index of a monastic's studiousness.[7] Being able to recite without any aid created a more *riaproi* appearance for the lay audience.

To learn these chants, a monk gave the novices a printout of a chant. Breaking up into groups of about ten, they spent the next couple hours saying the chants stanza by stanza. At the beginning they read off the paper, then while covering part of the chant with one hand, and then by

7. The distaste for monks using chanting guides was particularly pronounced at special rituals like funerals and life-prolonging ceremonies (*suep chata*). So much so that newly ordained monks who had not yet memorized chants were instructed to just mouth the chants, pretending as though they knew the chant. At funerals, though, some chants were surreptitiously printed and concealed by taping them to the back of the fan (*phat yot* or, more generally, *phat*) that a monk placed in front of him while chanting.

giving the paper to a friend and trying to recall it by rote. At times, the monks stepped in to help or give little mnemonics for remembering certain stanzas or the order of the stanzas. After much practice alone and with peers, the novices were called one-by-one to recite it from memory for one of the monks.

At eleven o'clock they broke for lunch. Generally lay people who lived near the temple where the novices were staying (the novices moved every few days to a different temple in the district) organized the lunch. After eating, there was a short period of free time for the novices. Novices sometimes spent such time napping. Other times the novices would sit around and talk among themselves and maybe some lay supporters, too, who had come to offer the lunch. At times, the novices would try playing. Such activity was tolerated to a limit by the monks and older novices in charge. If the novices got too loud or began running around, the leaders would tell them to stop. If they continued, a monk would sometimes take out a long bamboo switch to hit the offending novice or novices on the legs or buttocks. They returned to their studies at around two in the afternoon. In later weeks, after they finished memorizing chants, they took lessons on the history of Buddhism, further details on the monastic rules in the Vinaya, and particular Thai and northern Thai religious ceremonies and festivities.

Many of these lessons touched on the importance of monastic *riaproi*-ness. For instance, one afternoon the lesson was on how novices should eat (Figure 3.7). The monks taught them that they should not put large portions of food in their mouths so their cheeks puff out. And they should not eat so that grains of rice fall back into their bowl. That is, they should train themselves to eat in a *riaproi* manner during their time as novices.

To mark the transition from afternoon studies to evening activities, the novices broke from studying at around four thirty to bathe. The timing always had to be flexible. Many of the temples where they stayed did not have an adequate water supply for 100 novices to bathe at the same time. So, they had to wait for the local fire truck to come and provide enough bathing water to meet demand. When I asked the leading monk why they all had to bathe at the same time, he explained it was important for them to do everything together: study, eat, sleep, and bathe. It would help

Figure 3.7: Afternoon class on the "proper" way to eat led by an older novice

them develop unity, he said. At six o'clock, they all gathered together usually outside (weather permitting) for their evening "interview" (*samphat*). A couple of the novices were selected by the monks to come up in front of the other novices and, as the monk explained, "chat together so one of the novices can talk about his life before ordaining—who recommended they ordain, what their family was like. Some speak just a little, others a long time. We talk about things that are going on in their lives." This was also a time when one of the monks gave a short lecture for 15 or 20 minutes about something the novices should learn during their time as novices.

They did their longest chanting session, the evening chanting (*tham wat yen*), afterwards at seven o'clock. This included five to ten minutes of meditation at the end. They took their evening drink (*nam pana*) at eight. The *nam pana* was something else the local villagers or some of the novices' parents organized. Oftentimes there were multiple sponsors so the novices were treated with many options: hot cocoa, Ovaltine, sodas, milk, or some other sweet drink. Like at meals, the novices were dismissed from chanting one line at a time. As they proceeded to the folding tables and plastic chairs that made up the makeshift canteen, they quietly took their drinks, generally

Figure 3.8: Evening "interview" of one of the novices by two monks

served by the laity making the offering. They sat and waited for all the novices to be served before chanting a blessing and having their *nam pana* together. All these actions stressed patience, unity, and being *riaproi*. Bedtime was at nine o'clock so they could get up in seven and a half hours to begin the whole routine again.

In discussing this daily schedule with the monk sitting next to me, he placed a lot of emphasis on the novices learning to tie their robes in a *riaproi* manner without the monks' help and memorizing the main daily chants. As we discussed the number of novices who would be staying on as novices for the next school year (about 25%), I wondered why they emphasized these skills when the vast majority (around 75%) of boys would be returning to lay life in just a few weeks.

"Why do these novices who ordain just for the summer camp—a few weeks—have to learn to put on their robes so they're *riaproi*? Why must they memorize giving a blessing?" I asked.

"They might ordain again," he answered, "so they must practice. It's also that they must practice so they learn how to live together. Putting on their robes, going on alms rounds—whether they use it or not—they must practice following the regulations that exist."

Here he used the word *katika* for "regulations." *Katika* has the connotation of a rule, condition, or agreed upon covenant. It is used in talking about the rules of a game or the agreed upon settlement of a legal dispute. In this sense, then, he is emphasizing that the novices should learn certain skills like tying their own robes and chanting blessings from memory not because these are skills that will be useful in later life or have some profound impact on their inner, personal lives. Instead, they should practice these skills over their four weeks of monasticism because that is the agreement they made in ordaining. These are the rules and expectations associated with being a good monastic. In learning and practicing these, boys reproduce these ideals and the expectation that monastics will follow them. Being *riaproi* is part of this agreement. They agreed to follow these practices, and that agreement in and of itself is enough reason for the novices to spend many hours a day learning to put on the monastic robes and memorize chants.

3.2.2 Adjusting to Being Riaproi *with Patience*

Learning to follow these rules was one of the main themes of the program regardless of whether or not one was going to be a novice for four weeks or many years. Throughout the day, especially during the evening "interview" of novices, the monks would ask how they were "adjusting themselves" (*prab tua*). "Can you adjust?" or "Is it difficult to adjust yourself?" were common questions to which novices would emphatically declare, "It's so difficult!" or "Um, it's not too bad" depending on how much they wanted to continue the conversation with their interlocutor. Saying it was difficult would lead to nods and laughs of agreement. Saying it was not too bad led to more questions and probings about how much patience the novice had. Having patience to endure the process of adjusting was closely tied to one's ability to adjust or not.

"If the novices have patience [*khwam otthon*], they will be like diamonds that have much beauty," said one of the monks in charge of the camp. Having patience in the face of difficulties with the monastic life is paramount in learning to adjust oneself. By having patience and being placed in the right environment, he thinks novices will be able to adjust themselves to the monastic rules. As he said, "The novices' adjusting themselves depends on the environment." The camp,

then, is meant to provide such an environment that will effect adjustment.

One way in which the importance of environment manifested itself was that the novices in the camp moved to a different temple in the district every few days. While not all summer programs operated this way, many monks in charge of Namsai's program felt it was important for the novices to experience the different environments of each temple. They could see what the abbot of each temple was like (e.g., how strict he was), what the monks and other novices who lived there were like, and what the general atmosphere of the place was. As the monk discussed above explained, "After this program, what temple will they go to live? Living at a temple where the abbot has discipline [*mi winai*] and is a bit strict [*mi khwam khrengkhrat*], those novices can develop themselves [*phatthana tua eng*] to be better little by little." A novice's ability to adjust himself to monastic life, what the monk earlier called the *katika* or monastic-lay agreement, depends upon the environment in which he places himself. With patience, they will be able to adjust themselves to fit in with their environment in an orderly (i.e., *riaproi*) manner.

Novices often spoke similarly about the difficulty in adjusting. One afternoon after their studies, I asked one of the novices, "Is this program difficult?"

"Adjusting oneself . . . it's not too difficult as soon as you can do it," he answered. "As soon as you've adjusted a bit, it becomes familiar."

A little later on, we picked up this issue again when I asked him what he enjoyed doing before he ordained:

Novice: Traveling [*pai thiao*]

Me: Where did you like to travel?

Novice: The walking street.[8]

Me: Do you still like to travel now?

Novice: Well, I want to go out but can't.

Here a monk who had joined in our conversation jumped in to expand on the novice's senti-

8. In the city of Chiang Mai on Saturday and Sunday nights a major road in the old city is closed off and turned into a large outdoor market filled with vendors of food, arts, and crafts. This is referred to as "the walking street."

ment, rhetorically asking, "Persist in the rules, right? [*Fuen kot noe*]"

"Yes," the novice agreed.

"As monks and novices know," the monk continued, "when there are prohibitions—sometimes we have them such as running—that break the Vinaya, we have to adjust." Seemingly knowing my train of thought and where I was going with my line of questions, the monk asked the novice, "Before you ordained, how did you feel? Do you feel different now?"

"Definitely different," he responded.

"Different how?" I asked.

"Before I ordained," he answered, "I was a villager; I was a child. I had freedom [*mi itsara*]. But now I live in the yellow robes[9] and am a novice. I have to stay within the boundaries. I can't go outside this frame."

"So, you feel you have less free—"

"Is it difficult adjusting yourself?" the monk interjected, cutting off my comment about the novice's sense of freedom. In this question, the monk shifted from talking about rules to adjusting to the rules, reinforcing the connection between rules and adjustment.

"It's difficult. Some things are difficult," the novice responded.

Following up, I asked, "In the time you've been a novice, do you feel you have more patience?" Here I bridged the conversation from the topic of adjustment to patience to see how the novice and monk thought about this connection.

"A lot of patience," he answered, emphasizing "a lot."

"Will you be ordained for much longer?" the monk asked him.

"I don't know yet. Who can answer that?!" he responded, indicating the future is unknown even to him, so one should not dwell on it too much. This was a common response when asking about the future. After I ordained, laity would ask me the same question: "Are you going to be a monk for long?"

9. While generally not a vibrant yellow but rather a dusty orange-brown, the monastic robes are frequently referred to colloquially as *pha lueang*, yellow robes.

"I don't know," I would say, "nothing in the future is certain except death." At my saying "nothing is certain" (*mai mi arai thi nae non*), my lay interlocutor would smile widely, nod enthusiastically, and say, "Yes, yes. Nothing is certain." In such interactions, a certain temporal orientation is fostered: People should not dwell too much on the future or grasp onto their hopes too tightly. Instead, they should focus on adjusting to their present situation and enacting their situational role in a *riaproi* manner.

Programs like the novice summer camps work to get novices to develop not only this temporal orientation but also patience. With such patience, novices are able to endure[10] the rules and requirements of monasticism. One's ability to look and act *riaproi* marks one as being able to live within the boundary of these rules. Being *riaproi* indicates one has the patience necessary to adjust oneself. To fully understand the psychological and social consequences of this process, it is important to look at what exactly is being adjusted. More to the point, the next section turns to the question of interiority: whether or not *riaproi*-ness marks some inner state of one's true self.

3.3 Demonstrating *Riaproi*-ness to Convey Interiority or Produce Actions

The notion of orderliness entailed in being *riaproi* is a major part of being a monastic. With monastics filling the role of moral exemplars and *riaproi* being a key marker of being moral, many monastics expressed concern about looking *riaproi* for lay supporters. Monastics feel laity measure their ability to be good monastics by the extent to which they embody being *riaproi*. But what exactly is being measured when one gauges the *riaproi*-ness of a monk or novice? As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, monastics' *riaproi*-ness may be a measure of their

10. The Thai word I translate as "patience," *ot thon*, is made up of *ot*, which by itself means to refrain or abstain from something, and *thon*, meaning to endure. *Ot thon*, then, has the connotation of giving something up and enduring that loss. This is very much part of the monastic endeavor as envisioned by lay and monastic communities. Perhaps this is why a favorite English idiom among the monks I knew was: If you love something, let it go. If it returns, it's yours; if not, it was never meant to be.

inner selves and the degree to which their minds are similarly smooth and orderly. A monk's or novice's *riaproi* robes and actions, then, may render knowable to others a *riaproi* interiority.

However, the way monks and novices at the summer camp talk about *riaproi*-ness is not fully accounted for by seeing it as a reflection of inner life. In the day-to-day events of the camp, monks direct novices to behave *riaproi* regardless of what their inner state may be. Their outward appearance should be orderly because, as the monks remind them, that is the rule, the agreement, of being a monastic. By being patient and doing everything in unison, they will appear *riaproi* to themselves and their lay supporters. "They will be like diamonds" as one of the monks said.

Cook (2010) similarly notes in her study of a monastic community the importance of participation in learning to be a monastic. However, the goal for her informants is generally to develop a monastic identity that conveys one's "mindfulness" (*sati*) and thus renders one an exemplar for laity. For boys who do these practices for a few weeks, though, they are not necessarily trying to develop a monastic identity. Even those who remain as novices for several years often do not have such intentions. They ordain to get a general education, and although they are willing to perform their monastic duties, they are not specifically focused on effecting substantial personal transformation. Practicing *riaproi*-ness in this context, then, serves a different purpose.

In some ways, this is similar to the observation made by Stanley Tambiah of the "conspicuous paradoxes in the communication system of Buddhist ritual" (1985, p. 23). Namely that the efficacy of Buddhist rituals in Thailand often rest on monastics chanting in Pali while the temporary monastic community performing the rituals often do not know the meaning of the Pali texts they are chanting. Even if monastics and laity may not know the meaning, it does not necessarily diminish the ritual's efficacy. As Tambiah also notes, such practices demonstrate language has other effects in the world than just conveying meaning among individuals. Different contexts can elicit different language ideologies: implicit understandings of what language or the conveying of certain concepts through speech does in the world. Language here need not be constrained to just spoken words but can include bodily actions. The ability for being *riaproi* not only indicating an inner state but also effecting certain behaviors temporarily has to do with different language

ideologies.[11] To understand what *riaproi*-ness is doing in the context of temporary novicehood, it is necessary to more fully understand the language ideologies at play here and what they mean for language's and actions' ability to convey truths about individual's inner selves.

3.3.1 Language Ideology, Truth, and Action in Northern Thailand

Here I would like to explore a particular language ideology at play in northern Thailand that questions the ability for language and actions to express truth. This notion of language, I suggest, shapes what it means for novices to "adjust themselves" to the *riaproi*-ness of monasticism.

One morning after the summer camp was long over and I had been a monk for several months, I traveled with the novices from Wat Doi Thong to Charoensat School at Wat Ton Pai. Those novices who stayed on after the summer program ended went to school there. As the novices went off to the main hall for their morning announcements and chores, I walked to the school office where the monastic teachers—and some of the lay teachers, too—did their work during the day. The office was right next to the abbot's *kuti*, his living space. As I walked by, he invited me in for tea. While he prepared the tea, we discussed the recent meditation courses he had taught and where he would be going next.

Our conversation got onto the topic of "truth" (*khwam cing*). More specifically, we discussed when the truth should be spoken or when we should hold our tongue and just let things be. "If there is no usefulness (*mai mi prayot*)," he explained, then one should hold off on speaking truth. He described how there has to be a purpose and benefit to saying the truth. If the truth would upset the parties involved or make a situation worse, then great care needed to be taken in laying out what the truth was. In certain situations, it was perhaps best to never speak directly and plainly about it. Like many of the conversations I had with the abbot of Wat Ton Pai, this was a rather philosophical one. Neither of us had explicit examples in mind. We were talking about

11. Anthropologists have long been interested in beliefs about language's ability to not only convey certain aspects of the self but also the performative aspect of language that effects change in the world. Such interest is largely rooted in Max Weber's (2002) analysis of how Protestant ethics seeped into broader Euro-American cultural ideals, including the notion that language and action can reveal the "true" inner selves of individuals. More recent scholars have looked at how theories of language reflect notions of the self, e.g., Keane (2002) and Carr (2013).

truth, its directness and usefulness, in general. It was Phra Mai who made clear in action what the abbot and I had talked about.

Shortly after this conversation with the abbot, Phra Mai received some bad news: His older brother had died. This was Phra Mai's third brother who had died from illness or accident. He came from a family of many siblings. Still, by the age of 28 to have already lost three brothers, it was a lot for Phra Mai and his family. Everyone in the family knew of the most recent death except for his mother. Phra Mai had taken it upon himself to tell her. She had lost two sons already and she suffered from minor mental health issues for which she was taking medicine. Given these circumstances, he decided not to tell his mother. For the time being, she would believe her older son was still alive. The fact of his death would be too much to bear, he reasoned; so, he devised a plan. Over the next several weeks whenever he spoke with his mother, he would remind her of all the children she still had and their good health. With such positive thoughts in mind, he would then slowly remind her that some of her children have already passed and that death was inevitable for us all. Only after she had had time to process this would he inform her that another one of her sons had died. This slow revealing of the truth seemed to have the outcome Phra Mai hoped for. When I asked Phra Mai about it several weeks later, he said his mother had slowly figured out what had happened and it was not as devastating to her as if he had just revealed the truth from the very beginning. That is, telling her in the first few days after her son's death would not have been useful; it would not be beneficial to speak so directly and plainly. Phra Mai had to wait and cultivate the proper conditions first. Only after that, would revealing the truth be beneficial (or at least non-harming). She would not suffer as much from the loss.

Such an orientation towards speaking truth emphasizes the effects words and actions have rather than language as a neutral carrier of truth. As John Locke (1823) once wrote: "To love truth, for truth's sake, is the principal part of human perfection in this world, and the seed-plot of all other virtues" (p. 271). Contrary to truth being the seed "of all other virtues," Phra Mai and the abbot of Wat Ton Pai point to different seeds of virtues: compassion and knowing one's duties. I do not bring up Locke to say the function of language in contemporary Buddhist

Thailand is the Other to Enlightenment-era Christian Europe. We will see later how both these orientations towards language coexist across temporal and spacial contexts. In many cases for the monastics in Namsai, though, truth should be revealed not for the sake of truth but because it is the compassionate and beneficial thing to do at the right moment. The skill in doing this is particularly a monastic skill. Phra Mai said he felt it was his responsibility to inform his mother because he was a monk, the only one in the family. Fulfilling his monastic duty was about creating the circumstances where she could be told compassionately, reducing the emotional and mental anguish truth may produce.

Such concerns about the communal ramifications of one's words and actions are in part a reflection of a Buddhist modernism that emerged in the late 18th–early 19th centuries in much of mainland Southeast Asia. The historian Anne Hansen (2007) writes regarding colonial Cambodia:

> For [Buddhist] modernist thinkers, this construction of reality necessitated awareness of and responsibility for one's moral conduct, choosing a road or path to follow, a way of directing the actions constantly being performed by one's mind, speech, and body. Modernist moral perception also involved a collective or communal sense of relationship. The actions of one person affected those of others, and purification thus required collective effort. (p. 11)[12]

As noted in Chapter 2, Thailand and the Thai Sangha, at this time, were similarly going through a transformation of modernization and centralization. This time was largely a period in Thailand's history where there was a royal-led push for a return to a "canonical" Buddhism and a monastic community that practiced according to foundational texts like the Vinaya of the Pali Canon (what Anne Blackburn (1999) calls the "formal canon") rather than commentaries, local texts, or embed-

12. Part of Hansen's argument is that while the Buddhist modernist movement in Cambodia did interact with similar movements in nearby places like Siam, Cambodia's movement was largely the result of inherent tensions within Cambodian Buddhism itself. I agree with Hansen's characterization of modernism. A "modernist" movement is a way of being that can emerge *sui generis* from small tensions within the local social structure. It does not have to come from anywhere. We call it "modern" because it seems to align with other emergent ways of being in different places around this same time. But that does not mean they have to be caused by one another or that there must be some mechanism that causes such "modern" ways of being to emerge in all contexts.

ded practices (what Blackburn calls the "practical canon").[13] Along with this return to texts was also a movement to more greatly regulate monastics' conduct. Such regulation focused on the moral conduct of monastics with the aim that it would positively impact the morality of laity, too, especially in peripheral regions that needed to be brought under Siamese control. Monastics needed to be more aware of their mind, speech, and body and how this conduct impacted their lay supporters. Novices at the summer camp learned this importance of monastic conduct and how it could impact laity's perceptions. In handling the situation with his mother, Phra Mai was also performing this role of a monk to teach the core tenets of Buddhism such as illness and death being inescapable.

Choosing the correct path towards responsible awareness was of concern to many of the monastics and laity whom I knew. A common phrase we chanted at the end of our morning or evening chanting was a reminder to "guard our bodies, speech, and hearts/minds" (*raksa kai waca cai*).[14] As the father of one novice explained: "Three things need to be in harmony: thoughts, speech, and action. Then there will be success." In line with ideas of *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*), our current situation is the result of our actions and ways of speaking in this life and previous lives. These actions, in turn, are the result of certain thoughts or states of mind.

Our thoughts, speech, and actions not only affect ourselves, though. They also have ramifications for others. It is therefore important to be aware of one's speech and actions not just for oneself but also for how they may affect others. Acting in a certain way or saying certain things can impact other's thoughts, which in turn can impact their speech and actions. Choosing to speak truths is a heavy burden, then, for one who is obligated to take into consideration how this speech will impact others' thoughts, speech, and actions. Similar to Hansen (2007), *kamma* is a collective effort. The thoughts and actions of one person affect those of others.

While the case of Phra Mai's mother required that he eventually reveal the truth, in other circumstances it is perhaps best to keep the truth hidden indefinitely. A few days after the con-

13. See, also, Steven Collins (1990) on the history of both written texts and other, non-written sources informing monastic practice.

14. In Thai, *cai* refers to both mind and heart as a single concept.

versation with the abbot of Wat Ton Pai, I had a similar conversation with Phra Mai in the school's office. It was just the two of us, each working on preparing lessons for the day. Phra Mai struck up a conversation, saying he was a little worried about what the purpose of my research was. Even though I had known him for over two years at that point and I had returned to do longterm fieldwork nearly a year earlier, he said he had never really asked before what my research goal was. I was excited; I had wanted to get his opinion about some recent details of my research. Conveying this sentiment to him, I pulled out my recorder and asked if I could record our conversation. He gave me the very common, non-committal response, "Never mind" (*mai pen rai*). I asked if that meant he wanted the recorder turned off. He nodded slightly with a smile; I took that to mean he did not want me to record. That is, I suspected he would feel uncomfortable if I recorded, but in the end it was my decision. Not wanting to make him feel uncomfortable, I put the recorder away.

This small interaction says a lot about knowing one's own "true" self, conveying that to others, and knowing others' minds. In asking whether or not I could record, I was trying to elicit how Phra Mai truly felt about me recording our conversation. I hoped he would confess his real feelings about the subject. His non-committal response denied me that attempt. Instead, I had to try to glean how he really felt another way. That is, I presumed there must be a core, true feeling that he simply was not telling me.

Phra Mai shifted the interaction from me trying to elicit his true feelings to me making a choice about my actions. As Foucault (1978) tells us, in much of Christian Western society the "obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points . . . it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface" (p. 60). And this surfacing is most evident in authentic speech, the idea that language is capable of conveying the real feelings of a true, bounded self.[15] It would seem, though, that Phra Mai was not under the impression he had to speak what his true feelings were. Instead, what needed to surface was what my action was

15. For more on language ideologies in which speech is presumed to be able to fully render one's interior state knowable, see Trilling (1972).

going to be: turn on the recorder or leave it off. It was how I acted in that moment, the *kamma* that directed my action, and the *kamma* that would result that were at stake, not the veracity of our feelings or words. By not giving me a verbal statement of what his thoughts or feelings about the situation were, he shifted the center of discourse from words to actions.

With the business of recording decided, he asked if what I would be writing for my research would include both positive and negative things. The latter is what had him worried. He did not express exactly what "negative things" he meant, but I had a sense. Knowing many of the monks and novices in the area for a while, I had seen many aspects of monastic life. I had encountered the "positive" aspects of monasticism: children of poorer families able to receive a better education, novices learning Buddhist history, being socialized into Buddhist morality, and learning greater patience and other "positive" skills and traits. At the same time, I had encountered the "negative" aspects: novices sneaking out of temples at night, novices contravening temple rules and lay expectations, and boys not abandoning but actually developing addictions to cigarettes or alcohol during their years of novicehood. I said I understood his worry. It is often encouraged to not acknowledge, or at least not dwell on, some of the "bad" things monks and novices may do.[16] I explained that in the United States, academics tend to value truth in and of itself, that one should report all aspects, both positive and negative, regardless of whether it is beneficial or not. We discussed how that is often not the case in northern Thailand. For many here, the truth should only be spoken if the benefit is clear and the intent and purpose for speaking it is positive. If you do not think telling the truth would have a positive benefit, then you should not say it.

Prioritizing the social effects of language over its ability to convey interior states does not mean that self-knowledge was not important in this context. In fact, monks often criticized and

16. In October 2015, a very relevant controversy arose in Thailand. A horror movie by the name of *Abat* was to be released. *Abat* is the Thai rendering of the Pali word *āpatti*, meaning a monastic offense. The movie centers on a teenage boy who ordains as a novice and commits multiple "offenses" such as romantically touching a girl. Because of these offenses, horrific things begin to happen. This film was initially censored by the junta government because of its negative depiction of monastics. After global public outcry over the censorship, the government body relented and allowed the movie to be screened but changed its title to *Apat*, a meaningless word yet visually similar to the original. Such subtle censorship is common in Thailand similar to the blurring of cigarettes, alcohol, and guns in television and film. The actual object is blurred but the context makes it obvious what it is.

disciplined novices for not "knowing themselves" (*ru tua*). In October 2013, Phra Udom decided to kick out Chan, a novice, from Wat Doi Thong. Both had been at the temple only a few months, but Phra Udom knew Chan living there would not work out even though he had expressed ambivalence about dismissing him from the temple. ("Am I doing the right thing?" he asked me several times in the weeks prior to dismissing Chan.) After several lectures, Chan still was not doing his assigned chores, he was sneaking out of the temple to smoke, and he was not wearing his robes in a *riaproi* manner. While he was not necessarily breaking any codified monastic rules, these were things seen as unbecoming for monastics. Most of all, though, Phra Udom bemoaned Chan "not knowing his responsibilities" (*mai ru khwam rapphitchop*).[17] In not knowing his responsibilities, Chan did not "know himself" (*ru tua*) and, therefore, would be unable to "adjust himself" (*prap tua*). Not being able to convey his monastic responsibilities through words or actions (e.g., not having his robes *riaproi*) led to Phra Udom dismissing Chan.

3.3.2 Disparate Ideologies Co-existing

What being *riaproi* is indicative of in Chan's case and its connection with conveying a novice's ability to adjust to his monastic responsibilities provide an interesting contrast to Cook's study of a meditation-focused temple. For her, monastics' outward appearance, their ability to act *riaproi*, revealed an inner state of orderliness. For the monastics of Wat Doi Thong and Wat Ton Pai, though, being *riaproi* orients one towards his responsibilities and the interpersonal effects of his appearance and actions. The meditation-focused temple of Cook's research both presumes the ability for and works towards a congruence between an inner state of mind and authentic speech or—in the case of acting with *riaproi*-ness—behavior. It is getting the meditation practitioner to develop an inner state of calm and orderliness that they "speak" through their body. By enacting a demeanor of *riaproi*-ness, they reveal an inner state of *riaproi*-ness.

For Phra Udom, though, Chan's failure to enact a demeanor of *riaproi*-ness does not neces-

17. Phra Udom generally said this in a mixture of northern and central Thai. In this case, he actually said "*bo hu khwam rapphitchop*." I changed *bo hu* to *mai ru* to make the connection with later terms introduced clearer.

sarily reveal Chan's inner state. Instead, it shows that Chan does not act in accordance with his responsibilities as a novice monk.[18] Phra Udom is trying to get Chan to take action in such a way as to allow him to fulfill his monastic duties better so that he may appear to be a more *riaproi* novice to lay supporters. This is similar to how Phra Mai shifted my attempts to glean his "true" feelings about my recording our conversation to my action in that moment and how it would align with my responsibilities as a researcher, a monk, and a friend. Ultimately, Phra Udom was concerned about the "unity" (*khwam samakkhi*) of Wat Doi Thong. By dismissing Chan from the temple, he hoped it would lead to better unity among the remaining monastics at Wat Doi Thong and lead Chan to a temple where he could integrate into the community better (i.e., join in their unity) and in the process be able to better perform his responsibilities.

In this way, his actions align with the novice summer camp's decision to move the novices around to different temples. By doing so, the novices could try to find the environment that worked best for them. Phra Udom's uncertainty—his occasional questioning of whether he was "doing the right thing"—in dismissing Chan was not primarily an uncertainty of whether he was understanding the truth of the situation or the veracity of Chan's words and actions. It was an uncertainty of whether his words and actions would produce a positive result like moving to a temple that provided a better environment for him. Phra Udom calling out Chan's non-*riaproi*-ness was not about referencing Chan's inner self as not being *riaproi*; it was about effecting a change in Chan's behavior—moving temples—to better adjust himself which would ultimately lead to being more *riaproi*. A negative result of Phra Udom's action would be Chan leaving monasticism and returning home.

While Cook's field site was only about 30 kilometers from Wat Doi Thong, on the other side of Chiang Mai, I suggest each site emphasizes a different understandings of what it means to

18. This is not to say one's *riaproi* behavior (or lack thereof) in such contexts reveals nothing about one's inner state. Indeed, at times Phra Udom and other monks would admonish non-*riaproi* novices with not having mindfulness (*sati*). That is, outward actions and inner states operated in a way similar to the monastery Cook looks at. Here I emphasize this counter-discourse about outward actions and inner states in order to show more clearly that there are multiple discourses concerning language, performativity, outward speech/appearance, and inner states of mind at play in contemporary Buddhist northern Thailand.

act *riaproi* and its connection with monasticism. At the temple Cook calls Wat Bonamron, there is an ideology wherein one's actions reflect their inner state. At Wat Doi Thong, however, the ideology most at work is not that actions reflect an inner state. Instead, actions reflect whether one is performing his or her responsibilities and whether those actions are creating the conditions of possibility for better social relations. To be clear, I am not suggesting these two ideologies are mutually exclusive. In fact, both may be drawn upon in either monastic context. Instead, I am suggesting that there are disparate ideologies at play within the broader context of Buddhist monasticism in northern Thailand.

