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Education and Sociocultural Assimilation in Northeastern Thailand

Paitoon Mikusol

Introduction

The modern educational system in Siam started in 1870 when King Chulalongkorn founded a school for the royal family and the children of the Thai nobility. In this school both Thai and English programs were taught by Thai and English teachers. In later years, the king issued a decree creating special programs that would train young people for civil service. Students were instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, and official rules and regulations. The King's brothers and half-brothers, Princes Damrong, Devawongse, Wachirayan, Phanurangsi, Sommot, and so on, who became the Ministers of the Siamese government, were given both Thai and English educations.

In 1884 the first primary school was founded at Wat Mahannapharam, Bangkok, to provide free education for the common people. This idea spread to other large temple-monasteries throughout the kingdom, and more schools were started under the management of the abbots, with monks as instructors. In 1898 provincial education was organized by the Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Phra Mahasamanachao Krom Phraya Wachirayan Wororot (Prince Wachirayan). He sent monks, who were assisted by khaluang thammakan (Circle Public Instruction Commissioners), to manage education in the provinces in each monthon (circle), under the Sangha Administration Act of 1902. Chao kana monthon (Lord Abbots of Circle) served as directors of education in each monthon and took responsibility for religious and secular education. Later, the government passed the Primary Education Act of 1921, which made it mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 14 to attend school. Since then primary education had been through many changes in curriculum and
administration at the hands of the Ministries of Education and the Interior; it is now managed by the Ministry of Education. However, providing primary education for all children free of charge is still the responsibility of the government as it was during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

**Traditional Educational System**

Prior to the instruction of modern national schools in Thailand, people could study at the local *wat* (monastery) where Buddhist monks provided instruction to monks, novices, and temple-boys. The main purpose of this instruction was moral and religious education. Monastic education has been in existence since at least as far back as the thirteenth century. The famous stone inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng (1279-1300), stated that "the court and the inhabitants were devout Buddhists (who) observed the season of Vassa (rain retreat) and celebrated the festival of Kathina (presenting robes to the monks) with processions, concerts and readings of the Scriptures"\(^1\) The inscription also noted that the King of Sukhothai invited in high ranking monks from Nakon Sithammarat and appointed one of them to be the Sangharaja (Supreme-Patriarch) in residence at Wat Aranyika (the Forest Monastery).

George Coedès summarized the spread of Buddhist education for the common people in Southeast Asia as follows:

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the common people received a new contribution from India in the form of Sinhalese Buddhism. The Penetration of this new faith to the masses cannot be doubted; in Cambodia, Siam, Laos, and Burma, Buddhist cosmogony and the doctrines of retribution for one's acts and of transmigration have been deeply ingrained in the humblest classes by the teaching of the Buddhist monks.\(^2\)

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Instruction was given by the monks to males who were ordained as Buddhist monks or novices. Females did not have the opportunity of academic study; they were taught at home such skills as home-making and farming. Most boys were also trained to be rice-farmers by their parents or kinsmen. Both boys and girls were given traditional religious training such as how to achieve a good crop by praying to the puta (village spirits) and making merit at the wat. Ceremonies associated with religion and traditional customs performed before important events such as planting, harvest, threshing, and transport of the rice crop to the granary, were handed down from generation to generation.

Monastic instruction focused mainly on the teaching of Buddhism (dhamma). Local literature, magical arts, and the like, were also-taught as secondary subjects. In northeastern Thailand, the hotrai (Tripitake-house) was used as a library in which to keep the dhammic texts as well as texts of local legends, myths, rituals, and medical texts. These texts were written with a stylus on bailan (palm leaves), and thus were known as nangsu bailan (palm-leaf manuscripts) or nangsu phuuk (in Lao) or samut khoi, samut thai (in Thai).

On some occasions such as funeral rites, or Buddhist festival days (e.g. the Buddhist holy day, wan phra), local literature (the kalakade, Sungsinchai, Rammakian, etc.) was read by ex-monks. Troubador singers (mo lam) learned these stories by heart as well as religious tales (e.g. the jataka-stories of the former lives of the Buddha). This traditional practice existed before the introduction of the national school system in the Northeast.

Traditionally, monks in Thailand studied Khom (Khmer) script as well as the Thai. In northeastern Thailand, they studied Lao script (tua thai noi), and Dhammic script (tua thai yai), as well as the Khmer (khom) script. The Khmer script was used in magic formulas, such as tattoos, as well as in religious writing. It was viewed as a sacred script. The Dhammic script was used in

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religious texts, and the Lao script was used in official texts.\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.} \textit{Tua Thai Noi} or Lao script was derived from the Thai script, which was created by King Ramkhamhaeng in 1283. \textit{Tua Thai Yai} (Dhammic script) was derived from Mon via Thai Yai (Shan). It is still unclear, however, whether Dhammic script passed to Thailand from the Mon or the old Khmer script. As an organized system of education did not yet exist, monks gave instruction in these scripts through private tutoring rather than in class; the lord (chaomuang) prompted education provided by the monasteries, but the central government had not yet proclaimed any legal requirement.

