

**THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT OF SPIRITUALLY ENGAGED  
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN THAILAND AGAINST THE  
BACKGROUND OF REFORM AND GLOBALIZATION**

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## ABSTRACT

**Michael E. Jones**

### **THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT OF SPIRITUALLY ENGAGED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN THAILAND AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF REFORM AND GLOBALIZATION**

The establishment of alternative education, private foundations, and networks linked to socio-political and spiritual advocacies distinguishes the Thai social movement in this research. This research is a qualitative study that has made use of historical accounts to associate with data gathered from extensive interviews and case studies in order to inquire as to whether alternative education represents an historical spiritual tradition of opposition to reform hegemony, and whether it has had an impact on state reform efforts. Also investigated was whether there are some historical patterns associated with the manner in which the state of Thailand has dealt with the forces of globalization and whether the collective action by informal movements of Thai people also has the same predictable pattern of response to the global. Analysis and comparison of these issues contribute in determining the values associated with people in the alternative education movement and the motives and intentions associated with state-initiated reforms. A further related aspect explored is the degree of “Thai-ness” and the embedded historical pattern of both the alternative education movement and education reform. These inquiries were answered through the collection of data from three different trips to Thailand over a four-year period, the last trip a one-year stay that

permitted case studies and observations at three alternative schools, and the interview of a host of participants from home-school parents and students to Ministry of Education staff and officers. In examining the data, a clearer notion of what lies underneath the idea of Buddhist education and spirituality became clearer and how educational reform based on Western ideals and notions has not taken into account Buddhism and culture as education. This illumination brings new insight and also raises a new question as to the difference between social movements in a Buddhist nation such as Thailand and social movements in the West.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Purpose, Questions, and Significance of Research

*I've said two things about it [objectivity] One is that it's not possible. Two, it's not desirable. It's not possible because all history is a selection out of an infinite number of facts. As soon as you begin to select, you select according to what you think is important. Therefore it is already not objective. It's already biased in the direction of whatever you, as the selector of this information think people should know. So, it's really not possible. – Howard Zinn*

#### 1.1 Introduction

Thailand has never been a stranger to global influences, in fact it has often welcomed influences from afar only to adapt and fashion the influences to fit the customs of the local. A quick look at Thai cuisine and agricultural production will clearly reveal this point – staple fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes as varied as pineapple, watermelon, peanuts, sweet potatoes, cashews, guava, capsicum (hot chili peppers), papaya, and cassava, among many others were not indigenous to Thailand but were brought by adventurers and tradesmen. In my research and interviews I have heard accounts of how Ayutthaya, an old capital of Thailand, invited and welcomed foreigners and that dozens of languages were spoken in the capital, an incomparable cosmopolitan and multicultural hub that was rare for those times. Examining historic Thai cultural details reveals that even Thailand's spiritual “glue” teems with outside influences of animism, Jainism, Brahmanism (Hinduism) and Buddhism while the artistic and civilizing features of the land are more than tinged with a variety of characteristics that have been assimilated into a local style from ancient international influences. One might say that the global provided the resources for the people to create the land of Siam and

those who drew up the plans of a nation, also dictated the Thai identity of what is now known as Thailand.

Thailand has not only encountered global influxes of people, ideas, and treasures, but it has developed strategies over time to incorporate these influxes into a somewhat coherent cultural landscape, a landscape not as idealistically sculpted and defined as many contemporary Thais would believe, but one that has retained patterns of managed design. These designs have begun in various reforms, and for the purpose of this research, the major reforms examined have occurred over the last 150 years. These reforms have, however, been arguably the largest civil reforms Thailand has undertaken, determining the frontiers of geography, administration, and reaching as far as formulating and inculcating notions of what it means to be Thai.

This notion of being a Thai is at the center of this research because the means to accomplish the task of defining a Thai identity has been ingrained through the use of Buddhism and inculcated through education. The relationship between Buddhism and education is particularly significant because before the reforms started 150 years ago, Buddhism and education were one and the same for the villager and commoner, perhaps not in substance, but certainly in the learning of how to make life worth living as an individual and as a member of a family and community. Education and Buddhism represent the interface between Siam and what has become Thailand; what was once spiritual has now become religion; what was once living-learning has now become formal schooling; and what was once for the benefit of the community is now for the benefit of the nation-state. The reform of 150 years ago cleaved education from

Buddhism yet both continue to play significant roles in the implementation of the educational reform of 1997. It is the evolution of the relationship between education and Buddhism and their interface with reform that is of specific relevance in this research.

### 1.2 Purpose of this Research and Research Questions

As in any case regarding social or cultural movements, one must inspect the historical context. The historical context of the alternative education movement in Thailand is fixed in notions of spirituality and, in particular, Buddhism. The notion of spirituality in Thailand has also been entwined in the traditional model of king as enlightened spiritual being (Bodhisattva) and the development of nation-state. This creation of a nation-state has been motivated by the attempt to interact with the forces of globalization on an even footing and not as a country in an inferior position – first in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Colonial era, and then again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the era that promoted modernization, industrialization, and global economies. The reforms necessary to develop a strong state has an historical pattern of manipulating social class structures through the utilization of what I refer to as “reform utilities” – state-determined notions of culture, Buddhism, and education. I make the assumption that it is the control of these concepts that defines the issues and distinguishes the value differences between the alternative movement and the state. While the basic values in Buddhism and education are shared, the value differential is in the interpretation of the principles, purpose and practice of both – a wide chasm exists.



In order to conduct this research and examine these issues and assumptions, I ask four primary research questions:

1. What social, cultural, political, and spiritual values inform alternative education activists in Thailand?
2. What are the differences in spiritual and/or educational values between alternative educators/homeschoolers and policy-makers/formal educators in Thailand?
3. What has been the impact of alternative schools and homeschooling on decentralization and reform in Thailand?
4. What (if anything) is distinctly “Thai” about Thai reform and Thai social movements?

### 1.3 Significance of this Study

Scholars lack an understanding of how globalization works in cultural contexts, which is particularly striking since globalization has its manifestations in the educational systems of many countries, particularly developing ones. A number of scholars have noted how surprising it was that very little research done on the topic of education decentralization uses an international comparative approach; and, in addition, other researchers have asserted that only one in twenty research studies compare the outcomes of education decentralization with other local areas within a nation. The obvious paradox facing an educational policy-maker is that decentralization is so routinely prescribed as a conscious remedy, but is based on so little empirical knowledge. In this regard, it is assumed by many that developing nations undergo

reform to various degrees due largely to international pressure and factors related to globalization. It is my supposition that educational reform and the related redefinition of cultural values in Thailand have resulted as much from homegrown alternative education movements as they have from external pressures.