Riaproi-ness's indexing of unity rather than inner mindfulness (*sati*) is similarly evident at the novice summer camp. With the camp lasting only a few weeks and being attended by boys who often did not have intentions to transform themselves, the emphasis was on getting these temporary novices to adjust to they lay supporters' expectations of what their monastic duties entailed. In order to convey this ability to adjust, displays of unity (e.g., chanting in unison or waiting till all had finished eating to go wash their dishes) were highly indicative of their level of adjustment. Novices' *riaproi* appearance further highlighted their unity, like having their robes neatly tied, and *riaproi* behavior, such as not running around or yelling loudly. They would appear "like diamonds," and, through this appearance, "they [would] be like diamonds" for others to see.

3.3.3 Reasons for Disparate Ideologies

It is not unusual that ideologies and counter-ideologies can co-exist and perpetuate one another. In this final section, I explore similar instances of ideologies and counter-ideologies in other parts of the world. By doing so, I hope to better articulate how different ideas of what monastics are demonstrating to themselves and others with their *riaproi* behavior can co-exist. In addition, this will show why one idea becomes more salient in certain situations.

3.3.3.1 Counterhegemonic Discourse about Gender in Java: A Comparative Case

Suzanne Brenner (1995) demonstrates how, in Java, a counter ideology concerning gender exists alongside a dominant ideology that is mostly articulated by Javanese elite, mostly benefits men, and has been the dominant frame of scholarly analysis. The particular ideology she explores is the dominate idea that Javanese men do not deal directly with money and finances because it would undermine their spiritual potency. Women handle the finances because they have less spiritual potency to begin with and therefore do not need to concern themselves with guarding it. Brenner argues, however, that there is an alternative idea that Javanese women handle financial matters because men are naturally unable to control their desires. Women have better self-control and are therefore best positioned to handle the family's finances. This alternative discourse had been missed by previous ethnographers, Brenner claims, because it only emerges in particular contexts such as in informal conversations between female shop owners in a market.

Similarly, there are disparate ideologies regarding behavior and interior states in Thai Buddhist monasticism. Some, such as Cook, suggest that Buddhist self practices like meditation produce certain internal states reflected in external acts. From these altered inner selves comes the ability for monastic communities to form social unity. Without self-transformation, there cannot be unity. There is an alternative discourse, though: Monastic practice compels individuals to perform actions that create and maintain social unity proximally and, more distally, may result in self-transformation. The emphasis in this alternative discourse is not to substantialy transform selves but, rather, direct monastics to act in a *riaproi* manner. The appearance of *riaproi*-ness conveys a sense of monastic unity, especially to lay visitors or tourists coming to a temple. As it is an important part of the monastic image, performing *riaproi*-ness is emphasized at novice summer camps.

These different ideologies concerning monastic inner and outer selves are not in conflict or contradict one another. Instead, they exist simultaneously and are able to be called upon depending on context. Brenner argues similarly in saying that when there is less at stake ideologically—

that is, when there is less possibility of negative repercussions—alternative ideologies may become more salient. In her case, it is in female-dominated arenas like the market. As Buddhist practice increasingly becomes tied to meditative practices of self-transformation, the dominant ideology of orderly behavior indicating an orderly mind persists. In certain situations, though, an alternative ideology of orderly behavior indicating one knows and is performing his social role becomes more salient. This is the case with young novices newly ordained who need to learn to live harmoniously with 100 other adolescent novices. Performing *riaproi*-ness also reproduces particular ideas about how monastics should act. For those novices who ordain for just a few weeks but who must perform strictly in accordance with the monastic rules, their adjustment to being *riaproi* demonstrates the ability for the monastic rules to produce unity.

3.3.3.2 The Role of the Life Course in an Ideology's Salience

What accounts for the emergence of counter ideologies? Anthropologists have often turned to modernization, globalization, Westernization, and similar "-izations" as ways to explain the intentional and unintentional reworking of local and global cultures (Appadurai 2001; Giddens 2003; Lewellen 2002), particularly in terms of hybridization or syncretism (e.g., Pieterse 2001; Stewart 1999).[19] However, in the case of alternative ideologies concerning monasticism, I wish to emphasize a different explanation: life course. In so doing, I suggest that seemingly conflicting ideologies need not be the result of something coming into an established set of uncontested beliefs and practices. As Sarah Lamb (1997) notes in her work in West Bengali, there are often multiple ideas of personhood at play in any single place and time.[20] Similarly, Nancy Eberhardt (2014a) argues that moral expectations and what it means to be a moral person vary according to one's stage in the life course. That is, the morality of a morally good child is not the same as the morality of a morally good adult, and both may be different from what it means to be a morally good elder.

19. For a more thorough overview of the hybridization and globalization literature, see Palmié (2006) and Mazzarella (2004).

20. Brenner (1995) makes a similar argument concerning multiple gender ideologies in circulation in Java.

A similar process is true when it comes to the issue of interiority and what being *riaproi* indexes. What the presumed relation between words or actions and inner states is for children or adolescents may be very different from what it is for adults (cf. Berman 2014). Particularly for younger monastics, a congruence between outward actions or speech and inward states is neither expected nor always encouraged. Several novices who remained as novices after the summer camp to get an education expressed their dislike of being novices at times and wanted to return to lay life as soon as possible. When I discussed these instances with teachers and monks, their response was often, "that's how kids [adolescents] are" (*dek [wairun] pen yang ni*). That is, I should not take what the novices said seriously. And, in fact, although many novices expressed dissatisfaction with monastic life, most stuck it out until they finished their secondary education when it was more timely to leave monasticism. If they left before finishing school, the government's compulsory education requirements would require them to continue school. Attending school outside the temple, though, would cost money, which could be burdensome on their families. At this stage in the life course, the emphasis was getting young novices to act in a way that would be beneficial for them and their families. This meant staying as novices so as not to be a financial burden on their parents and to perform their monastic duties and responsibilities. In performing their duties, they also came across to others as *riaproi*. As such, staying a novice was not only beneficial for themselves but also to lay supporters who provided the monks and novices with food and other resources. Conveying an image of *riaproi* unity is what was taught and emphasized at the novice summer camps, and it is what laity expected from "good" monastics. As the young monk at Wat Doi Thong said when we were talking about how the temple's lay supporters would react to the large number of monastics (17 in total) chanting in unison at ceremonies: "They will feel good. They'll be happy and want to support us monks." Continuing to perform ideal monastic comportment after the summer camp ended demonstrated to laity the unity and social *riaproi*-ness that can come from living within the monastic community.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored what it means to be *riapiroi* generally in Thai society and, more specifically, as a monastic. By drawing on the day-to-day practices of popular novice summer camps and how novices and monks talk about them, I have tried to show how novices learn to adjust themselves to being *riaproi*. Developing patience is key to being able to adjust to living in the monastic community and displaying unity.

In the second half of the chapter, I explored what acting *riaproi* shows to others. Contrary to the idea that acting orderly demonstrates one has an orderly mind or inner self, I have argued that getting novices to act *riaproi* is to get them to perform particular social roles. In this performative, they both reproduce what it means to be *riaproi* and social order or harmony. Whether acting *riaproi* reveals an inner truth to others or works to produce certain outcomes[21] depends on certain ideologies being activated within a particular context. In the context of mediation-focused temples, orderly behavior indicates one has also ordered his or her mind. The language of *riaproi*-ness can render some inner state of an individual knowable to others. This ability to render inner states knowable, though, is largely not what *riaproi* behavior is doing in the context of novice summer camps. There orderly behavior effects unity among the novices and positive feelings among their lay supporters. Seeing *riaproi* monastics, laity will feel they are "good" monastics who are fulfilling their responsibilities and will want to encourage and support the Sangha. While they may also hope boys will personally transform, and in this way address the "problem of Thai youth" around the issue of addictions, this is a secondary expectation.

Nonetheless, adjusting to the monastic role does help to reproduce state-sponsored ideas about the importance of making sure monastics live according to the Vinaya rules. In this way, temporary monastic programs like novice summer camps can be a way to reproduce nationalist ideas about Thai Buddhism and monasticism. Boys learn what it means to be a "good" monastic and perform it for their lay supporters, reinforcing for all the notion that a morally good monastic

21. What J. L. Austin (1978) would call a "felicitous" outcome.

community will appear *riaproi*.

Finally, I suggested that different ideologies can co-exist and be drawn upon in different contexts. Life course and the stage of life the actors are in often make certain ideologies salient over others. It is for this reason that in some contexts monastics acting *riaproi* may indicate that they also have *riaproi* minds. In other contexts, though, actions may not be referencing inner states but be attempts at producing social outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTING "THE MIDDLE": IMAGINED LAITY AND REWORKING MONASTIC IDEALS

A few weeks after I had ordained, I was walking with Chai, a 14-year-old novice at Wat Doi Thong from Tak province who had ordained as a novice a little over a year prior. We were heading back to the temple from the main road. We had gone to turn on the water pump that provided water from the canal running along the road to the temple. As we wound around the bend in the road that branched off to a path leading to the temple—and out of sight of any laity traveling on the road—Chai began to play a joke on me. Walking behind me, he put his hands on my back. He began running, pushing me forward and forcing me to run, too. "You broke the rules!" he exclaimed triumphantly, drawing on the notion that a monk running is aesthetically unpleasing, not *riaproi*, and therefore against the monastic rules as the novices would have learned at the summer camp. I contested that there was no explicit proscription against monks running. However, my objection went unheeded; the fact that a running monk does not look proper to laity was enough for him to consider it a transgression.

As we continued up the path, another novice, Big, joined in on the joke. Pretending to be me and pretending there were laity around who saw me "run," Big said emphatically, "It was necessary! It was necessary [that I run]!" In such a statement, he suggested that, if a monk has a valid reason to run, laity may not see it as a transgression of the monastic rules.

Continuing on the topic of monastic rules, Chai asked me, "How many days was it before you broke a rule?" Recalling that a few weeks prior I had covertly driven myself and Phra Udom in the school truck to a nearby temple—many laity think monks driving vehicles is against the monastic rules[1]—I told them it was about a week after ordaining that I first broke a rule. "A week!" Chai

1. Near the end of my time as a monk, there were several reports across the country in news media of monks driving vehicles. Some Thais became upset and the National Office of Buddhism issued a statement reminding monks that they were not allowed to drive under any circumstance. Many monks I knew laughed at this pronouncement. Some times it was necessary for monks to drive, they reasoned. Not driving would require laity to do more work for the temple and monastics. The monks, though, did not want to be overly burdensome on the laity, so they sometimes drove themselves.

exclaimed, "I went 30 days before breaking any rule." Big, though, explained that of course Chai had not broken any rules the first month he was a novice. "[Chai] ordained during the summer camp," Big said, "They're much stricter about following the rules during that [camp]."

How Chai and Big talk about the summer camp and their time as novices after the camp finished was common among the monks and novices in Namsai. Between the end of the summer camp and continuing their monastic careers, novices transition in how they approach monasticism. For those who ordain only during the summer camp, they leave monasticism under the impression that all monastics continue to follow the strict rules they followed and the adjusting to being *riaproi* that go along with them. However, as Chai and Big show, novices' approach to the rules shift; they begin to adjust the rules themselves and their orientation to what the rules accomplish. They make this adjustment in large part because strictly following every rule quickly becomes onerous for the novices. If they are to remain as novices to finish their education, monks realize they must be more lenient with the novices than they are during programs like the summer camp.

Buddhist communities like Namsai, in which Big and Chai live, confront a problem: How do they make long-term monasticism not so difficult that no one would ordain for more than just a few days or weeks? But at the same time: How do they make sure monastics are not so lax in their disciplines that they risk appearing to be bad monks and novices or jeopardizing the well-being of the religion and the Buddha's teachings?[2] As a lay woman who frequented Wat Doi Thong put it, "Will [the monks and novices] be able to endure the rules? . . . Too strict, they can't do it. Too lax, they can't do it." Another woman added, "We can't make things too strict. We can't make things too lax. We have to make things in the middle [*pan klang*]."

2. One of my Thai language instructors gave what was to her an extreme example of making monasticism easier: One of the main precepts is abstaining from alcohol. While both laity and monastics should abstain, many laity do drink alcohol nonetheless. Monastics, though, should definitely not drink under any circumstance. The instructor told of a small, rural temple where there was only one monk. He was a local villager who ordained later in life and everyone in the village knew him to be an alcoholic. Even as a monk, he continued to drink, and laity actually provided him with alcohol. The instructor explained that the laity accepted it because he was the only one in the village who was willing to be a monk. The village needed a monk to look after the temple, so they accepted his breaking of the precept against drinking alcohol. She said, however, that the villagers were not particularly happy with this arrangement. Yet they accepted it as necessary given the circumstances.

In this chapter, I explore this process of monks, novices, and laity constructing "the middle" (*pan klang*)[3] between being too lax and too strict. As the latter woman above noted, it is a process they—monastic and lay alike—are involved in together. Finding the middle is further complicated because neither the monastic nor the lay community talk openly with one another about exactly what the monastic rules are, how monastics approach or understand the rules, or how strictly they should be applied to novices. Instead, "the middle" is navigated within quotidian social interactions. The rules of everyday social rituals largely dictate how these interactions play out. Expectations about others' behavior and unspoken obligations of one's own social role determine how social interactions between monastics and laity proceed. As these interactions are largely shaped by the complexities of social ritual, the theories of Erving Goffman on performance, expectations, and obligations will help us make sense of how people reinforce or rework social roles through performance.

I will also show how both communities draw on this process of constructing "the middle" to construct a sense of what it means to be uniquely northern Thai, different from other regions of Thailand. Recall from Chapter 2 the continued emphasis many Thais place on regional differences in Buddhist practices and monastic communities. While the previous chapter focused on nationwide novice summer camps that largely instilled in participants a pan-Thai version of Buddhism, in this chapter we will see how longer-term monastics challenge this nationalist Buddhism by drawing on notions of a unique northern Thai Buddhism. Thus, this chapter adds to the dissertation's overall argument by looking at how social interactions between monastics and laity reformulate what it means to be a good monastic. Claims to northern Thai uniqueness sometimes aid in this reformulation, although not in all cases.

On the surface it may look as though Chai and Big begin to learn to break the rules. What the

3. In this particular incident, the woman did not specify the need to find the Buddhist concept of the "middle way" (*matchimapatipatha*; Pali: *majjhimāpatipadā*). Instead, she spoke of the middle or average. However, the two concepts of "the middle" and "middle way" are likely connected. This rendering of complex Pali concepts into colloquial understandings is similar to Julia Cassaniti's (2015b) work, which shows how philosophical concepts like "impermanence" (*anicca*) are enacted in everyday village life through more colloquial terms like "acceptance" (*tham cai*) or being "cool hearted" (*cai yen*).

novices are doing, though, is more complicated than just breaking the rules. As Big's appeal to the occasional necessity for monastics to bend the rules suggests, the novices learn how to negotiate the varying expectations laity, teachers, and monks all have of them. While the previous chapter emphasized the consistent reinforcement novice summer camps provide novices in learning the "cultural schema" (Quinn 2005b) of monastic ideals, here I emphasize the ways in which novices' experiences are inconsistent. Instead, they encounter social situations that are indeterminate and in which they must figure out on their own how best to perform their monastic role. As such, this chapter probes the limits of reproducible cultural schemas across generations, and it looks at how cultural schemas are flexible, open to change by youth.

Moreover, young monastics, when deciding how to act, often draw on an imagined laity: an idea of how they think everyday lay people, who have a cursory understanding of monasticism and the rules of the Vinaya, perceive them as novices. When Big makes a claim about it being necessary that I run, he is anticipating a lay audience who would disapprove of a monk running. Whether or not laity actually think running breaks monks' rules is beside the point. That the novices can imagine circumstances in which they must make assumptions about how laity will perceive their behavior is what is most relevant here. This imagining shapes how novices engage with the world around them. Regardless of whether or not they actually interact with laity who hold such ideas about the monastic rules, an imagined laity is a powerful figure that shapes their monastic performance. This is particularly the case the longer they stay as novices. Outside the highly regimented summer camps, the novices oftentimes have to decide on their own how best to enact their monastic role in a given situation.

While there are explicitly stated rules in the Vinaya, the portion of the Pali Canon concerned with the ascetic disciplines of monasticism,[4] there are often other ideals at play shaping how monks and novices present themselves. As noted by Buddhist studies scholars, Buddhist and moral ideals often stem from more than just what is explicitly written in the Vinaya. There are other stories and aspects of Buddhism, what Anne Blackburn (1999) calls the "practical canon,"

4. See Chapter 1 for a brief overview of the Vinaya and the difference between novices' and monks' rules.

that inform monastic discipline over the "formal canon" of the Vinaya's set of rules establishing approporiate monastic behavior. While many laity and monastics will at first point towards the Vinaya as describing exactly what monks and novices should and should not do,[5] in practice there are many other processes—such as social expectations—that determine how monastics should act or what it takes to be a "good" monk. These additional ideals can often not be pointed to explicitly in either texts or a particular exemplar of monastic behavior. That is, there is not "one or more ideal individuals from mythic antiquity" who embody all the aesthetic ideals of Buddhist monasticism that all monastic and lay Buddhists in northern Thailand look up to when judging whether or not a particular novice or monk is acting appropriately (Collins 1998, p. 57). Rather, the process of constructing monastic ideals is a "cultural-ideological project of ongoing collectivities" (p. 58). We can begin to see this project in the vignette above with Chai and Big, who were actively constructing what they thought laity expected out of them as monastics.

While the novice summer camps are about adjusting oneself to temporary asceticism, longer-term monasticism is about adjusting both oneself and the rules themselves. Being too strict about the disciplines can be detrimental to a novice's long-term monasticism. Making a monk's or novice's monastic life too onerous can cause him to prematurely leave the monastery. There are several benefits of keeping novices in the monastic community for as long as possible. For one, novices who leave before completing schooling will have to return to their parents and families who will have to bear the expenses of the boys' room, board, and education. By keeping the boys as novices, they reduce the financial burden on their families. As the father of one novice at Wat Doi Thong explained when I asked him how he felt about his son being so far away from home for several years, "I'm happy he decided to ordain. He is well taken care of here, and the monks are good. I don't have to worry about him." Similarly noted by Jeffrey Samuels (2010) in Sri Lanka,

5. For instance, as I was conducting archival research one afternoon at a university library in Chiang Mai, I struck up a conversation with the librarian. Saying that one aspect of monasticism I was interested in was the history of *kathoei* ordaining as monks and novices in northern Thailand, the librarian explained that it was clear from the Pali Canon that *kathoei* could not ordain. All I needed to do, he said, was look at the text of the Vinaya. The Buddha, he contended, explicitly stated who could and could not ordain. As we will see in Chapter 5, though, it is not entirely clear from the Pali Canon what genders could and could not ordain during the time of the Buddha. For the librarian, however, the text of the Vinaya was clear and final.

parents of novices are often concerned about the physical and emotional well-being of their sons. Seeing that their sons are well fed, cared for by good monks, and protected by the temple from social ills like drugs, parents are generally glad that their sons stay novices as long as possible.

Monks remind novices of this when they are upset and considering leaving monasticism. When the novice Big told Phra Mai he had decided to quit being a novice at the end of his second year, Phra Mai reminded him to think of his parents. He should not do anything that would make his parents "upset" (*dueat ron*). Although not explicitly stated by Phra Mai, leaving monasticism and going back to live with his family was something that could upset Big's parents. By not making the rules too burdensome, monks can help ensure novices stay as novices and do not return to their families' care, potentially being a burden on them.

Keeping boys as novices for as long as possible can also benefit Buddhism. At a practical level, having more novices means having more individuals to help build, clean, and maintain temple buildings. There are also more monastics available to perform rites and rituals in the community. On another level, maintaining a large number of novices improves the image of Buddhism in the eyes of laity. By seeing many monastics at their local temple, laity feel they are doing their part to help support and maintain Buddhism. With the Buddha himself prophesying that his teachings would eventually be lost,[6] a large monastic community and well-maintained temples give the impression that the Buddha's teachings are alive and well. The laity are maintaining this perpetuation of the teachings rather than their downfall and disappearance. By having a large monastic community, lay villagers have more opportunities to make merit and help Buddhism flourish by supporting the monastic community.

While making sure novices want to and can stay as novices by not making the monastic expectations too onerous, the laity also do not want the novices to rework or circumvent the rules and their expectations too much. Although it is important for the laity that there is a monastic community that they can support (and thereby support the religion), they do not want to

6. For more on Buddhists' perception of the Dhamma—the Buddha's teachings—being in a state of decline, see, e.g., Blackburn (2010); Braun (2013); Hansen (2007); and A. M. Turner (2014).

be supporting an immoral monastic community or one that deviates too much from what they imagine monasticism to be. This image of monasticism is reproduced in large part by programs like the novice summer camps, which promote "modern" state-sponsored ideals of monastic comportment. When discussing with lay informants what makes a monk or novice a good monastic, many would indicate he should "keep the precepts" (*raksa sin*) in addition to being *riaproi* or "clean" (*sa-at*). The precepts (*sin*; Pali: *sīla*) are the set of moral practices all Buddhists, both monastic and lay, should cultivate. A good novice, then, cannot completely ignore the rules.

4.1 Social Rules, Obligations, and Expectations

To figure out how they should act in a given situation, novices must rely on what they think their interlocutors expect of them. They also have their own sense of obligation towards performing their monastic duties well. Between these expectations and obligations, novices attempt to perform their monastic role for lay observers in such a way that will lead the laity to think well of the novices and thus the monastic community and Buddhism more broadly. To better theorize how monastic and lay communities draw on social expectations and obligations, I turn to the work of Erving Goffman, who wrote extensively on such phenomena and the way they shape social life.

In his article "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," Erving Goffman (1956) draws a distinction between obligations and expectations. According to Goffman, "Rules of conduct impinge upon the individual in two general ways: directly, as *obligations* . . . indirectly, as *expectations*" (pp. 473–474; emphasis in original). Obligations are the moral constraints that guide our own actions. Expectations, alternatively, are the moral constraints we put on others' actions. Goffman gives the example of a nurse who is obligated to care for her patient according to the prescribed treatment. At the same time, she has the expectation that the patient will cooperate with her treatment. In the case of a monk, he generally feels obligated to accept a lay person's offering. He may, then, expect the lay person to make the offer using both hands, which is a sign of respect. His obligations shape his own actions; his expectations shape how others act (or at least how he thinks they should act). In terms of lay-monastic relations, this set of obligations and

expectations works in both directions. A lay woman is obligated to avoid touching a monk, and she will expect him to speak and act politely in her presence.

Goffman notes that when this set of obligations and expectations are broadly desirable within a social context, then these rules of conduct are a right or privilege to uphold. Such is the case for monks and novices whose monastic role garners much respect and prestige. To be a monk or novice and to have the opportunity to "live within the monastic frame" (*yu nai kotrabiap khong phra*) is a great privilege boys and men have. As one of the female teachers at the novices' school told me: "You're lucky you were born a man in this life. You have the opportunity to ordain."[7] By casting monasticism as a right and a social position from which privilege and esteem is available, being able to perform the obligations and expectations of monasticism becomes desirable.

While performing monastic obligations is desirable, making these obligations too onerous can detract from this desirability. How, then, is the desirability of monasticism maintained? That is, how do social actors reproduce and maintain the desire to fulfill social roles and the privileges that come along with it when the desirability requires strict adherence to the roles' obligations and others' expectations?

One strategy is to maintain a positive affect associated with the role. Jeffrey Samuels (2010) suggests this is the case in the Sri Lankan monastic community he focuses on. By maintaining the novices' positive affect (e.g., making sure they are comfortable and relatively content in their monastic role), novices are able to act as an example and encourage other boys to ordain as novices.

In finding "the middle," though, the positive affect that may come from relaxing the rules can go too far so that obligations and expectations are no longer being met. Being too lax about the rules may make the novices feel more comfortable but it also erodes the very thing that makes monasticism a desirable social role in the first place: they are maintaining the rules of monasticism and encouraging the laity's obligation to show respect towards them as monastics.

7. The gendered aspect of this privilege to ordain is a fascinating topic but beyond the scope of the current chapter. See Chapter 5 for a more thorough investigation of monasticism and gender/sexuality. For more on women and monasticism in Thailand, see Cook (2010) and Collins and McDaniel (2010).

This is the difficulty Big and Chai were trying to work out on our way back from the water pump. In getting me to run and in asking me about how long it was before I broke a rule (note here their assumption that I had already broken a rule), Big and Chai were working out when and where they could begin to relax the rules, making their monastic lives more enjoyable or at least more tolerable. In pretending laity were around, Big was able to play with what he imagined laity's expectations of him and other monastics were. This negotiation of maintaining the obligation of monks and novices to act appropriately but also maintain a positive affect with this obligated behavior illuminates how monastics construct expectations and obligations that fit in "the middle."

To see this process of negotiation more clearly, let us first look at how older monks view the monastic rules and how the novices learn to take on this perspective of their monastic obligations. Then we will look at how much the laity are aware of this reassessing of the monastic rules and at times also alter their own expectations of how monks and novices should act. Finally, we will look at how this process of bringing expectations and obligations into concordance produces particular regional identities around how Buddhist communities resolve this issue. That is, how monastics and laity come to understand exactly what the expectations are of monks and novices is important for understanding how regional identities as northern Thai and northern Thai Buddhists arise and become inhabitable.

4.2 Relationship between Monastic and Lay Approaches to Rules

One day late in September 2013, Phra Mai was teaching the Buddhism class for the first year novices. In this class they read through the *Vinayamukh*, which is a Thai translation and compilation of the Pali Vinaya. As it was several weeks into the term and the course began with the major rules for monks, the four "heavy" rules,[8] they were now on the topic of the minor rules.

8. The four heavy rules are those rules whose consequence is most serious if broken. A monk who knowingly and intentionally commits one of these four acts is automatically no longer a monk and cannot ordain again in this lifetime: 1) Having sexual intercourse; 2) Killing a human being; 3) Stealing something of value; 4) Lying about possessing or achieving some superhuman state or skill for material gain.

Phra Mai asked the room full of around 25 young novices if they were aware that if a monk so much as went outside and broke off a blade of grass he was breaking the monastic rule against destroying plant life. The novices shook their heads, some let out a gasp of disbelief, and others shouted out, "Impossible!" thinking such strict adherence to the rules could not be done. Besides, on many occasions, they had likely seen monks cutting grass, trimming trees, or digging out bushes in order to make their temples cleaner, more beautiful, and more *riaproi*. Seeing the novices' looks of surprise, Phra Mai joked how it was good the laity did not study the Vinaya in detail. Otherwise they would be able to point out all the mistakes monks make.

Presuming the laity do not fully know or understand the rules of the Vinaya is one way in which monastics approach the rules so as not to be too strict. There are two aspects of this idea that laity do not fully know the monastic rules. First is that expressed by Phra Mai: there are so many rules for monks that it is likely the case laity—and likely many monastics—do not know every one of them. And if they did, they would likely approach each rule as though they were equivalent. When talking about precepts (*sin*), laity will often say how lay people have five, novices have 10, and monks have 227. Without specifying that a portion of those 227 can also apply to novices[9] or that those 227 are divided up into different levels, the laity often have the impression that just as they should try to equally follow each of the five lay precepts, monastics should equally approach each of their 10 or 227 precepts. The second way monastics may approach the rules differently from laity is in how they approach the goal or purpose of the rules. Monastics may approach the rules with more nuance, distinguishing between major and minor rules and how strictly one should follow each category. While some laity may also approach their expectations of monastics with similar nuance, the imagined lay person monastics think they may interact with does have a strict idea of how monastics should follow all Vinaya rules.

Whence this idea that laity have high expectations that monastics will strictly abide by every

9. Here I am referring to the Sekhiya rules, which are the 75 most minor rules of the monastic precepts. Several monks explained how novices should also practice these rules in addition to their main 10 precepts. Many of the behavioral disciplines of being a novice such as eating properly, talking quietly, or moving *riaproi* that laity expect novices to enact stem from the Sekhiya rules rather than the 10 precepts.

rule of the Vinaya especially when most of the male population in Thailand will have had some experience of monasticism? Recall from the previous chapter two main points: 1) Strict adherence to all the monastic rules is encouraged at the novice summer camps so that boys can learn to adjust themselves and develop unity; 2) The vast majority of novices at these camps (about 75%) will only experience monastic life through very short stints like the camp. Understandings of what it means to be a monastic largely stem from boys' and men's brief experiences within the monastic community, experiences that typically last a few days or few weeks. In this short amount of time, they learn many of the monastic rules but not necessarily that longer-term monastics orient towards these rules differently. As such, their understanding of the rules reproduces laity's high expectations of monastics and most longer-term monks and novices presume that laity they are unfamiliar with will hold such high expectations.[10]

4.2.1 Vinaya as Substantive or Ceremonial Rules

In addition to having high expectations of monastics' strictness towards the Vinaya, most laity do not know the specifics of the Vinaya. Because laity do not know the specifics of the monastic precepts, monastics often shape their behavior around other ideas of monastic comportment than strict adherence to the Vinaya rules. By trying to anticipate the expectations of laity, monastics adjust their obligations accordingly, even if it means circumventing some precepts. I discussed this approach to the Vinaya one day with the 64-year-old head monk for a subdistrict in Namsai

10. Let me give another example of this from Wat Doi Thong. There was a man from the city of Chiang Mai who decided he wanted to ordain for a couple weeks. He was in his 30s and had not yet ordained as was custom, and as he was able to take some time off from work, he decided to use this time to ordain as monk. He wanted to ordain at a temple that was more removed from the city and, thus, quieter than temples in the city, so he came to Wat Doi Thong having heard about it from a friend. As Phra Udom was not familiar with this man, he did not know how he thought about the need for monastics to be strict with the rules. As we will see in this chapter, the novices of Wat Doi Thong often snacked in the afternoon and had dinner. During the two weeks this man ordained, though, Phra Udom told the novices they could only drink milk in the afternoons—no snacking on foods—and if they wanted to have dinner that would have to go to one of the novice's rooms which was in a far corner of the temple's grounds and use an electric kettle to boil water for ramen noodles lest the temporarily ordained man see them. This man would be a monk for two weeks under the impression that the monastics never ate dinner. He would express this to his family and friends, reproducing the expectation among laity that monastics do not eat after midday.

who had been a monastic for about 45 years at that point.[11] He explained:

> The laity haven't studied the Vinaya. When monks don't work, dig, cut the grass, or plant trees, the laity criticize [the monks]. But if monks do too much, it breaks the Vinaya. It's an offense [*phit pen abat*]. This offense, however, is a small offense. So, monastics must do some work so as to prevent the worldly fault [*lokwatcha*] that is an untidy temple. Presently monks must work, clean, sweep leaves, and cut grass so that the area is not untidy. . . . Laity today are not like the laity of the past. In the past, laity came to the temple to clean and do this and that.

