

## CHAPTER ONE



## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF PROBLEM

In every human society since the beginning of recorded history, teachers have proven themselves to be of utmost importance. Whether their positions were formally documented as in modern classrooms, or merely assumed because of an ability to pass on important occupational skills as in times past, good teachers have been recognized as a vital ingredient of growing communities. Thailand is no different than other countries in that she owes a great debt of gratitude to the teachers who have helped bring the Nation to its current level of development. This achievement has not been easy, as contemporary society has allowed the teacher's role to lose some of its attraction to the point where it is getting difficult for school administrators to fill their available positions. This development could turn into tragedy if the erosion of respect and support given to teachers is not checked.

There have been several significant studies done on the topic of Education in Thailand during the past twenty years. The two most helpful works were *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* by David K. Wyatt and *Educational Development in Thailand* by Keith Watson. Although both books provided an overview of

the developmental changes which have affected Thai educational circles, Wyatt focused on reform during the turn of the last century while Watson discussed educational issues all the way up to the 1980's. Other sources such as B. J. Terwiel's book *A Window on Thai History*, and Wyatt's *Studies in Thai History* and *Thailand: A Short History* provided at least part of a chapter dedicated to the role of teachers and their relationship to the Sangha. Other writers such as M.L. Manich Jumsai, W.A.R. Wood and Ruth-Inge Heinze provided background information, but none of these publications address in depth the question of motivation found in Thai teachers.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVE

The insights and background material from these studies helped a great deal in the design of this project, which attempts to do the following:

First, to survey the operative beliefs of Bangkok teachers in an effort to find out what their initial motivation was for becoming a teacher, and exactly what it is that now keeps them in the classroom.

Second, the desire of this project is to do more than just report the percentages of teachers who might hold a specific opinion or be motivated by a given force. It is an attempt to find out why these opinions and motivations are sustained. Teachers are human, and like every other group of professionals, their ranks include those with a strong commitment to their calling as well as those who have allowed their sense of responsibility

to be diluted by external factors. Teachers in Thailand have traditionally been held in high respect because of the allegiance shown to their vocation, and if the reasons for this devotion can be identified, an interesting facet of Thai culture might be better understood. This information could be used by administrators and parents in dealing with faculty, as well as by the Ministry of Education in recruiting and training new and better teachers.

### 1.3 HYPOTHESIS

The specific motivation being sought in this study is the Buddhist concept of *witthayadana*, or Alms of Knowledge. Since most teachers in Bangkok are Buddhist, it would appear reasonable to assume that their commitment to students is somehow related to their commitment to the Buddha's teachings. Although not specifically understood by the public, it is hoped that the principle of making merit by teaching can be found as a significant motivation among the inspired educators of Bangkok.

### 1.4 METHODS OF STUDY

There were three distinct phases to this project, beginning with a background investigation of topics which might be related to the topic of Alms of Knowledge. Research was done in such Buddhist doctrines as merit, field of merit and karma, as well as etymological research into the concepts of *dana*, *dhammadana* and *witthayadana*. This research took place in various Bangkok libraries, including the Chulalongkorn University

libraries, the library of the Siam Society and others. Personal interviews were conducted with such specialists as the Venerable Luang Paw Panya, Honorable Secretary-General of the World Fellowship of Buddhists Prasert Ruangskul, William Klausner and others. Various professors from Chulalongkorn University also provided input and specific guidance.

The second phase of this project consisted of the collection of data with the help of the interview of 124 teachers and 20 students currently studying to become teachers.\* Literature dealing with empirical research in sociology helped in formulating the interview schedule, which consists of forty-six questions divided into two sections. Section I (sixteen questions) deals with independent variables or background data of the interviewees, such as age, sex, religion, family situation and educational background. Section II (thirty questions) deals primarily with motives and feelings relating to their roles as teachers and their perception of the Buddhist concept of *witthayadana*.

The data for the study was collected from people who identified themselves as being teachers within the Bangkok metropolis. The possibility of including rural teachers in the interview schedule was discussed, but due to logistical and time constraints, the decision was made to focus this study on teachers in the Bangkok setting. It is interesting to note that a large number of the urban interviewees actually have their roots

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\* The data collected from this target group proved to be incompatible with that collected from teachers, as the students had no first-hand experience as educators. Because of their lack of experience, they were unable to make a legitimate response to many of the questions. This aberration affected the overall balance of data to a significant degree. As a result the records of student interviews were not included in the totals for analysis.

in provincial schools. This phenomenon is to be expected, given the continuing migration of people from rural to urban centers in Bangkok.

The teachers for interview were selected completely at random. Anyone who in the course of daily conversation identified him/herself as being a teacher, was asked for an interview. These occasions of data collection took place between July 1994 and February 1995. In addition, starting in November 1994, schools were approached with a personal request for permission to interview members of their faculty. Some administrators were skeptical and requested a formal letter of introduction from Chulalongkorn University, while most others were quite willing and asked their staff to cooperate. There were two assistants who helped conduct some of the interviews and with the entry of observation results into the computer data bank.

The final phase of this study involved the analysis of all the data collected to compile the operative beliefs of Bangkok teachers and determine what motivational trends might exist. It is hoped that significant interpretation can be made which will help Thailand extricate herself from the current educational quagmire which is proving to be such a hindrance to the growth of the country.

## 1.5 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The issue of personal integrity provides the first limitation of a study such as this, as we are dealing with perceptions which are rather nebulous in nature. Despite the careful scrutiny and delicate interview of each respondent, there continued to be an element of predictability as the respondent was tempted to “tell you what you want to hear”. Although the subject was approached from several different angles in an attempt to verify true motivation, it was often difficult to substantiate the interviewee’s claims with examples of individual action.

The study of values which exist in any given culture is a most difficult challenge, because values dwell primarily in the heart and mind of the people. Normative beliefs and practices are those which are officially stated and prescribed by a recognized authority. Operative beliefs, on the other hand, are what people actually believe. It is assumed that these same values are expressed in everyday practices, but what people say and what people do are often two separate issues. What they claim as being their strong belief and motivation, may in fact have little to do with what can actually be recognized in their life and practice.

A second shortcoming of this study is the limited number of educators interviewed. To know beyond doubt what all teachers in Bangkok think on a subject, it would be necessary to interview every single one of them. Since such an effort would be impractical for the purposes of this research, an attempt was made to approach a wide range

of ages, backgrounds and educational experiences, including teachers from private as well as public secondary schools. Teachers Colleges, Universities, Technical Schools and the Ministry of Education were also represented in the collection of data. The resultant collection of 124 interviews is considered to be a representative cross-section of the men and women currently teaching in the city. Although there were some important patterns which appeared consistently during the research, it would be premature to assume that these exact results would show up in every such project involving teachers from around Bangkok.

Thai society has developed its current identity from a number of interesting, yet diverse directions. By far the single most influential factor, Buddhist philosophy has helped to shape the world view of every citizen in the country, whether they claim to be disciples of the Buddha or not. With thousands of temples, tens of thousands of monks, and millions of practitioners, this religion has roots deep into the value system of the nation.

On the other hand, teachers and the Thai educational system have also exerted a great influence on the development of the nation's students. In an effort to examine some of the blending of these two powerful forces, this paper will present background research, informational data and statistical analysis done on the topic of *Thai Teachers and the Concept of Alms of Knowledge*.