This being the case, themes that will reoccur throughout my research will be globalization as the paradoxical paradigm of change; power and its relation to cultural conflict; culture as an expression of learning and adapting to international influences; spirituality as a valuable cultural embodiment of education and social movements; and administrative educational reform of the state and the educational reform by alternative educators. These themes are important to look at because they reveal cultural motivation and the mechanisms in which societal change occurs. As for Thailand, social movements generally go hand in hand with culture, spiritual values, and education to *inform* and reinforce deeply embedded values; oppositional and protective intentions that lead to *reform* of the systems of learning; and which, ideally reflect civic participation and public good in educational *form*. Regrettably, however, it is rare to have policy-makers consider these factors because the notion that popular movements may be significant means to guide executive decisions threaten traditional cultural hegemonic patterns and turn power frameworks upside down. This research will bring to light how significant and beneficial alternative education and local social movements are to regions and nations in a globalized world.

#### 1.4 Theoretical Framework & Discussion of Issues

This research has been informed by several broad theoretical frameworks, including:

- globalization (particularly related to decentralization);
- educational decentralization in a developing country context;
- the cultural influences of social movements;
- comparative education and culture, contemporary Asian social movements;
- and Thai Engaged Buddhist social movements.

Other important frameworks presented throughout this research include:

- Buddhism as a historical, cultural, and contextual reference;
- Western notions of spirituality is placed in a comparative context with Buddhism as a spiritual basis for an engaged social movement;
- and alternative forms of education and learning is contextualized in traditional forms of Buddhism as education, as a form of holistic education, and as a form of opposition to global pressures, hegemony, and cultural and moral coherency.

My research priority was to examine how individuals or communities appropriate from the global and re-define the local, and in turn, instruct the national and regional through discourse on multiple stages. These theoretical frameworks were found to be useful in framing the discourse between participants and in understanding the deeper significance and complexity of issues not previously examined by researchers or amongst the participants themselves.

## CHAPTER 2<sup>1</sup>

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Globalization & Decentralization as the backdrop for Education, Buddhism, & Culture

Buddhist reform cannot be separated from social reform; they are “dual missions” that concerned people must carry out together... Reforming Buddhism is the only way to liberate its potential to support civil society. – Phra Paisal Visalo

##### *2.1.1 Globalization, Decentralization, and Reform*

There is no end to the amount of research on globalization, nor will there be for quite some time to come. This is due to the very thematic foundations of globalization that continue to be prevalent concerns to every country – movement of ideas/people/interactions/industry, appropriation, and reform. These foundations represent the power that is projected and passes unimpeded across and within national borders to effectuate multi-leveled disturbances through the galvanization of global economic configurations that advocate “excessive consumption, individualism, and competition – the three dominant traits of our times” (Stromquist, 2002). These traits, however, are not merely the influences of a globalization process characterized as “a passive diffusion; it is also an active, even aggressive, process of social transformation” (Astiz, et al., 2002). These transformations are not only instigated at the insistence of transnational entities, but are also capitulations made by states to bring about a sense of development commensurate with those determining the requirements and price of

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter liberally uses text from a previously published textbook chapter cited as: Jones, M. (2008). Thailand and Globalization: The Use of Reform Utilities – Culture, Education, Engaged Spirituality, and Social Movements. In Hopson, R., Yeakey, K., Camp, C., & Boakari, F. (Eds.), *Power, Voice, and the Public Good: Schooling and Education in Global Societies*. Oxford, England: Elsevier.

admission to the developed world. Stromquist (2002) exhorts us to look closely at how globalization's "economic dimension is deeply guided by a development model based on the hegemony of the market and the role of the state as a key supporter of market decisions."

Contemporary globalization represents nothing less than confrontation at multiple intersecting levels – culture, technology, religion, politics - and is driven not only by powerful economic dynamics, but by institutional reform that imposes social transformations. Transformations are commonly of the type whereby familiar cultural beliefs deeply rooted in traditions and/or socio-political conventions are vibrantly challenged at seemingly mystical levels through the intervention of media technologies. These are generally market strategies that present enticing promises of modernization, progress, and empowerment. In a 2003 Pew Research Center report on globalization, "In 41 of 44 nations surveyed by Pew, majorities think growing trade and business ties are both good for their country and good for their families" with "at least two-thirds of the public in every country - except Jordan and Tanzania – think it is a good thing that their countries are becoming more connected to the world through trade and communication"; however, "people are also unwilling to link problems like economic inequality, the lack of good-paying jobs and poor working conditions to globalization." Ironically, the majority of people in all nations support modern communications and international commerce, but acknowledge that global problems are getting worse, people's traditional ways of life are being disrupted and threatened, and "the erosion of

traditional ways is often blamed on commercialism and consumerism... and are a threat to our culture.”

According to Wang (1996), the research literature on education decentralization is uneven in its definition as many people give it the meaning most fitting for their context. Although they performed their research over two decades ago, Rondinelli, Cheema, and Nellis are still considered the foremost authorities on educational decentralization in developing nations by both Wang (1996) and Rhoten (1999). Their typology of the four modes of decentralization in developing nations: deconcentration, delegation, devolution, and privatization remains the standard model simply because there is not a great amount of literature on education decentralization in international contexts. Rhoten (2000) has contributed her own description of educational decentralization in the nested framework of “international origins,” “national intentions,” and “local interpretations,” and this has paved the way for uncovering globalization from local and regional perspectives.

Noel McGinn and Thomas Welsh (1999) mention factors in how the democratic emphasis of decentralization is often subjugated by centralized forces and Bray (1999) reports that decentralization often perpetuates inequalities and policies often tend to exclude people who have already been largely factored out of the national development equation. Similarly, Mary McNeil (2002) believes that there is a need for a concerted effort by communities to learn how to administer their educational needs through a democratic process to approximate political effect. It would seem reasonable then to expect equity to become a concern since scholars believe that the divide between rich

and poor will widen; however, decentralization normally reflects a managerial perspective on change rarely asking how local actions and social movements could beneficially influence its implementation. Prompilai Buasuwan explains from a world-institutional theory that “the quality of a national educational system is increasingly being held to international standards” (2003: 249) and this in turn is to the benefit of the elite in maintaining their socio-economic status.

Transformation comes also as a political and administrative implementation that presents the enticement of modernization and empowerment, generally through education decentralization and related reform measures. The accompanying rationale for decentralization and reform offers the explanation that centralized states are inefficient and do not deliver the resources to compete for a place in the global market. Paradoxically, decentralization and adjusting to the demands of the market do not necessarily bring about beneficial outcomes. Jere Behrman et al. have pointed out that “decentralization of education management simply shifts the same old problems to levels that are less capable of resolving them” (2002: 3) and “is largely driven by the fact that it can relieve strained public sector finances” (4).