Here he suggests that monks cannot follow the rules too strictly because the lay community has changed—"In the past, laity came to the temple to clean and do this and that."—but their expectations about how the temple should look has not changed.[12] For him, one way of finding the middle between too strict and too lax is for the monks and novices to follow and conform to the expectations of the laity so long as it only adjusts minor rules like cutting grass or plant life. The importance laity put on having a tidy, *riaproi* temple, including trimmed grass, plants, and trees outweighs the formal prohibition in the Vinaya against the cutting of living plants.[13]

11. The hierarchy of monastic leadership follows along the lines of municipal divisions of government. Thailand is divided into 76 provinces such. Provinces are divided into districts, *amphoe*, which are further divided into subdistricts, *tambon*. In each of these divisions, a monk—generally the most senior monk—is selected as the head monk for that division. So, there are head monks of each subdistrict who are under the head monk of the district they belong to and so forth. The similar structuring of the political localities and the Sangha hierarchy has led some scholars, such Somboon Suksamran (1982) to conclude that the state-led structuring of the Sangha demonstrates the state's control over the Sangha. As we see in this and other chapters, though, monks in positions of power do not always promote the ideas of Buddhism expressed by the state that gives them their titles of rank.

12. I do not know objectively the extent to which laity have actually altered the amount of work they do at the temple or have not changed their expectations for how temples should look. This is how this particular monk perceived the history and current moment of the lay-monastic relationship based on his numerous decades of being an abbot and leading monk in the community. It is a view I heard many other monks express, too.

13. All monastic precepts have an origin story, a story that explains why the Buddha made a prohibition against a particular action. The origin story for this rule is that during the time of the Buddha there was a monk who cut down a tree for the wood to make himself shelter. The *devatā*, the spirit, living inside the tree went to the Buddha to complain. The Buddha, empathizing with the *devatā*, found a vacant tree for her to live in and made it an offense for monks to damage a living plant (DeGraff 1994, p. 272). Many Thai Buddhists continue to believe that spirits live in trees, particularly large trees like banyan trees. At least a couple monks I knew referred to this origin story when explaining to me why it was okay for monks to cut grass and smaller plants and trees. The Buddha forbade the damaging of plants to protect the spirits living in the trees. As the current belief is that only larger trees can house spirits, these monks explained that cutting smaller plants, which cannot be spirits' homes, is not an offense.

In terms of obligations and expectations, monastics attempt to adjust the obligations they feel to line up with laity's expectations. On one hand, the monks could feel obligated to follow every single rule exactly as it was presumably followed during the time of the Buddha. On the other hand, monks could adjust certain rules so as to perform laity's expectation that they will keep the temple grounds clean and *riaproi*. At the same time, though, laity expect that they strictly maintain their ascetic rules. To reconcile this double bind—if they don't adjust the rules and follow all of them strictly, they may be criticized for not taking care of the temple grounds; yet if they adjust the rules and cut grass and trees for maintaining the temple's cleanliness, then they will not be strictly following the rules—monastics rely on the presumption that laity do not know the details of all the monastic rules. In this case, monastics may think that laity do not know the restriction against cutting living plants, so they do it anyway under the pretense of fulfilling the laity's broader expectation of having a *riaproi* temple.

Goffman's distinction between substantive and ceremonial rules is helpful here. Substantive rules are those that are primarily followed because they are rules. Goffman gives the example of laws against stealing. When we refrain from stealing, we are upholding a substantive rule as the law's primary function is to protect the property of others. Its purpose is not mainly to convey to others we are good individuals who respect proprietary rights. "The expressive implications of substantive rules are officially considered to be secondary" (Goffman 1956, p. 476). Ceremonial rules, on the other hand, are followed in order to express one's character. Here, Goffman gives the example of tipping one's hat or the exact procedure of a coronation ceremony. These things are not explicitly codified anywhere but one's ability to follow the unwritten ceremonial rule will reflect positively on his or her character. When meeting a new business associate, for example, ceremonial rules dictate shaking her hand. Failure to do so may suggest to her you could be an untrustworthy business partner.

The head monk above makes a similar distinction between substantive and ceremonial rules. When a monk breaks a substantive rule of the Vinaya, it is an "offense" (*abat*). However, sometimes that is necessary in order to avoid committing a "worldly fault" (*lokwatcha*), something

that may not violate a substantive rule of the Vinaya but jeopardizes the image of the monastic community. He suggests sometimes they must break substantive rules for the sake of ceremonial rules. Making the temple look nice demonstrates a monk's character as being neat and *riaproi*, which justifies breaking the rule of cutting living plants, a rule that if followed would only be followed because it is a rule (i.e., a substantive rule). Some monks go further, suggesting most rules of the Vinaya are really ceremonial rules designed to make the Sangha look respectable to laity. Such monks draw on the Vinaya itself, which states one of the reasons the Buddha promulgated the Vinaya was "to foster and protect faith among the laity" (DeGraff 1994, p. 15). They imagine, though, that laity do not know this and see the Vinaya as a collection of substantive rules that must be followed.

The process of shifting obligations to meet lay expectations can go the other direction, too. That is, sometimes monastics see these expectations as adding rules rather than causing them to violate a rule. Take for instance the prohibition against eating after midday, which is strictly enforced during the summer camp.[14] It is common for monastics in northern Thailand—particularly younger novices—to eat a bit in the afternoon or evening. Some monks, such as one of the monks in charge of Namsai's novice summer camp, see the rule of not eating after midday, which they themselves enforce at the summer camp, as a rule that emerged as a misunderstanding among lay Buddhists:

> The thing is there are many laypersons who are not familiar with the monastic precepts. They all think doing this or that breaks the precepts, but truthfully it's not very wrong. However, their feelings are easily hurt. They think, "It's wrong. How wrong is it? Defrocking is the only way." [i.e., laity think if a monastic breaks any rule at all

14. This is perhaps one of the most memorable proscriptions for boys who ordain during the summer camp. Food is central to Thai sociality. Asking if one has eaten or not is a common greeting at anytime during the day. Offering food and drink to visitors is generally expected. To restrain from eating for even a few hours is a difficult discipline to keep in this setting. Many see the 18 or so hours that monastics ideally fast as a major difficulty. Older men whom I talked with about their experience with very temporary ordination—a few days or weeks—often began by describing how hard it was for them to refrain from eating after noon. Some, too, described sneaking in snacks at night to have without the monks' knowledge, although they saw this as contravening their obligation to fast from noon to dawn the next day.

> he must leave the monastic community]. For example: *vikāla bhojanā*[15]—not eating after midday. Does "*vikāla*" really mean "after midday?" If it's true, then we cannot enter people's houses after midday. That is the wrong time, *vikāla*. But "the wrong time" according to the law is after the sun sets.

The monk here is suggesting it is difficult to know exactly when monks are forbidden to eat because the precept is that they cannot eat at "the wrong time," or *vikāla* in Pali. The question for him, then, is what time that corresponds to precisely. I want to note here that I am not arguing that the monks' interpretation of the monastic rules is always the correct interpretation. In fact, many Pali or Buddhist studies scholars would likely point out that it is relatively clear in the Vinaya that the precept against eating at "the wrong time" means after midday (e.g., Wijayaratna 1990, p. 68; Gombrich 2006, p. 78). However, here I take at face value the monks' conviction—the monk quoted here is not the only one who expressed confusion around the translation of *vikāla*—that the proscription against eating at the wrong time means it is acceptable for monastics to eat in the afternoon. My interest here is how different interpretations and understandings of monastic rules and expectations get expressed and worked out between the lay and monastic communities.[16] In terms of "the wrong time," in some instances of monastic life, it means after the sun has set. In other instances, it means after the sun has reached its zenith. For him, the notion that eating at "the wrong time" means after midday rather than after sunset is a uniquely Thai practice:

15. I have rendered this as romanized Pali because the monk said it in Pali and was referencing what is said when novices recite their 10 precepts, which are said in Pali.

16. I feel I need to emphasize this point because as I have presented some of this data on how monastics interpret their ascetic rules, participants at conferences or workshops have commented on how it seems it is all about the monks figuring out how to justify their misbehavior. That is, some think I am showing that the monks *truly* know what the rules are but in practice they do not match those ideals. That is not my point here. Instead, I think the monks and novices in their everyday lives encounter many different ideas and interpretations of the monastic rules from what they study in school, what older monks instruct them on, and what lay supporters tell them or—more precisely—what they hear through rumor about how lay supporters think and react to certain monks' behaviors. What monks and novices are expressing in these interactions and interviews is them trying to grapple with these different messages of monasticism and how to balance them so they can enact the role of a "good" monastic while not being overwhelmed, stressed out (*cai ron*; i.e., have a "hot heart"), or "thinking too much" (*khit mak koen pai*)—states of being that people avoid at all costs in many Southeast Asian contexts (Cassaniti 2015b; Muecke 1994)—about the duties and expectations of monasticism.

> We Thais have misinterpreted it. If you go to Sri Lanka or India, they can eat [after midday]; but if you come to Thailand, we can't. It's just Thailand. It's a misinterpretation. Nonetheless, it's been taken this way from our ancestors up until now. It continues. There's no one brave to bring it up to discuss. If they bring it up, they'll be seen as a parasite [*pen kafak*] who likes to create conflict. And so it keeps going like so.

This last sentiment about no one being able to talk about these issues openly says a lot about how lay and monastic communities negotiate the rules and ideals of monasticism in everyday life. It is not in the realm of spoken discourse. Instead, the monks and novices must enact the expectations laity have even if it is not exactly in line with the interpretation of the rules the monks have. To meet these expectations, monastics may be obligated to break certain rules or add rules. They change the quantity to better match expectations and find "the middle." However, this is not the only way monastics and laity may adjust the rules.

4.2.2 Symmetrical versus Asymmetrical Orientations towards the Vinaya

A common approach to the monastic rules, to the Vinaya, is to see them as substantive rules, disciplines that one should follow because they are rules. When talking with lay informants about what makes a monk a "good" monk or a novice a "good" novice, they would often describe the importance of "keeping the precepts" (*raksa sin*).[17] This would often lead to a comment or discussion about how the difference between the lay and monastics precepts was one of quantity rather than quality: lay Buddhists have five precepts, novices have 10, and monks have 227. Just as an ideal lay Buddhist would strictly follow each of the five precepts, they expect novices or monks to follow the 10 or 227 precepts strictly.

Given how monks teach the Vinaya to short-term monastics like those at the novice summer camps, many of the young novices have a similar orientation to the monastic rules. In the opening

17. As discussed in the previous chapter, this description of monastic goodness often followed the main expectation for monastics: being *riaproi*.

vignette with the novice Chai getting me to run, he exclaimed in triumph that I had "broken the rules" (*phit sin laeo*). That is, I had presumably broken one of the 227 precepts just as a lay person may break one of the five precepts or he as a novice may break one of the 10 precepts. Similarly, in the evenings sometimes one of the novices would offer me a bite of whatever they were snacking on. If I declined his offer, he would make a comment like, "Oh, right, you're keeping the precepts." For many of the novices, too, to be a monk is to follow these precepts.

Goffman describes asymmetrical rules as those social rules that apply differently to different groups. This is distinct from symmetrical rules which apply equally to everyone such as the golden rule of doing unto others as you would have others do unto you. Symmetrical rules equalize while asymmetrical rules differentiate. In this way, the precepts are asymmetrical; laity have less rules than novices who have less than monks. This difference in what rules apply to which groups is something that leads lay and monastic communities to see one another as different. Asymmetrical rules, though, still presume that all groups similarly approach the rules as substantive rules. Following the rule because it is a rule creates this difference, the asymmetry, between laity and monastics. However, this is not the only way to approach the rules.

At the beginning of the school year, several weeks after the end of the novice summer camp, Phra Mai challenged this perspective in the Buddhism class of first-year novices he taught. "Do you know what 'Vinaya' means?" he asked. The young novices responded with "precepts" (*sin*) or "principles" (*kot rabiap*). Phra Mai corrected them. The "naya" part of "Vinaya," he explained, meant "to follow" (*tam pai*) as in following a path. The "vi" part of the word is a common prefix in Thai words such as *wiset*,[18] meaning "special" or "extraordinary." In this way, Vinaya does not really mean precepts or disciplines; it means a path to be a certain, special kind of person.

For Phra Mai, this orientation towards the Vinaya and rules as markers along a path differs from what he and other monastics assume the laity's orientation towards the Vinaya is: a set of rules and disciplines the monastics should enact in full in order to be "good" monastics. That

18. The "vi" of "vinaya" and the "wi" of "wiset" are equivalent here. The discrepancy is because *v* in the Pali word "Vinaya" is similar to the *v* sound of English so romanized Pali uses the letter *v*; however, Thai does not have this sound, so it is pronounced in Thai as *w* instead of *v*. Subsequently, romanized Thai uses the letter *w*.

is, this orientation to the Vinaya as path rather than a body of rules and regulations reworks the issue of obligations and expectations. What monastics' obligation is to their lay supporters' expectations is different within this orientation to the Vinaya. Here monks and novices feel obligated to try to stay on the path that is the Vinaya to the extent possible. Expanding upon Goffman's terminology, I call this orientation towards the rules an "asymmetrical orientation" because the way lay and monastic actors should approach the rules (as a body of disciplines or as a path towards a certain goal) differs. Monastics like Phra Mai hold such an asymmetrical orientation, which distinguishes the monastic community from the lay community. Many monastics presume the laity hold a symmetrical orientation towards the rules; that is, laity and monastics should approach the rules similarly as a body of disciplines to be enacted. As Phra Mai joked above about it being good the laity do not study the Vinaya because then they would be able to point out all the mistakes monks and novices make, laity think a lay person breaking one of the five precepts and a monk breaking one of the 227 precepts are symmetrical mistakes.

Novices who ordained for longer than just the summer camp learned about this asymmetrical approach early in their monastic careers. One of the first lessons they have in their Buddhism class and one of the first set of definitions outlined in their textbook, the *Vinayamukh*, is the difference between monastic rules that are "fixable" (*kae dai*) and "unfixable" (*kae mai dai*) if broken. The four "heavy" rules described above constitute the "unfixable" rules for monks, while all others are "fixable." Such a distinction does not exist for the five precepts. In the rare instances where monks explained this distinction between fixable and unfixable rules to laity—usually monks did not go into detail about the monastic precepts with laity—the lay person was rather surprised such a distinction existed between different categories of rules.

Focusing on the Vinaya as path changes one's orientation to the rules. One day Phra Mai, myself, and a few lay people went to Chiang Rai, a city about 200 kilometers northeast of Chiang Mai with several popular temples and tourists sites. On our way there, a lay woman asked where monks are allowed to sit and next to whom as we climbed into the minivan. This led to a discussion of whether or not it was against the rules for monks to touch women—many laity presume

monks cannot touch any females, while many monks think they are only forbidden from touching females while having lustful thoughts or feelings—which led to a further discussion between Phra Mai and me about not getting caught up in the details of the rules. He explained that if you worry about the rules too much or stress about minor rules that you may have broken, then you actually make it worse. If you worry too much about it, "your mind will not be good," he said (in English). So, worrying about the rules actually doubles the negativity of the rule. He related this worrying to the three unwholesome roots (*akusonlamun*)—greed (*lopha*), anger (*thosa*), and confusion (*moha*)—saying such worrying was *moha*, confusion or delusion. This is why, he explained, it is important to keep in mind intention.

Phra Mai and other monastics taught this orientation towards the rules to the novices, too. In fact, Phra Mai emphasized that such an orientation towards the rules was particularly applicable to the novices. The common saying used to describe a monk or novice who leaves monasticism is *lasikkha*, to leave the training. To be a novice, then, means to *tam sikkha*, that is, to follow the training. As novices, they are there to learn and to practice following the rules but not necessarily follow the rules perfectly.

Such an orientation to the ascetic rules also alters the idea of novices needing to "adjust themselves" (*prab tua*) emphasized at the novice summer camps. Recall in the previous chapter that one of the main purposes or goals of the novice summer camp was to get the temporary novices to adjust to the rules and thereby enact the ideal *riaproi*-ness of monasticism. That is, new novices adjust themselves to the ascetic rules. However, viewing monasticism—particularly novicehood—as a path and as a slow training that one can deviate from or reroute in certain ways changes the possibilities for adjustment. Not only does one change himself; he may also change the path that is supposed to lead him to this changed state.

Changing the path one is expected to follow leads to the difficult problem of knowing when to adjust oneself and when to adjust the path.[19] One way monks described knowing which one

19. Some monks and laity insist this is the main difference between Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Mahayana Buddhism in other parts of Asia: the former does not adjust the monastic path in any way, while the latter can change the path. Heretofore I have not emphasized this distinction between the two schools, and I do not plan on doing so.

to do was by looking at their own and others' intentions. A monk from central Thailand who was a well-known meditation instructor and a friend of some of the monks at Wat Ton Pai relayed the following story: There was a wealthy man he had met who after becoming wealthy decided to ordain as a monk. A man had gone to talk with this monk one evening around six o'clock. After their conversation, the lay man wanted to offer the monk some soy milk. The monk refused to accept it because it was after the allotted time that he could accept food of any kind.[20] The monk telling this story thought such an action was ridiculous. Instead of refusing the offering, the monk should have taken into consideration the lay man's purpose (*watthuprasong*) for making the offering. Obviously the man's intentions were good; he wanted to make merit by offering something to the monk. By rejecting the offering, the monk was thereby rejecting the man's good intentions.

Goffman does address the role of intentionality in his essay. For him, one may shape how others see his or her demeanor, or character, by intending to portray certain behaviors. The example Goffman gives is of a person who wants to be seen as a person who follows the rules or having a rule-abiding demeanor. Such a person will intend to meet the expectations of others and her own obligations of what it means to be a rule-abiding person. Her intention of self-fashioning is accomplished (or not) by way of her actions and others' uptake of those actions to attribute a particular demeanor to her. As the previous chapter showed, this process of self-fashioning can be not only about demonstrating one's inner state but also about creating the conditions for performing social roles.

Such is the case for critiquing the monk who refused to accept an offer of soy milk from the lay man. The monk is taken to be misorienting himself towards the rules of monasticism. What

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The reason is I do not find such a rigid distinction helpful. Instead, by labeling my informants as Theravada Buddhists, I would be imposing this expectation onto their beliefs and practices around monasticism. I am not interested here if my monastic informants are truly Theravada monks or Mahayana or something else. In fact, the notion that northern Thai Buddhism is Theravada Buddhism is contestable (Moonkham 2009). This study is not an attempt to figure out what school of Buddhism northern Thai Buddhist monks really belong to.

20. While most see the proscription against eating after midday meaning that any sort of liquid is fine to consume for monastics at anytime of the day, some strict monks will only consume—besides water—one of the six things they think the Buddha allowed monastics to consume at "the wrong time" (i.e., between noon and dawn the next day): sugar/molasses, ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, and medicinals.

he did was try to adjust himself to the rule of not accepting food items at the wrong time and not accept the offer. In criticizing the monk's actions, though, he was suggesting the monk should have made an adjustment to the rules and how he approached them. It was important for the monk to bear in mind the lay offerer's intention and his purpose for making the offer: to do something selfless and merit-making. The monk's intention to be seen as a rule-abiding monk backfired. He was seen as a monk who did not prioritize the lay man's intention of being seen as a generous Buddhist who makes offerings. The issue to be worked out here is not what exactly the rule about accepting food is or what constitutes the category of food or how monastics and laity may have different ideas about these definitions that need to be worked out in certain contexts. Instead, this example describes a different orientation to what it means to be a monastic. The monk is to be a conduit for the lay person's good intentions to make merit. By refusing this lay man's attempt of making an offering to the monk, he was not living up to his monastic duty of being a "field of merit" (*na bun*), the ideal recipient of an act of generosity.

Phra Mai conveyed a similar sentiment to me shortly after I ordained. "Now you work for the Buddha," he told me. As a monk, my responsibility was to be a monk for the Buddhist community, being a support for the religion such as a being a receptacle for the laity's offerings. I should prioritize the laity's good intentions, enabling their ability to make merit. I should not prioritize my own self-perceived obligations to what I imagine monasticism to be. It would be counter to this purpose, then, to refuse laity's offerings.

Focusing on the laity's expectations required an asymmetrical orientation towards the precepts. While laity should try to uphold their five precepts to be morally good Buddhists, strict adherence to the monastic rules was not a requirement as viewed by many monks. Rather, by seeing their 227 rules as largely ceremonial, they could orient their rules in a way that allowed them to adjust them so long as they stayed on a path that would make them look good and respectable among laity.

4.3 Novices Learning Rules, Paths, and Intentions

So far, I have concentrated on how monks view the rules and orientations to these disciplines or the path of monasticism. Novices, too, walk a similar path and confront similar dilemmas that they need to work out how best to act in certain situations even though quantitatively they have much fewer rules than monks. In some cases, novices may see inaction as the best route, although this can lead to trouble, too.

One day after all us monks of Wat Doi Thong returned from being away from the temple for several hours, Phra Udom called the novices into the dining hall. He had received a call while we were away from a lay family in the area who had come to the temple to make an offering. They had waited there for over an hour without any of the novices greeting them or saying anything. Eventually they left without making their offering. Asking the novices why none of them greeted the lay visitors, the novices—perhaps knowing they were in trouble—remained silent. Phra Udom explained what he assumed was their justification: The novices were afraid of the laity. "You don't have to be afraid of the laity" (*mai tong klua yatyom*), he told them. Instead, when the laity come to the temple, they should come out to greet them, offer them some water, and fetch trays used to present their offerings to the monastics. If one of the older novices were present, he could accept the offering and make a blessing. Otherwise, they could contact Phra Udom to see what to do.

While in this situation Phra Udom encouraged the novices to engage with lay visitors, at other times the novices were encouraged to hide from the laity. On another evening, I and a couple other monks were returning to Wat Doi Thong. It was a little after five o'clock in the evening. With dusk approaching and much of the temple under the shadow of a large banyan tree, the lights in the dining hall were on. As we approached the dining hall in a pick-up truck that one of the school teachers was driving, the group of novices in the dining hall quickly got up, closed the door, and switched the lights off. We realized the novices must be having dinner and that they thought we were lay villagers coming to visit the temple.

Phra Yaa, the principal of Charoensat School, chuckled a little. Turning to Phra Udom, he said, "You have taught the novices very well to hide from the laity." Indeed, a few days prior Phra

Udom had told them they needed to keep the door closed, especially if they had dinner, and to keep an ear out for laity when they were doing things some people may not approve of such as eating after midday or playing sports. In the evening, it was common to hear novices yell, "*Yom, yom*!" (the word monastics use when referring to lay persons) when they thought laity might be arriving at the temple as a sign to the other novices to hide whatever it was that they were doing.

The novices are confronted with having to reconcile these different expectations: hiding or not hiding from the laity, not knowing exactly how to act with laity around. Phra Udom did try to aid the novices in sorting out this balancing act.

Often in the mornings that the novices did not have school, Phra Udom would give a brief lecture after breakfast to the novices. The topic of the lecture one morning was making sure the novices kept up on their two kinds of "responsibilities" (*nathi*). On the one hand were the responsibilities that were important for themselves (*nathi thi prayok ton eng*) such as studying. I would add here, as well, things like playing sports and other forms of exercise they felt was necessary for their personal well-being. On the other hand were the responsibilities that were important for the laity (*nathi thi prayok yatyom*). Here he emphasized receiving the offerings laity made and using them properly.

Of particular importance was the food the laity offered and the value it held. Phra Udom said the novices had gotten used to having a lot of food around. So much so that they would at times casually toss it out without thinking much about its value. "Some days we have little. Some days we have a lot. For example, today we have a lot; the pots are all full," he said, pointing to the large stainless steel pot next to him that was filled to the brim with bags of food that the laity had offered that morning. One of the dangers of ordaining as a monk or novice, he explained, was that they needed to guard against becoming a "hungry ghost" (*pret*) in the next life more than the laity did. Pointing again to the pot full of food next to him, Phra Udom explained, "Monastics get a lot [of stuff] but the laity have less so they don't have to worry as much about this issue." He went on, "But ordain as a monk or ordain as a novice and you have a greater opportunity than the laity to be reborn as a hungry ghost."

In Thai Buddhism, a *pret* is one kind of ghost in a large pantheon of ghosts from Thai and Buddhist folklore. Hungry ghosts are born when humans with insatiable desire and greed die. Their bad karma from this greed causes them to be born as hungry ghosts. People describe them as tall with a large mouth but very small throat. So, they try to consume as much as possible with their large mouths but can never be satisfied because of their small throats. In general, ghosts are a popular topic of discussion among all ages but particularly among the young novices. Ghosts make appearances in many of the stories they read or watch. Novices frequently asked me if I had ever seen a ghost or what I would do if I saw one. They were also very interested in whether there were ghosts in America and what they were like. Any meritorious activities at the temple were often in part dedicated towards *pret* in the area so they would not disturb humans but have a better rebirth, i.e., as a human.

Figure 4.1: Trays of food leftover from the laity's morning offerings

Phra Udom relayed a cautionary tale to emphasize his point. "The Lord Buddha told this story, and the Buddha does not lie," he began, stressing the veracity of the tale. "There were once two monks who would go collect alms together. One day one of the monks was not feeling well." So,

the other monk went on alms alone. When the laity heard that the other monk was sick, they gave the healthy monk additional food, asking him to take it back for the sick monk. On the way back to the temple, Phra Udom explained, "I don't know if it was greed (*lop*) or jealousy (*itcha*), but this monk tossed the [extra] food to the side of the road." Because of this act, the monk was reborn as a hungry ghost for several hundreds of years, never able to get full. Eventually, after consuming a placenta,[21] he was reborn as a human again, subsequently ordaining as a monk again and reaching arahantship (i.e., one who has reached enlightenment). Concluding the story, Phra Udom again stressed that they needed to be careful with what the laity offer them and make sure they "understood the value" (*ru khunkha*) of what had been offered and to use it appropriately.

Such stories did have a temporary effect on the novices' behavior. They would be less likely to throw away food or toss it about absentmindedly as they were sometimes wont to do. After a few days or weeks, though, they would slowly move back to their old ways, and Phra Udom, myself, or another monk would have to remind them to be careful with how they were using the food and items laity provided the temple.

At the same time, Wat Doi Thong did get way too much food some days (see Figure 4.1), especially on major *wan sin*[22] or holidays. While some days we would try to give the leftover food back to the laity, they would often refuse it, saying it was for us monastics. There were some days, then, that throwing out excess food was unavoidable. Under such circumstances, Phra Udom would toss out excess food, but he would be sure to say to himself that he was sorry to have to do so.[23] In this way, he made evident to himself his own intentions. It was not greed

21. I later asked Phra Udom what kind of placenta. He said it was a human placenta (*rok manut*).

22. Called *wan phra* in central Thai, *wan sin* is the weekly Buddhist holiday. It follows the lunar cycle, falling on the new, first quarter, full, and third quarter phases of the moon. On this day, laity typically come to the temple to make offerings to the monks and the temple's Buddha statue. A monk leads the laity in reciting the five precepts and gives a short lecture, or Dhamma talk. The laity also receive a blessing from the monastics at the end of the ceremony. During the three-month rains retreat, or *phansa*, monks in a subdistrict gather on the new and full moons to hear a recitation of the Pāṭimokkha in Pali, a listing of the 227 monastic rules and their origins. On these days, too, novices recite their 10 precepts. The monk and novice ceremonies are held without laity present. That laity recite their precepts—with monks often including in their Dhamma talk the importance of upholding all five—and monastics recite their precepts without the laity fully knowing what is recited likely reinforces the notion among laity that the Vinaya rules are substantive rules that monastics ought to abide by.

23. Phra Mai told me he did something similar when he was doing work around the temple and had to clear out

or jealousy that drove his actions as in his cautionary tale to the novices. It was with hesitancy that he did this. Setting such an intention, he felt, would help protect against the bad karma that could arise if one discarded laity's offerings without being mindful of the consequences.

