

**Between Idealism and Pragmatism
A Study of Monastic Education in Burma and Thailand
from the Seventeenth Century to the Present**

**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (D.Phil)
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Abstract

There has been in recent decades an increased academic interest in the *Sangha*, the community of monks, in Burma and Thailand. However, monastic education is still often misunderstood there, particularly in the context of the relationship between the *Sangha* and the monarchy. The introduction by the king of monastic formal examinations has simply been assumed to be evidence of royal devotion towards the Order, which was perceived to be in decline and was therefore in need of royal intervention. This thesis attempts to reveal the complex relationship between the *Sangha* and the kings on the question of monastic education, arguing that the need for a monarch to control his people during war led him to interfere in monastic education. It also examines the *Sangha's* inability to define the objectives of its education systems. A large part of the thesis is devoted to reconstructing the historical process by looking at the impact of geopolitical developments on teaching methods.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One introduces monastic education, its current problems and the conflict between idealists and pragmatists within the *Sangha*. Chapter Two explores monastic education under two strong Burmese monarchs, Thalun (1629-1648) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819), who introduced formal examinations and used them for political purposes. Chapter Three examines the impact of the colonial threat on the *Sangha* and on the improved relationship between the *Sangha* and King Mindon (1853-1878) with regard to monastic education. Chapter Four looks at the impact of the instability under King Narai (1656-1688) at Ayutthaya on monastic education. Chapter Five investigates the process of standardisation of monastic education under Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). Chapter Six focuses on the current state of monastic education in both countries and analyses the *Sangha's* lack of proactive vision and its failure to reach a consensus on the aims of education.

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