Even though the intent of decentralization is to devolve some authority to the local level and improve administration, in practice its rationale has been reinvented by policy-makers in many developing countries to become a means for a state to be more internationally competitive. This reform language designates a political ideology of government-directed initiatives (Young & Levin, 1999) that often perpetuates inequalities and policy processes that generally exclude educators and people who have

already been largely factored out of the national development equation. These ideologies are driven by concern for economic standing and achieving development based on production, not equity. According to Martin Carnoy, decentralization in developing countries is generally finance-driven and “its primary effect on their education systems is to increase inequality of access and quality” (1999: 60) as the nation-state fails to determine the means to develop an “educational process and practice *within the context of globalization* rather than on globalization’s financial imperatives themselves” (Ibid.).

Reform is generally a formulaic prescription for the benefit of the global economic standing of the nation-state. Reforms read like litanies emphasizing the means to attain global educational values; in addition to decentralization, you will frequently see a variety of practices that support economic interests of education – national standards, accountability, testing and quality assurances (Stromquist, 2002). The growing alliances between education and economic interests are obvious, but questionable in practice. Policy-makers have determined the necessity for educated, skilled labor and radical changes “in what is learned and how it is learned, even though there is little evidence that this change is or will be accompanied by positive social transformation” (Stromquist, 2002: 61); in effect, education still represents the political ideology of the market and not the public good. It is not a coincidence that much of the language around educational reform has been coined by the business world, particularly as applied to the technological world – a short list that includes: knowledge management, efficiency, accountability, quality assurance, equity, and competitiveness.



The education systems of many countries, particularly developing ones, often experience firsthand the manifestations of globalization. Diana Rhoten asserts that education decentralization is one of the “most salient and tangible public policy manifestations of globalization” (1999: 1), but suffers from an even greater lack of understanding, particularly “in terms of implementation and impact” (3). This is an unsettling characteristic of decentralization and reform because decision-makers rely on the consequences of acts that have little precedence – conscious remedies based on very little empirical knowledge, and few decisions are made reflectively and with insight by decision-makers.

What makes reform particularly problematic is that, like Diana Rhoten (1999) and Dani Rodrik (1997) both affirm, there is a lack of understanding of how globalization works in cultural contexts. Martin Carnoy has given several reasons why examining the effects of globalization in cultural perspectives is essential: “schools are transmitters of modern culture” (1999: 76); globalization redefines culture and the nature of identity; globalization defines the sorts of knowledge and skills to be valued in a culture; and global markets create and rend communities. Carnoy also reminds us that not only does globalization alter cultures, but the resistance arising from social movements allows a relative amount of self-assurance in appraising the degree of power a community of individuals has in life to define ones environment. It would seem that a society’s ability to change consciously comes down to who wields consensual power and who directs the forces of culture.

## 2.2 Learning the Complexity of Change and Reform

*It is a world where one should never trust a change agent or never assume that others, especially leaders, know what they are doing – not because change agents and leaders are duplicitous or incompetent – but because the change process is so complex and so fraught with unknowns that all of us must be on guard and apply ourselves to investigating and solving problems. – Michael Fullan*

### *2.2.1 Change Paradox*

The paradoxical feature of change and reform is that they are usually attempts to simplify, and yet complexity is a trait of an evolving system and human being. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1993) has said that this paradox is due to the fact that all components of systems are “organically related,” or as Buddhists call it, intersubjective. Change and reform of systems represent an evolving transformation that cannot be managed or directed unless the system becomes more complex and this requires human consciousness to become equally more complex. Complexity of consciousness within individuals requires the freedom to explore and discover one’s own pattern of evolution. In the case of educational reform, it requires more than transforming school systems in order to encourage the growth of students’ conscious complexity – it takes an interdependent community and family system providing “diverse experiences” (171) as well. Csikszentmihalyi defines some of the contributing factors that limit the development of complexity: “boring jobs, oppressive or excessively bland political arrangements, lack of a common moral code and trustworthy leadership, and leisure opportunities that cater to the lowest common denominator” (171).

In order to live with all the complexities of change, particularly related to educational reform, in a more productive manner as opposed to trying to manage it as a

problem, Michael Fullan (1993) sees “study [of the] factors associated with the success or failure of the latest innovations or policy” as insufficient because it tends to lead to the bifurcation of planned changes from essential (and quite natural) spontaneous change. Fullan, basing his observations on decades of work on educational reform, further believes that instead of elaborating the latest and best policies and strategies, educational reform requires a holistic, local effort because, invariably, national education and reform policies are political treatments that most usually serve to retain a stratified, unequal system that fails to develop in complexity and in the development of what Peter Senge refers to as a “learning organization.” Learning is defined, not as the acquisition of contextual-less information, but knowledge that has the potency to continually transform community purpose in desirable and unexpectedly innovative ways. People within learning organizations are also continual learners “acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, and their growth areas” (Senge, 1990: 142) and know how to acquire “personal mastery... [as] a lifelong discipline” (Ibid). Fullan, in comparing traditional organizations to learning organizations, views traditional management fortified with systems that are more concerned with controlling people’s behaviors while learning organizations “invest in the quality of thinking, the capacity for reflection and team learning, and shared understandings of complex issues” (100).

With globalization exerting pressure on citizens, communities and institutions to deal constructively, morally and intelligently with dynamic cultural and societal changes, “education is the only [institution] that potentially has the promise of fundamentally contributing to this goal [of a multi-cultural dynamic society]” (Fullan,

1993: 4). However, Fullan observes that change is dealt with in clichés and schools fail to prepare students for the dynamic global world, and in fact, prepare students to become victims at the mercy of global institutions that predictably define and conclude in non-complex, linear sequences, but do not question and unexpectedly learn in dynamic, interconnected ways. His tonic for the fractured society grappling with the pressure to reform education is to give deeper meaning in the ability to make change a productive element in all student's lives and in order to establish a relationship between moral purpose and change agency, and to develop the ability "to be self-conscious about the nature of change and the change process" (12). Providing the channels for people to embrace this dual motivation involves a multi-leveled approach including creating a cadre of teacher-as-change agents, an on-going educational program in parenting, and establishing a national corporate ethos that requires quality production and less of an emphasis on high profit margins while investing in research and development (Goodlad, J., 1992 in Fullan, M., 1993). The practical aspects of negotiating this new paradigm of change and reform are encapsulated within Fullan's eight lessons:

- Lesson One: You Can't Mandate What Matters (The more complex the change the less you can force it)
- Lesson Two: Change is a Journey not a Blueprint (change is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse);
- Lesson Three: Problems are Our Friends (Problems are inevitable and you can't learn without them);
- Lesson Four: Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later (Premature visions and planning blind);
- Lesson Five: Individualism and Collectivism Must Have Equal Power (There are no one-sided solutions to isolation and groupthink);
- Lesson Six: Neither Centralization Nor Decentralization Works (Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary);

Lesson Seven: Connection with the Wider Environment is Critical for Success (The best organizations learn externally as well as internally);  
Lesson Eight: Every Person is a Change Agent (Change is too important to leave to the experts, personal mind set and mastery is the ultimate protection) (Fullan, 1993: 21-22).