Along with dealing with the obligations and expectations of monasticism is the issue of intentionality (*cettana*). Monastics must learn to become aware of their own and others' intentions. The raising of this awareness is especially true for novices staying on after novice summer camps are over. As we saw in the previous chapter, the performance of monasticism by the novices at the camps is more important than intentional self-transformation. The longer one is a monastic, the more he needs to be careful of his own intentions.[24] One way Phra Mai got the novices to look at their own intentionality was to get them to "practice themselves" (*patibat tua eng*). For instance, when handing back their graded assignments, Phra Mai would ask the novices to *wai* to him. He would emphasize, though, that he was not asking them to *wai* because he wanted to remind them of his seniority but because he wanted them to notice what they were doing and how they were moving. The mechanics of *wai*-ing while receiving their homework was often confusing to the novices. They were not sure if they should put their palms together before, after, or while receiving their paper from Phra Mai. So, they often tried various methods of *wai*-ing while taking the paper in their hands sometimes with comical results. Instead of correcting any of them or demonstrating how exactly to do it, Phra Mai would just laugh a little at the novices' attempts. What was important was that they were intending to do it, not how perfectly executed the action was.

The novices also had to take into account laity's intentions and try to adjust accordingly. At the end of the school term when the novices of Wat Doi Thong had many days off from school, one

some bushes or trees. He would ask for forgiveness from any spirits who may reside there.

24. Phra Mai once made explicit this need to be aware of intentions depending on how long one ordained. One evening as I sat in the school's truck with Phra Mai and Phra Ratana, another monk at Wat Ton Pai, Phra Mai told Phra Ratana to turn off the radio, which the latter had turned on and who was singing along with the pop song playing. Phra Mai explained to Phra Ratana, who had recently ordained, that he needed to follow the monastic rules more strictly because he had just ordained. He needed to set his intentions in order to make the most of his short time as a monastic. Phra Mai, on the other hand, who had been a monk for several years by then, often circumvented minor rules.

of their English teachers, a middle-aged woman from Mexico who had come to volunteer as an English instruction coordinator and tutor for the temple and surrounding government schools, invited the novices and me to the local hot springs, a popular tourist destination for local and foreign tourists. A popular activity at the hot springs was to purchase a basket of uncooked eggs and take the basket to the main spring. There at the spring's source a pool had been constructed. It was full of hot water and its inner edge was lined with many hooks. Visitors could place their basket of eggs on one of the hooks, submerging the eggs in the hot mineral water thereby cooking them. We arrived at the hot springs around two o'clock in the afternoon, well after midday. Still, the instructor wanted the novices to have an enjoyable time, so she purchased several baskets of eggs for them to cook and eat.[25]

Figure 4.2: Novices at the hot springs

The novices graciously accepted the baskets from her, but I could tell they were a little uncertain about what to do. As we walked to the pool for cooking the eggs, which was on the other

25. While she was not Thai, the English-language instructor had spent a long time in Thailand around monks and novices. She was very much aware of the rule concerning eating at the wrong time and that most took that to mean monastics should not eat after midday. However, she was also aware that novices often circumvented this rule.

side of the hot spring area, we had to pass by all the visitors. Not knowing exactly how these laity would perceive a group of novices carrying eggs to cook and eat, they walked hesitantly and shifted their eyes to and fro, trying to get a sense of how the laity around them were perceiving them. We reached the pool, and the novices cautiously placed their baskets in the water (Figure 4.2). They wanted to acknowledge and make good on their instructor's intention of doing something nice for them. At the same time, they were cautious of how others might perceive—or misperceive—the events unfolding. Their baskets placed in the water, the novices casually walked around the grounds of the hot springs, trying not to pay too much attention to the eggs cooking. Sensing the novices' discomfort—and probably a bit of my own discomfort, too—I talked with the instructor. Acknowledging her good intentions and reassuring her that the novices did enjoy and appreciate her offer, I suggested it might be best if she carried the baskets back from the hot springs. After several minutes, the novices collected their baskets and set them on the pool's ledge for the instructor to take. Walking back through the crowd of visitors, the novices seemed much more comfortable, not carrying baskets of eggs.

In incidences like this the novices are learning to construct "the middle" ground among laity's expectations and intentions, their own obligations as novices, and how to orient towards the rules. On the one hand, it is important they recognize their teacher's intention of doing something generous for them and not reacting in a negative way towards this generosity such as refusing her offer. (Recall the above story of the monk being admonished for refusing an offering from a lay person.) On the other hand, they were in a setting with many laity, some of whom may see novices cooking eggs in the middle of the afternoon as breaking their precepts. Ultimately the good intentions of their teacher won out. They accepted the offer and cooked the eggs while trying to conceal it somewhat from other laity.

This process of learning to navigate obligations, expectations, and intentions is further complicated for the novices because not all laity have such high expectations of novices. As we walked through the throng of laity at the hot springs, it was likely that some of the laity would have had no problem with the novices eating in the afternoon. In some instances the laity also adjust them-

selves. They shift their expectations of how monastics should act and how strictly they should follow the rules. How laity see circumventing the rules and how they justify it is what we turn to the next and final section.

4.4 Constructing Regional Identity by Negotiating Monastic Ideals

So far, I have looked at how monks and novices try to find "the middle" between too lax and too strict based on how they themselves view the monastic rules and how they imagine laity view the rules. As the quotes from the lay women towards the beginning of the chapter show, though, sometimes the laity themselves relax their expectations. Some laity know the monks and novices do not always approach their precepts as substantive rules, needing to be followed as is because they are rules written in the Vinaya. Instead, some rules can be circumvented at times without jeopardizing a monastic's character for the laity. That is, he can still be seen as a good monk even if he does not follow all rules precisely.

To make such a justification, laity often elicit the notion that monastics in northern Thailand act differently than those in other regions. Casting alternative approaches to the Vinaya as regional variability allows laity to be lax with some rules while still seeing such lax monastics as "good" according to regional norms. Before delving into how the laity perceive the rules, though, it is important to understand more generally how northern Thais perceive northern Thailand as unique from other parts of Thailand. This perception will help explain how laity think about what it means when monastics circumvent the rules they are expected to follow.

4.4.1 Northern Thai Uniqueness

One evening, Phra Udom and I were returning from a *poi luang* festival[26] at another temple in the district. As we sat in the back of the *song thaeo*,[27] we struck up a conversation about the purpose of these *poi luang* ceremonies. Phra Udom told me that only people in northern Thailand celebrate them, describing how important such festivals are to northern Thai social life. Their importance, he explained, lay in how festivals build and maintain relationships between temples. This relationship between temples also improves relations between villages. When a temple has a big celebration coming up, neighboring temples and villages come to help out. Villagers, monks, and novices of neighboring temples will go to a temple holding a *poi luang* festival beforehand to help setup tents, tables, chairs, sound equipment, decorations, etc. Wanting to make sure everything looks *riaproi*, laity and monastics will spend several days to make sure the host temple looks tidy and beautiful. Providing a pleasant and beautiful atmosphere will draw more people to come to the celebration, increasing the amount of merit everyone makes.

That evening, Phra Udom, myself, a few novices, and some lay supporters of Wat Doi Thong took a *sangkhathan*, an offering, to the monks at the temple hosting the *poi luang* ceremony. Our offering—as is typical—was a reddish brown plastic bucket containing a bottle of water, a roll of toilet paper, some cough drops, a couple packages of instant noodles, and a package of shortbread cookies. The bucket and items inside were decoratively wrapped in translucent yellow cellophane that crinkled loudly as we carried it. On top of the cellophane wrapping, someone had taped a white envelope indicating that this offering was from Wat Doi Thong, its monastic residents and its lay supporters. Inside the envelope was 300 baht (about US$10). This was the typical amount of money offered to a hosting temple from each invited temple. Upon offering this donation, the

26. *Poi luang* festivals are quite common in northern Thailand. They are typically held at the beginning and ending of construction for an important building. Although usually a temple building, ceremonies can also be held for communal and government buildings. The purpose of these ceremonies is to dedicate the building and dispel any ill-meaning spirits which may jeopardize the building or the construction workers. These ceremonies are huge, three-day-long community events, bringing in musicians, dance tropes, comedians, fireworks, carnival games and rides, raffles, food vendors, etc.

27. A *song thaeo* is a pick-up truck that is covered and has two rows of benches in the back. It is a common form of public transportation in northern Thailand.

hosting temple monks offered us calendars and an envelope with 100 baht in it. More than just the exchange of materials and money, Phra Udom explained that the help, materials, and money exchanged built unity between temples and between villages. In the future, if Wat Doi Thong had a ceremony that needed extra help and support, he could ask other temples that we had supported to come help us. Such ceremonies, then, were important ways for establishing community unity. I asked Phra Udom about other regions of Thailand: What did temples in other regions do to build unity? He responded that he didn't know; they didn't do anything he knew of. For him, such ceremonies and the community unity they fostered were uniquely northern Thai.

Northern uniqueness—the sense that northern Thailand is culturally, socially, historically, and linguistically unique and different from other regions of Thailand—is not new in the study of Thai Buddhism. The northern Thai language is quite distinct from central Thai. While most northern Thais can understand central Thai (print, radio, and television media are largely in central Thai), most central Thais cannot understand northern Thai. Thais from other regions who migrate to northern Thailand often spend months or years practicing northern Thai until they are fluent if they even reach fluency at all. For example, when I first began field work in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, I stayed with my Thai language instructor. She was from central Thailand but had lived in northern Thailand for over a decade. Although she shared her house with a northern Thai family, she communicated with them exclusively in central Thai and often could not follow along with conversations that were solely in northern Thai.

In her article *Polluted Identities* about northern Thai temples' practices concerning women, Katherine Bowie (2011) demonstrates the political and historical contexts in which northern Thai—or Lan Na—constructions of regional identity occur.[28] Bowie shows how northern Thais utilize the common practice of forbidding women from entering areas of temples that hold sacred relics in constructing what it means to be northern Thai. They argue that this practice is uniquely part of northern Buddhism and is distinct from other regions of Thailand. While other regions of Thailand—central, northeastern, and southern—may not forbid women from entering certain

28. For more on the historical context of central Thailand (Siam) and northern Thailand (Lan Na), see Chapter 2.

parts of the temple, some northern Thai temples do. When a senator from northeastern Thailand claimed that northern Thai temples that barred women from certain areas were in violation of the Thai constitution's equal rights clause, northern Thais mobilized to claim that this prohibition was a unique cultural practice of northern Thais. For the Thai government to forbid northern Thai temples from making such prohibitions would be denying the uniqueness of Lan Na cultural heritage, these northern Thai groups argued, which the constitution also protected as a cultural practice. Bowie's article is rare in that it focuses on popular Buddhist practice. Other research on Lan Na Buddhism's uniqueness has mostly focused on famous, charismatic monks (e.g., P. T. Cohen 2000; Easum 2013) rather than "the practices of ordinary monks, nuns and laypeople" (Lopez 2002, p. 14). The following subsection aims to illuminate how specific Buddhisms—regionally distinct versions of what Buddhism is and what Buddhist monasticism should look like—are imagined and deployed in everyday life for non-charismatic monks and laity in northern Thailand. A key way in which northern Thais articulate this distinction is how they have different expectations of monastics and their rules than other regions of Thailand.

4.4.2 Monastic Strictness and Northern Thai Uniqueness

It was the day before Phra Udom's birthday. Several of the lay supporters of Wat Doi Thong came to the temple in the evening to chop vegetables to be used the next day for making fried rice. The laity were going to offer the food to the monks and novices who taught and went to school at Wat Ton Phai. Several weeks earlier Phra Udom had asked the lay supporters of Wat Doi Thong if they would be interested in providing lunch for the monks and novices who attended Charoensat School. The laity agreed, and Phra Udom said he would fund the ingredients necessary. In this way, Phra Udom would make merit for funding the lunch and inviting the laity to join in the merit making—making merit on one's birthday is a common way to celebrate the occasion in Thailand—and the laity would make merit by helping out.

That evening during chanting, a couple of the lay people who had been working on the lunch preparations joined us for the evening chanting. After the chanting was over, Phra Udom in-

formed the novices there was a funeral ceremony that evening and that I and three of the novices were going to be chanting at the ceremony.[29] Asking the four of us to stay behind to practice our chanting, Phra Udom dismissed the other novices, saying they could go eat dinner. The novices looked shocked. Why was Phra Udom informing them that they could go eat dinner when there were laity right there? Monks and novices are expected not to eat after midday. Although the novices frequently do have dinner, it was not something they should do brazenly in front of laity. Seeing the novices' nonplussed looks, Phra Udom told the novices that the laity present who had come to prepare for lunch the next day had on their own decided to make a dinner of rice and fried eggs for the novices that evening. It was the laity's decision to have the novices eat.

After I, Phra Udom, and the three novices had finished practicing the chanting for the funeral that evening, Phra Udom and I descended the hill from the main chanting hall to the dining hall. Phra Udom was going to have his dinner, too. As we walked, Phra Udom said to me, "See. This is why monks in northern Thailand have dinner." He and other monks had explained to me on several occasions that oftentimes monks and novices will have dinner because laity offer it to them. This was particularly true in the north, they explained, because when northern Thais make food the first thing they think of is monks, and they want to go to the temple to offer some of the food they have made to monks. Much like the novices at the hot springs, the monks felt it was their obligation to accept the offering of food. While they perhaps could have accepted the food but not eat it, they were worried about the appearance of greed, the arising of bad intentions, and the possibility of becoming a *pret* in the next life. Accepting the food, using it wisely with good intentions, and adjusting their approach to the monastic rules was preferable.[30]

29. We would be chanting the Abhidhamma, the portion of the Pali Canon typically chanted by monastics every evening for at least three days after someone dies. The Pali Canon, also known as the Tipiṭaka (Sanskrit: Tripiṭaka), is divided into three parts, or "baskets" (*piṭaka* means "basket"). The Vinaya Piṭaka outlines the disciplinary code for monastics (see above). The Sutta Piṭaka is the collection of teachings from the Buddha and some of his disciples. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is an attempt to systematize the Buddha's philosophical teachings.

30. Besides the uniqueness of northern Thailand, another common explanation for eating dinner was health. Fasting for 18 hours a day and eating only the heavy, rich, and high-in-sodium foods laity liked to offer the monks often took a toll on monastics' health. The typical sedentary life of monastics exacerbated these health problems. Issues like obesity and diabetes were prevalent within the Sangha. As such, some monks said they ate dinner so they did not have to eat so much in the morning and could have a more steady blood sugar level throughout the day. One monk went so far as to say the Buddha himself taught that hunger was a disease and that food was the medicine for

Negotiating the rule of not eating after midday and not being too strict or too lax about it was an issue through which monks and laity constructed a northern Thai identity. Similar to the case of women entering certain parts of the temple explored by Katherine Bowie (see above), monastics having dinner was something both monastics and laity saw as being a uniquely northern Thai practice. Even though it may technically be breaking a rule, because certain laity were okay with the monks and novices breaking it in certain times and places, it was not a highly contentious issue. When I brought up the issue of monks and novices following the monastic rules in the contemporary world during a group interview with laity of Wat Doi Thong, one woman expressed the following: "Some might eat one meal [per day]; some might eat two. But dinner—most won't have it. Central [monks] won't have it. Here the monks who have it will secretly have it." She is aware that some monks and novices will have dinner, and it is largely a northern Thai practice. Other regions (like central Thailand) are presumably more strict. The relative laxity is uniquely northern Thai.

The seeming laxity of monastics in northern Thailand justified a unique regional identity as northern Thai Buddhists within not only the monastic community but also the lay community. One afternoon as I sat in the school's office with a female teacher, she asked how I had found being a monk so far. I told her I had enjoyed the monastic life so far; it had not been as difficult as I thought it would be. "Yes, in northern Thailand we're not very strict," she explained. As it was just her and me, a monk, in the room together, she continued, "Really we are breaking the precepts now—a monk and a woman in a room alone. But it's not a problem. People will see we are here to work. Northern Thailand is like this." Intentionality is important again. As both of our intentions for being in the room were to work, preparing lessons for the novices, it was alright to relax the rules a bit to help fulfill these good intentions. For her, this is something that is unique to northern Thailand. Buddhists in other regions may not be as lax concerning monastic rules regardless of intent. Finding "the middle," then, can strengthen regional distinctions. Everyday

such a disease. As medicine is acceptable for monastics to consume at any time, the monk reasoned, it was acceptable to eat food whenever afflicted with the "disease" of hunger.

interactions between monastic and lay communities can work to solidify this identity as northern Thai Buddhists unique from other forms of Thai Buddhism.

4.5 Conclusion

The longer boys and young men stay as novices and monks the more complicated they see the monastic rules and their obligations to uphold them. In some instances, laity's expectations make them follow the rules more strictly. In other cases, though, the expectations make them have to break certain rules. Having to circumvent certain precepts complicates the distinction between lay and monastic communities because the asymmetry of the rules is in part what divides these two communities. To address this issue, some monastics see the difference between lay and monastic communities as being not about the number of precepts each group has. Rather the difference lies in how the precepts should be approached. This asymmetrical orientation with the laity's five precepts achieving one thing and the novices' 10 or the monks' 227 precepts accomplishing another goal is one way monks and novices justify the need to circumvent certain monastic precepts.

Regional uniqueness is another way in which this process of finding "the middle" between too lax and too strict is made sense of. For many, the reason monks and novices may circumvent certain rules is because northern Thailand is generally a more relaxed place than other regions, especially central Thailand. Taking into account a person's intention for following or breaking a certain rule is important for determining the extent to which the action is actually breaking a rule.

CHAPTER 5

"ARE YOU A MAN?": HOW MONASTICISM SHAPES THE MORAL CONTOURS OF MASCULINITY

While previous chapters have focused on different orientations towards the goals of monasticism within the monastic and lay communities, this chapter turns to the relationship between monasticism and masculinity. As indicated in Chapter 1, there has been growing national concern about male youth in Thailand. Like issues of attachment or addiction, many turn to monasticism as a way to address concerns about masculinity. Given that monastics generally assume that laity hold strict ideas about how monastics should act—as we saw in the previous two chapters—there also exists the expectation that monastics will uphold particular ideas of masculinity associated with monasticism. The previous chapter showed how the monastic and lay communities construct a middle ground between having monastics be too strict and too lax with their ascetic rules. In this chapter, I explore a similar process in terms of gender. Because the Thai Sangha is open only to men but the category of "real men" is ambiguous, Buddhist communities must also construct gender positions that are masculine enough for the requirements of monasticism. I suggest that the institution of monasticism can be a site for challenging notions of masculinity just as it may reinforce stereotypical gender roles. Let us begin by looking at contemporary concerns in Thailand around masculinity and the role of monasticism in addressing these concerns.

One morning during the novice summer camp in Namsai, the novices congregated in the Vihara, the largest temple building, after they had returned from collecting alms from around the local village. While the lesson that morning was to be about the early history of Buddhism and the life of the Buddha, the monk leading the class began with a more contemporary topic to get the novices' attention.

"It's good you all came to ordain. It's a good thing for men to do," he began, "because there are fewer monks today." The reason for fewer monks, he explained, was because there are fewer

men in Thailand. He contended this was because the men who are in Thailand are increasingly *kathoei* (transgender), *tut* ("sissy") or *gay*. He then asked the novices, "How many kinds of *gay* are there" (*mi [gay] ki praphet*)? The novices, though, were giggling too much to answer as the topic of *kathoei*, *tut*, and *gay*—often the subject of humor—typically made adolescent boys laugh.

To understand the question the monk posed to the novices ("How many kinds of *gay* are there?"), it is important to understand how people in Thailand often conceive of gender and sexuality categories. To begin, labels such as *kathoei*, *gay*, and *tut* are often interchangeable depending on context. While some *gay* may dislike being called *kathoei*, and vice versa, in many parts of Thailand the native category of *kathoei* is used to describe all men whose gender or sexuality is "not normal" (*mai pokati*). *Tut* is more pejorative, often translated as "sissy" or "fag," and many use it to tease effeminate-acting boys and men.[1] These labels should not be seen as rigid identities within a logic of identity politics as labels like gay or transgender often are in the context of Euro-American LGBTQ communities.

As scholars have noted, gender and sexuality are inseparable in the Thai context (Jackson 2000, 2004; Morris 1994). To be *kathoei*, which is typically translated colloquially as "ladyboy" or more formally as "transgender," is not only to present oneself as a particular gender but also engage in or desire particular sexual activities, too. For instance, many informants described *kathoei* as overly sexual and sexually interested only in "real men" (*chai thae*) who would eventually find and marry a "real" woman, leaving the *kathoei* alone and unpartnered. Alternatively, informants often described *gay* as being attracted to other *gay*, not to "real men." Gender marks one as having a particular sexuality, and having a particular sexual orientation marks one as being a certain gender.[2]

Monks at the summer camp discussed not only a diminishing number of "real men" (*chai thae*) as the numbers of *gay* and *kathoei* increased, they also suggested that this shift in genders has

1. The word *tut* comes from the 1982 American film *Tootsie* in which the main character, a man played by Dustin Hoffman, dresses as a woman.

2. *Gay* is used nearly exclusively for male-bodied individuals and not used as a category for female homosexuality. Instead, terms such as *di* or *tom* describe female same-sex genders/sexualities (Sinnott 2004).

made boys need to show they are "real men" more than they used to. This is especially true given the category of *gay*, which is not as visible as other genders like *kathoei*. As one monk explained:

> If I see a *kathoei*, I can tell. If I see a *gay*, I can't tell. I have to accept that I don't know. In the case of *tut*, expertise is needed, which comes from having to tell often. Or, another way, is what's called a "sense"[3]—a special way of seeing. If someone has this sense, he will notice them. If he's not good with this sense, he won't.

Being able to tell if one is a "real man," *kathoei*, *gay*, or *tut* is particularly relevant for the monastic community, which is only open to men. During the summer camp, when discussing the precepts with a middle-aged lay man, one of the novices told him and other novices present that the monastic precepts "forbid *kathoei*." Another novice, a little younger at 10 or 11 years old added, "*tut* can't be novices." The lay man neither agreed nor disputed these claims by the novices, remaining silent. Many laity hold similar perceptions about monasticism and masculinity: only "real men" can ordain as monks or novices. In such instances, the ability to ordain marks one as being a "real man" rather than some other gender like *kathoei*.

Such a view, however, is far from universal. For nearly every lay person or monastic who expressed the view that non-"real men" could not ordain, I met a lay person or monastic who said anyone male bodied could ordain regardless of being *gay*, *kathoei*, or *tut*. While an effeminate novice I knew often complained about the teasing and harassment his gender expression elicited from fellow novices, he was never, to my knowledge, told he should not have ordained. In an interview with a monk who identified as *gay*, he described how the lay villagers who supported the temple had no problem with effeminate monks or novices. In some circumstances, then, the ability to ordain does not necessarily require being a "real man."

The issue of which genders should be allowed to ordain is a contested one. Much like the issue of monastic rules, the question of whether *kathoei* or *gay* can or should ordain is rarely talked about openly. It was a topic negotiated more subtly. The leader of M-Plus, the main LGBTQ

3. Here he used the English word "sense."

rights organization in northern Thailand, described the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics as a "very sensitive" (in English) topic that most people would not want to talk about. It is a sensitive topic largely because of the way in which gender and sexuality entail morality. For some Thais, the presumed morality of *kathoei* or *gay* disqualifies them from being able to ordain.

For those like the novices above who thought *kathoei* were forbidden from ordaining, their reasoning is often grounded in assumptions about certain genders' morality. Namely, the stereotype of *kathoei*, *tut*, and—to a lesser extent—*gay* is they are overly desirous of sex. As in many Buddhist societies, desire itself is not necessarily negative because many Thais see desires in the present life as the result, the *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*), of actions in past lives (see, e.g., Eberhardt 2006). Partly because of this acceptance of living with one's *kamma*, foreigners often perceive Thai society as being more tolerant of homosexuality and transgenderism than Christian societies, which often place more negative moral weight on desire, especially same-sex desire or desiring to be another gender than ascribed at birth. This does not mean, though, that Thai society is completely accepting of *kathoei* and *gay* (Jackson 1999).

Within the context of monasticism, the sexual desires ascribed to "non-normative" (*mai pokati*) genders like *kathoei* or *gay* render them as unable to adjust to monasticism and, thus, not morally suitable for the Sangha.[4] A related concern is they may be a source of sexual temptation for "real men" monastics who must remain celibate during their time in the robes. Given the temporary nature of monasticism in Thailand, this celibacy does not necessarily render monastics as asexual or non-sexual. The particular morality—and potential immoral acts—of *kathoei* or *gay* who are monastics is what is at stake in the issue around what genders can ordain.

Still, many *gay* and *kathoei* do ordain. And some Thais do not express a problem with it. In some instances *kathoei* and *gay* are not masculine enough to ordain. In other instances, their effeminacy is of little concern. Like the issue of being too strict or too lax with the monastic rules, lay and monastic communities construct notions of monastic masculinity that allow some

4. The connection between "adjusting oneself" (*prab tua*) and being a morally "good" monastic was the focus of Chapter 3.

effeminate boys and men to ordain but to a certain limit.

In this chapter, I argue that in the construction of boundaries around monastic masculinity, monkhood both reproduces and reshapes ideas about masculinity and the morality of non-"real men." Given concerns about the dearth of men and the increasing feminization of men in Thai society, many turn to monasticism to reinforce the boundary between what it means to be a "real man," who is able to ordain, and other genders. At the moment that many turn to this institution, though, others question the masculinity of the Sangha itself given a seeming increase in effeminate monastics. Within this moment of ambiguity, the institution serves a dual role of both reproducing an ideal form of masculinity and also potentially changing notions of masculinity. Throughout the chapter I will draw on a number of cases that demonstrate these two roles of monasticism. First, though, it is important to understand the connection between gender and morality in Thailand, which also requires a better understanding of gender and sexuality more broadly.

5.1 Conceptions of Gender, Monastic Masculinity, and the Moral Contours of Genderscapes

Before delving into how monasticism reproduces and changes notions of moral masculinity, it is necessary to understand ideas of gender and sexuality and their connection to morality in Thailand. Only by knowing this broader context is it possible to see how the category of "real man" operates. I will begin with how scholars have historically tried to make sense of genders and sexualities in Thailand. Given the vast number of categories, which are constantly in flux and which Thai youth encounter and use presently, we will see the limits of these scholars' approach. I then turn to a more robust way of conceiving of gender and sexuality, which incorporates notions of morality. With this framing of gender, sexuality, and morality in mind, we can see what kinds of masculinities monasticism produces in contemporary Thai society.

5.1.1 Earlier Scholarly Notions of Gender and Sexuality

Scholars have historically suggested Thailand has a tripartite gender system organized around the durable categories of man, woman, and *kathoei* (Morris 1994; Totman 2003). *Kathoei* is a term that in the past could refer to either male-to-female or female-to-male transgender individuals or any person who displayed cross-gendered behavior or characteristics. More recently, however, *kathoei* has come to refer only to individuals born male who desire to be women or who exhibit feminine behaviors and characteristics like wearing makeup and dressing in women's clothing. Some Thais refer to *kathoei* as a "second kind of woman" (*sao praphet song*). This in-between-ness of being *kathoei* has led scholars to suggest that *kathoei* is a "third gender" distinct from man or woman (Herdt 1996).

According to Rosalind Morris (1994), historic folktales from the kingdoms of Lan Na and Burma about the origin of the universe support the interpretation of gender as a tripartite system in Thailand. As Morris relates the tale, "they [a male being and a female being] populate the world, and from the four elements—earth, fire, water, and wind—they conjure 'three sexes': female, hermaphrodite, and male. Although it emerges from a context of binarity, the sexual trinity is central and fundamental to the origin of humanity" (p. 20). While this tale predates Buddhism's entry into northern Thailand, the key role of *kathoei* in the northern Thai cosmology has taken on Buddhist significance.

Kathoei-ness has often been understood in Buddhist terms largely around notions of "suffering" (Thai: *thuk*; Pali: *dukkha*) and *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*). A conversation I had with one of the female lay teachers at Charoensat School nicely illustrates the relationship among gender, suffering, and *kamma*. She described how it was unfortunate she was born a woman because she could not ordain, although she did know of women who traveled to Sri Lanka to ordain as *bhikkhunī*, female monks.[5] For her, this was all part of how "women suffer more than men."

5. Sri Lanka is one of the few Theravada Buddhist places that has restarted the lineage of female monks, or *bhikkhunī*. Thailand and the Thai Buddhist Sangha do not recognize this community of *bhikkhunī* currently. While women in Thailand can ordain as nuns, or *mae chi*, Thai women must travel elsewhere to ordain as female monks. Like the difference between male novices and monks, a main difference between *mae chi* and *bhikkhunī* is the number of ascetic rules they should practice. *Mae chi* take eight rules, and *bhikkhunī* take 311. The debate over restarting the

"Do *kathoei* suffer more than both women and men?" I asked.

They do, she replied, because of the third Buddhist precept out of lay followers' five precepts: abstaining from sexual misconduct. For her, the Pali canon described how if a man was adulterous and a playboy, having many mistresses (i.e., having too much desire), he would have 500 rebirths as a non-male with many at the beginning being born as a *kathoei*. By first being born as *kathoei*, they must endure the suffering of that existence before being reborn as a woman with less suffering than a *kathoei* but more than a man. Much of the suffering of being *kathoei* is non-acceptance and unrequited love. The teacher described how one *kathoei* she knew had to find family and friends to stay with because her father did not approve of her *kathoei*-ness and would not allow her to stay at home.[6] Another way they suffer is by having a lonely existence. Many informants—including *kathoei* and *gay* themselves—described how *kathoei* are doomed to never have a long-lasting, stable relationship.