In the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851), people in the Northeast began to learn the Thai language from the basic Thai text known as \textit{ko ka} or \textit{prathom koka} (the "ko ka" in this title is based on the first letter of the Thai alphabets; its English counterpart would be the term "ABC'S"). During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Phraya Sisunthon Wohan (Noi) compiled a series of texts called \textit{Munlabot Banphakit} (First Steps toward the Performance of Obligatory Duties), Books 1 and 2. These books replaced the Prathom ko ka in 1871, and continued to be used as monastery school textbooks throughout the following reign.

In northeastern Thailand, during the reign of King Mongkut, monks played an important role in the development of the program of Thai studies. They went to study in Bangkok, and then came back to establish schools in the outer provinces. For instance, Phra Ariya Thammawongsacan (Sui), was the Lord Abbot of Muang Ubon Ratchathani. He was educated at Wat Saket in Bangkok, and later founded a school dedicated to the teaching of the Thai and Pali languages at Wat Supattanaram in Ratchathani. This school attracted many people in northeastern Thailand, especially the children of the élite. According to Yanyong Charanyananda, monks and children of the élite in Surin, Sangkha, and Khukhan went to Ubon Ratchani to study Pali at Wat Supattanaram, Wat Suthat, Wat Sithong, and others. Wat Supattanaram was the first Thammayut monastery in northeastern Thailand under
the patronage of King Mongkut.\textsuperscript{5} Wat Bowonnivetwihan, in Bangkok, was the center of education for both Pali and Thai instruction of the Thammayut sect. The Thammayut sect was founded by King Mongkut while he was a monk. He believed in \textit{vinaya}, discipline, and introduced the most orthodox practices such as modes of dressing, ordination procedure, and chanting which differed from the old sect, Mahanikaya. When he became king, the Thammayut sect received royal patronage and the Thammayut monks were appointed to be the Lord Abbots of the Monthon in the later reigns.

Monks from the outer provinces also studied in the Thammayut monasteries in Bangkok and then returned to their home provinces or towns as teachers. Prior to 1902, these returning monks were appointed to be Lord Abbot of the \textit{muang} known as \textit{lak kham}. Later, high ranking monks in Bangkok and the provinces were appointed to the position of the Lord Abbots of the Monthon, \textit{chao khana monthon}. For example, Phra Yanarakkit and Phra Sasanasophon were appointed to be Lord Abbot of Monthon Isan during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

Traditionally, education in the \textit{wat} consisted mainly of moral and religious studies. Young boys were sent to the \textit{wat} to be temple-boys (\textit{dek wat} or \textit{luksit wat}) who were served as servants of the monks and were taught reading and writing by the \textit{acan} (abbot, or educated-monk). According to Etienne Aymonier, the young men in the Northeast learned to read and write Lao at the local monasteries. During 1883 and 1884, Aymonier toured this region, and noted that the \textit{wat} of each village was the center of education. In some ethnic groups such as Kui, Khmer and Lao villages, the monks also taught the Lao language to novices, monks, and young boys.\textsuperscript{6} Aymonier stated that in Surin, where the population was mostly Khmer and Kui, they used the local dialects in speaking but used Siamese script in writing. This might be suggested that the writing of Siamese script existed mostly in the core areas (e.g. in town or district).

\textsuperscript{5}Toem Wiphakpotjanakit, \textit{Prawattisat Isan} (2 Vols.) (Social Science Assoc. of Thailand, 1970), p. 616.

\textsuperscript{6}Etienne Aymonier, \textit{Voyage dans le Laos} (Paris: Leroux, 1897), p. 168.
Prior to the establishment of Thai and Pali programs in the Northeast such as in Ubon Ratchathani, the children of the local elite were sent to study administrative practices as well as the Thai language, at the court in Bangkok. The northeastern people called this education *rian muang*, administrative study, or *rian ratchakan*, official study (for civil service). According to Pramuan Dickinson, before receiving their appointments, the first *chaomuang* of Mahasarakham and three high officials (*Achaya Si*) of this town studied at the court (*rian muang*) for 6 years. They then received the appointments of the *Chaomuang*, the *Uppahat*, the *Ratchawong*, and the *Ratchabut*. For the common people, on the other hand, education was centered at the *wat* of each region. The purpose of education for the common people was to teach religious and moral practices. There was no organized secular system of education. To learn to read and to write in the Lao script was a religious act. Both teacher and book were treated respectfully with "religious veneration." Every day before each class of four or five persons began to study, the students demonstrated their respect for their teachers by kneeling with hands together in a praying position and bowing to touch the floor three times. After this ceremony, the teacher would begin the day's lesson on the basic Dhamma such as the Five and Eight Precepts. These the students learned by rote using a method of learning by chanting.