### *2.2.2 The Global Expression of Reform & Policy Motivations*

Over the last two decades educational reforms have proliferated across developing nations, mostly prodded by international forces touting modernization and industrialization. Institutions such as the multi-branched United Nations and many “liberal” NGOs proclaiming ambitions to eradicate global ignorance and issues of equity have inadvertently and sometimes actively collaborated with and promoted the agenda of the transnational capitalists - mostly European and USA corporate interests - through global education initiatives. James Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank, unilaterally asserted in 1999, “All agree that the single most important key to development and to poverty alleviation is education” (Grindle, M., 2004: 27). However, pedagogical ethnocentrism has not been adequately addressed in recommending reform initiatives, and it is taken for granted that the sort of education needed to eradicate poverty, introduce multicultural inclusion, and bring equity to a nation is a Western framework that ignores differences in historical, cultural and societal contexts and replaces them with contexts of markets, capital, and consumption.

In looking at issues and reasons that led to the spate of global educational reforms, James Kaufman and Joan Nelson (2004) point to the 1990 UNESCO-sponsored education conference in Jomtien, Thailand and the 1998 meeting of American heads of state in Santiago, Chile. Purveyors of reform were active during this

time period and “investments in education became one of the highest priorities of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and other international financial institutions” (Kaufman, J. & Nelson, J., 2004: 252). In a show of global *groupthink* spreading at a fevered pitch, “Conclaves, conferences and studies in a number of individual nations replicated this ferment at a national level” (Ibid.). Kaufman & Nelson identified two ideas that influenced the growing movement towards global educational reform: 1) education as a means of development to foster global commerce, capitalism, and the rudimentary forms of democracy that make global commerce an amenable policy in further shaping the consensual definition of development; 2) propagation of the belief that human capital was an essential investment in order to further the project of modernization, reduction of poverty via creation of inviting investment environments, and to create the attitudes necessary to accept competitiveness as a societal norm in order to integrate into the global markets.

Policy changes in South American contexts reflected these ideas, the “neo-liberal vision” in which reformers and policy-makers interpreted the “vision” within their own national context and became worried that their national and personal interests were being left behind the modern times; and, as in the case of Mexico, “improving education in the country would increase the potential to generate benefits from globalization” (Kaufman, R. & Nelson, J., 2004: 285). While the concerns of Latin American reformers and policy-makers became the guiding principles of reform, overall, the “market ideology, fiscal concerns, and democratic demands were thus less important in explaining how the reform emerged” (Ibid.). Although Kaufman and

Nelson cannot make direct links between globalization and reforms, the influence of scholars, international agencies and corporations are, if not evident, then implicit. Merilee Grindle, in expressing a rationale for the policy of educational investment, defends it on the grounds that the link between education and “worker productivity, technological, and global competitiveness are all increased through advances in education” (Grindle, M., 2004: 27). Grindle also makes oft-used claims of the superior human quality of educated people, but one must question the amount of epistemological ethnocentrism involved in data used from these research projects as there is generally no mention of issues surrounding non-school, non-formal learning, except to imply their inferiority and that people educated in this manner are ignorant and are in great need of intercession. Policy-makers, who are generally those educated in Western traditions, are highly influenced by these sorts of academic assertions and often look down on traditional practices as superstitious or backwards or just inferior.

Grindle has noted that analysis of education policies during the past reform decade in South America has centered around issues of access, efficiency, pedagogical delivery, measurements of learning improvement, and assessment of school’s efficacy. Most reform advocates’ and policy-makers’ concern arose after reading country comparative research evidence that indicated education was of poor quality and many students failed to learn or had completely dropped out. Other concerns that were inter-related were the dismal state of disrepair of the schools, the lack of updated textbooks, and the subsequent demoralization of teachers. Sociologists and educators questioned whether the youth would have a future in the labor pool shaped by global market forces

and whether the rural areas would become shtetls and culling grounds for cheap labor. In the end, reform policies, in seeking educational quality, focused on “addressing the problem of poor management and inefficient use of resources by increasing accountability” (5).

In a rather sobering look at recent reform analysis and how complex change is so difficult to manage is a study conducted by Mark Robinson in 2007 questioning whether decentralization reforms improve equity and efficiency. His key findings indicate that: “poor and socially marginalized people have not in general benefited from improved access to services.” In a similar study by Diana Conyers in 2007, she assesses the reform of public service delivery thusly: “there is little evidence to suggest that decentralization significantly improved the quantity, quality or accessibility of public services in sub-Saharan Africa.”

## 2.3 Change and Reform through Culture & Social Movements

### *2.3.1 Comparative Education & Culture*

Social movements and comparative education are related through historical and theoretical events and concepts, but rarely do you find them associated together in the contemporary field. They have three fundamental interest areas in common: power and conflict, culture, and globalization. It would seem so natural that comparative studies would utilize some form of cultural theoretical framework of social movements to explain some of the responses and opposition to global effects. But for whatever reason, many researchers do not use social movement theory as a framework to study international or comparative educational issues. It is globalization that has become the



paradigmatic catch phrase for the new millennium and this is reflected by the plethora of research and postulation regarding the girth of its influence. The literature on globalization is replete, but is not coherent and is generally approached with a bifurcated emphasis – winners and losers. Kellner (2000), however, acknowledges the dual-faced nature of globalization in which global and local cultures interact and configure new cultural hybrids that have demonstrated the potential for social movements. Soraj Hongladarom (1998) also has dismissed the idea that the global swallows in whole the local culture, “Unless the global is accorded with myths or narratives particular to the locality in which it is adopted, it remains forever fleeting and unintegrated into the actual lives and hopes of the members of the community” (9).

The lack of scholarship surrounding education and social movements has been lamented by Morrow, & Torres (1999), even noting that there is an “obvious foundation for understanding comparative education” (91) in the natural interface with the relationship between the state and social movements. Reasons for this lack of theoretical scholarship are due to the misconceptions concerning the concept, objectives, and importance of social movements, and the attention given to reform guided by principles of assessment to establish an elite order that nullifies class opposition. This goes in hand with the prevailing dominance of neo-liberalism, which has authorized states with the justification to extend the power of the elite to a transnational platform. This transnational wielding of power is the central characteristic of the “globalization of capitalism” (Morrow & Torres, 1999: 98), the haven of

autonomous individuality – the antipode of the collective momentum needed for social movements.