5.1.2 Contemporary Notions of Gender and Sexuality among Youth

In contemporary Thai society, there are far more gender and sexuality categories than just man, woman, and *kathoei*, challenging the idea of a clearly defined tripartite system. Thai youth and young monastics often struggle with the seeming plethora of gender and sexual categories available at any given time. Man, woman, and *kathoei* remain the most durable categories, by which I mean they have been in circulation the longest and are the most used by the largest number of people. Newer categories like *gay* or *tut* seem to be increasingly common when describing non-normative men. For women, the categories of *di* (coming from the second syllable of the English word "lady") and *tom* (coming from the English "tom boy") are increasingly being used

lineage of female monks across Theravada Buddhist contexts like Thailand is ongoing (Collins and McDaniel 2010; Cook 2010; Kameniar 2009; Keyes 1984; Tomalin 2006).

6. Gendered pronouns are not required in Thai. In most contexts, *khao* (he/she/they) is used as a third-person pronoun for someone of any gender. In more familiar contexts, kinship terms are used to refer to others, including those not directly related by blood or marriage. Even these, however, are often not gendered. *Phi* (older sibling) and *nong* (younger sibling) are used among friends and are not gendered. *Mae* (mother), *pho* (father), *pa* (aunt), *lung* (uncle), and others are gendered, though. In the case of *kathoei*, I will use she/her/hers unless it is clear the person is trying to present as a man.

to describe partners in female same-sex relationships. At any given time, though, there are additional terms floating around that may or may not take hold in popular discourse. Youth are often more aware of these fleeting categories as they use them to describe and experiment with their own and peers' desires and presentations of self.

Youth's reflexive look at the number of gender and sexual labels was made evident to me late in 2012. A novice I knew posted to his Facebook page an image depicting various gender categories with cartoon caricatures of each category along with its label in Thai. In large letters, the top of the image reads "humans" (*manut*). From this title an arrow descends and splits into two sides: on the left is "men" (*chai*); on the right is "women" (*ying*). Under each of these two headers are several arrows pointing to 12 different subcategories. Under each of these is a cartoon image portraying a caricatured version of the subcategory. The subcategories under "men" are (from left to right): "real men," "adam," "bi[sexual]," "king," "queen," and "*kathoei*." The subcategories under "women" are (from left to right): "lesbian," "tom,"[7] "di," "bi[sexual]," "*chérie*,"[8] and "real woman" (*ying thae*). Underneath these images is a complex series of arrows pointing from certain subcategories to others.

Other versions of this chart (See Figure 5.1) popped up on popular online discussion forums in Thailand such as Dek-D,[9] Sanook,[10] and even a forum for Thai gun owners.[11] Postings on these forums make clearer the meaning of the network of arrows at the bottom of the chart. The explanation generally posted on these forums by users reads similar to Table 5.1 below.

7. Like the word *gay*, I maintain the English spelling of "tom" to make its connection to the word "tomboy" clearer. The RTGS romanization would be *thom*. The literal translation of what's written (*tom hua kai*) is "chicken-headed tom." I am unsure what "chicken-headed" (*hua kai*) refers to. When I asked a few novices about it, they were also unsure.

8. Like *tom hua kai*, neither I nor informants knew what this label referred to or where it came from. A French-speaking friend unfamiliar with Thailand has suggested it likely stems from the French word *chérie*, "sweetheart." As this seems likely, I keep the French spelling. The RTGS romanization would be *choeri*.

9. http://www.dek-d.com/board/view/2370475 (Last accessed: January 16, 2016)

10. http://webboard.campus.sanook.com/forum/?topic=3402431 (Last accessed: January 16, 2016)

11. http://www.gun.in.th/2012/index.php?topic=997620 (Last accessed: January 16, 2016)

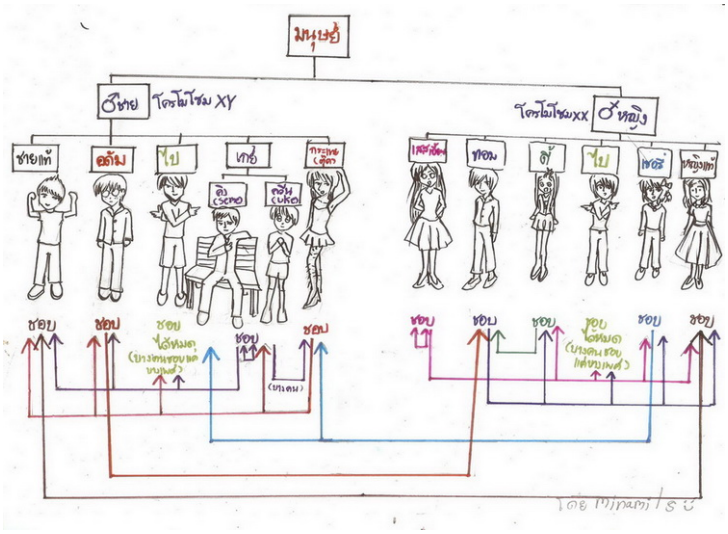

Figure 5.1: Chart of gender/sexuality categories

SOURCE: "Minamits" (used with permission)

Table 5.1: Explanation of arrows pointing out the relationships among gender/sexuality categories

Men	like	Women
Bi[sexual]	like	All of them (some people, some genders)
Adam	like	Tom
Gay	like	Men, Gay, Bi Men, Adam, Kathoei (some people)
Kathoei	like	Men, Bi Men, Adam, Gay
Women	like	Men
Di	like	Tom
Lesbian	like	Women, Dee, Lesbian, Chérie, Bi Women
Chérie	like	Kathoei, Gay
Tom	like	Women, Dee, Lesbian, Chérie, Bi Women

The chart includes other interesting aspects. The category of "gay" is divided into the two subcategories of "king" and "queen." In parentheses, "king" is also labeled "*seme*," and "queen" is also marked as "*uke*." These latter two refer to the character types found in the genre of Japanese *manga* called *yaoi*, which are stories that center around romantic relationships between two boys, one more masculine (the *seme*) and one more feminine (the *uke*). Creators of *yaoi* often market it towards a young female audience in Japan. Japanese youth culture is very popular in Thailand. Youth in Thailand often listen to music and watch music videos of musical groups in both Japan (J-Pop) and Korea (K-Pop). From these music videos, as well as East Asian movies and TV shows that have been dubbed in Thai, youth pick up fashion, hairstyles, and other aspects of Japanese and Korean culture.

This image and how people engage with it reveal several important points. It demonstrates the interesting bricolage of gender/sexuality categories that emerge from local terms (e.g., *kathoei*, *chai thae*, and *ying thae*), English (e.g., "gay," "lesbian," and "bi"), and Japanese (*seme* and *uke*). The image further demonstrates the tight interconnectedness of gender and sexuality. Each of the subcategories is indicated not only in relation to what broader gender category it falls under ("men" or "women"). The type of person each is sexually or romantically interested in also defines the subcategory. At the same time, sexual preference is not enough to define one's category. For instance, according to the explanation provided in the forums, a lesbian and a *tom* are interested sexually in the same kinds of people. What differentiates them, then, is their different presentation of gender: a lesbian may be more feminine while a *tom* is more masculine.

Given this panoply of genders and sexualities, the difficulty in determining who is a "real man" and can ordain becomes clearer. It is within this broader context of gender and sexuality that some Thais worry about how masculine the Sangha really is. The masculine status of the community of monks is not limited to there just being no women in its ranks. It is a question of whether or not all the other categories under "men" can ordain. This panoply of categories also throws into question the usefulness of describing Thailand as having a tripartite gender system.

5.1.3 Revised Scholarly Notions of Gender and Sexuality

By rendering the older tripartite man-*kathoei*-woman model of Thai gender as a somewhat stable system, scholars had to try to make sense of this explosion of different gender and sexual identities through the frame of a durable, established gender system. This explosion of gender and sexual categories emerged especially between the 1960s and 1980s (Jackson 2000). Perhaps most enigmatic was the way Thais took up the English term "gay." Peter Jackson (2003b) suggests the category of "gay" took on local meanings as it was taken up in Thailand, hence my rendering of the Thai notion of "gay" as the italicized *gay*.

Scholars have suggested different reasons for this proliferation of gender/sexuality categories. For instance, Rosalind Morris (1994) suggests that the "traditional" model of three sexes—man, *kathoei*, and woman—is being replaced by a "modern" model of four sexualities—female heterosexuality/homosexuality and male heterosexuality/homosexuality. The transition between these systems has led to the large number of transitional categories of gender/sexuality. One way this approach is problematic is that it relies heavily on the stable existence of "third gender" categories (Herdt 1996). As Towle and Morgan (2002) note about "third genders" and their analytic viability, they become a "junk drawer into which a great non-Western gender miscellany is carelessly dumped" (p. 484). As such, Morris's model of three sexes morphing into four sexualities is problematic; it relies on a stable "traditional" gender system where the "third gender" was always a stable category only destabilized by foreign concepts like "gay." Alternatively, other scholars such as Peter Jackson (2004) and Megan Sinnott (2004) have suggested the proliferation of gender/sexuality categories in Thailand is a result of the Western gender categories like "transgender" and sexuality categories like "gay" being localized through interacting with indigenous Thai understandings of gender/sexuality.

More recently, Dredge Byuang'chu Käng (2012) has suggested thinking of gender/sexuality in terms of "genderscapes": "the conceptual distribution of gender/sexuality forms in fields of uneven power" (p. 476). That is, a genderscape is the possibilities of genders/sexualities that emerge through interactions with various other social dimensions—such as morality, globalization, or

nationalism—making certain categories of gender/sexuality more inhabitable and readable than others in a given time and place. Such a conception of gender/sexuality better deals with the fluidity and in-between-ness of categories that are prevalent in Thailand, wherein a multitude of terms emerge temporarily before passing away and seemingly stable categories are often in flux. I take up this notion of genderscape because it does a better job of describing how gender and sexuality operate in Thailand rather than rigid structural analyses of a tripartite gender system have attempted to do in the past.

5.1.4 The Moral Underpinnings of Genderscapes

The connection among gender, sexuality, and morality that genderscapes provides can allow us to better understand how labels like *kathoei* and *gay* take on particular moral overtones in the context of monasticism. Gender, sexuality, and the terms people use in their everyday lives become intelligible through other concepts and processes. For instance, the popularity among Thai youth of Japanese and Western societies lead them to take up terms like "gay" or *seme* and deploy them within new contexts of Thai conceptions of gender and sexuality. Besides these processes of globalization, genderscapes also allow for domains like nationalism and morality to influence people's understanding of gender and the meanings of particular categories.

The concern over the dearth of "real men" and the increase in *kathoei* and effeminate men, which we saw expressed at the beginning of this chapter, is indelibly tied to concerns about the reproduction of the Thai nation and morality. As Käng (2012) notes, *kathoei*-ness and male effeminacy are detrimental to national identity and the reproduction of Thainess as there are less "real men" to partner with women and have children. Effeminacy jeopardizes the reproduction of the Thai population. An overabundance of *kathoei*-ness represents a degeneracy of Thai masculinity and a failure of a man's moral obligation to support Thainess. This interaction with morality also works to solidify certain gender/sexuality categories such as *kathoei* or *gay* at least temporarily. The seeming solidity of these categories further allows for "contextual suturing," (Hall 1996) in which "identities are points of temporary attachment that 'suture' an actor to a variety of subject-

positions in the divergent social locations of his or her life" (Mageo 2002, p. 3). That is, rather than taking labels like *gay* or *kathoei* to be durable identities ascribed to individuals, these categories emerge and individuals inhabit them based on broader discourses around—among other things—the nation, social reproduction, and morality. What it means to be a man, *gay*, or *kathoei* is not separable from concepts of morality. These categories are a sum of—another form of suturing together—various domains like gender, sexuality, morality, and nationalism. One aspect of them may be made more salient depending on the context. An example from Käng's work on genderscapes in Thailand will make this more concrete.

The "contextual suturing" of gender/sexuality and morality means individuals can work to legitimate categories of *kathoei*-ness or effeminacy by claiming to be morally good persons. Käng gives the example of "Wonder Gay," a group of five Thai high-school students who self-identify as *tut*. In 2009, they created a YouTube video that went viral.[12] The video is of them dancing to the song "Nobody" by the popular South Korean girl group Wonder Girls. In interviews with Wonder Gay members, the media raised concerns that such videos could encourage more boys to want to be *gay* or effeminate (and thus jeopardize national Thainess and its reproduction). The members countered that they were good students who got good grades and were "not addicted to drugs or computer games" (Käng 2012, p. 485). That is, they were morally good youth who had effectively resisted desires that lead to attachments, the key concern facing Thai youth as we saw at the beginning of this dissertation.

By suggesting they were morally good persons, they were also trying to legitimate their identity as *tut*, not as moral degenerates who threaten Thainess but as decent role models for other youth. The concern over the Wonder Gay's performance depends on a discourse about *gay*-ness or *tut*-ness that connects them to a particular moral orientation. The Wonder Gay group threatens youth's morality because being *tut* is presumed to infer a sense of immorality. In defending

12. The video received over five million views on YouTube before being removed "on copyright grounds": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=031N31B4EvM. Another version of the group performing this song at a shopping mall was available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw1l6n-2lSM. (Both URLs last accessed: January 16, 2016)

themselves, the group responds within a genderscape that connects gender, sexuality, and morality. They do not try to argue their gender has nothing to do with their morality. Instead, they argue they are morally good youth, dutifully fulfilling their role as students. Because of their morality, *tut* and *gay* need not be indelibly connected to immoral behavior but can be social positions through which one can exhibit morally good behavior.

This close connection between gender/sexuality and morality also illuminates why the issue of effeminate monks and novices is such a sensitive topic. As morally ideal behavior is expected out of monastics, novices and monks who act in non-normatively gendered ways can cause people to question the morality of those particular monks and novices and the entire Thai monastic community more broadly.

5.1.5 Monastic Masculinity and Its Forms of "Real Man"

Given this broader context of genderscapes and their connection with morality, we can now turn to better understanding what forms of moral masculinity monasticism ideally constructs. Individuals who enact these forms of monastic masculinity would be considered "real men." While different from the masculinities associated with being, say, a soldier or police officer, Thais respect monastic masculinity as a form of manhood. This respect in part stems from the moral purity that comes from letting go of desires and training oneself to live by the rules of the Vinaya.[13] Monasticism also promotes other respectable forms of "real" manhood.

One form of monastic masculinity stems from a monk's ability to make amulets, tattoos, medicines, and other materials spiritually powerful. For instance, a 13-year-old novice in Namsai ordained because he was particularly interested in protective tattoos that prevent bullets or blades from striking the tattooed person (usually a man). There were a couple monks in the area

13. What I am calling "monastic masculinity" is similar to what Simon Creak (2011) terms "muscular Buddhism" in the context of colonial and postcolonial Laos. According to Creak, muscular Buddhism "drew on the character- and state-building logic of European athleticism, but was also enmeshed in the ideas and practices of Buddhism" (p. 19). It is the disciplining of the body to the strictures of Vinaya discipline that develops one's adherence to muscular Buddhism. While this is a helpful term, I choose to use "monastic masculinity" in order to highlight the monastic discipline's connection to notions of being a man and because the notion of "muscular" over emphasizes the physical body. For a more historical look at Buddhism, masculinity, and the body, see Powers (2009).

who were well known for this practice, and the novice wanted to study under them. By developing this skill, he could become a respected monk and man who reproduces the very masculine practice of protective tattoos.

Monasticism can also open up forms of masculinity connected to politics, which would help render one as a "real man." Phra Udom's many years of monastic education away from his Karen village in Tak province provided him with the ability to not only speak his native Karen tongue but also northern Thai and central Thai. When central Thai bureaucrats began instituting farming and water usage policies that negatively impacted the livelihoods of farmers in Phra Udom's home village, the villagers were not able to effectively communicate their concerns with these government officials. Phra Udom was able to translate between the groups, working to ensure the people from his village were able to be understood by the government bureaucrats.

Upon leaving monasticism, many men become bureaucrats or civil servants. As Phra Udom explained to the novices of Wat Doi Thong in one of his evening lectures, temporary ordination teaches boys and young men how to adjust to performing social roles properly, how to speak publicly, and how to know themselves better so they could control their desires. These characteristics, Phra Udom told them, is what led many former monastics to become politicians, teachers, or other professions where they could be respectable "real men."

For those who end up staying monks their entire lives, the monastic masculinity they inhabit is one in which they are able to control desires. Not only sexual desires, but they also keep in check "normal" (*pokati*) desires like having a family. They are able to temper the desire to have the freedom of being a lay man, being able to travel more easily and go to more places. The spiritual and moral strength required to adjust oneself to this lack of freedom rendered such a long-term monastic as a "real man."[14]

14. Some scholars have argued that during their time as monks, men take on a different gender, a monastic gender (*phet yang song*) (Jackson 2004; Keyes 1986). Charles Keyes (1986) notes that this uniquely monastic gender is achieved through men's effort to transcend all desires, especially sexual desire. However, in my fieldwork, I knew of no monks or novices who described themselves as being *phet yang song*. As in the case of Phra Mai we explore below, most monks saw themselves as "real men" who were presently non-sexual but who would eventually leave monasticism, get married, and have sex. Keyes further suggests the category of *phet yang song*, which renders monastics as not fully men, would place monastic masculinity in an ambivalent position: On the one hand, being an asexual monk

5.1.6 The Gendered Requirements for Ordination

The monastic ordination ceremony helps define the relationship between monasticism and being a "real man." Recall from Chapter 3 the process entailed in becoming a novice. Most simply it involves receiving a set of robes, an alms bowl, and reciting (in Pali) the 10 precepts of novices. This *banphacha* ceremony (Pali: *pabbajjā*) to become a novice is often translated into English as "going forth." It is a process of leaving one's lay life and entering into the mendicant life of monasticism. This ceremony may be conducted within the presence of lay persons. So, monasteries often hold the ceremony en masse in large temple buildings with many boys ordaining simultaneously.

Ordaining as a monk, though, requires an additional ceremony after the "going forth" into novicehood. The *upasombot* ceremony (Pali: *upasampadā*) is this additional step. It is conducted only among the monastic community—lay persons must be outside a designated area. *Upasombot* is the process of acceptance into the order of fully ordained monks (i.e., monks who have gone through the *upasombot* ceremony previously). The beginning part of this acceptance ceremony involves assessing whether or not the novice applicant now requesting acceptance meets the necessary requirements. In addition to ascertaining whether or not he has the necessary material requirements (robes, bowl, etc.), the attending monks ask him a series of questions in Pali beginning with whether or not he is free of certain diseases (e.g., leprosy or tuberculosis). Following these queries, the monk questioning the applicant will ask:

- Are you a human being? (Pali: *Manusso'si*?)[15]
- Are you a man? (*Puriso'si*?)
- Are you a free man? (*Bhujisso'si*?)

The applicant should answer each of these questions with a response of "Yes, venerable sir" (Pali:

would strip one of being fully a man because he could not reproduce. On the other hand, ordination can make a man seem morally respectable and therefore better inhabit an ideal form of Thai masculinity. He notes this ambivalence may be heightened because of the high visibility and tolerance of male homosexuality in Thai society (Keyes 1986, p. 96 fn. 47). Given this heightened ambivalence and the contemporary gender panic over the dearth of Thai men, I suspect fear of being seen as not a "real man" may be a reason monastics do not consider themselves to be *phet yang song*; they would rather have others see them as "real men."

15. The Pali and English translations of these questions are from DeGraff (2001).

Āma, bhante) if the answer is truly yes. There are then additional questions after this to ascertain whether or not he meets other requirements such as being at least 20 years of age and having his parents' permission to undertake the *upasombot* ceremony. With these questions satisfactorily answered, the applicant is granted an audience with his monastic preceptor and the monastic community to ask for acceptance into the community.

Of particular importance here is the question: "Are you a man?" It is the question which, for some people, a *kathoei* or *gay* could not truthfully answer "yes." While it is only asked of applicants to be fully ordained monks, many hold that the requirement extends to boys ordaining as novices, too.[16] The Pali word for "man" (*purisa*) used in asking this question can also be used in Thai (pronounced as *burut*), although it is not as common as *chai* (or *phuchai*). *Burut* and *chai* are more-or-less synonyms in Thai.

The relation between the Pali *purisa* and the Thai *chai* leads some to think *kathoei* and *gay* cannot answer yes to being *purisa*, to being a man. As one lay man explained:

> If you open up and take a look at the Pali Canon, it says that when ordaining you have to be *burut*, you have to be *chai*. That's it. There is a question [when ordaining] that asks, "Are you a man [*chai*]?" You have to answer yes in Pali when you ordain. If they ask if you're *kathoei* and you say yes, then you can't really ordain in Buddhism. It doesn't matter if it's *kathoei* or *gay*; it's still just wrong.

For him, to be *burut* is to be a "man" (*chai*), which necessarily excludes *kathoei* and *gay*. While he refers to those who can ordain as *chai*, he is using *chai* to more specifically refer to "real men" (*chai thae*). As the unmarked category, *chai* is presumed to refer to "real men." It is only in the context where there may be ambiguity between a "man" and a not-quite-"real" man such as *kathoei* or *gay* that one has to specify whether or not someone is a "real man."

Recall the opening exchange in this chapter between the novices and their monk teacher. He expressed a concern over "fewer men." While not specifying "real men," his audience presumed

16. This is another example of the way in which the expectations of laity for novices extends beyond the 10 rules for novices. As novices are monastics, many laity see it as important for them to act more monk-like.

that that is what he meant when talking about the cause of "fewer men": an increasing number of effeminate men, who are not "real men" but could perhaps still be considered men of a particular marked category of man.

Taking "man" to refer strictly to "real men," in the context of asking questions during ordination to establish one's eligibility, makes the Pali *purisa* stand for "real men" only and not include categories of effeminate men. We can begin to see how monasticism may reinforce what it means to be a "real man." By viewing the ordination ceremony as only allowing "real men" to truly ordain, monasticism becomes a way to establish a boundary between different categories of men. Some, however, did not equate the Pali *purisa* with the category of "real men," questioning monasticism's ability to draw such a boundary.

5.2 How Monasticism Reinforces the Moral Contours of Genderscapes

The forms of masculinity monasticism produces along with the interconnectedness of monasticism and morality not only mean the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics is a sensitive one as it potentially throws into question the moral standing and manliness of the Sangha. It also means ideas of monasticism can shape gender/sexuality by solidifying effeminate identities and rendering them as particular moral positions similar to the case of the Wonder Gay group.

In this section, I explore the ways in which lay and monastic communities mobilize the boundaries of monasticism to shape the moral contours of the current Thai genderscape. That is, various actors use criteria for the ability to ordain as a monk or novice and expectations for how they should act to do boundary work around different gender/sexual categories, especially those of "real men," *gay*, *kathoei*, and *tut*.[17] This boundary work—determining who constitutes a certain gender and accompanying moral position—can happen in a number of ways. For one, ideas of who should or should not ordain can inform what it means to be a particular gender/sexuality.

17. For a review of earlier sociological studies on boundary work, see Lamont and Molnár (2002). For studies specifically on gendered boundary work, see, e.g., Gerson and Peiss (1985) and Ridgeway (1997). Studies have also looked at sexual identities and boundary making, such as Brekhus (2003). While there has been much on boundaries around identities, scholarship has often overlooked the role of morality in constructing boundaries. I hope the focus on the moral contours of genderscapes will help elucidate morality's role in boundary work.

Saying only "real men" can ordain requires articulating a set of characteristics that define what a "real man" is. Second, some see temporary monasticism as being able to transform effeminate boys into more masculine men, suggesting monasticism, for some, demonstrates the fluidity and mutability of gender/sexual identities. Both ways depend on a connection between gender/sexuality and morality. People often use the morality ascribed to non-"real men" to explain why they cannot ordain. The fluidity of categories suggests adjusting to the moral rigors of monasticism may also adjust one's gender.

5.2.1 Guarding Ordination to Guard "Real" Manhood

In February 2013, I sat down with one of the male lay teachers at a large school for novices in the city of Chiang Mai. As we talked about his thoughts on novices' behavior and what lay people are able to accept or not in novices deviating from their expectations, he brought up the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics:

> Not knowing your position [*sathana*] is like this: If you're a monk but *kathoei* or *gay* and you don't maintain being a monk—you act in a way that breaks the tenets of the religion [Buddhism]. . . . If you followed the tenets of the religion, you wouldn't ordain. But . . . if you did ordain and you were a monk . . . but you didn't take care, you didn't maintain being a monk. This is something damaging monks now. We see it a lot on YouTube. We see it on the Internet. It does damage, especially this topic of being *gay*, being *kathoei*.

"So, if you're *kathoei* or *gay*, you shouldn't ordain?" I asked. "Right," he answered. "If you ordain, you must control your actions so that they're good."

The teacher here is expressing a common view that *kathoei* and *gay* should not ordain because their status as such a person inevitably leads them to act in ways that "do damage" to Buddhism. For him, this is already happening as people post images and videos on the Internet of monks and novices who are presumably *gay* or *kathoei* and acting in ways that Thais deem inappropriate

for monastics. While he does not go into details here, the images and videos he is referring to often depict novices or young monks in tight-fitting robes—sometimes tied in a style similar to a Japanese kimono—donning makeup, and carrying bright pink or purple bags.[18] In more salacious incidences, images of monastics embracing romantically as a couple spread over Internet forums. In extreme cases, there were news reports of images surfacing depicting two monastics having sex or a monastic and a lay man (or woman) having sex. Such news stories, though, would caution that it was uncertain whether or not the monastic pictured was actually a monastic or someone posing as one. (Apparently there is a sexual fetish involving one or multiple sexual partners role playing as a monastic.)

Referencing such images and the concern over *gay* or *kathoei* monastics doing "damage" to Buddhism draws on a general concern about gender/sexual minorities: They are people whose lives are inherently overly sexual. As the female teacher expressed above, many Thais believe *kathoei* are born as such because in a previous life they were adulterous men. Their current existence and gender/sexuality is a result of past sexual transgressions. *Gay* and *kathoei* are categories whose sexual desire is overdetermined. They must be overly interested in sex because their being born as *gay* or *kathoei* is a result of unrestrained sexual desire and activity. Those who hold such a view would be concerned over an image of an obviously *gay* or *kathoei* monastic as they may assume such an effeminate monastic is only interested in sex. This view is likely bolstered by news reports' depiction of *kathoei* in general, and *kathoei* sex workers in particular, as devious, swindling individuals who trap or coerce men into having sex and then robbing them.

This concern over non-man monastics having inherent proclivities that mean they will not be good monastics (or corrupting for monastics who are "real men") is highlighted in other ways.

18. There was an interesting shift in colors' meanings that happened over the course of fieldwork. During much of fieldwork I volunteered teaching English to the novices or at government schools nearby. I would sometimes purchase pens, pencils, erasers, and other supplies for the students. During preliminary fieldwork in 2011, when I brought an assortment of pencils in different colors for the novices, the purple ones were avoided while pink ones were taken at the same rate as other, non-purple colors. When I asked the novices why, they said purple was a color for *kathoei*. In other instances, too, the color purple was avoided. When I returned in 2012, I did something similar. This time, though, the novices avoided pink while purple items were taken with no issue. Again, when I asked the novices why they avoided pink, it was because now it was a color for *kathoei*.

The abbot of a temple a few miles from Wat Doi Thong, and where I stayed for a little while, described how he figured *kathoei* novices and monks would not stay as monastics for long. "Most are more interested in looking beautiful, doing their hair and nails. They don't have much interest in being a monk or novice," he told me. By framing *kathoei* as being more interested in looks and attracting men, he suggests these characteristics would lead one to not fully engage in a monastic life. He did not, however, suggest they should be prohibited from ordaining. While he described how some people believe monastics may become *gay* after living in a temple for some time, he disagreed with that notion. He believed one was either born *gay* or not. Käng similarly notes how some of his informants express concern over single-sex institutions like all-boy schools as environments that can cause *gay*-ness and *kathoei*-ness to spread. In the same way, some believe the all-male setting of the temple could potentially lead to the development and spread of *kathoei*-ness, weakening Thai manhood, and thus strengthening the idea *gay* and *kathoei* should not ordain lest they turn "real man" monastics into effeminate men.

Desire and the fear of boys over desiring are at play here in terms of gender. Earlier chapters focused on monasticism being a space where boys could be shielded from the pull of addictive desires in broader society like drugs or video games. There is a similar concern here that the presence of effeminate monastics in an all-male environment will—like the Wonder Gay group among high-school students—lead other monastics to desire to be *kathoei* or *gay* themselves. By discouraging the presence of effeminate monastics, some hope to maintain a monastic environment that is a place to diminish desires of all kinds.

The potential contagiousness of male effeminacy connects concerns over effeminate monastics to broader concerns about the state of Thai morality. A lay man in his late 30s or early 40s, who was from Nan province in northern Thailand and who had spent several years in the city of Chiang Mai as a monastic to go to school, explained his concern like so:

> Those ordaining need to be far from women. If there's a monk who's a *kathoei*, it will mean the monks are not that far from women. Buddhism teaches that [monks] should distance themselves from these things: desire, desire for women, and various sexual

> desires. However, if there's a *kathoei* who enters, it will cause inappropriateness in the hearts of those monks who are men. This might cause some things—some good things—to decline or cease to be. So, it's not appropriate. The more one is a teacher—the more one is an example for students—the more one is a model. If a teacher is *kathoei* whom students see as a *kathoei*, they'll think it's good. They'll want to be *kathoei*. It will continue in this way to a negative place, a bad place.

The threat of contagion that *gay* or *kathoei* monastics pose to Thai society and the state of "real men" is exacerbated by the presumed morality of effeminate monastics and their inability to follow the monastic life. As the lay man continued: "A [monk] who's *gay* is not appropriate because it breaks one of the precepts, which is sexual desire, having sex. It's how both [*kathoei* and *gay*] are wrong." Trying to figure out which precepts he was referring to, I asked, "It breaks the precepts of—?"