In the old days, any educated ex-monk usually became the teacher of his village, because there were very few, if any, other educated villagers. Moreover, ex-monks were considered to have been morally tempered to a greater degree than a layman. Thus, an ex-monk might be appointed village headman. An ex-monk might also be chosen as the leader of itinerant traders, known as *hoi* or *nai hoi* (in Lao), *nei ruai* (in Kui), and *neah ruai* (in Khmer), for another reason: when the *hoi* took cattle or buffaloes from

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northeastern Siam to sell in the central region (central Siam), an ex-monk was needed to communicate with the Siamese in the Thai language.

Also, the leaders of the Holy Men’s Rebellion, which occurred in 1901-1902, were mostly ex-monks and some were still members of the Sangha. For example, Rusi ta fai (Fire-eyed Hermit), the leader of the rebellion in Sisaket was a monk who had studied at Wat Supattanaram, Ubon Ratchathani; Somdet Lun Pasak was an ex-monk from Nakhon Champasak; a man named Moung was a monk from Det Udom, and so on. (Prince Sanphasit to Prince Damrong, July 11, 1903).

In short, traditional education, both religious and secular, was informal and unorganized. There were no authoritative guidelines to follow, and no standardized texts to be used. Education at that time was unregulated and non-compulsory. The method of instruction depended on the monk giving the lessons. Some monks taught only dhammic texts, some taught literature and local myths, and even medical practices. However, the government initiated a new system of compulsory education in the last decade of King Chulalongkorn’s reign.

National Educational System

This section will deal with the development and effects of the new educational system in the Huamuang Khamen Padong and the Isan Circle which was the headquarters of administrative reforms at Ubon Ratchathani.

The establishment of a basic school program (rongrian munlasuksa) in monasteries in Bangkok and the provinces occurred as a consequence of a royal proclamation in 1892. This proclamation called for a two-level system: a Lower Basic School and a Higher Basic School. The program and method of instruction still depended on the clerical teachers (acan) of each monastery. If there were at least ten students in a monastery, the government would establish a monastery school there. Most monasteries in Bangkok at that time, having less than ten students, were allowed to teach as before, by

9Prawat krasuang suksathiksn 2435-2507 (Story of the Ministry of Education 1892-1964) Published for 72nd Anniversary of the Ministry (1964) p. 97.
private tutoring. In the provinces, the Act of 1892 had no effect; the traditional form of education continued unchanged until 1898.

In the "Act of 1898," the government declared that the state would begin to take responsibility for mass education. The relevant section of this proclamation was as follows:

Education in Bangkok at this time is widespread throughout the area. Schools should be established in the provinces as in Bangkok. The King has ordered Prince Wachirayan to take charge of monastery schools throughout the kingdom.

Prince Wachirayan, the king's younger half-brother who was the head of the reformed Buddhist order, the Thammayuttika Nikai, and who later became the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha, took responsibility for all the monastery schools in the provinces. Prince Wachirayan promoted a high standard of religious education for the monkhood, establishing the Mahamakut Academy at Wat Bowonniwet. He also sponsored modern schools in some of the Thammayuttika monasteries before he became the manager of education of the kingdom (Phra Yannarakkhit to Phra Khru Palat Chulanunayok, Wat Bowonniwet, September 8, 1900). The Ministry of Public Instruction at that time managed only Bangkok schools.

With the introduction of the new school system there emerged a pattern of "dual education" in which the monastic education paralleled that of the Western-typed school. The subjects of instruction were morality and Buddhism, Thai language, and arithmetic. Texts were provided by the government free of charge; the teachers received salaries from the govern-

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11*Ratchakitchanubeksa* (Royal Gazette), November 11, 1898.

ment, and standard examinations were developed by the administrators of each province or *monthon*. In each *monthon*, Prince Wachirayan appointed a high ranking monk to be its director of education who would then take responsibility for both ecclesiastical and secular education. In 1902, circle lord abbots in 14 *monthon* in the kingdom were appointed and took responsibility for both types of education in the country. The title "Director of Education" was later abolished because the duties of this office were performed by the lord abbots of the circle. The lord abbots of the circle therefore had to manage to inspect all new schools located in his circle as defined under the Act of 1898.13 A modern school in Monthon Isan will serve as a case in point in the following paragraphs.

A new school in Monthon Isan was set up when Phra Yannarakkhit was appointed Director of education. Under the Sangha Administration Act of 1902, the Sangha bureaucracy appointed local abbots in the provinces and districts parallel to those of the government administration. Phra Yannarakkhit's report to Prince Wachirayan about traditional and modern education in Monthon Isan in the year 1900 stated traditional education in Monthon Isan consisted of instruction in Lao and Khmer scripts. Only the *chaomuang* and other officials and their children could read and write Thai. Phra Yannarakkhit estimated that about one or two percent of the population could read and write Thai, and about 0.002 or 0.003 percent could do arithmetic.