In order to see the relationship between globalization, education reform, cultural defiance, and social movements, my research will note some of the historical and conceptual influences that might enlighten the current field of comparative education, a field of study that one might use as a close-up lens to take snapshots of the interplays on the global educational terrain. A major limitation in the field of comparative education is that it has not established a firm understanding or interest in understanding how culture is mobilized to create reform. Generally, culture has been acknowledged as a general effect, a significant one, but it is usually generalized and not analyzed as an aspect of historic events. There is a lack of general understanding of how culture is to be perceived and when it is to be used as a resource. Perhaps the inability to include culture and its movements that shape society is related to the level of specific local, national, and regional cultural knowledge needed and the shifting nature it exhibits. It is an aspect of human social interaction often spoken of, but in a cavalier fashion that explains everything and nothing at the same time.

In addition to the disregard for culture, comparative education research has suffered from the oversight of not incorporating contemporary cultural and social theory, particularly when globalization became the dominant face of change. Globalization caught the comparative education field unprepared and concepts and narratives from the development era took precedence (Marginson & Mollis, 2000). This is a critical development because globalization expresses the paradoxical movement

characterized by worldwide convergence of markets and divergence of ideas through cultural encounters. Morrow and Torres (1999) note that the globalization of culture establishes new international links between new social movements. Spiritual, religious, and ethnic groups have revitalized principles related to identity and the rationale for opposition; and while this adds to the diversity of the global tendency to flatten dissent and variance, it threatens the conventional power of the nation-state, a vacuum filled by regional and international influence.

Different nations have a variety of means to distribute national resources, but very few nations promote any other educational goals than those on the global agenda (Cheng, 2000). This evokes another image of neutralizing cultures by way of creating a normative standard for all peoples in which to aspire. This is another paradox arising out of globalization in that some societies use education to develop individuals while others promote ideologies and specific social order that are difficult to understand from the perspective of another culture. “Educational missions are often culture specific... they are deep-rooted in the culture and are not easily understood from another culture” (Cheng, 2000: 84). Cheng asserts that cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary research is rare but promises much potential in the understanding of one’s own culture and the capacity of their educational duties. He thinks that only when a society knows the benefits and limitations of cultural borrowing can they face the challenges of globalization. But Cheng gives this discouraging assessment of comparative education, “... the ‘discipline’ of comparative education may not develop much further if the specificity of cultural values about education is not studied” (88).

### *2.3.2 Social Movements as Cultural Discourse*

Kenneth Wain presents a philosophical approach to social movements and what they could represent and manifest in a society. In paraphrasing Foucault, Wain says that, outside of political and economic strategy, the idea of justice isn't a useful idea unless the objective is to topple the very basic assumptions of society. The rationale with this idea is that power precedes justice, particularly how the dominant power is defined, and struggle is usually for power and not justice. Giugni (1998) reported that the majority of research on social movements reveals that the central issue of social movements is power and movements can be immobilized with suppression in the short term, while disruption and violence can be intimidating effects used by protesters. However, displays of forced power cause divisiveness within groups and rarely engender community. Caputo thinks that society views difference as a loss, "a fall from unity" (in Wain, 2004: 250) but that the idea of community is ethically compatible because of its tolerance and respect for dissent and difference. A sense of community at the local level is conducive to a mobilized society. Wain imagines Derrida would favor a loose community that resists assimilation by the state and is both hospitable and reassuring to its citizenry but discourages uniformity. Derrida would want the idea of justice and democracy to be perpetually restive, but still inspire full commitment to its promise. He would emphasize that lifelong learning is a sacred duty and learning must be a commitment to form as a community, one in which the needs of the weak demands a generous response and the community gratefully complies.

Social movement theory is founded in the European context defined by class struggle, trans-boundary crossings, and cross-cultural interactions. Its primary historical features have highlighted the resistance to indignity through acts of mediation and adaptation strategies to the conditions of subordination and the hardships of migration. Porta & Diani (1999) have differentiated the European and the American traditions in social movement theory. The American social movement perspective is historically recent emphasizing critical theories, and is now a permanent component of western democracy. Social movements in the European tradition have been closely associated with education as an alternative form of mobilization for freedom and liberation (Harrison, 1963 as cited by Cooke, 2000) and the establishment of a civil society.

Brown (1998) and other researchers of social movements have identified how cultural, political, and religious identities are linked with independence movements. Many of these movements have various strains of cross-cultural and global influences that are deeply rooted in comparative adult education, particularly the alternative Scandinavian folk high schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Popovich, 1998; Hake, 1998). The affects of culture on social movements have been duly noted by scholars, notably Johnston and Klandermans (1995), who believe that culture, without the intervention of revolution, spans lengthy time periods and appears to be static. Social movements on the other hand, arise within the milieu of a culture and provide a background from which to observe that the seemingly static culture is actually in continual flux. Johnston and Klandermans remind us that “Social movements are not just shaped by cultures; they also shape and reshape it” (1995: 9).

Examining social movements as cultural in nature allows researchers to investigate the complex interactions as interpreted by social movement members. Social movements then can be thought of as cultural movements and how movements are framed depends on how actors respond to cultural themes and how their influence is projected through discourse (Fine, 1995). Fine elaborates this significance with metaphor, “it is helpful to conceive of a social movement as a bundle of narratives” (1995:128). It is these narratives that create bonds, images, and traditions – the very foundation pieces of culture. In essence, culture is created through interaction and becomes the praxis of collective identity with social movements representing “staging areas for behavior” (Fine, 1995: 129). Similarly, Rick Fantasia and Eric Hirsch consider movements to be creative dialogs between insiders and outsiders whereby emergent qualities of culture are contested and tend to create new meaning and significance for future cultural events.

Fantasia and Hirsch owe much of their view of culture to anthropology and postulate that culture is a creative dialog between insiders and outsiders. They are most interested in the emergent qualities of culture that tend to create new meaning and exemplify dynamic potential and constraint, expressed as counterculture, oppositional, and counter-hegemonic. They suppose that the relationship between culture and social movements can be made more evident, particularly if researchers “focus on what takes place in the interactive struggle for power between elites and movement participants” (1995:145). They maintain that power relationships define cultural values, beliefs, and practices, and in reciprocation, subordinates adapt to their place by creating and

expressing oppositional cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Fine believes that the analysis of social movements has great potential to illuminate the content of culture and how it is situated in relation to local expression. This requires examining social movements to include the individual, the society, the resources, and the culture in the research.