"It breaks the novices' rules," he responded. "If novices act as monastics [should], then there's a tenet that they don't act in a way that breaks *Brahmacharya* [the celibate life] of monks."

The presence of *gay* and *kathoei*, especially in social positions like monasticism where they are to be teachers and moral exemplars, threatens not only Thai masculinity. It also jeopardizes the morality of Thailand. For him, the spread of effeminacy would lead Thai society to a "negative place, a bad place."

From this point of view, guarding monasticism from certain genders/sexualities is an attempt to guard "real men" from suffering a further decline. This is especially the case for all-male institutions like the monastic community. For some like the latter lay man, any introduction of a potential sexual partner (like *gay* or *kathoei*) into the monastic community threatens it. Effeminacy is a weakening force for monasticism and the "real men" who are supposed to make up its ranks.

The presence of effeminacy not only jeopardizes manhood from this perspective but also morality. It reinforces the assumption that *gay* and *kathoei* are inherently less morally upstanding because of their proclivity towards sex and tricking men into sexual relationships. In this

way, the presence of effeminate monastics reinforces for some the moral contours of the Thai genderscape. Categories of gender/sexuality are formed in part because of their presumed moral standing. "Real men" become moral superiors to effeminate *gay* and *kathoei* because the former are able to abstain from sex and lead the celibate monastic life of *Brahmacharya*, increasing their moral standing. That is, they are able to "adjust themselves" to the holy life. Many presume that effeminate men, however, cannot adjust; their immorality of being unable to adjust their sexual desire and the potential contagious spread of this desire reinforces the boundaries in the genderscape between "real men" and effeminate men.

5.2.2 Using Temporary Monasticism to Construct "Real Men"

While some hold that effeminate men inherently should not be monastics because of their connection to abundant desire, others held that *gay* or *kathoei* monastics could ordain so long as they adjusted themselves to the expectations of monastic life. Similar to how the novice summer camp was often about getting young novices to "adjust themselves" and discipline themselves to the strict rules of monasticism, this adjusting had the potential to produce not only moral or *riaproi* behavior and selves but more masculine behavior and selves.

In 2009, the popular monk Phra Vudhijaya Vajiramedhi started a "maleness education program" at his temple in the Chiang Khong district of Chiang Rai province in northern Thailand, about 300 kilometers northeast of Chiang Mai. According to news reports (e.g., Fugal 2011), he began this program in response to the images of effeminate monastics discussed in the previous section that had sparked public discomfort across Thailand. To address this issue, the "maleness education program" provided a space for effeminate boys who had ordained as novices to learn to control their thoughts, feelings, and bodies in ways becoming of monastics. By learning to act like ideal novices, some believed these boys would no longer act effeminate but rather enact a more masculine form of manhood. While this program was neither mandatory nor did it spread across Thailand to other temples, the popularity of the founding monk did make it a program parents wanted to send their sons and attracted international press attention.

This program, however, did not last long. During preliminary fieldwork in 2010, I visited the temple briefly. When I returned in 2012 to conduct longer fieldwork, though, monks there told me the explicit focus on maleness training no longer existed. They still held a summer camp for novices and had a secondary education school there. These were similar to the camp and school in Namsai district where I ended up conducting the majority of fieldwork.

The idea that temporary monasticism could alter a boy's sense of gender/sexuality was a tenuous one. Most monastics and lay people I asked about the transformative power of such a program were dubious of it being able to make an effeminate boy into a more masculine man. As a monk who lived at a temple just a few miles from Phra Vajiramedhi's temple in Chiang Rai said, "Honestly, if parents want their sons to be tough like men, they should send them to military training." Indeed, the form of idealized masculinity proffered by monasticism is not a "tough" masculinity associated with such things as the military. Monasticism, instead, offers a masculinity rooted in the potency of Buddhism, what Craig Reynolds calls "the religious dimension of Thai *machismo*" (2011, p. 56).

Thus, monasticism could foster forms of monastic masculinity outlined above. However, many doubted the ability of monasticism to make effeminate monastics adjust to monastic masculinity. Further solidifying the boundary between "real men" and effeminate genders, many Thais doubted the ability of monasticism to transform effeminate boys to be "real men" in the sense of being "tough" men.

5.2.3 The (In)ability for Effeminate Monastics to Adjust

While monasticism may not make *gay* or *kathoei* monastics into "tough" men, does it open up the possibility for effeminate monastics to inhabit other forms of monastic masculinity? This was a debatable point. For some, such transformation was not possible. As the monk who suggested parents who wanted "tough" sons should send them to military training said, "The problem that a son who's *kathoei* is sent to ordain—I believe that this can't be fixed 100% because the manners of monks and novices must be gentle, pleasant-looking, and *riaproi*, which is the opposite of some

kathoei's habits." The more "gentle" form of ideal masculinity associated with monastics was untenable for *kathoei* monastics, according to this monk, because their *kathoei*-ness precluded the ability to adjust their habits to be *riaproi* as they should be.

Others, however, suggested *kathoei* and *gay* monastics could (and should) adjust to monastic masculinity. The abbot of a temple in Wiang Haeng district explained:

> Those who are men, even though their hearts may be those of women, they can ordain. It's not something that can stop them. Even though they may be like this, if they ordain, these robes are the robes of the Lord Buddha. You must be calm and composed [*samruam*]. To be calm and composed means that if you're a lay *kathoei* you might wear lipstick or walk in a way that kinda shows [i.e., is evocative]. [But if] you're a novice, you can't go doing those things. You can be this kind of person, though, because sometimes you can't choose your birth. . . . Therefore, I teach the novices they can live [as novices]: "You can do it."
>
> We can't not be born, but we can choose what we will be. You see lay *kathoei* wearing makeup, but you [a monk] can't go around wearing makeup or drawing your eyebrows.[19] . . . Suppose [a novice] is a *kathoei*, it's the same. He must be more calm and composed because there are precepts.

For this monk, being *kathoei* or *gay* does not preclude one from being able to ordain. The ability to be a monk or novice does not depend on what one is born as but rather what one's actions are: "We can choose what we will be." He does not deny effeminate monastics who were born as such the ability to ordain and gain access to monastic forms of masculinity. However, the masculine form this abbot sees as monastic masculinity (calm, composed, and *riaproi*) do not change. These ideals are rooted in the monastic precepts and thus to moral ideals. Moral masculinity does not change; effeminate monastics must change themselves to fit the model. Similar to those who see *kathoei* and *gay* as inherently unable to ordain, this view reinforces the moral

19. In Thailand, monastics shave their eyebrows in addition to their heads about once or twice a month.

contours of normative masculinity. The ability to act and adjust oneself to the moral ideals of monasticism renders oneself as a certain kind of masculine person. Effeminate monastics shift their gender (at least as read by others) by shifting their behavior to be more morally appropriate.

Is it possible to alter the moral contours of gender? That is, what are the possibilities for changing what it means to be a good, *riaproi* monastic and thus shift conceptions of gender, particularly masculinity? This is what we turn to presently.

5.3 How Monasticism Reshapes the Moral Contours of Genderscapes

Thus far we have looked at the ways in which monasticism—particularly the boundary between who can or cannot ordain, or the boundary between who can or cannot potentially be a "good" monastic—reinforces the moral contours of gender. The morality of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics is inherently suspect, reinforcing their categorization as non-"real men" and thus unable to ordain or unable to adjust themselves to being "good" monastics. As pointed out earlier, however, thoughts on *gay* and *kathoei* monastics varied widely. I, therefore, turn to individuals who held that more than just "real men" could ordain or be adequate monastics to look at how boundaries within the Thai genderscape may be altered.

5.3.1 Expanding the Category of Purisa*: The Case of Phra Jazz*

In 2013, the story of Phra Jazz stormed across Thai media in newspapers, television, social media, and online forums. Born Sarawi Natthi and later going by the nickname Jazz, he[20] won the Miss Tiffany Universe contest in 2009. Miss Tiffany is a popular *kathoei* beauty contest in Thailand. After several years in the beauty contest and fashion industries, Jazz decided to, as he told reporters, "start a new life" (*Kom Chad Luek*, May 14, 2013). He returned to his hometown in order to ordain as a monk, and he did not plan on leaving monasticism after ordaining. When the announcement went out he would be ordaining, debates began on online forums on whether or not Jazz could

20. I use masculine pronouns for Jazz because, as we will see, he positioned himself as being a man and, thus, able to ordain.

actually ordain or if he was just trying to "cause a sensation" (*sang krasae*).

The media cast the question of whether or not Jazz could ordain in terms of the status of his body as a man's body. The article in the daily newspaper *Kom Chad Luek* indicated in the article's title: "National Office of Buddhism Director Declares 'Phra Jazz' is a Man, Can Ordain." Or as the reporter on Channel 3 television news put it: Phra Jazz is "100% fully a man" (*pen phuchai tem roi poesen*). The *Kom Chad Luek* article went on to explain:

> The director of the National Office of Buddhism explained the skepticism about what genders can ordain [*upasombot*] or not: The Vinaya is clear that being a *bantho* [Pali: *paṇḍaka*] or *kathoei* means one cannot ordain. If they ordain, they must leave monasticism. But if the ordinand has the body and heart/mind the same as a normal man [*chai pokati*]—as in the case of Phra Jazz when he took out the silicone or other things that are of women from his body so he had the figure of a normal man, not the heart/mind of a woman—he can ordain. It is at the abbot's discretion.

The abbot of the temple Jazz was to ordain at had determined that he was a man and could ordain. His ability to ordain depended largely on the state of his body. Prior to ordaining, he had removed his silicone breasts and stopped taking hormones that had given him a more feminine physique. News reports also emphasized he had never undergone sex-reassignment surgery. His genitals were male.

The other main question regarding his eligibility to ordain was the state of his heart/mind (*cit cai*). The director of the National Office of Buddhism also indicated that a monastic ordinand must have the heart/mind of a "normal man." In the case of Phra Jazz, this state of his heart/mind was confirmed in a couple ways. First, he expressed an intention to remain as a monk for a long time, perhaps even the rest of his life. Second, news reports often included statements about how he had been heavily involved in practicing meditation the last couple of years prior to ordaining. Sometimes included, too, was a statement on how he wanted to ordain for his parents, especially his father who was suffering from health problems.

These intentions—a desire to be a monastic for a long time, wanting to focus on meditation, and ordaining in support of his parents—resonate strongly with most Thais. In ordaining for one's parents and demonstrating a desire to adjust himself to the monastic life, Phra Jazz was not threatening the institution of monasticism. He, instead, was reinforcing lay expectations that a monk should focus on following the monastic rules and devoting time to meditation practice. He was going to use monasticism to tamper his older desires of vanity during beauty pageants and try to foster positive desires of aiding his family and promoting Buddhism.

Such a positive image of a person wanting to uphold the rigors of monasticism likely resonated with the Thai public who had just recently suffered the scandal of Phra (Luang Pu) Nenkham who was alleged to have embezzled nearly $10 million, impregnated a 14-year-old girl, and purchased several Mercedes Benz cars. The image of this "jet-set monk" (as the English-language media described him) wearing designer sunglasses, carrying a Louis Vuitton bag, and riding in a private jet spread across not only Thai media but international news agencies, too. The immorality of Phra Nenkham perhaps led to the welcoming of Phra Jazz's desire to uphold the morality of monasticism by ordaining for the correct reasons: practicing the Dhamma, adjusting his lifestyle according those teachings, and not taking advantage of his position as Phra Nenkham had.

Phra Jazz's acceptance as a monk stems from his claim to upholding the moral ideals of monasticism. In this way, he is not challenging ideas expressed thus far that *kathoei* and *gay* should not ordain because their hearts/minds are those of women. He is suggesting that, regardless of his past actions as a *kathoei* beauty pageant contestant, he can presently inhabit the proper heart/mind associated with monastic masculinity.

The case of Phra Jazz highlights the relationship between gender and the body. As one's body is mutable, so is one's gender. Part of why he was able to ordain was because he had a male body. His body had been temporarily feminized through silicone and hormones. The removal of these materials, though, returned his body to that of a "normal" male body. While he may have altered his body in the process of becoming Miss Tiffany Universe, he was able to change it back to be a male body. And this male body was grounded in his genitals, which never fundamentally changed.

He was able to reaffirm his being a man by reaffirming his male body. This underlying male body was the justification the abbot used for determining that he was not presently a *paṇḍaka* or *kathoei* and, thus, could ordain.[21]

His gender, his being *kathoei* or man, was able to shift more fluidly than his body without there being any necessary base to return to. As a transgender beauty pageant winner, he was able to claim being *kathoei* and the gendered expressions that went along with that category: being concerned with appearance, wearing makeup, and being interested in fashion. As his intentions shifted, though, his gender shifted towards the gendered expressions that went along with monasticism: an interest in adjusting himself to the monastic rules and spending most of his time studying Buddhism and meditation. By shifting his intentions and interests, he was able to shift his gender (i.e., his heart/mind) towards that of a man. Unlike the shift in his body, it was not about removing certain things to return it to a masculine body. The heart/mind was malleable and able to be shifted in a way that was different from his body.

The case of Phra Jazz provides an interesting example of how *kathoei* or *gay* monastics may reinforce linkages between monasticism and masculinity. That is, *kathoei* and *gay* are able to ordain so long as they enact monasticism in a way that corresponds with present notions of how monastics should act. When asking lay and monastic friends about this case, I was largely met with responses of indifference. For instance, when I asked Phra Udom what he thought about Phra Jazz ordaining, he shrugged his shoulders, saying, "It's up to the abbot." While this particular case did not seem to resonate with informants, that does not mean the monastics and laity of Namsai were able to avoid this issue.

5.3.2 Changing Laity's Conceptions of Monastic Masculinity

In some instances, monastics—through their socially elevated position—are able to reshape laity's ideas of who is or is not able to ordain. While the case of Phra Jazz, I suggested, reinforces the status quo moral contours of the genderscape, monasticism need not always reinforce moral

21. For more on the category of *paṇḍaka* in the Vinaya and their ability or inability to ordain, see Gyatso (2003).

masculine norms. In some cases, they can subtly challenge what it means to be a good monastic, altering the genderscape's moral contours, and thus conceptions of gender itself. Like the ways in which the Wonder Gay group worked to legitimate their *tut* identities by legitimating their moral character as outlined by Käng, the monastic community may do something similar for *kathoei*, *gay*, or *tut* monastics. Given their moral standing, they would be in a position to alter conceptions of moral masculinity and gender more broadly.

This process can happen in at least a couple different ways. First, monks may suggest to laity that their assumptions of who can or cannot ordain according to the Pali Canon are not so clear. Second, *katheoi* and *gay* monastics can fill beneficial roles within the monastic community, expanding ideas of what a "good" monastic can or should do. Unlike Phra Jazz's case where the claim that his ability to ordain was justified because he would fulfill the expected proper roles of monasticism (i.e., self adjustment by strictly following the monastic rules and focusing on his meditation practice), *kathoei* and *gay* monastics may claim roles that have historically not been associated with monasticism. Through their enactment, though, they may make those roles associated with monasticism, broadening ideas of what genders can ordain.

5.3.2.1 Changing Ideas of Who Can Ordain

In June 2014, I traveled to Wat Ton Pai where they were having a ground-breaking ceremony and celebration for the new school being built for the novices. One reason I was looking forward to going to this event was that Phra Mai had told me his friend and his friend's wife, a spirit medium, would be attending. I had become interested in the relationship between gender and other aspects of religious life. Friends had told me spirit mediums in northern Thailand had primarily been women, although an increasing number of *kathoei* were becoming mediums. I was interested in talking with Phra Mai's friend and his wife about it and her experience as a medium to scope out potential future research projects.

As I sat down with her, her husband, a friend of theirs, and Phra Mai that afternoon, though, our conversation began with me describing my current research project. I explained that I had

been doing research about novice monks and masculinity, and I was more broadly interested in what religious roles were available for women and *kathoei* in northern Thailand. At this, their friend described how there are a lot of *kathoei* monks in Lampang, a major city in northern Thailand about 100 kilometers southeast of Chiang Mai.[22] He was "shocked" (*tok cai*) when he went to Lampang and saw several monks with breasts. They were not fat monks with man breasts, he clarified, but had "actual, woman-like" breasts that could be seen when they were not wearing the larger, upper robe (*ciwon*) but only the smaller undershirt (or *angsa*).[23] The mood of this conversation was rather lighthearted. No one expressed condemnation towards such monks. This joking, lighthearted telling of the story—common around this issue of effeminate monastics—belied the held ideas of what genders could make for good monastics.

This man did express doubt that such individuals should be able to ordain. With Phra Mai present, he turned to the monk for some expert knowledge, asking him if *kathoei* really could ordain. Phra Mai explained that people of both or uncertain genders could not ordain, but that this was determined at birth. If a baby was born and the parents or doctor were not sure what sex the baby was or thought it was intersex, then that person could not ordain later in life. However, if the baby was determined to be male at birth, then he could ordain.

The lay people present were a bit surprised by this response. "So *kathoei* can ordain?" asked the man to Phra Mai. Yes, they could, he reiterated, so long as when they were born they were categorized as being male. Although Phra Mai did not specify, he likely meant that this determi-

22. The topic of *kathoei* monks and novices often prompted people to respond in an "over there" way. Informants in Bangkok or in the northeastern part of Thailand would often say there were lots of *kathoei* monastics in northern Thailand (cf. Käng 2012). Informants in Chiang Rai and Wiang Haeng would say there were lots of such monks and novices in Chiang Mai. And informants in Chiang Mai would describe there being a lot of effeminate monastics in Lampang. It always seemed to be an issue elsewhere but not where they were at.

23. I was not terribly surprised to hear such a story. Early in fieldwork I tutored an effeminate novice after school at Wat Namsai. As the temple he stayed at was several miles away, I usually took him back on my motorbike after tutoring. Some days he asked me to stop at the local drug store where he purchased birth control pills, which he called "female hormones" (*ya homon phetying*). Taking these, he felt, would give him small breasts and a more feminine appearance. Interestingly, after he left monasticism a few months later, he told me he stopped taking such pills as he was no longer interested in maintaining a feminine physique. Comparing this to the case of Phra Jazz, we can better see the ambiguity of *kathoei*'s bodies and monasticism. This refiguring of the body to be more feminine that this novice attempted is a key point many point to for why *kathoei* and *gay* should not ordain. They do not adjust their bodies to fit the expected figure of monastic masculinity. Phra Jazz's visible effort to not do this but to actively transform his body so it did fit expectations was likely a major reason for his ultimate acceptance.

nation was based on the genitals of the baby at birth.

Phra Mai and I had a similar conversation a few days earlier as I drove him into the city to pick up a prescription from the hospital for his mother. I asked him what he thought the question *Puriso'si*? (Are you a man?), which was asked during an ordination ceremony, meant. With a smirk on his face (the meaning of which I could not figure out), he said it meant if you were a man (*phuchai*) or not.

Playing ignorant, I asked, "What is a man?" (*phuchai pen arai*). Continuing his smirk, he simply answered, "I'm a man."

I clarified my question: "Is being a man about the body, the heart/mind, or about both the body and heart/mind?"[24] It was both, he answered, a man because of both his body and heart/mind.

In terms of ordaining, then, how would one know if someone was also a man in his heart/mind or not, I further inquired. He said that this is why the Pali word *purisa*, and thus the question to ordinands ("Are you a man?"), is really asking what one's body is. It is the sex one is born as that determines whether or not one can ordain.

In these conversations, Phra Mai complicated what people assumed about who could or could not ordain as a monk. Because of the question, "Are you a man?" asked at an ordination ceremony, some laity hold that *kathoei* and *gay* could not answer "yes" to that as their heart/mind was not that of a man even if their body was that of a man. By interpreting the Pali word *purisa* as meaning one had been identified at birth as being male, Phra Mai encouraged the laity present to think differently about gender and its relation to monasticism.

While such conversations may have prompted people to rework their understanding of gender, it did not necessarily change moral readings of *kathoei* or *gay*. That is, the laity may have walked away thinking *kathoei* and *gay* could technically ordain but perhaps holding onto ideas that such monastics would be inherently immoral and therefore bad monastics. Other monastics,

24. As I go through my field notes on this event again, I realize Phra Mai could have taken my clarifying question another way. Because of Thai grammar, he could have thought I was asking him if when he said he was a man that meant he was a man because of his body or because of his heart/mind or both. That is, he could have taken what I meant to be an abstract question to be a question about him personally.

though, did try to alter this moral understanding of *kathoei* and *gay*.

5.3.2.2 The Moral Goodness of *Kathoei* & *Gay* Monastics

Much of this chapter so far has looked at how the institution of monasticism can be seen as a conservative social force. By guarding the boundaries of monasticism, it guards against broader social changes in gender and the decline of "real men" or traditional masculinity and its connection to Buddhist morality. For some, though, monastics hold an important position for encouraging social change, reshaping cultural practices and institutions in necessary and beneficial ways. I spoke with one such monk, the health teacher at a school for novices in the city of Chiang Mai.

That day the school was preparing for an important visit from members of the royal family and government officials, who were going to be conferring an award on the school for excellence in education. I joined this monk along with four novices, ages 12 to 16, in the main meeting hall. Their work for the day was to decorate the hall for the award ceremony. In particular, they were doing the flower arranging. We were surrounded by bunches of fresh flowers, piles of cut stems, and stacks of green wet foam blocks in various sizes covering the floor. Engulfed in the flowers' sweet fragrance, the monk and I started talking about gender:

> **Me**: I'm interested in gender because some people here have said that in the city there are a lot of novices who are *gay* or *kathoei*. They think it's a problem or something not very good. I'm not sure, though, why they think it's not very good.
>
> **Monk**: Their mannerisms are inappropriate.
>
> **Me**: Inappropriate how?
>
> **Monk**: Inappropriate for monastics. There are many precepts to observe. Showing their mannerisms, bringing in new things like technology, adorning the body; these things go against that. But truthfully, we can't forbid it. They are ways for kids to feel that they can control something of their own. For me, it's not a problem. Laity, though, will wonder if it's appropriate. If we talk about human rights, they think there should be every opportunity for everyone as everyone has the same rights

under the constitution. However, it may go against custom or culture.

Me: Honestly, I don't think it's a problem. However, if most Thai people think it's not appropriate, how do you teach your students when some teachers want them to have a life that is appropriate, that follows society?

Monk: If kids are already this way, can we really forbid it? Their hearts/minds are already this way. Don't force them. It can't be done. Some kids kill themselves. This is a roundabout way of killing kids. We don't take a small blemish and make it into something negative, do we? You have some abilities. Show those. . . . We must have a way of life that's not too bound to the monastic frame. Conduct yourself in a way that's appropriate—that's good—along with conducting yourself in a way that's up-to-date, that's modern.

In this way, he is suggesting a way in which *gay* and *kathoei* monastics could be better accepted in Thai society. For him, it means laity should try not to get caught up with something small like a monk's or novice's mannerisms that suggest an effeminate gender/sexuality. Instead, they should focus on good things about such monastics and encourage them to pursue those abilities. They cannot change these gendered behaviors lest they do damage to these young monks and novices such as driving them to suicide.[25]

Similar to the previous chapter with finding "the middle" between being too strict or too lax with the monastic rules, flexibility is also needed in the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics. If displaying effeminate behaviors may be seen as "inappropriate" for some, but in the contemporary moment forcing young monastics to stifle such characteristics would be dangerous, then a way of life needs to be found in between that works. Such a way may deviate from laity's expectations but work to help these monastics conduct themselves in a way that is still beneficial. By doing something beneficial for the Sangha and thus society, effeminate monastics should be seen as morally good actors. *Kathoei* and *gay* should be seen as morally good persons. Like the case

25. This is not a hyperbolic claim. The suicide rate in northern Thailand is one of the highest in the region (Lotrakul 2005). Since beginning fieldwork, I have known multiple people who have contemplated, attempted, or did commit suicide.

of Wonder Gay, this monk suggests effeminate monastics' gender should be accepted because of their moral appropriateness. Reworking notions of morality can reshape the connections people make between monasticism and masculinity, altering the Thai genderscape.

Another young monk I knew in another part of Chiang Mai province tried to demonstrate an alternative view of morality and gender on a daily basis. He was one of the few monks I knew who openly identified as *gay*, with most in the village knowing. He described how sometimes people would have an issue with *gay* or *kathoei* ordaining, largely by being more critical of *gay* or *kathoei* monastics who misbehaved than other monastics. He felt his presence was changing some people's minds. He tried to be more involved and helpful in the community, working to organize events and to improve community unity. By doing these things (more frequently than the non-*gay* monastics at his temple, he noted), he tried to show the lay community that he was a morally good monk who benefited the community.

The monk teacher, whom I quoted above about not forcing kids to change, is hopeful that changes to perceptions about effeminate monastics would make Thai society more open and accepting, as he suggests Thai culture is changing:

> **Monk**: Culture can change. Thai society can become more accepting.
>
> **Me**: How does culture change?
>
> **Monk**: Culture changes following the tide of globalization [*krasae lokaphiwat*]. The system changes. It can change. It's not that this person is a *gay* or *kathoei* and therefore asked to leave. He can be a part of building society. It's not that he's always going to be a negative point [in society]. This is something Thai people respect one another for. This makes us different from other countries. . . . What to do with someone who's already this way [*gay* or *kathoei*]? You can't force him to be a man. Whether he's a monk, novice, or lay person, you can't force him. . . . A child likes certain things. If we force him, he will be uneasy [*uetat cai*]. He won't want to study. It will have a direct impact on this child. This is the important thing about human rights.

This concern about forcing a child to do things he does not want to and the negative consequences is similarly noted by Nancy Eberhardt (2006) in the Shan Buddhist community she has studied in northern Thailand. As she notes, "For many Shan, a person's desires or preferences are not culturally/socially constructed but, rather, essential to the person—emblematic even—and, hence, somewhat arbitrary and mysterious. . . . Therefore, one should be wary of forcing a child to do something that is against its will" (p. 81). In the context of monasticism, a young novice is expected to adjust himself and tamper his desires in order to be a good monastic. However, there is a limit to how much he can realistically adjust. Forcing him to adjust too much could be detrimental. While those whose views were explored in previous sections may argue effeminate novices who cannot adjust should simply not ordain, the monks here take a differ perspective. They suggest the laity's expectations can and should shift so that such monastics can ordain and not feel they need to force themselves to adjust too much.

The contemporary world is a global world organized around the discourse of human rights, according to this monk. The monastic community and what lay people expect out of it need to shift to be in line with this way of life. This is so because children are organizing their lives around this way of being. Forcing them to be otherwise could be damaging. In a way, then, the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics and Thai society's inclination towards greater acceptance sets the stage for monasticism's ability to not be a force for stalling social change but to be a site for encouraging change in how Thai society perceives *gay*, *kathoei*, and male effeminacy.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter began with the issue of how *gay* and *kathoei* monastics are a sensitive topic in contemporary Thailand. For many, such monastics are metonymic of a larger social concern: fewer "real men" in Thai society, which jeopardizes the ability for Thai society to reproduce itself at a very basic level. That is, fewer "real men" means fewer heterosexual relationships and, thus, fewer children and a shrinking Thai population. This concern over masculinity is exacerbated by a burgeoning number of gender/sexuality categories that deviate from "real men."

There is also the concern around morality. Many hold that *kathoei*, *gay*, and other non-"real men" are inherently prone to immoral behavior because of their strong desires. These desires, particularly sexual desires, would be exacerbated in the context of the monastic community because of the Sangha's homosocial structure and vow of celibacy. The presence of effeminate monastics could jeopardize this celibacy or encourage impressionable novices to become *gay* or *kathoei* themselves.

For some, monasticism can work to prevent this crisis of masculinity. As the ordination ceremony requires one to be a man in order to be eligible for monkhood, preventing non-"real men" from ordaining—largely by discouraging effeminate boys and men from ordaining—may protect the monastic community from suffering the same fate as larger Thai society. That is, keeping the institution of monasticism a homosocial environment of only "real men" may work to protect Thai Buddhist masculinity. For others, although few, monasticism could alter effeminate boys and men. The monastic lifestyle could transform them into more masculine men, or at least they would present themselves as being more masculine while being monastics.

Both of these orientations towards monasticism and masculinity reinforced the moral contours of the Thai genderscape. Many Thais presume that *gay* and *kathoei* are inherently immoral because of their gender/sexuality, which predisposes them towards hypersexual desires. Attempts to protect monasticism from effeminacy reinforces these moral assumptions.

This conservative function of monasticism, like the connection between monasticism and Thai nationalism explored in earlier chapters, is often emphasized in the literature. However, I have tried to show how this is not always the case. The opposite may also happen in which monasticism can be an important site for seeing the unfolding and uptake of emerging conceptions of gender, sexuality, and morality. In cases where young monastics who are *gay* or *kathoei* demonstrate their morally good inclinations, they try to alter people's perceptions of genders by changing the connection between morality and gender. Reworking the domain of morality can reshape the categories of gender and sexuality. Similarly, adjusting the categories of gender reshape ideas about morality.