The first school in Ubon Ratchathani was set up by a Mrs. Noo in about 1870. It provided a program for both boys and girls. By 1900, there were ten schools in Boriwen Ubon, and one each in Boriwen Khukhan and Surin. During that year, the Ministry of Public Instruction sent 1,000 textbooks, *bap rian riew* (Standard Book I), to Monthon Isan. Phra Yannarakkhit distributed 50 of these to every new school, including those in each *muang* in Surin, Sisaket, and Khukhan.

When Phra Yannarakkhit was appointed Lord Abbot of the Isan Circle in 1902, he appointed an abbot in each Boriwen headquarters to serve

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13 *Royal Gazelle*, July 20, 1902.
as "Supervisor of Education," and ordered the Provincial and District Lord Abbots in each Boriwen to set up and manage modern school system in their respective regions. An abbot who was a school manager received a lump-sum of 30 baht each year as a bonus; the head teacher, whether monk or layman, received a salary of 8 baht per month (96 baht per year), and his subordinate, the assistant teacher, received 6 baht per month (72 baht per year).

The curriculum of instruction was divided into two levels: Munlasuksa (Basic Education) and Prathomsuksa (Elementary Education). The Munlasuksa was divided into two grades: Grade I, which gave instruction into Thai language (bap rian lem 1, Standard Book I), arithmetic, and Buddhism. Grade II gave instruction in the Thai language (bap rian lem 2, Standard Book II), arithmetic (System of weights and measures), and Buddhism. At the end of each year a standard examination was given by the Director of Education or the Assistant Director of Education of the Boriwen headquarters.

Prathomsuksa (Elementary Education) was the highest level of education at that time in Monthon Isan and other monthons. Students who graduated from the second of the Munlasuksa could enter the Prathomsuksa level. But an elementary school could only be opened if there were to be at least 30 students attending it. Because of this, the first elementary schools were not opened until 1906, when there were enough students to attend in the respective centers of the Boriwen of Ubon Ratchathani, Roi Et, Surin, and Khukhan.

In 1901, 5 Munlasuksa were founded: 2 in Surin and 3 in Khukhan territories under the advice of the Director of Education of Monthon Isan. In the following year, Phra Yannarakkhit spent 20 days, from March 16 to April 4, 1902, on an inspection tour from Ubon Ratchathani through Yasothon, Surin, Sangkha, Khukhan, Sisaket, and on to Ubon Ratchathani. He talked with all abbots, teachers, and governors who were involved in education. He also developed a standardized examination for students at the Munlasuksa level. Most provincial schools were able to provide classes through Munlasuksa grade 2 (see Table 1).
Table I: Exam results for Boriwen Surin and Sangkha in the academic year 1901-1902.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muang</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>No. of students per grade level</th>
<th>No. of pass per grade level</th>
<th>No. of failures per grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G.1</td>
<td>G.2</td>
<td>G.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surin</td>
<td>Wat Phrom</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wat Ban Nasam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khukhan</td>
<td>Wat Thepnimit</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wat Chanlakon</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisaket</td>
<td>Wat Phra To</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>57.70</td>
<td>85.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NA, R.5 M. Phra Yannarakkhit to Minister of Public Instruction, April 26, 1903.

The chart shows that 89.90% of the students in grade 1 failed, and 42.30% in grade 2 failed.

Of the students in the first grade in Surin and Khukhan territories, only 4 and 9 respectively from the totals of 29 and 41 could pass the examination. In comparison, in Boriwen Ubon Ratchathani in the same academic year, 44 students (61.96%) out of a total of 71 passed the examination (see Table 2). (Prince Sanphasit to Prince Wachirayan, May 30, 1900).

It must be remembered that the students in Boriwen Surin and Khukhan were mainly native speakers of Khmer and Kui (except in Lao-speaking Sisaket) and so were at a disadvantage compared with those who spoke the Lao dialect. Lao and Thai are very similar, so Lao-speaking students learned Thai much more easily than did the Khmer and Kui. Also, the teachers in the territories of Surin and Khukhan were more likely to be less able in teaching Thai language, because they too were native Khmer or Kui speakers.
A study by Isara Charanyananda (1962) on the ability of the Kui-Khmer-speaking children in Surin and the Malay-speaking children in southern Thailand to hear the tones of the Thai language showed that:

In general, the non-Thai speaking children were almost exactly one year or grade poorer than Thai speaking children in their ability to hear tones. That is, the mean scores of Malay, Cambodian, and Soai (Kui) children in the fourth grade were not statistically different from those of Thai speaking children in the third grade. There were no significant differences among the non-Thai groups.\textsuperscript{14}

Table 2: Exam results for students of the Sangha-managed schools in Monthon Isan for the year 1900-1909.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>No. taking exam</th>
<th>Passes</th>
<th>% passed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900 – 1901*</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>78.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>67.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>51.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>77.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>54.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>48.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6290</strong></td>
<td><strong>3155</strong></td>
<td><strong>50.16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Exam given in Ubon Ratchathani only.