Janet McIntyre-Mills (2000) defines social movements as a collective action by informal groups of people committed to broad changes to social institutions and structures. She agrees with Touraine and Castells in that the mobilization of society through social movements will be essential in the new millennium. She believes social movements should assume personal agency and capacity in order to bring about a cultural re-education, while groups take personal responsibility for changes in their thinking and acting. She believes that movements need to address power imbalances and find common denominators across interest groups in effort to create a global citizenry. She calls social movements the new form of politics and concurs with Touraine in his argument that the fundamental feature of post-industrial society is that the society's struggle must be contested at the cultural level. This is in contradiction to Marx's belief that the primary struggle of society is at the class level. According to Touraine, the character that makes social movement so valuable is that they are assigned the charter to invent the norms that transform institutions, alter practices, and induce a reshaping of meaning and solidarity among people.

### *2.3.3 Culture & the Thai Notion of Culture*

But what is this thing called *culture* and how does it relate to education and social movements? It is not self-evident, because the contradictoriness and multiple uses of the word *culture* are well noted. Kroeber and Kluckhohn substantiated at least 160 definitions of culture – and this was in 1952! Some social scientists have used the term to refer to symbolic aspects as opposed to artifacts, while some make a distinction between society and culture (Banks, 2001). Culture has also been defined as a survival mechanism or strategy and is dynamic and subject to a society's intricate circumstance that has evolved with meaningful input to ensure future security. In contemporary circles, the symbolic and intangible aspects of societies are used most frequently when talking about culture, because it is usually in reference to the comparative discrepancies between social values, perceptions, beliefs, representations, preferences, and mannerisms. Anderson-Levitt summarizes it in brief: “culture refers to what people know and know how to do, and not to a group of people” (Anderson-Levitt, 2002:20). It is her definition that has appropriated culture to the field of education because, as she makes unambiguous, culture is social - it is learned from others, and it is shared – the directives all societies have given to schools and educational traditions. Culture can be said to be “networked knowledge situated within communities of practice” (Wenger as paraphrased in Anderson-Levitt, 2002: xii).

The Thai word for culture, *wattana-tahm*, is a word that doesn't have a deep history, and according to Raksasataya (1997), is a comparatively new word in the Thai lexicon and means “development, growth, or evolution from an original state of nature”



(Raksasataya, 1994: 3-4 in Raksasataya, 1997). The Office of the National Culture Commission has given *wattana-tahm*

an operational definition: ‘culture means growth, which is the result of relationship [sic] system between human beings themselves, human beings and societies, and human beings and nature. It can be classified into three aspects, namely, spiritual, societal, and material (Office of the National Culture Commission in Raksasataya, 1997:1).

Defining *culture* in a Thai context is reflected in how the nation, once a land where a small cultured elite consorted in ornate temples and palaces and ruled imperially over a mostly uneducated Buddhist peasantry, has evolved to a rather well developed nation. It also gives insight into why the peasantry felt the need to resist the imposing reigns of the elite and why Thai society retains elements of homogeneity. The Cultural Council, created in 1943 by the Thai government, became the Ministry of Culture in 1953 and promptly changed the nation’s name from the indigenous Siam, and defined national cultural referents ranging from the king’s anthem and the meaning of patriotism to manners, language and literature to appropriate attire, chores, and how the disabled and elderly were to be regarded. Over the next five decades, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) has released occasional cultural policies, generally to refortify and conserve Thai culture, or at least how it is officially defined. It is clear in this Thai context that culture has acted as education and cannot be separated from the process of cultural adaptation (Levinson, 2004).

Historically, Thai culture has been defined by the state and it is not unusual for redefinitions of Thai culture to be remodeled and/or refined at the state level. Culture is promoted to the populace and once activated in ones life, is transmitted from generation

to generation. Raksasataya's view of culture has a prominent authority component that determines what people need to know and to produce. In his scheme, the Thai state categorizes cultural aspects in hierarchical tiers of end products and resources that have been developed and produced by a people in a nation-state. At the bottom end of every tier in this scheme are primitive acts, which are deemed uncultured because they are in their natural, original state. To many Thai officials it is only through acts of innovation that enter modern commerce does a product become cultural – it is dependent on being developed, tooled, fashioned, or manipulated. There is an over-riding sense of progress as the resource of culture moves in a linear progression to the future. One might ask where cultural production ends and indoctrination begins. It is also pertinent to ask where culture as a symbolic means for people to control their environment ends and control of the symbolic to control people begins.

## 2.4 Historical Patterns of Thai Reform in Response to Globalization:

### Nation, Buddhism, & Education

*On the futility of becoming overly preoccupied in affairs of the world, Ajahn Chah reminds his audience of the beetle, scratching in the earth: It can scratch up a pile that's a lot bigger than itself, but it's still only a pile of dirt. If it works hard, it makes a deep hole in the ground, but it's only a hole in dirt. If a buffalo drops a load of dung there, it will be bigger than the beetle's pile of earth, but it still isn't anything that reaches to the sky. It's all dirt. Worldly accomplishments are like this. No matter how hard the beetles work, they're just involved in dirt, making holes and piles – Paul Breiter, 2005*

#### *2.4.1 Thumbnail of Thai Historical Background – Ayutthaya Period*

International encounters and interactions have been a steady factor over many centuries in Thailand and it is worthwhile to look at the distant past and assess the

significance of actions taken in response to historic global threats and opportunities and consider whether there are vestiges of cultural patterns or linkages that are reflected in current responses to globalization. Of particular interest for this study are the *reform utilities*, tools used by the state or oppositional movements to shape the course of societal dynamics. The most significant utilities in Thai history appear to be culture, religion/monarchy, spirituality, political discourse, and education.

Thailand has long been involved in international commerce dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Pupphavesa, 2002) and its' cosmopolitan image was second to none during the middle-end of the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767 A.D.). Traders and nobility traveled regularly from distant lands such as China, Japan, Persia, Holland, France, England, Arabia, and India and were awed by the opulence of Siam temples and palaces of the capitol cities, the resource-rich territory, the mystical spiritual practices, the progressive commercial climate, and the accommodating nature of the kingdom in the form of tax breaks, festivities, entertainment, commerce justice, and free trade. In addition, and unlike most nations during this period, the kingdom would periodically invite skilled craftsman and administrators from abroad offering incentives of property and position (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005).

The ability to balance international and regional trade with the governance of a vast frontier land allowed for an expansive kingdoms in the region that stretched as far north as southern China and central Laos; as far west as eastern Burma, as far east as Vietnam, and as far south as Malaysian peninsula (see Appendix F). The large area encompassing the kingdom necessitated unique political administrative structures such

as the “emboxment” configuration in which villages were contained in *muangs*, or semi-autonomous constellations of ascending larger communities with local lords (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005; Keyes, 1977). These emboxments were part of the *sakdina* economic and political system that prevailed during the period and featured no private ownership of land except by the local king (Ungpakorn, 2003), who provided villages with militia protection. Aside from the corvee, forced labor, slavery, and invasions from marauders, villages found the means to establish community self-rule and a climate of peace until capitalism ravaged the community structure in the twentieth century (Nartsupha, 1999).