CHAPTER 6

MONASTIC BODIES AND THE EMBODIMENT OF THE SANGHA

Phra Udom and I were sitting in the back of Charoensat School's pick-up truck. One of the school's lay teachers had driven us into the city of Chiang Mai to run errands. Before returning to Namsai, though, we stopped at one of the main temples just outside Chiang Mai's "old city" where Phra Yaa, the principal of Charoensat School, had a meeting. We were sitting in the truck parked along the temple's main drive, waiting for the principal to get out of the meeting. While we were waiting, a small group of novices around 15 years old came walking out of the temple's high school that was across from where our truck was parked. One of the novices was wearing his robes tied very tightly, making clear his body's lanky frame. His upper robe was tucked straight across his chest rather than the more typical style of having the upper robe at a diagonal up to his shoulder. When Phra Udom saw this novice, he said to me with a grin, "Oh! That is too much!" (*o! koen pai!*). Switching to English, he laughed as he struggled with which pronoun to use: "She . . . or he . . . she . . . yes, she is too much."[1]

The way novices wear their robes says a lot about their gender, sexuality, and personality. Monastics convey these traits within a limited range of possibilities compared to what most lay persons have available to them. Monastics have just one type of outfit they can wear in a limited range of colors (usually dusty oranges, yellows, and reds). Bodily adornments—whether clothing, jewelry, piercings, or makeup[2]—are common material ways in which people convey their gender, sexuality, or other characteristics. By restricting access to such modes of presentation, monastics

1. Phra Udom most likely switched to English because the joke is easier to make in English, in which pronouns are clearly gendered. While there are pronouns in Thai to distinguish between "she" (*lon*) and "he" (*khao*), the former is generally used poetically and not used in everyday conversation. Instead, the third person pronoun *khao* is generally used conversationally for "he" or "she." That is, in conversational Thai—and northern Thai—a gender neutral pronoun is used. It is also important to note here that Phra Udom is not making a joke about the novice's effeminate appearance or looking *kathoei* in English because *kathoei* are only funny or the objects of jokes for English-speaking foreigners. *Kathoei* are often the object of jokes in Thai, too. It is just in this case the joke was easier to make in English—with its required use of unambiguously gendered third person pronouns—than it was in Thai.

2. I am leaving out tattoos here because many monastics do have tattoos that they either had done prior to ordaining or while they were a monastic. Monastic tattooing is often about protective tattoos, although they also mark a particular kind of masculinity as noted in the previous chapter. Among novices, though, at ages between 12 and 19, it is very uncommon for them to have much in the way of tattoos.

are less able to readily display individual differences. Most lay and monastic Buddhists laud this restriction. By shaving their heads, not wearing makeup or perfume, and all wearing the same clothing, monks and novices do not have to think much about their appearance. The lack of concern about clothing or hair was a memorable experience of temporary monasticism among lay men who had ever ordained. Usually after making a comment about having to refrain from eating after midday, they would express happiness for how they "didn't have to worry" (*mai tong kangwon*) about what they were going to wear or how their hair looked. Among monks in charge of the novice summer camps, they expressed how the monastic robes and shaved heads made the novices more uniform regardless of their socio-economic or ethnic background. While these markers indicate monastics are separate from laity, they also mark that monastics are equivalent to one another. That is, the robes and shaved heads are polysemic; they convey different meanings to different people. Much like the monastic rules (as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4), the sameness of the monastic robes becomes more complicated the longer one is in the monastic community. Minor variations in how the robes are worn can signify very major differences for monks and novices.

Just as we saw a discrepancy in Chapter 4 between how former short-term monastics or laity talked about the monastic rules around eating and how current monastics approached them, the idea monastics do not worry or think much about their clothing often does not reflect monastics' experiences in day-to-day life. While lay persons can style their hair in different ways, transform their faces with makeup, or adorn their bodies in different styles of clothing, monastics are usually not allowed such self-styling. Yet Phra Udom is able to make a judgment of a novice's gender/sexuality from several meters away and without speaking with the novice. The level of tightness and how the cloth is folded across the novice's chest are indicative of what kind of monastic this novice is. Dress and appearance, then, are still important within the monastic community. Clothing is something monks and novices—and some laity—*do* pay close attention to.

The previous chapter looked at the intersection of gender/sexuality and morality made par-

ticularly evident through the issue of *gay* and *kathoei* monastics. Because of the high expectations laity (real and imagined) have about monastics' moral behavior, monks and novices are in a unique position to reproduce Thai stereotypes about the presumed immorality of gender and sexual minorities such as *gay* and *kathoei*, or they may work to change such presumptions. By expanding the possibilities of monastic masculinity, they reshape the moral contours of masculinity and challenge the assumption that non-"real men" are inherently immoral because of their gender/sexuality.

In this chapter, I further explore how the monastic body and robes represent Buddhism. I suggest that the body becomes another way in which conceptions of monasticism and moral masculinity are constructed between monastics and laity. The monastic body is "indexical" (Silverstein 1976) of the Thai Sangha. That is, individual monastic bodies reference not only the individual but also the broader monastic community, which they are connected to and representative of by virtue of being a monastic. The indexicality of monastic bodies have particular temporal "entailments," too (Keane 2003). The image of contemporary monastics entails concerns about the future of Buddhism, monasticism, and the Thai nation, which in turn strengthens the symbolism of the monastic body. This indexicality also leads to a certain amount of "erasure" (Gal and Irvine 1995), in which individual monastics' characters may be erased as their symbolic representation of the larger Sangha takes precedence. More concretely, seeing a "misbehaving" monk can lead people to worry about the whole of the monastic community because the individual monk represents the entire Sangha.

At the same time, I argue that analyzing the monastic body and robes through the analytic of representation is not enough; it does not fully explain what is going on with the monastic body and robes. By focusing on representation, scholars often cast the body as an *a priori* canvas onto which representations are inscribed on the body. The body, though, is itself a construction that is socially and dialogically produced (Butler 1990). Drawing on the notion of the "social body" by Mary Douglas (1970), I argue that novices and monks become part of a larger "Sangha body." That is, when Phra Udom jests about the novice wearing his robes too tightly, conveying the notion

the novice may be *kathoei*, the novice is not just (mis)representing the monastic community by showing others he is not comporting his individual body to be inline with expectations. The novice as an appendage of the Sangha body is comporting the social Sangha body in a way that makes the entire monastic community, the Sangha, look to be *kathoei* or *gay*.

The body plays a central role in Buddhist philosophy and practice, making it a fruitful site for inquiries into issues of embodiment and embodied representations. The foulness and mortality of the body, as well as the decay of corpses, have long provided Buddhist practitioners with objects for meditation on the nature of human existence (Desjarlais 2016; Klima 2002). Contemplating the inevitability of death, as well as the constant change experienced by the body, provide rich insights into the Buddha's teachings on the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). For the monastic ascetic, contemplation on the body provides a practice by which to deconstruct the body-as-self and tamper desires, particularly sexual desires (Collins 1997). Apart from the creation of a space to meditatively analyze the nature of the self, Steven Collins (1997) notes the importance of the monastic body in socially performing the bodily comportment expected of monastics. In this chapter, I focus on this second aspect of the monastic body. I am primarily concerned with how the individual monastic performs his role as part and parcel of the Sangha. I largely focus on this because the young, temporary monastics of Charoensat School were often more concerned about their monastic performance than effecting profound self-transformations through meditative practices. While the monks and novices around Namsai would at times engage in contemplative practices on the body, the educational focus of temples like Wat Ton Pai and Wat Doi Thong left little time for such ascetic practices.[3]

3. For example, some evenings at Wat Doi Thong we would chant the reflection on the repulsiveness of the 31 parts of the body (for a list, see Collins 1997, pp. 192–193) in both Pali and Thai. Monks and novices were also encouraged to participate in week-long meditation retreats where they could focus more on their ascetic practices. Funerals also provided an opportunity for monks to talk about the inherent foulness of the body.

6.1 Standing in for the Nation: Monastic Body as Representation

Monastics' concern about their appearance stems, in part, from how the monastic body can represent Thai religion, morality, and nation. How the monastic body represents the Thai nation becomes clearer if we take a look at the context of the three southernmost provinces in Thailand that neighbor Malaysia. This area has a large number of Muslims who often do not feel Thai because of the linkage between Thainess and Buddhism. Because of their religious identity as Muslims and the history of the Patani kingdom that, like Lan Na, had been separate from Siam, they do not feel they truly belong in Thailand but rather Malaysia, which is in many ways religiously and culturally more similar.

These ethnic and religious differences have led to conflict and violence in these provinces, including the violent targeting and killing of monks. As Michael Jerryson (2011) notes in his study of Buddhist monks' role in the violence of southern Thailand, "there are Buddhist organizations that seize upon the significance of a defaced Buddhist monk as a means to rally support for Buddhist nationalism" (p. 75). That is, many Thais see an assault on a Buddhist monk as an assault on what the monk represents. In this case, he represents Thai Buddhism and hence the Thai nation. Regardless of what individual motivations may be, actions by or toward the monastic-body-as-representation is connected to larger symbolic systems. Jerryson further notes, "The murder of monks may be personally or politically motivated, but if the murder is located within a larger narrative, it results in local and national rage" (p. 76). An attack on an individual monk is an attack on Buddhism and the Thai nation, the things a monk represents. For Jerryson, violence towards an individual monk is not a literal attack on Buddhism or the Thai nation. It is an attack on a representation of the concept of Thai Buddhism or nation. Representation is the mechanism through which an individual monastic body stands in for the Sangha.

While the intense interreligious tensions of southern Thailand make monastics' representation especially salient, the importance of monks' image and what it represents is present in other parts of Thailand, too. At one level, this reverence towards monastic images is seen throughout Thailand in the collection and trade of amulets (Kitiarsa 2012; McDaniel 2011). Amulets often have

images of well-respected Thai monks on them and are collected, worn on necklaces, and affixed to car dashboards or hung from rear-view mirrors to provide protection and good fortune. The "merit" (*bun*) of these famous and powerful monks is materialized and made accessible through their image. The images represent the spiritual power amassed by such charismatic monks.

On another level, the visual reminder of Buddhism through actual bodies of monastics is representative of the religion's presence and strength in northern Thailand. The monks from Wat Doi Thong, Wat Ton Pai, and Wat Namsai who came from more remote regions of Chiang Mai or neighboring provinces visited their home villages with fellow monks and novices as often as possible. In many of their villages, Christianity was becoming more popular, particularly as missionaries increasingly provided social services like education to these remote areas. They feared Buddhism was losing its relevance and importance in their home villages and being replaced by Christianity, which offered more tangible benefits in terms of resources. Their returning with a group of monastics—and usually always with clothing, food, medicine, money, and other resources—to their home villages reminded villagers of Buddhism and its tenets of compassion and generosity. Their bodies and robes were the vehicle for reminding laity. Monastics' representation of Buddhism's generosity to local villagers would hopefully instill "faith" (*khwam napthue*) and continued interest in Buddhism, preventing the spread of Christianity. The image of the monastic and what he represented through his robes and shaved head perpetuated faith in Buddhism. At the same time, the monks represented to the villagers the opportunities for "development" (*phatthana*) made possible by the Thai state. The monks, through ordaining and receiving a government-regulated education, showed with the resources they were able to amass and redistribute that Thai Buddhism—and, hence, the Thai nation—could help villagers improve their economic status by aligning with the state apparatus of Thai Buddhism.

Monastic robes are a metonym for the current state of Buddhism in Thailand. Their appearance in a village can stand for the social benefit provided by the religion as a whole. While standing in for the religion, the appearance of an individual monk or novice in his robes can also represent aspects of his gender as we saw above with Phra Udom pointing out a *kathoei* novice

by how the novice wore the robes.[4] Moreover, an individual's robes can symbolize the current moral status of individual monastics as well as the larger monastic community. Subtle changes in the style of wearing robes can have a significant impact on how a monk's or novice's morality and gender/sexuality are perceived by both laity and other monastics. The monastic body, then, can stand in for many things from the state of Buddhism to the morality of the Sangha. Representation shifts according to the regional context, too. We can begin to see here the ways in which individual monastics embody the larger social body of the Sangha body. To better understand this process, though, it is important to know more about the history and regional variation of the monastic robes in Thailand.

6.2 A Brief History of Monastic Robes in Thailand

Like the rules and expectations of Buddhist monasticism, most Thais hold that the robes are just like the robes used during the time of the Buddha.[5] While modern techniques of fabric production and dyeing have altered the ways robes are made, the look and use is presumed to be just as it was millennia ago. This apparent continuity from the original monastic robes to the robes of today is important to Thai Buddhists. History, however, is not just about continuity. There are important moments of discontinuity that are symbolized in the robes, which often represent regional distinctions in Thai Buddhism. Such discontinuities undermine the notion that monastics represent a unified Thai Buddhism. While we will look at these discontinuities later, let us begin by looking at how the robes represent the continuous lineage of the Sangha from the Buddha to contemporary Thailand.

4. The ability for clothing and appearance to convey notions of Thai nationalism and masculinity is also noted by Ruth Streicher (2012) in her study of the "gentlemanly state" represented by soldiers and their military uniforms in Thailand's southern provinces.

5. This continuity between the Buddha's first community of monks and the contemporary monastic community relates to the sense Thai Buddhists have of being Theravada Buddhist. A defining characteristic of Theravada Buddhism compared to Mahayana Buddhism is that in Theravada the monastic code does not and should not change based on context. It should remain the same regardless of time and place. The rest of the dissertation, however, should make clear that such a premise is untenable; the rules and guiding principles of monastic behavior are constantly shifting according to time and place. As mentioned in a footnote in an earlier chapter, sorting out the distinctions between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhisms in Thailand is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

6.2.1 Historical Continuities in the Robes

Monastic and lay Buddhists remember the history of the monastic lineage in ways beyond just the robes. At the beginning of nearly all ceremonies, the participants pay homage to the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The Buddha represents both the historical Buddha who lived 2600 years ago and the idea that one can reach enlightenment (Pali: *nibbana*; Sanskrit: *nirvana*). The Dhamma represents the Buddha's teachings and the path he prescribed for reaching enlightenment. Finally, the Sangha represents the community of monks who practice and spread the Buddha's teachings. Phra Udom often reminded the novices at Wat Doi Thong that when we pay homage to the Sangha, it is not just the Sangha of today (i.e., the contemporary monastic community). When we pay homage to the Sangha, we are paying homage to all monks from Kaundinya Bhikkhu, the very first monk ordained by the Buddha, to the current community of Buddhist monks throughout the world and all the monks (male and female) and novices (male and female) in between.

While laity also pay homage to the Triple Gem, being reminded of the Sangha's lineage, they are also reminded of the monastic robes' connection to this lineage when they make merit by offering food and other requisites to monks and novices. Lay people often framed this giving to the monks in a very particular way: They were not making an offering to a particular monk; instead, they were making an offering to the entire Sangha. As such, they would often offer something they liked or something the deceased relative they were making merit on behalf of had liked, not what the monk liked. For example, even though the monks and novices at Wat Doi Thong did not smoke[6] and many laity felt it was inappropriate for monastics to smoke, some lay people offered tobacco and rolling paper because their ancestors smoked or it was tradition to offer tobacco to monks.

Such an orientation to offerings was because laity saw their offerings going to *pha lueang*, "the

6. There was one older monk at the temple, *Tu Lung*, who did smoke but was more reclusive and generally did not join in temple activities. Local villagers he knew would generally come in the morning specifically to him to offer food, cigarettes, and other things directly to him. Towards the end of fieldwork, too, a local man who smoked ordained. His wife, though, usually bought him cigarettes or tobacco and paper for smoking.

yellow robes" (i.e., what the robes stood for more generally, the Sangha), not to individual monks or novices. As one lay informant explained when we were talking about the duty of a Buddhist lay person to support the monastic community: "We do not give to a monk, we give to the yellow robes" (*mai thawai phra tae thawai pha lueang*). Using "the yellow robes" as synecdoche for the Sangha of monks and novices was common. People often said "wear the yellow robes" (*sai pha lueang*) to mean ordaining as a monk. They also spoke of "living in the yellow robes" (*yu nai pha lueang*) to refer to living under the monastic rules within a temple.

The notion of "giving to the yellow robes" was also used by some laity for why it was okay to make offerings to monks who were rumored to be corrupt or too lax in their following the Vinaya according to expectations. For instance, one lay woman I knew continued to support a temple in a district neighboring Namsai even though she had heard rumors that the monks were misusing temple money, using it to travel into Chiang Mai at night to go to bars and dance clubs under the disguise of lay clothing and wigs. I asked her why she continued to donate to the temple and help at its events, especially if the rumors were true and the monks were misusing the money she and other laity offered them. She gave the explanation of "giving to the yellow robes" Her offerings were still meritorious she reasoned because her intention was good: She wanted to support the Sangha represented by the robes. It was the monks, not her, who would reap the negative results, the bad *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*), from misusing the temple's funds. She hoped her continued support would generate enough good merit that the conditions of the temple would improve and the monks would begin to act better or leave monasticism and better-acting monks would live there. Of course, not all lay persons would act similarly. Most would stop supporting such a temple or work to force the offending monks out of the Sangha, which was why most monastics, like the monks and novices of Wat Doi Thong, were so careful about being perceived as rule-abiding monastics. I highlight this case to illustrate the extent to which some see the representation of the monastic robes. Giving to the robes as giving to the entire Sangha throughout time and space allows some to overlook the transgressions of individual monastics.

We can see more clearly the meaning and collective memory tied to the monastic robes. "The

yellow robes" often stand in for the entire Sangha of monks and novices. And this Sangha is not limited to just contemporary monks; it refers to the entire historical lineage from the young ten-year-old boy who just ordained as a novice all the way back to the Buddha himself. When lay people make offerings to a monk or novice in "the yellow robes," they see that act as also giving to the Buddha and the historical Sangha.

6.2.2 Regional Discontinuities in the Robes

Discontinuity, not just historical continuity, is encoded within the robes. This discontinuity is most frequently about regional difference. Differences in robes standing for national or regional differences can most clearly be seen around the color of the robes. While the Buddha forbade robes being certain colors (e.g., blue or green), there is nothing in the Vinaya that dictates what color the robes must be. As a result, many different colors have sprung up. In explaining the different colors, informants explained that as Buddhism spread from present day northern India to other regions of South and Southeast Asia the monks would use whatever flowers, tree bark, or other dye-making materials were available. As those natural dyes were replaced with synthetic dyes, the regionally distinct colors were reproduced. Different lineages sometimes had different colors, too, as the leading monk would choose to use one kind of dye over another. The students of that monk would continue to use the same dyeing formula.

How the robes are worn has also been a site for state intervention into the monastic community and shaping public perception of the Sangha as we saw in Chapter 2. King Mongkut (r. 1851–1868), borrowing from the Mon practice in Burma, required Thai monks to cover both shoulders when outside their temple's grounds (Taylor 1993; Tiyavanich 1997). Before then, monastics would often wear their robes as in Figure 6.1 both inside and outside their temples. Known as "two shoulder monks," those monastics who followed the edict were seen by laity to be more strict and to be practicing monastic asceticism as the Buddha originally intended. This was part of a larger scripturalist movement by King Mongkut to promote an "original" Buddhism as practiced during the time of the Buddha. And this original Buddhism was presumably "known" through

the Pali Canon.[7] The practice of covering both shoulders (Figure 6.2) took root and spread so that most monks throughout Thailand today cover both shoulders when outside the temple.

Figure 6.1: A novice wearing his robes in the *dong* style

In Namsai, it was not always done, though, and when it was not, it usually took on a specific regional connotation. For instance, most of the monks, when going to collect alms, covered both shoulders.[8] A popular custom on the day of *peng put* is for monks and novices to go out on alms rounds at midnight. It is particularly important in the Buddhism of Lan Na, the ancient kingdom that included northern Thailand. Northern Thai Buddhists believe that the monk Phra Upakhut, who was a powerful monk and meditation teacher 2000 years ago in northern India, takes the form of a young monastic on the night of *peng put*. Whoever makes offerings to Phra Upakhut in disguise will have good luck and become rich. On *peng put* day in Namsai, the monastics

7. I use "known" in scare quotes because the texts of Theravada Buddhism were not written and codified until some 500 years after the death of the Buddha, and scripturalist movements are often based on imagined histories. On the problem of taking the Pali Canon to be indicative of early Buddhism, see Collins (1990).

8. Oftentimes, novices would not. This was not necessarily because of regional distinction but convenience. Walking several miles while wearing the robes as in Figure 6.1 was easier. Wearing them as in Figure 6.2 would often cause the robes to slip around and become disheveled looking (i.e., not *riaproi*) on the novices.

Figure 6.2: A monk and novices wearing their robes in the *buap* or "two shoulder" (*song lai*) style

generally always went out of the temple on alms with only one shoulder covered, as in Figure 6.1. When I asked monks and laity about wearing the robes in such a way, they talked about how the veneration of Phra Upakhut was a particularly northern Thai, or Lan Na, practice. The way the monastics tied their robes connected people with that regional history. In this case, the yellow robes not only represented the continuity of the Sangha from the time of the Buddha to the time of Phra Upakhut to the present-day monastics in Namsai. The robes also represented disjuncture or discontinuity with the rest of Buddhist Thailand. The practice of collecting alms outside the temple with only one shoulder covered represented the Sangha of Lan Na before it was taken over by Siam and became part of Thailand.

6.2.3 History, Representation, and the Monastic Body

We can begin to see here how the monastic robes both represent the history of the Sangha and do more than represent the historical conjunctures and disjunctures through their robes. The symbol

of the "yellow robes" represents the contiguous history of the Sangha. Even though there may be some individuals who inhabit the robes but who do not inhabit the expected comportment of monastics, they still represent the Sangha through their robes. At the same time, the robes can also represent points of disjuncture in history such as when Lan Na was separate from Siam and had its own form of monastic presentation of the robes. While this form may have shifted to the two shoulder way of wearing the robes as Siamese images of the monastic robes spread, at certain times and during certain ceremonies, the separate Lan Na style can be represented.

When it comes to embodiment, we may think of Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, "structuring structures" that individuals are socialized into, taking on certain ways of being to the point that such behaviors seem "natural" to the person and their origin erased within the broader social structure. The notion of habitus depends on "transposable dispositions" that processes of socialization instill within individual bodies as character traits, tastes, or ways of being. In reproducing these dispositions, they come to be seen as natural and obvious. Within Thai society, we can think of *wai*-ing to elders as part of one's habitus. (Recall that a *wai* is a gesture of respect with palms held together and often done when greeting someone of a higher social status.) It is something people are expected to do. A young student who properly *wais* to her teachers and parents is seen by others as someone who is respectful, knows her duties, and has a good character. While most may not be able to explain the origins of *wai*-ing and this student may not remember exactly how or when she learned to *wai*, it is an act that comes naturally and seems like an obvious thing to do when meeting someone older or in a higher social position than oneself.[9]

While it may be tempting to see monastics' representation of the Sangha through the way they wear their robes as a form of embodiment, there seems to be something more going on. In some instances, embodiment of monastic ideals does not depend upon the internalization of these ideals within individual monastic bodies as suggested by the notion of habitus. The robes allow some Thais to separate the individual monastic body from the larger Sangha and the ideals

9. I experienced this myself as have many foreign researchers I know who have spent a long time in Thailand. Upon leaving Thailand and returning to the US, I had to consciously tell myself not to *wai* to my parents or professors. I had become so used to doing it, it became natural in all my interaction and needed to be actively unlearned.

attached to it. As such, laity can unproblematically make offerings to monastics who do not inhabit the disposition of an ideal monastic. Such monastics still embody the Sangha by donning the monastic robes. At the same time, though, there are aspects of ideal monasticism that should be embodied in the sense of a habitus. We will look at some of these aspects, namely morality and monastic masculinity, presently before turning to look more closely at what monastic embodiment in northern Thailand entails.

6.3 Displaying Morality on the Body and through the Robes

Appearance, how monastics are expected to look, is one of the first things young monks and novices learn. In the context of novice summer camps, novices ideally learn to adjust to the strict rules of asceticism. This adjustment, as we saw in Chapter 3, is evidenced through their display of being patient and *riaproi*. In that chapter, I suggested this *riaproi*-ness was not necessarily a display of one's inner self but rather a way to direct the novices' actions in such a way as to foster unity within the temporary monastic community and perform the expectations their lay supporters had of them. Here I want to complicate this a little. In some instances—usually after a novice has been as monastic for a while—appearance is tantamount to the presentation of moral personhood. In this way, what robes and appearance signify shifts over time, and this shift largely depends on the material difficulty of wearing the robes. To see this, let us look at the case of a young novice who is having trouble with the appearance of his robes and comporting himself to demonstrate monastic morality.

Bua was a 14-year-old novice from Namsai living at Wat Ton Pai who had ordained at Wat Namsai's novice summer camp when he was 12 years old. Even though he ordained to get his general education, he was not progressing in school, beginning his third attempt at completing grade one of secondary school (*mathayom* one). On a few occasions, I discussed Bua's case with Phra Mai and Phra Ratana, another monk at Wat Ton Pai in his early 20s who ordained around the same time as myself. They attributed his inability to make progress in school because of his "laziness" (*khwam khikiat*). They explained that his laziness connected more broadly with how

Bua presented himself.

One afternoon Phra Ratana and I were sitting lined up with a few other monks from Wat Ton Pai and Wat Doi Thong on the dais in the dining hall, waiting for the local laity who had come to make an offering to the monks and novices at Charoensat School that day. Phra Ratana and I struck up a conversation about Bua. He said the previous night he had to lecture Bua because he was having a problem with his "manners" (*marayat*). He explained that it was important for children, especially novices, to learn manners. He gave the example of having "spoken manners" (*marayat phasa*) such as using polite first person pronouns like *phom* and ending utterances with the polite particle ending *khrap*.[10] He complained that a lot of children today do not talk like this, which is bad because this lack of spoken manners will "attach to them" (*tit tua*; literally: "attach [to] the body") and look bad for the "family name" (*sakun*). If children act badly, people will think that their parents did not raise them properly, which will then make people look down on the entire family. This is what he had tried to explain to Bua, saying that that was why he needed to work on having good manners.

Much like the broader concern about youth becoming "attached" to drugs or other commodities, Phra Ratana and others worry about youth becoming connected, or "attached," to negative characteristics. Boys' experiences with monasticism, like Bua's, should therefore help them avoid not only the negative attachments associated with drugs and similar things but also from attaching to negative manners.

Bua's problem with manners also included bodily manners like bathing. Phra Ratana noted that Bua had not showered for five days. When he confronted Bua about it, the novice said he could not take a shower in the cold water and that if they had a water heater he could take a shower everyday. Phra Ratana, then, tried bringing heated water to Bua in the evening so he

10. Both of these examples are specifically male pronouns and particles. Monks use the masculine polite particle ending *khrap* but use the pronoun *attama* when talking with laity. As a novice, though, Bua would used *phom* regardless of the status of the other person. There is also a class and generational distinction to using *phom*. Among youth and among lower class groups, *ku* is sometimes used as a first person pronoun. However, most Thais are taught in schools that the polite way for men to speak Thai is to use *phom*. Females also have particular pronouns and particles to use that are more polite than others.

could take a warm bath. He still did not shower, though, which showed to Phra Ratana that it was not about the water; it was just that Bua did not want to shower. This was further evidence of his laziness and bad manners. He again lamented that such actions would attach to him and be bad for his family name if he continued in that way.

Certain characteristics—in this case manners or morality—become solidified on the body; they "attach" (*tit*) to Bua and are read by others through his appearance. This determination of one's manners and moral status is not just applied to the individual whose appearance is being judged. The individual's appearance can also impact his or her entire family.

For novices, the ramifications of their appearance were even greater than it would be for lay boys. Any doubts about their manners or moral status not only followed themselves and their families but also the monastic community more largely. Recall from Chapter 4 that for many monastics there is general concern over how an imagined laity will read and react to their appearance and actions. As the abbot of another temple near Wat Doi Thong emphasized in subdistrict-wide meetings with all the monks in the area: monks needed to watch the novices and make sure they looked appropriate whenever in the presence of lay people. In a later interview with him, the abbot explained:

> Concerning manners, we must practice them for ourselves [*rao tong patibat to tu-aeng*], for our groups, for our community, for our superiors. We must practice our manners. A bad monk—his robes untidy, not speaking nicely—you listen to him; it's unpleasant sounding. So, when someone comes to listen to this monk—when someone comes and sees how this monk looks—faithfulness will not arise. It will not arise for laity who come and see [this monk]. Therefore, we monks must protect the Sekhiya rules. It doesn't matter if we're in the temple or in the village. It doesn't matter if we're walking, lying down, or sitting. It doesn't matter what posture we're in. Monks must be *riaproi* because we must be an example for people to come and see that monks are *riaproi*.

The Sekhiya rules he referred to are 75 minor rules from the 227 rules for monks. They apply

to novices as well, adding to their 10 rules. The Sekhiya rules generally cover appropriate ways of behaving in the presence of lay people. At novice summer camps, there is usually not enough time to go over all 227 rules for monks and the various categories therein. So, temporary novices often only learn a portion of the 75 Sekhiya rules.

In much of this discussion, presentation of self is rendered as what the body represents. For instance, the abbot refers to the need for monastics to practice having good manners for themselves (***tua*** *eng*), literally "their own bodies."[11] Similar to novices learning to "adjust themselves" (*prab* ***tua***), or "adjusting [their] bodies," practicing the self is effected through practicing the body. As in the case of the novice Bua, his hygienic bodily practices (or lack thereof) are connected to his perceived morality. However, it is not only his individual morality that is at stake but also the morality of the monastic community to which he belongs. By embodying the moral ideals of being *riaproi* and having good manners associated with monasticism, monastics not only display to others that they themselves are moral persons. As embodied representations of the broader Sangha, they demonstate the good moral character of the entire religious order. Such a process applies to more than just morality, though.