It was difficult for the Siamese government to set up schools for the teaching of the Thai language in the Huamuang Khamen Padong, the outer

\textsuperscript{14}William A. Smalley, Ethnolinguistic Survey of Northeastern Khmer Speaking People in Northeast Thailand (typescript, 1964), p. 32.
provinces in the Northeast region. The government lacked the money necessary for teachers' salaries, and the local lord abbots who were to manage the schools had little experience. Thus the development of education in the outer provinces was very slow. In 1905, there were but two modern schools in Surin, two in Khukhan, one in Sisaket, and none in Sangkha (Phra Sasanadilok to Phraya Wisut Suriyasak, December 3, 1905). It was a heavy burden on the Director of Education to make the inspection tour necessary to give advice on how to prepare students for the standardized modern-school examination. For example, Phra Sasanadilok, who replaced Phra Yannarakkhit in 1904, traveled around Monthon Isan from July 25 to March 24, 1904, to advise the abbots and teachers, and to develop a standardized examination in every modern school. King Chulalongkorn was so impressed with Phra Sasanadilok's devotion to educational management in Monthon Isan that he wrote, "Phra Sasanadilok manifests very great endeavour and intention" in directing education in Monthon Isan (Prince Sommot to Phraya Wichitwongwutthikrai, January 21, 1906). The following figures show the results of Phra Sasanadilok's dedication: in 1903, the second year the standardized examination was given, 233 students took it; of these, 43 passed and 190 failed. In 1905-06, of the 651 students who took the examination, 344 passed and 317 failed. The number of students passing the examination increased almost 8 times (7.8) in a single year. In 1905, a third grade was added to the Prathomsuksa (elementary level) at Wat Supattanaram in Ubon Ratchathani.

A teacher training program was also offered at Wat Supattanaram. Thirty-five students were enrolled, of which ten passed the examination at the end of the academic year 1905 (Phra Sasanadilok to Phraya Wiset Suriyasak, January 27, 1906). The teacher training program in Monthon Isan played a key role in increasing the number of teachers available for schools in this Monthon as well as in Monthon Udon. Ubon Ratchathani became the center of education in Monthon Isan. Students from other provinces in both Isan and Udon circles went to study Pali and Thai languages there, and returned to serve as teachers in their native regions. Ubon Wittayakom School at Wat Supattanaram had 250 students in the 1905-1906 academic year; "many boys went there even if there own towns
In the academic year 1908-1909, there were 30 schools, with a total of 2,290 students, of whom 1,220 passed the examination (Phra Sasanadilok to Prince Sanphasit, December 19, 1909). This was an increase of 28 times the success rate in 1900, and almost 4 times that of academic year 1905-1906.

In 1907, the Ministry of Public Instruction sent the *khaluang thammakan* (Public Instruction Commissioner) with 3,000 copies of *bap rian riew* (Fast Learning Book) to Monthon Isan. Four teachers were also sent from Bangkok to advise teachers in modern schools. Mr. Charun Chawanaphat, the Public Instruction Commissioner of Monthon Isan formed a circle education committee for the purpose of inspecting and planning schools throughout the Isan circle. From 1907 to 1909, Mr. Charun, the Public Instruction Commissioner, and Phra Sasanadilok, the Director of Education, worked together in planning and inspecting schools according to the national system of education.

By 1905, every territory in Monthon Isan had its own elementary school. In later years this achievement was extended to other towns and districts as well. For example, in 1906, Surawittayakan School in Surin began giving instruction all the way up to Grade 2 of Prathom 2, and Sirisinsapha School in Sisaket began teaching at the Prathom 1 level (Phra Sasanadilok to Phraya Wisut Suriyasak, December, 1907).

During the academic years 1907 to 1909, the Prathom Suksa were under the Director of Education and the Ministry of Public Instruction. In 1910 when Phra Sasanadilok went to stay in Bangkok for one Lenten period, the authority in the management of elementary education was then transferred permanently to a Public Instruction Commissioner. On September 8, 1910, the Superintendent Commissioners from every circle had an organizational meeting at the Ministry of Interior. The educational system was then revised.

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Basic Education (Munlasuksa) was placed under the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior, and Elementary Education (Prathomsuksa) came under the Ministry of Public Instruction. Their goal was to found commune (Tambon) schools so that all boys would be able to read and write the Thai language by the age of 14. Commune committees were to be formed, consisting of the abbot of the monastery in the commune, the head of the commune, and the commune physician. The head of the commune was the chairman of the committee, and it was his duty to advise parents about sending their children to school. This program was offered only to boys because schools were still located at the monasteries and taught by monks; the monks could teach males, but not females, because they were allowed no female contact. Laymen male teachers could give instruction to girls, however. Female teachers taught the girls about domestic duties. Pramuan related how her grandmother sneaked to study with her younger brother who was studying at the monastery. Villagers in the old days believed firmly that if a woman learned to read and write, she would develop a stubborn character. For this reason, females were not allowed to attend schools at that time. However, at the 1910 meeting it was decided that private schools would be allowed to teach girls in Thai language. Consequently, a private girls' school was opened in Nakhon Ratchasima. During the academic year 1909-1910, 18 girls attended school there.