Although Buddhism was widespread throughout the region, local people were most attracted to belief in spirits and animism. Buddhism came to Siam in the fifth century from Sri Lanka, infused with strains of Hindu and Indian traditions that became cobbled together with the Thai belief in spirits. Theravada Buddhism arrived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was adapted to form local traditions and interpretations. The king of Siam was the lord of the land and since the Sukhothai period (1238-1350), the king has been expected to conduct himself as a *Bodhisattva*, a spiritually superior being that has accumulated an abundance of merit and spiritual power. He was also expected to follow royal laws of conduct, the *Dasarajadhamma*, which were a series of complementary religious and moral principles from the pre-Theravada era integrated into Buddhist teachings. When the king ruled in compliance with the principles, his rule brought happiness to the people (*raja*, or one who brings happiness and *dhamma*, the righteous way or rule). The ten major principles are: giving and forgiving; good moral conduct;

selfless sacrifice for the greater good; loyalty, gentle open-mindedness; consistency in performing duties; acting free of hatred and vindictiveness - compassion; harming no living creature or being; patient and persevering over emotion; and steadfast in righteousness (Uwanno, 2006).

The relationship between the king and Buddhism is therefore deep and the significance of the king as lord protector of the people is equally significant. The Thai people being ritualistic, superstitious, and believers of the spiritual and supernatural were undoubtedly attracted to the lineage of Thai monarchs that remained devoted to serving conventions rooted in mystical beliefs that protect those they serve. It is not hard to imagine the ease in which the nation of Thailand six centuries beyond the Ayutthaya period would move its large socio-political mass to a new phase in its history with god-kings initiating the crucial reforms to transform society and culture. After all, there was already a well-refined and significant pact between the monarchy, Buddhism, and Thai society.

It is also not difficult to see how a tradition of social resistance has developed in Thai society. As Giles Ji Ungpakorn has pointed out, “any real understanding of Thai history must place class struggle in center stage” (2003: 33). Siam/Thailand has always been a stratified society whereby citizens have been made to observe their social rank and respond accordingly. During the Ayutthaya period, a much feared *corvee* system (forced labor) permeated the society with people hunted down like animals (Nartsupha, 1999). Landless freemen were conscripted into the military and earned wealth, social position, and land in remote areas through military exploits. The less fortunate debtors

were forced into labor and slavery, an inevitable and lamentable offshoot of governing a vast undeveloped and primitive land mass. Slaves were traded to settle the remote villages and to sell on the international market. Alternative options for many lower status people were to become monks, sell themselves into slavery, or run away to the forests where brigands, rebels, and monks engaged in class revolts (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005).

#### *2.4.2 Thai Response to Globalization - 1850-1932 - Thai Monarchy Reforms*

Mid-nineteenth century rural Siam was largely undeveloped and unpopulated. Forests covered more than three-quarters of the terrain and human settlements were far and few between. Villages were isolated niches in the forests with little infrastructure. Villagers generally traveled beyond their village by horse, elephant, and boat. There were extensive networks of footpaths and trails, but frequented all too often by dangerous elements and a person risked encounters with bandits, cattle rustlers, wild animals, and spirits of all description. The forests were also the habitat for forest monks, or *Thudong* (pilgrim, or wandering aesthetic) monks who lived austere lives in effort to shake off mental defilements. They were skilled at meditation and were revered for their abilities to help rural people transcend their rugged lives and teach them valuable spiritual lessons. Keith Watson framed the importance of monks thus, “whereas parents gave life, monks imparted a way of life and knowledge which made that life worth living” (1980: 69-70 in Fry, 2002). They traversed the lengths and breadths of Thailand and surrounding nations and served many functions; most notably, as intercultural experts, linguists, explorer-archeologists, anthropologists, and all the other roles a rural

monk served without being confined to one *wat* or region (Tiyavanich, 1997). Their spiritual strength and impact are legendary and their tradition continues to influence Thai Buddhism, accentuated by amulet cults fired by millennial beliefs (Tambiah, 1984).

A Buddhist *wat* (local temple-monastery) was generally at the center of all activity and fulfilled multiple needs of the villages, much like a combination of a school, social center, hospital, town hall, playground, visitor inn, and community center. Monks were expected to serve regional Buddhist traditions (Khmer, Mon, Lao, etc.) and there were many different cultural customs and languages (80+ at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) associated with each region. Monks became living repositories of knowledge and wisdom, and many were also versatile masters of multiple skills: teachers, artists, healers and herbalists, bone-setters, psychologists, construction workers, agriculturalists, veterinarians, story-tellers, astrologers, community leaders, and protectors from spirits (Tiyavanich, 1997). They were the conduits from which the wisdom of indigenous knowledge was expected to flow. The village was a self-sufficient community bound by local cultural traditions and beliefs and protected by the spiritual nourishment provided by Buddhist monks.

Before acceding to the throne, King Mongkut (1851-1868) was a Buddhist monk for twenty-seven years and became largely disenchanted with what he deemed the undisciplined practices of Buddhism in Thailand. He was responsible for commencing the movement toward modernization in Thailand and began first with a major reformation of Thai Buddhism. He established a new sect of Buddhism, *Thammayut*,

inspired by the Mon tradition and it mostly emphasized an intellectual approach with prescribed strict rules of monastic practices (Tiyavanich, 1997). Its effect, however, was to lay the groundwork for a major shift in how Buddhism and culture would be defined in Thailand (Keyes, 1998) and was “highly divisive in character” (Payulpitack, 1991: 24). King Mongkut was negatively influenced by westerners who had expressed the belief that Buddhism was too superstitious and failed to equal Christianity in intertwining material and moral progress; and Mongkut made sure this distinctive separation would remain emphasized (Payulpitack, 1991) in order to fulfill his romantic notions of returning to Buddhist origins and making it accessible and pure of superstition for the masses. King Mongkut’s vision of Buddhist reform, however, also eliminated the sacred and the transcendent as he equated *nibbana* (nirvana) with a rational activity that also made material success a significant aspect of the spiritual path (Visalo, 1999). Although King Mongkut set out to demonstrate that western science and modernization were compatible with Buddhism, it actually became the cultural catalyst for the nearing revolution, nationalist reforms, and the impact of consumerism. Through it all, it was driven by a desire to elevate Thai identity to prove that Thai people were civilized and capable of making an impact on the world (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005).