6.4 Tightness of Robes as Indicator of Gender

As monks and novices spend longer amounts of time in the robes, the subtlety with which they can alter the presentation of their robes increases. Getting the basic mechanics of putting on the robes—a training that takes a week or so to learn—gives way to purposively trying slightly different styles and ways of wearing and working within the robes.[12] Besides the morality and

11. *Tua* is the Thai word for "body." *Eng* makes a word reflexive. So, to refer to "myself," I would say *phom eng*.

12. In the case of novices ordaining, such as at novice summer camps, they are often assisted in dressing for the first few days by monks and older novices who have been monastics for a while. As more precocious novices become able to tie their own robes, they begin to help other novices. By the end of the camp, most novices are able to tie their own robes but sometimes rely on peers for help in making the folds in their upper robes neat and *riaproi*. Even among the older students at Charoensat School, they would help one another with their robes even if they could tie them themselves. Among monks, helping one another was less common. Most monks took it upon themselves to tie their own robes. In my own experience, the first several days of monkhood were spent teaching myself how to tie my own robes by practicing again and again until I got the folds and dimensions correct. No one ever told me I had to learn to tie my own robes. However, Phra Udom directed the novices of Wat Doi Thong to help me dress.

discipline that can be put on display by how one wears his robes, gender/sexuality can also be denoted in the way one wears his robes.

We have already seen how monasticism plays an important role in constructing and altering the meaning of monastic masculinity and its boundaries with other genders. Here I want to turn to the particular role robes play in shaping these boundaries, or the moral contours of possible forms of masculinity. Establishing, maintaining, and altering the tenuous boundaries between "real man"-ness and *kathoei*-ness is enacted through the robes monks and novices wear in their everyday lives. The most salient feature of the robes in terms of gender/sexuality was tightness. This was the issue at stake in the opening vignette where Phra Udom commented on the novice's robes being "too much." The robes were "too" tight. Novices who had been monastics for several months picked up on this issue of tight robes and used it as a topic of humor, when joking around with one another. Take, for instance, the following example.

One morning at Wat Doi Thong, I was sitting in the dining hall with several of the novices. We were waiting for a ride to another temple in the district that needed our help setting up for an upcoming event. While we waited, the novices were playing with their large upper robes,[13] wrapping themselves in different degrees of tightness. As one of the novices tied his robes very, very tightly, to the point that he could barely walk or move, and began speaking in a higher-

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Whether or not it was Phra Udom's intention, being dressed by a group of 12–14 year olds who had just dressed themselves made me feel inadequate as an adult. This feeling pushed me to learn to tie my own robes.

Learning to shave one's own head and eyebrows was similar. The novices' heads were shaved by the monks. This was largely because a very sharp straight blade was used, and monks like Phra Udom did not fully trust the novices with such an instrument. Among monks, those who had been monastics for a long time, like Phra Udom and Phra Mai, usually shaved their own heads. For the first five months of monkhood, Phra Udom or another monk shaved my head. While no one explicitly said I should learn to shave my own head, it was something I wanted to do. So, one month I determined to shave my own head. While it took me about an hour the first time (cutting all the tufts of hair around the ear, using a straight blade, without slicing the tender skin around the ear is a difficult task!), I was eventually able to do it. I am unsure if Phra Udom did not push me to shave my own head like most older monks did because I was only ordaining for a short time, because I was a foreigner, or for some other reason. At any rate, in my own experience, it took quite a while—several months—before I felt comfortable enough in the robes to experiment at all with how I was tying them. Based on my observations of other temporarily ordained monastics, I think this time frame was typical.

13. For the novices, there are three main parts of the robe: the lower robe, or *sabong*, which is tied at the waist and covers from about the navel to above the ankles; the *angsa*, which is like an undershirt that covers the upper body from waist to left shoulder (the right shoulder is not covered by it); and the upper robe, or *ciwon*, which is the largest rectangle of cloth and covers from the shoulders to the bottom of the *sabong*. Monks have an additional robe, the same size as the *ciwon*, called the *sangkhati*, or outer robe.

pitched voice, the other novices began laughing, teasing him, and calling him *kathoei*. As we saw in the opening vignette, very tight robes are a sign of being an effeminate or *kathoei* monastic. The novice took the teasing in stride as it was his intent to make the other novices laugh. He loosened his robes back to how he usually wore them and began returning the name calling as another novice similarly tied his robes tightly, knowing it would elicit such teasing and jesting among the novices.

None of the novices at Wat Doi Thong considered himself to be *kathoei* nor did anyone else consider any novice there to be *kathoei*. However, they were still able to play with the boundary between being "real men" and being some other gender through their robes without worry that one of their peers would consider them to really be *kathoei*. In a way, the willingness to play at this boundary points to the general tolerance of *kathoei*, *gay*, and other non-"normal" genders. These labels are not so pejorative or damaging as to prevent boys from temporarily enacting effeminate behaviors. At the same time, though, we can see this play as a way of reinforcing the category of "real men." By temporarily arranging their robes in a *kathoei*-like way, they signal to peers that they are not actually that kind of person. It is a momentary performance to indicate they know how *kathoei* monastics stereotypically look and act, but they themselves do not act that way in reality and are therefore "real men." I should also note here that this play among the novices was only ever done among other monastics they knew. The novices would not pretend to tie their robes really tight in the presence of laity—or anyone they were less familiar with—lest they give the impression of not being serious monastics or that the Sangha was overly effeminate. In this way, they were also learning to manage their bodies and how monastic bodies represent the larger Sangha to laity.

The relative tightness of the robes did not always map onto the gender/sexuality of a novice. Sometimes the novices could be criticized for wearing their robes too loosely. Several days earlier, after our evening chanting was over, Phra Udom gave a lecture to the novices as he often did. The topic of that day's lecture was concerning the novices wearing their *prakot*, a woven cloth belt tied around the waist and one of the requisite items for a Buddhist monk to have. Although the

Buddha required monks to have a belt to keep their lower robe from slipping off their waist, in modern times the belt was often only for show. Most of the novices relied on metal binder clips to keep their lower robes up. (The binder clip also proved a more effective defense than a belt against conspiring novices who would grab an edge of another novice's lower robe and yank it in an attempt to "de-pants" him.) Being a requirement to wear, though, Phra Udom had mentioned several times to the young novices that they had to wear their belts when they came to evening chanting. He called out a couple of the novices who forgot again to put on their belts or who had worn them but did not tie them tightly enough so they just hung loosely around their waist. As he sometimes did when the novices had repeatedly neglected to follow his instructions, Phra Udom asked one of the novices to fetch a bamboo switch. Calling each of the offending novices up one by one, he hit the novices on the bottom twice if they had not worn their belt at all or once if they wore it too loosely. With the disciplining over, he lectured the novices on how they needed to listen to him when he tells them to wear their belts. He explained the importance of wearing their belts, saying if they did not wear them or they wore them too loosely or sloppily, it would show to others they were not *riaproi*. As novices, they needed to show through their robes that they knew their "duties" (*nathi*).

Novices, then, needed to learn to adjust their robes so they were neither too tight nor too loose. Wearing them too tightly could convey to others they were not "real men." Wearing them too loosely, though, could convey to others one was not keen on enacting his monastic duties of representing the Sangha by how he looked. The novices' bodies represented more than just their individual status as a monastic. They represented the collective Sangha body and how the Thai monastic community was perceived by the laity.

6.5 Multi-bodied Selves: Beyond the Monastic Body as Representation

As presented so far, a novice or young monk's body is an individual's body upon which techniques of discipline are enacted in an attempt by older monks, parents, and teachers to shape these boys and young men into embodying the ideals of monastic morality and masculinity. Although

this ideal may never be fully inhabitable, temporary monasticism works to adjust the individual monastic body as close to the ideal as possible. To put it in a more abstract way: monasticism disciplines material to conform to and manifest an ideology. The body, in this regard, is the purview of the individual monk or novice upon which work is done to have the individual body be in line with how the imagined laity think monastics as a whole should look and act.

Such a model fits nicely with the idea that the monastic body is representation of the monastic community proximally and the Thai nation more distally. The individual body is a metaphor or metonym for the state of Thai Buddhism. A non-*riaproi* novice with disheveled robes risks making the Thai monastic community look immoral or lacking in manners. Similarly, a novice with extremely tight-fitting robes may give laity the impression the Thai monastic community is becoming less masculine, less connected to being "real men." In the end, though, it is still an individual body, which needs to be reshaped and molded to the ideal it represents.

Within such a view, change to this ideal of monasticism emerges from the individual body and its materiality being unable to conform to (or resisting) these disciplining technologies. For instance, the effeminate body of a *kathoei* or *gay* monastic is not quite able to bend to the masculine ideal of monastic comportment. The lazy, unclean body resists the *riaproi* ideal of monasticism. It is monks and novices—particularly young monastics as youth still adjusting to monasticism—who encountering these ideals have individual bodies that resist social ideals of monastic comportment.

In many ways, then, this analysis of novices embodying monastic norms fits with a typical Foucauldian analysis, which attempts to ground ideology in the flow of discourse in, around, and through bodies. A rough Foucauldian take on this dissertation thus far would argue the following: The institution of Buddhist monasticism identifies the bodies of adolescent boys and young men to subject to the disciplines and thereby make into subjects—of Buddhism, of the state, etc. The bodies thus identified (i.e., boys and young men susceptible to attachments), the institution subjects them to disciplines of "adjusting themselves" to make their bodies into *riaproi* bodies. If we add Butler's notion of performativity to this—or perhaps remain with Foucault and

his notion of "subjectivation"—the monastic bodies disciplined within this institution are not only rendered as bodies that can be acted upon, it is through this very process that monastics are able to identify subjectively with their status as monastics. They construct their monastic selves through subjecting themselves and their bodies to Buddhism's ascetic disciplines (cf. Cook 2010).

Such an analysis is similar, for instance, to Saba Mahmood's study of the Islamic women's mosque movement in Egypt (Mahmood 2001, 2004). By subjecting themselves to the structured practices of the piety movement, women are not subjugated and rendered agency-less as liberal, secular feminism may assume based on definitions of agency that require the recognition of certain sartorial forms as signs of gendered oppression to be actively resisted. Rather, they develop a sense of self and moral agency through subjecting their bodies to their movement's religious technologies of self (cf. Lester 2005).

The congruence between monasticism's attempt at constructing certain monastic subjects and monastics own internal sense of being a monastic would ideally overlap. This overlap would reproduce the matrices of power and strengthen the discourses that prop up the construction of ideal monastics. It is perhaps for this reason and the tight hold Foucauldian (post)structuralism and Butlerian performativity have on anthropology that many ethnographers turn to positions of "deviance," "marginality," "vulnerability," or "precarity" as places to observe resistance and the possibility for political, social, and cultural change.

Such a frame for understanding ideology and resistance renders the body as a particular non-material object. As noted by Terence Turner, "Foucault's body has no flesh; it is begotten out of discourse by power" (1994, p. 36). This is perhaps even more so for Butler (1990) who argues the body itself is constructed through iterative performatives. For her, resistance is not so much about "deviance" but about the inherent inability for iteration to reproduce an exact copy of itself. Both Foucault and Butler, then, have been criticized for not taking seriously the material constraints of the physical body. As Turner, again, notes, "Foucault's body possesses an a priori individual unity disarmingly reminiscent of its arch-rival, the transcendental subject" (1994, p. 37).[14] That

14. For similar critiques of post-structuralism's approach to the body, see Van Wolputte (2004) and Csordas (1999).

is, for Foucault, the body is assumed to be the locus of the individual upon which and through which power subjectivizes. Such a rendering of the body neglects to take into account the social aspect of the body: "the plural aspect of the body as a relation (both physiological and social) among bodies" (ibid., p. 44).

The individual body, for Foucault, is a representation of the collective body, which is both a product and producer of discourse. The collective body disciplines and regiments the individual body. The collective body is historically produced, but we are left unsure of how the collective body is socially reproduced through physical, individual bodies. As we saw above, Bourdieu tries to resolve this problem through the concept of habitus. Through the embodiment of certain behaviors that become natural character traits, an individual's habitus reproduces and strengthens the naturalness of the discursive collective body.

A similar problem is evident in Jerryson's (2011) analysis of the Buddhist monastic body in southern Thailand explored above. For him, a monk's body *represents* Thai Buddhism and the Thai nation more broadly. An act of violence or aggression towards this individual body is an act of violence towards Buddhism and the nation. Jerryson insightfully traces the historical discourses that produced the religious and ethnic tensions present in contemporary southern Thailand. In the end, though, the body is relegated to being a metonym for this historically produced discourse. An attack on the monastic body is an attack on social ideals.

While in large part I agree with Jerryson's portrayal of monasticism and the monastic body (in fact, my argument so far has made a similar claim), I do not think it fully accounts for the social construction of the monastic body and its effects in the world. As we saw earlier, oftentimes when laity make offerings to the monastics, they are not offering it to the individual monk; they are making offerings to the "yellow robes" (*pha lueang*). One way to read this is that in such instances, the monk or novice receiving the offering is representing the larger monastic community. By providing resources to the individual, the lay person is symbolically supporting Buddhism and the Thai Buddhist nation.

However, I want to suggest an alternative way of understanding what is going on when laity

make offerings to the "yellow robes" or monastics "live in the yellow robes." Monastics, by wrapping their bodies in the robes, thereby making their body look like a monastic body, come to inhabit another body. This body, what I call the "Sangha body," is constituted both of individual monastic bodies with the physiological material of which it is composed and of the Sangha body that is historically, socially, and materially produced across several domains. This Sangha body is evidenced in statues of the Buddha and arahants—those who have reached enlightenment through the Buddha's teachings—and amulets. These objects are not just representative of the Sangha body; they are constitutive of it.

Seeing the monastic body as a physical part of the Sangha body rather than representative of an ideal monastic body shifts our understanding of what is going on when monastics and laity express concern over the cleanliness, *riaproi*-ness, or effeminacy of an individual monastic body. Take for instance the abbot above who described the importance of novices following the Sekhiya rules and practicing manners. The need for monastics to have manners is that they are supposed to be "an example for people to come and see that monks are *riaproi*." The key here is that they are an "example" (*tua yang*). Literally, they are a "body" (*tua*) that is of a "type" or "kind" (*yang*). Their bodies are not a model of a monastic ideal. They *are* the Sangha body. They are an "example" of how the Sangha body is *riaproi* regardless of whether or not the individual body of the monastic inhabiting the Sangha body is entirely *riaproi* or not.

The Sangha body, which is ideology and discourse loosely tied to a material body, is not uniform. It is a multi-bodied body in multiple senses. First, when individual monastics inhabit their monastic bodies, it is more than presenting a certain self that meets the presumed expectations of laity and their own sense of monastic obligation (as we explored in Chapter 4 with the help of Goffman's theories on self-presentation). It is about becoming a different body entirely, one that is the Sangha body in the flesh. The Sangha body, then, is comprised of multiple monastic bodies. Second, the Sangha body, like individual monastics, is not constrained to one possiblity. Like a malleable self that shifts according to time and place, the Sangha body is malleable and not the same in all times and in all places.

This malleability of the Sangha body is evident when the novices of Wat Doi Thong play with the tightness of their robes. It is important to note that they did this outside the purview of the laity's gaze. Within the gaze of laity, their bodies and the robes they wear are rendered as constitutive of the Sangha body. Outside the purview of laity, though, the novices are able to rework the Sangha body. They are able to play with the masculinity and effeminacy of the Sangha body. Through the robes, they are able to make their bodies into a masculine Sangha body or an effeminate, *kathoei* Sangha body. As such, their own bodies are not in jeopardy of being read as *kathoei* or not for it is not their bodies that they are manipulating.

6.6 Conclusion: Revisiting Monasticism's Roles in Thai Society

Conceptualizing individual monastics as both representation and constitutive of the Sangha allows us to better understand how young monastics are in a position to both be transformed by and transform the institution of temporary monasticism. As representative of the Sangha, laity expect monastics to adjust and comport themselves to these expectations and the monastic rules. As constitutive of the Sangha, young monastics make adjustments to what it means to enact their monastic selves, transforming monasticism.

What monastics represent leads many Thais to think monasticism can transform boys to be morally good men. The Sangha is supposed to be the embodiment of what it means to be a good Buddhist. By subjecting themselves to temporary monasticism, boys are to adjust themselves to these ideals the Sangha represents. If young monastics, like the novice Bua, are able to adjust their appearance to be in line with monastic ideals, then they will become better individuals with good manners, not lazy, and not addicted to bad things. In so doing, they will also reproduce the ideals of monasticism that they work to embody.

At the same time, embodying monasticism is more than just learning and adjusting to what the Sangha represents. It is also about becoming the Sangha body, being constitutive of it, not mere representation of it. With this in mind, young monastics' reshaping of their role—whether it is tying their robes tightly to look like a *kathoei* monastic, eating at night at the laity's behest,

or prompting laity to rethink their moral assumptions about *gay* and *kathoei*—takes on a deeper significance. They are reshaping more than just themselves. They are reshaping the Sangha itself, as they are the Sangha and all the parts and bodies that make it.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In what ways does temporary monasticism shape boys and young men to be particular kinds of adults in Thai society? And in this process of transforming youth, in what ways, if any, do young monastics transform the roles monasticism plays within Thai society? These are the questions I set out to investigate in this dissertation. By doing so, I have sought to better understand the intersection of the life course and social change. In particular, I have studied the ways in which youth, through their encounter with cultural institutions, not only take up and reproduce ideals of morality and gender but also, in ways often unintentional, reshape those ideals.

Thailand has provided an apt context for looking at these questions. National concerns over Thai youth's moral development, the standing of Thailand in the region and the world given recent socio-political changes, and a gender panic about a dearth of "real men" have made more salient the issue of social reproduction. At the same time, these concerns have led Thais to question the ability for cultural institutions to reproduce particular ways of being Buddhist men and citizens of Thailand. The institution at the heart of addressing these issues has been temporary Buddhist monasticism. Given monastics' central role in the reproduction of moral ideals, being exemplars of Buddhist morality, and being a site for state intervention in cultivating a sense of "Thainess," monasticism has a long history of transforming boys into moral men.

Concerns over "the problem with Thai youth," in which children and adolescents in contemporary Thailand were particularly at risk for developing unhealthy attachments and addictions, were apparent across different generations. Teachers, parents, and abbots of temples described to me their concern for Thai youth's development. A group of middle-school students at a government school in Namsai explained to me how youth today often do not listen to parents and teachers because they are too attached to their friends and social media or, worse, addicted to drugs and alcohol. In addition to a shared recognition of the problem, many individuals across generations saw a similar solution to this problem: encouraging boys and young men to temporarily ordain as Buddhist monastics.

Such a turn to monasticism was not unfounded as it has long been a site for men to recover from problems with addictions. The ability for monasticism to adjust individuals was a pull for some boys to decide to ordain. A 17-year-old young man in Namsai, who had recently left monasticism, discussed his reasons for ordaining, "At first there was the issue that when I was about 14 or 15, I had a problem with drugs. I was addicted." And so he ordained as a novice at Wat Namsai for three years. As we continued talking, he described how this problem with addiction specifically led him to the temple: "I wanted to change myself to be better. That was one thing. I wanted to get away from the issue at home [with drugs]. I didn't want to be there . . . and so I fled my problem [and came to ordain]." Many Thais strongly believed that temporary monasticism could adjust boys and young men to become better. By living within the confines of monasticism and its rules, boys could adjust themselves to be more morally good people with less desires. Such tempered desires could help prevent boys from developing addictions.

This ability to address youth's problems with attachments was one of many purposes temporary monasticism served. For many informants, these purposes had changed in recent years. In a conversation about the history of education and monasticism in Thailand with a retired professor, who had spent several decades teaching at a university for monks, he explained:

> In the past, [ordination] was for education. And it was for repaying the merit of one's parents in the past. Everyday now, most ordain firstly to maintain this tradition. Another large group is rural children who are not very good at studying or have dropped out of other schools. Now throughout the country the government provides education to all children, but if you go back 50 years, Isaan [the northeastern region of Thailand] didn't have paved roads. . . . Another group of children who come to temple schools are children who come from broken families where the parents are divorced and children do not study.

As education and socioeconomic conditions have changed, so have the purposes of temporary monasticism. More than just tradition and basic education, temporary monasticism has become

important for training boys to be good men who may lack moral socialization from other contexts, such as families.

The ability for monasticism to educate and transform individuals has drawn the attention of the state for centuries from past kings to present-day military juntas. As I have explored in Chapter 2, the relationship between the state and the Sangha has been an ambiguous one. The literature has long suggested that the two have a symbiotic relationship in which the state supports the Sangha's religious authority and the Sangha legitimates the state's political authority (Ishii 1986; Kirsch 1978). Other scholars have questioned this relationship, looking at ways in which charismatic monks have challenged the central Thai government (Bowie 2014) and showing how state-mandated reforms of monastic education meant to centralize control of Thailand's peripheral regions often did not trickle down to local temples (McDaniel 2008).

Expanding on this literature, I have shown the ways in which education in Thailand has been changing in recent years. While temples were historically the primary or only site for education, the government's expansion of compulsory education and the increasing wealth of some sectors of Thailand have meant that not as many boys need to ordain at a temple to get an education. As the professor above pointed out, today boys are often ordaining for an education as an escape from troubled backgrounds such as "broken families" or problems with attachments. In general, there are also fewer boys ordaining. These shifts have led to questions about what exactly the role of temples should be. This debate was particularly evident at the temple school Charoensat, which the abbot of Wat Namsai largely forced to move because he had a different idea of what Wat Namsai's purpose should be. Rather than the state dictating how exactly temple schools should be educating, recruiting, and transforming boys through monasticism, it is often up to individual temples to figure out what the role of temporary monasticism should be.

Local temples' independence, however, does not mean that temples such as Wat Namsai serve no function to nation building. In fact, at times they do. The novice summer camps held across Thailand, including temples in Namsai, are a good example of the way in which temples work to instill national ideas of Buddhism and how monastics should comport themselves. Continuing

the history of the Thai state trying to instill order and *riaproi*-ness as ideal characteristics of Thai-ness, Chapter 3 showed how novice summer camps stress the importance of novices to "adjust themselves" (*prab tua*) to the rules of monasticism, through which they will become more *riaproi*. By learning to be more *riaproi*, these young novices also learn what ideal monastic comportment is. They learn what the rules for monks and novices are, and they leave their monastic roles after just a few weeks, taking with them this notion of how all Thai monastics should be following their rules.

As noted by scholars working in other contexts—such as Mexico (Lester 2005) and Egypt (Mahmood 2004)—religious institutions play a powerful role in transforming individuals' sense of self, their morality, and their position in society. In the case of boys who ordain temporarily as novices, they become part of the Sangha body and, as a part of that body, act as an example for laity of how to act appropriately *riaproi*. Through the enactment of being *riaproi*, they reproduce the institution of Buddhist monasticism and the ideals associated with it. In this way, monasticism can work as an "integrative force" in Thai society (Suksamran 1982, p. 6). It can bring in younger generations from disparate parts of Thailand and instruct them on the shared ideals of monasticism.

Yet, at the same time, novices, through the very institution that has shaped them, have a certain "capacity for action," as Mahmood (2001, p. 203) has said, to rework what exactly it means to be a good monastic. We have seen this particularly in small, everyday interactions between young monastics and lay supporters, which were highlighted in Chapter 4. In such instances as determining whether or not it would be acceptable to eat after midday in front of lay supporters, the novices demonstrate their ability to reinforce or shift people's expectations of how exactly they as novices should be acting. As different expectations about monastic behavior become linked with broader discourses such regional differences in Thailand, novices' actions also reinforce such narratives. This demonstrates how the everyday lives of northern Thai village monastics can also challenge the assumption that Thai Buddhism is shaped by the state, which then disseminates from central Thailand to more peripheral areas like the north. Far from being

a "unifying force" as suggested by Suksamran (ibid.), monastic communities like the one in Namsai can reject state-sponsored notions of ideal monastic comportment, producing their own local ideas of what ideal monasticism looks like.

The construction of ideal monastic behavior goes beyond just what it means to be a "good" Thai Buddhist. Communities like Namsai also confront the issue of monastic masculinity and notions of what kinds of men are masculine enough to ordain. Alongside this, communities confront the issue of just how much a religious institution is able to transform individuals' gender presentation. For some Thais, *gay* and *kathoei* monastics are able to adjust themselves to act in ways becoming of monastic masculinity. There are limits to this ability to adjust, though, that some effeminate monastics must confront. In circumstances I explored in Chapter 5, such as the former *kathoei* beauty pageant winner ordaining as a monk or lay Buddhists in Namsai asking Phra Mai about whether or not *kathoei* can ordain, local communities must work out what genders can appropriately ordain. The Thai state may make attempts to delineate what type of men are allowed to ordain, such as the recent military junta's attempt to legislate the banning of *gay* and *kathoei* from ordaining. However, this state-level activity has little impact on what actually happens in local villages and temples. Instead, it is the small, everyday conversations and situations in which the relationship between monasticism and masculinity is reworked and reproduced.

In studying this relationship, I have contributed to our understanding of how dominant, or hegemonic, forms of masculinity are both reconstituted and challenged. Rather than looking at how masculinity and femininity co-define one another or look at how a potentially destabilizing "third" gender such as *kathoei* forces a reconfiguration of dominant masculinity, I have highlighted the ambivalence of dominant masculinity itself. In the case of Thailand, this ambivalence is evident in the uncertainty of what kinds of men can ordain. In trying to draw a line between those who can and cannot ordain in terms of who is a "real man," who is effeminate but able to adjust himself to the proper appearance of monasticism, and *kathoei* or *gay* who should simply not be permitted to ordain, what constitutes a "real man" is unclear. The internal dissonance of

Thai masculinity reshapes that masculinity. In understanding how notions of masculinity change, then, it is important to look at the instability of dominant masculinity itself in relation to other forms of masculinity as well as effeminate masculinities.

I have demonstrated how deeply entrenched institutions associated with idealized forms of masculinity do not just reproduce these forms of masculinity. They are also important sites for challenging status quo conceptions of gender. The Sangha in Thailand has been a site tied to normative notions of masculinity. As detailed in Chapter 5, some boys ordain to learn about protective tattoos or to gain a level of education that will lead them into politics, i.e., social positions often associated with masculinity.[1] People often consider spending some time within its ranks as a key rite of passage for boys entering manhood. As such, monasticism has long been associated with transforming boys into ideal men. However, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the visibility of effeminate monastics who do not fit the notions of normative masculinity challenge the degree to which temporary monasticism actually reproduces ideal men in Thai society. In grappling with monasticism's connection with masculinity, some Thais may reconsider notions of what it means to be a "real man" in relation to being *gay* or *kathoei*. Far from being only a conservative force that reproduces the status quo, religious institutions associated with ideal forms of masculinity can also play key mediating roles in shifting the social construction of gender. In Chapter 6, I demonstrated how individual monastics being both representative and constitutive of the Sangha allow them to both reproduce the ideals of monastic bodily comportment and to reshape them.

Finally, this dissertation has looked at the way in which gender and morality co-construct one another, which has implications for the anthropology of morality. In recent years, morality has again become a central domain of inquiry within anthropology (Cassaniti and Hickman 2014). An emerging question within this "new" moral anthropology has been: How does the domain of morality relate to other domains of social life? In addressing this question, we may better

1. Although across Thailand, political leadership is not necessarily tied exclusively to masculinity (Kammerer 1988; Satyawadhana 2003).

understand the variability of moral experience and what constitutes the domain of moral goods across cultures. Research in Thailand, interestingly, has been central to the study of how various domains of social life intersect the experience of morality, from personhood (Hickman 2014) and the life course (Eberhardt 2014a, 2014b) to the experience of emotions (Cassaniti 2014, 2015b). Another key domain of social life that may mediate or shape the experience of morality is gender (Shweder and Menon 2014).

Within the developmental psychology literature on morality, scholars have long noted the importance gender plays in mediating moral experience. Perhaps most famous is Carol Gilligan's (1982) critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) theories of moral development. Gilligan argues that girls have a different approach to ethical problems than boys. As such, girls' and boys' moral developments are distinct processes resulting in an "ethics of care" and an "ethics of justice," respectively. Gender, then, shapes what is morally appropriate and how individuals should approach moral dilemmas.

Like much of psychology, though, these theories are largely derived from Western, Judeo-Christian contexts like the United States. Psychological anthropology is well positioned to question many of the assumptions underlying psychological theories. By studying variability across cultures in terms of how aspects of social life like gender and morality are experienced and made sense of, I challenge the universal claims often made by psychologists about basic human nature.

By looking at the relationship between morality and gender in the context of temporary monastic ordination in Thailand, I have begun to address this issue. The dual concern within contemporary Thai society about both the moral development of boys and the reproduction of Thai masculinity highlights the relationship between these two domains. As the chapters in this dissertation have suggested, understandings of what it means to be a morally good monastic are often associated with notions of being a "real man." Recall that for some Thais, the very fact of being *gay* or *kathoei* meant one could not act appropriately *riaproi* as a monastic and, therefore, could not perform as a morally good monastic should. Likewise, particular genders elicit certain understandings of how moral they are.

The panoply of gender categories and complexity of gendered experience in Thailand highlights the relationship between gender and morality but not in the way anticipated by developmental psychologists such as Gilligan. It is not evident that "real men," *kathoei*, *gay*, *tut*, "real women," etc. all approach ethical problems in unique ways. Rather, the relative fluidity of gender categories highlights the fluidity of morality, that what is morally appropriate in any context is dependent upon the particular circumstances that gave rise to that moment, but which will shift again. As gender categories shift, so do conceptions of morality. By focusing on the particular institution of monasticism, which links issues of morality and masculinity, and the everyday interactions between monastics and laity, this dissertation has argued that it is necessary to look at how youth take up notions of moral masculinity and, at the same time, rework these domains and their interrelationship.

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