Gradually, the system of commune schools was extended to the districts and communes in every province, including Surin and Sisaket. In 1911, for example, Phra Anan Suranukun, the Circle Deputy of Surin (Palat Moonthon Pracham Changwat Surin) opened 5 commune schools in Chumphonburi district; the commune head man and commune physician founded a commune school in the Taksin district, Surin. A commune school was also opened in both of Rasisalai and Uthai Det Udom districts, in Sisaket province (Prince Prachin to King Chulalongkorn, March 22, 1911; August 9, 1912).

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16Pramuan Dickinson, *Duangchai khun thin* pp. 2-3.

Commune school at that time did not have any financial support from the government. The commune committee and the villagers provided the monks with food and robes as they had always done before the instruction of a national system of education. Before 1920, most commune schools were low in quality. Because of the lack of trained teachers, students were not learning Thai, especially in Surin and Sisaket. Phra Sasanadilok reported to Phraya Wisut Suriyasak that in “these two provinces, the management of education both in Thai and Pali was slow because of the language barrier” (May 15, 1910). This obstruction to language acquisition exists even today in areas of non-Thai speaking people.

During the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) the commune schools had a primary plan of literacy instruction. Boys ages 7 to 14 who lived not more than 80 sen (3.2 km.) from school were required to attend school. Teacher-monks were still supported by the commune committee and the villagers through donations of food, robes and money. These teacher-monks taught without any financial grant (salary) from the government. At this time, students were still “not organized into grades and did not take any standardized examination.” 18 The method of instruction was by rote as it was in traditional education. Most of the teachers were monks who had no training in the new curriculum as were the teachers of the Prathomhsuksa in towns or districts.

In 1921, King Vajiravudh passed the Primary Act which aimed at making basic education compulsory for all children from the age 7 to 14. This was the first attempt to eliminate sex discrimination in education. By 1922, the number of students increased 50.60 percent from 1921. The number of girls attending all schools in the nation, 124,850 in 1922, showed an increase of 7.4 times or 642.30 percent over the preceding year (see Table 3). The following two tables are summaries from the Ministry of Education’s Report (Annual Report to Chao Phraya Dhammasak Montri, the Minister of Education, 1924).

### Table 3: School attendance in 1921 and 1922:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>199,663</td>
<td>16,819</td>
<td>216,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>300,754</td>
<td>124,850</td>
<td>425,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>101,091</td>
<td>108,031</td>
<td>219,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent increased</td>
<td>50.60</td>
<td>642.30</td>
<td>96.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Total Population of Children of Ages 7 to 14 in 1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>568,193</td>
<td>464,262</td>
<td>1,032,455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1922, 41.22 percent of the total population age 7 to 14 attended school. That year the government had primary schools in 2,644 of the 5,053 communes in the kingdom. From 1922 to 1932, the Siamese government extended its primary educational program into 4,042 additional communes for a total of 83 percent of the 5,053 communes in the kingdom.

The financing of schools for the first ten years (1922-1932) during the time that the Primary Education Act was in force depended on the collection of an education tax from every adult between the ages of 18 and 60 under the Act of 1921. The education tax or *suksa plee* was collected only in the areas that had primary schools. The tax was one *baht* per person per year in the circles of Ubon Ratchathani, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Udon, and two *baht* per person per year in Monthon Roi Et. Of the 24 communes in Monthon Ubon, three charged school tax of two *bath* per person in 1922.

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19Ministry of Education's Report for 1922 Academic Year (1924), p. 3.

20Prawat krasuang suksathikan 2435-2507, p. 302.

According to my informants (Mr. Yanyong, Mr. Ngoen, Mrs. Yee, and others in Surin province) the education tax was collected at two baht per adult male per year. In the areas along the Mekong River, such as Ubon Ratchathani, Nakhon Phanom, Nongkhai, and Khemmarat, the education tax was only one baht, for political reasons; the government abolished this tax a few years later because the population along the Mekong areas migrated to French Laos where they paid less tax than they had to in Siamese territory.²²

In the first seven years of education, most adult males were able to pay the education tax. After 1929, many of them did not have enough money to pay the tax, because of the world depression. In 1930, King Prachatipok (1925-1946) abolished the education tax and the government allocated 3 million baht per year from the national treasury to meet the costs of maintaining the national system of education.²³

When the absolute monarchy was abolished in 1932, the government under the new democratic monarchy held that national education "would be the best preparation for all democracy."²⁴ Revisions of the Primary Education Act of 1921 were made in 1932 and in 1936 which called for the chief district officer (nai amphoe) to promote the establishment of local schools in every commune. Every child between the ages of 7 and 14 was required to attend school until finishing prathom 4 (Grade 4). In following years, the government succeeded in establishing primary education at a higher level. The number of local teachers increased from 10,983 in 1928 to 55,856 in 1943,²⁵ and to 300,000 in 1983.²⁶ There are now at least 7 million children attending


²³Prawat krasuang suksathikan 2435-2507, p. 303.

