

วิปัสสนาแบบธรรมกายในสังคมไทย



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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

ภาควิชาไทยศึกษา

อักษรศาสตร์

พ.ศ. 2538

ISBN 974-632-211-7

ลิขสิทธิ์ของบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

I16๗48189

THAMMAKAYA MEDITATION IN THAI SOCIETY

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts

Thai Studies Program

Graduate School

Chulalongkorn University

1995

ISBN 974-632-211-7

Thesis Title: THAMMAKAYA MEDITATION IN THAI SOCIETY


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Department: Thai Studies

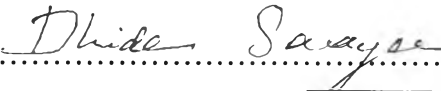
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Accepted by the Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University in Partial Fulfillment
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C511043 : MAJOR THAI STUDIES

KEY WORD: DHAMMAKAYA / BUDDHISM / MOVEMENT / MEDITATION

JEFFREY SCOTT BOWERS : THAMMAKAYA MEDITATION IN THAI SOCIETY. THESIS ADVISOR : ASSISTANT PROFESSOR SUWANNA SATHA-ANAND, Ph.D. 84pp. ISBN 974-632-211-7



The objective of this research is to explain the Dhammakaya meditation technique, and the modern movements utilizing it to better understand its importance to these movements. By better understanding these modern Buddhist movements in Thailand, a better understanding of Thai society can be gained.

Although the Dhammakaya movement at Wat Phra Dhammakaya has received some scholarly attention recently, much of the information concerning the meditation technique was omitted or described inaccurately. As the meditation technique plays a significant role in the different movements, it must be correctly understood if one expects to fully understand the movements. For this reason it is necessary to begin by gaining a better understanding of the founder, or 're-discoverer' of the meditation technique, commonly known as Luang Phor Sodh. A brief background of Luang Phor Sodh reveals both his interest in meditation and dissatisfaction with his progress in traditional meditation practices common in Thailand at that time. He devotes considerable time to studying the Maha Sattipattanasutta, and interprets it to learn a meditation system which he called the Dhammakaya system, and declared it to be the same system used by the Buddha to reach enlightenment. Luang Phor Sodh's fame grows and he is appointed abbot of Wat Paknam, where he centers his movement dedicated to meditation.

The system is a complex visualization method where meditators, practicing in groups, concentrate on a variety of images in order to progress in meditation. Progress brings with it powers, which may be applied differently, depending on the movement one follows. The system is shares many similarities with Tantric meditation systems, and is quite different from traditional meditation systems.

Luang Phor Sodh's death in 1959 brought about confusion and disagreement over who should control Dhammakaya meditation, and the movement split, with an elderly nun and her young followers establishing their own meditation institute, which eventually became Wat Phra Dhammakaya. The activities of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, and their vocal claims to controlling the true teachings of Dhammakaya meditation concerned other followers of Dhammakaya meditation not associated with Wat Phra Dhammakaya. As a result, a new meditation institute formed in order to counter the negative publicity of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, and safeguard the meditation technique from any unwarranted criticism. This meditation institute eventually became Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dammakayaram, and although it shares followers with Wat Paknam, it has its own goals and objectives.

By examining the technique and the movements, and what they offer their followers, a more complete understanding of Thai society in general can be gained.

ภาควิชา Thai Studies

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In completing this thesis, there are many people to whom I owe gratitude. First, I owe a tremendous thanks to my Primary advisor, Dr. Suwanna Satha-anand, who was able to provide necessary guidance and instruction as I charged unknowingly into this project. Finding time to meet with me in the midst of her normally full schedule was especially appreciated. This also applies to my Co-Advisor, Dr. Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, who always found time to share some of his extensive knowledge, and keep me on track during this research. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Dhida Saraya, a member of my thesis committee as well as Head of Chulalongkorn University's Thai Studies Master's Degree program. The interest she took in my research, and the time she sacrificed listening to me go on about it greatly encouraged me. The assistance provided by Dr. Sunait Chutinanon during my entire time as a graduate student, in everything from registration to preparation for graduation was invaluable, and greatly appreciated. Additional gratitude is owed to Dr. Somboon Suksamran, who supervised much of my early research and independent study at Chulalongkorn University, for his generosity with both his knowledge and time. I am also grateful for the valuable, thought inspiring advice of Phra Medhidhammaporn, who served on my committee, and gave truly meaningful input and corrections. Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai was extremely helpful in researching this thesis. He was generous with books, articles, taped conversations, and most importantly with his time, in ensuring I had a complete understanding of Dhammakaya meditation. Phra Dhattachivo, Phra Mettanando, and everyone I met at Wat Phra Dhammakaya were also helpful in providing important information used in writing this thesis. A special thanks is owed to Dr. Frank Reynolds for finding time to meet with me in Chicago, and for providing me copies of much-needed articles which were unavailable here in Thailand. Finally, and most importantly for my wife Kanita, who sacrificed so much of her free time with me traveling to temples, and helping with translation, when she could have been having fun, and also to my son Benjamin, who was born in the middle of all of this and has had to put up with me writing this in my free time when we could have been playing.

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Notes on Spelling and Names

Although the title of this thesis is Thammakaya Meditation in Thai Society, the word referring to the meditation technique as well as the images seen during meditation are spelled Dhammakaya. This is due to the difficulty encountered in finding a uniform spelling of the word in existing publications. The pronunciation of the word is Tammakai, which has led to it being spelled differently by different authors. The word Dhammakaya is spelled as such in publications produced by the temples which practice and teach the meditation technique, and therefore I have chosen this spelling, but as this was not decided until after the thesis title was approved by the Graduate school, the title is different. The Sanskrit pronunciation of the same word is Dharmakaya, and this spelling is used in the section entitled “The Dhammakaya” when it appears in reference to Mahayana or Tantric schools of Buddhism.

Concerning Thai names, in keeping with Thai style, first names precede family names, and people are generally referred to using first names only. Spellings of Thai names is as they appear in publications cited whenever possible.

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