²⁴K. Landon, Siam in Transition (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1939) p. 98.

²⁵Charles F. Keyes, p. 32.

²⁶Thai Rath, May 11, 1983.
school in the country since the government extended compulsory education from grade 4 to grade 6 in 1981.

From 1900 onwards, the Siamese government extended primary education into the provincial areas in the Northeast. Traditional education was gradually changed from the hands of Buddhist monks to the training of the layman-teachers. The primary Act of 1921 brought opportunity for education throughout the kingdom. The main purpose was to introduce the concept of good Thai citizenship throughout the country. The Siamese policy of assimilating the Northeast populace was introduced in the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

Effects of the Combination of these two Systems

The new school system in the early twentieth century emphasized a knowledge of Thai as well as moral and religious principles. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the management of schools was in the hands of the Buddhist Sangha. Phra Yannarakkhit, the first Director of Education (from 1899-1903), who later became the Lord Abbot of Monthon Isan was replaced by his Assistant, Phra Sasanadilok (Ouan), from 1903-1925, who was very active in Monthon Isan. These high ranking monks took other monks, novices, and boys to study in Bangkok and then to return home to serve as teachers and in other official positions. Some of these students founded the Thammayut wats in Monthon Isan, Udon and later in Monthon Nakhon Ratchasima.

In 1925, the Ministry of Interior combined Monthon Ubon Ratchathani, Roi Et, and Nakhon Ratchasima into one monthon, and established its headquarters at Nakhon Ratchasima. Phra Sasanadilok (later Somdet Phra Mahavirawong) moved to Nakhon Ratchasima as the Lord Abbot of Monthon Nakhon Ratchasima. The Thammayut sect spread throughout the Northeast. At the time sociocultural traditions in the Northeast were being increasingly mixed with those practiced in the Central region. The Sangha played an important role in the assimilation of the local ethnic groups into Thai culture.

The traditional ranks of the Sangha in the Northeast such as samret, sa, ku, ku fai, ku dan, lak kham, luk kaeo, and yot kaeo were abolished
under the Sangha Administration Act 1902, Article 2. Under the Sangha Administration Act, the Sangha bureaucracy paralleled the district, province, and *monthon* bureaucracy of the government administration. The Supreme Patriarch appointed the Circle Lord Abbot, and the Circle Lord Abbot appointed the District and provincial Lord Abbots with the approval of the Supreme Patriarch. In short, since the reign of King Chulalongkorn the Sangha administration in the provinces has been centralized like the government administration.

Phra Sasanadilok promulgated that whoever was tattooed on the face or back would not be allowed to be ordained. A young man had to learn the basic *dhamma*, the five precepts (*sin haa*) and the ten precepts (*sin sip*) before becoming a novice, and before being ordained a monk he had to memorize the *sin 227*, the 227 precepts that govern a monk’s behavior. The abbot had to approve all applicants for ordination under the Sangha Administration.

In every inspection tour, the Lord Abbot of the Circle stressed to the abbots, monks, novices, officials, and laymen that all people owed respect and loyalty to Buddhism and the King (Phra Sasanadilok to Phraya Wisut Suriyasak May 15, 1910).

For King Vajiravudh’s grand coronation ceremony on November 11, 1912, Prince Damrong, then the Minister of Interior, ordered every *monthon* to supply water from its famous ponds and rivers to be used in the coronation ceremony in Bangkok. Phra Ratmuni (known as Phra Sasanadilok prior to November 10, 1912), the Ubon Circle Lord Abbot, instructed Phraya Sithammasokkarat, the Ubon Superintendent Commissioner, to bring water from the regions of Monthon Ubon Ratchathani to Bangkok. There were six sources to be tapped: the Mun River at Tha Ho Chai, Kut Si Mangkala, Kut Chantarachai, and Kam nam sap in Ubon Ratchathani; Huai Samran in Sisaket; and Sra Boran (Ancient Pond) in Surin.  

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(Toem 1970:598). Phraya Sithammasokkarat (Charoen) and Phra Wipakpotjanakit (Lek) brought water from these places to Bangkok. Because the water from these places was believed to be holy; good fortune would accrue to the king and his subjects. The water was "the means to implant an idea, and that idea was nationalism, from which all good things would flow."\textsuperscript{29}

Both Phra Yannarakkhit and Phra Sasanadilok realized that the extension of education to all children in Monthon Isan would give them the opportunity to learn the Thai language and Dhamma discipline. So, in 1903, the Isan Circle Lord Abbot initiated a regulation making the local lord abbots responsible for seeing that monks and novices studied Thai and Dhamma seriously in every area in Monthon Isan (Phra Yannarakkhit to the Ministry of Public Instruction, March 15; April 26, 1903). He also ordered teachers to teach Thai instead of Lao and Khmer as they did prior to 1900. Lao numbers (\textit{Lek Lao}) were no longer allowed to be used in schools beginning in 1903 (Phra Yannarakkhit to the Ministry of Public Instruction, March 15, 1903).

In the territories of Surin and Khukhan, where the population was mostly Khmer, Kui, and Lao, provincial officers and the Sangha co-operated in the establishment of schools for the purpose of teaching the Thai language and Buddhism. In 1904, Phraya Khukhan and Phra Khru Dhewwarat founded a school at Wat Thepnimit; Phraya Bamrung founded one at Wat Chanlakon in Muang Khukhan; and Phra Palat Nam founded a school at Wat Phra To in Sisaket. In Surin and Sangkha, schools were founded at Wat Phrom Surin and Wat Salaloy (in Surin), Wat Ban Nasam (in Taksin district), Wat Ban Chomphra (in Chumphon district), Wat Klang (in Sangkha), and Wat Pho (in Sikoraphum) (Phra Sasanadilok to the Ministry of Public Education, 1904).

On every inspection tour, Phra Yannarakkhit and Phra Sasanadilok reiterated to local lord abbots the importance of getting monks, novices,

and temple and village boys to learn Thai and Dhamma principles in order to learn the national language and to be good Thai citizens. In 1906, the government announced during the Superintendent commissioners conference that:

In circles where two languages are used-- such as Phayap, Udon, and Isan in particular-- the local language may be taught if (the) school wish(es). But we will consider (that only) Thai language as the medium of instruction... will be supported by the government.\(^\text{30}\)

In 1926, Phra Siphichai Boriban made an inspection tour throughout the Northeast. He reported on the provinces of Surin, Sisaket, and Buriram, where the non-Thai speaking portion of the population was coming to accept Thai culture:

From this alone one can see that a lot has already been done administratively to make them realise they are "Thai" people. If we do more to develop schools, and if communications with Bangkok in future become more convenient, these people will probably feel more and more that they are "Thai."\(^\text{31}\)

The concept of nationality as introduced by King Vajiravudh made use of Western ideas yet retained Thai values. For instance, the national slogan of loyalty to nation (chat), religion (satsana), and king (phra maha kasat) was introduced from Great Britain (God, King, and Country). He pointed out that, "Siam's essential strength was derived from the devotion of the people to their nation, to their religion, and to their king."\(^\text{32}\)

In the interest of nationalism, King Vajiravudh founded the Boy Scouts (luk sua), and the Wild Tigers (sua pa) "as new instruments for bringing

\(^{30}\)Kennon Breazeale, p. 259.

\(^{31}\)Phra Siphichai Boriban, p. 5; Breazeale, p. 261.

\(^{32}\)Walter Vella, Chaiyo: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalish, p. 22.
the Thai nation together; breaking the narrow interests, personal and developmental, of civil servants; stimulating martial values; and above all, creating among the Thai people a new national spirit of the Wild Tigers."

The present-day government still uses the slogan of nationalism of King Vajiravudh—*chat, satsana, phra maha kasat,*—and still supports the Boy Scouts. The name "Wild Tigers" has been changed to "Village Scouts." The Boy Scouts are organized through the schools, whereas the village scouts are organized at the commune level. The school in the northeastern villages of Thailand is, therefore, an important instrument of the government in assimilating villagers into the Thai mainstream.

Conclusion

According to the extension of primary schools into more than 90 percent of the villages, village children now have the opportunity to attend school up through the sixth grade. The primary school is the most fundamental grass-root level in which the national language, Thai culture and values impinge on the average ethnic groups of northeastern Thailand. The Boy Scouts and Village Scouts tend to be very helpful instruments toward the political and educational goals of the Thai government today. Buddhism also plays an important role in helping people in Thailand to share common beliefs and traditional practices. People in Northeastern Thailand, therefore, have come to accept being Thai in nationality even though they are culturally different to the dominant Thai group. This sense of identity with the nation has been reinforced through the introduction of modern education as already described and the creation of communication and transportation links to people in central Thailand as can be seen today.

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33 *Ibid*, p. 29.
Notes

The major sources cited in this study can be found in the National Archives (NA) of Thailand in Bangkok. The following citations are the reign (i.e. R.5 for the Fifth Reign), the ministry (i.e. M. for Mahatthai, Ministry of Interior), and the file number in a series (i.e. 1/28, refers to a file number in a series).

NA, R.5 M.57/15

Phra Yannarakkhit's Report Concerning the Officials of Monthon Isan

NA, R.6 M.26

Concerning Monthon Isan Officials 1910-1923, 3 files.

NA, R.6 S.1

The Meeting of the Superintendent Commissioners during 1910-1923.

NA, R.6 S.2

Reports and Drafts Law of Primary Education 1917-1923.

NA, R.6 S.2

Concerning Religion and Education Duties, 44, files.