The influence of the global became very pronounced in the late nineteenth century with the steady movement of colonial powers in the region who unabashedly believed it their mission to bring progress and civilization to create an equitably satiated world. King Chulalongkorn, Mongkut’s son, ascended to the throne in 1868 at the age of fifteen and took on where his father left off in both parrying the Western forces and



using Western concepts as models for the development of his nation-state. King Chulalongkorn and the ruling elite were aware of the encroaching colonial savagery and were also aware that their notion of nationhood was weakened in this colonial climate due to loose borders, a plethora of languages, traditions, ethnic identities, and Buddhist practices. It was necessary to define a nation utilizing many of the same political devices of the colonial powers, which amounted to a sort of internal colonization with conceptualizations of nation, unity, and identity handed down from the ruling class. This unifying reform began with constitutional writing designed on a French model, the abolishment of slavery and the corvee system, the creation of modern Thai mass education, and a centralized administration that affected every Thai *muang* (provinces in Thailand). Reform was also about the imposition and spread of capitalism and development throughout Thailand as conceived by the aristocracy (Payulpitack, 1991; Nartsupha, 1999; Ungpakorn, 2003; Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005).

King Chulalongkorn was tutored by European teachers and in time, facilitated growing numbers of nobility going abroad to study in western schools. Eventually, the urban elite began to travel and study abroad and brought back with them new ideas of political rule. Education was initially used to prepare the urban elite for the development of a large bureaucracy to administer a modern nation-state, including a police force to maintain order and a national army – not necessarily to defend from external forces, but to defend against internal unrest from the peasantry who balked at the interference and exploitation of the state. More importantly, the state utilized education and Buddhism as a means to redefine Thai identity, implanting culture and

language in the villages in order to create good, obedient citizens that were educated and disciplined. The majority of this work was left for the Sangha to deliver through young monks (Payulpitack, 1991).

One of the most critical acts that sent convulsive ripples throughout Thai society to this day was the 1902 Sangha Act. In effect, it stratified all monks under the king and supreme patriarch and, most importantly, it required the use of a uniform curriculum to educate all monks; mandated that all monks preached from texts sanctioned by the Sangha in Bangkok; and with the spread of development and capitalism, encouraged the creation of new *wats* that emphasized merit through opulence instead of acts of ritualistic spiritual significance (Tiyavanich, 1997). This began the cultural and educational transformation that allowed the development of a nation-state, but at great cost to the nation-state because it also depleted and discounted the capacity of traditional wisdom. However, when the movements to oppose state hegemony were suppressed through force, it strengthened the heritage of social movements and gave the resistance legends with which to identify (Phatharathananunth, 2006). The overbearing administration, exploitation of regional resources, and high tax burdens to regions, particularly those communities who offered resistance, produced a similar response as that within many colonized nations – rebellion. Regional nationalists from Laos, Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam, such as Ho Chi Minh, were welcomed in North and Northeast Thailand and revolutionary thought fermented nicely in the villages (Payulpitack, 1991). In response to the repression and exploitation of the state, the millennial “Holy

Men” revolts took place in all corners of Thailand that temporarily slowed centralization (Keyes, 1977) and then were subdued by brute force.

The methodical breaking down of Siam cultures took place by the provision of texts authored in Bangkok by people who had no contact with the rural areas and written in central Thai language. The Sangha (central Buddhist ruling authority) forbid monks to teach the dhamma in the old manner – ironically banning the practical manner with concrete applications that rural people found useful – and instead insisted on an intellectual style in a language that the regional rural people didn’t understand or appreciate. Traditional customs and celebrations were forbidden and standardized Buddhist festivities and traditions were imposed (Tiyavanich, 1997). Monks were used to teach literacy and students were implored to memorize and assimilate information that pre-determined their behavior and identity. As Christopher Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit have pointed out, “The duty of the ordinary people was only to be unified, obedient, and grateful, to the point of self-sacrifice” (2005: 107). Secular schools started to appear and the roles and status of monks began to diminish. Thudong monks were frequently and severely reprimanded and were ordered to stop their wandering ways. Regional cultures were systematically dismantled, as was the indigenous knowledge that accompanied them.

The first wave of globalization had nearly washed clean all remnants of old Siam and the prevailing move towards nationhood bolted onward – driven frenetically by urban fascination with modernization and the growing zeal for democracy. The 1932 revolution organized by an elite cadre in Bangkok forced the monarch to capitulate to a

position of mere symbolic power that, in the future, would be frequently exploited. Concurrently, in a pivotal show of spiritual strength, a social-spiritual movement by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, his brother, and mother rekindled the spiritual heritage regional rural people had had repressed in the severe rush to become a free modern nation-state. That which modern education had taken away – the practical and the simply profound – was now quite visible through the teachings of the charismatic Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and very importantly influenced the urban middle class. Mongkut's insistence on separating moral from meaningful acts had begun to manifest and Thailand was now a society that pitted the spirit against the material; yet at the same time, one that entwined the state with religion and culture. And for the next global tidal wave to hit Thailand, it became obvious to some that this dual-natured development was pitting capitalist growth against ethical society.

#### *2.4.3 Response to Globalization - 1932-Present - The Age of Militant Nationalism*

*Thailand is entering a new period of the 'nation myth'. It is one in which people are ideally participant, in which plurality and difference is respected, in which the state is reformed in order to facilitate the workings of civil society and communities, and in which democracy is an order based on the virtuous citizens...* - Michael Connors

The 1932 revolution that saw the end to absolute monarchy and the beginning of the constitutional monarchy, eventually revealed distinct visions from the two principle leaders of the People's Party. Pridi Banomyong, educated in France as a political economist, sought a civilian, humanist state that empowered people, while Plaek Phibunsongkhram (Phibun), a military man, believed in nationalism and the shaping of minds via education and notions of culture (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005). This uneasy

alliance and conflict was a pattern that was to dog the nation well into the 1990s (and now 2006) with the military representing a conservative, reactionary front and the civilian forces forming an evolving civic society. Phibun and the military gained ascendancy in the Party and began to shape the martial imagery of Thai nationalism, gaining inspiration from German and Italian political fascism and Japanese Meiji cultural reform. Communism took its persistent and now customary position as the great threat to Thai unity.

The People's Party invested heavily in education – both primary and higher education. But with the military wing gaining control of the Party, education was used to further the process of controlling the cultural identity of the nation and to spread the state's vision of development through capitalism. Luang Wichit Wathakan, a member of the revolutionary movement, also believed in nationalism and the development of a Thai identity that would be accepted as civilized by Western nations (Sattayanurak, 2002). Wichit saw the social tension from the provinces as an obvious weakness that other nations could easily exploit, necessitating a reformed sense of being Thai and a new Thai culture, predictably leading to the development of the National Cultural Commission in 1942. Wichit thought it necessary for Thais to have a sense of national identity “moulded into their blood permanently” (Wathakan, 1932 in Sattayanurak, 2002: 16). Wichit had a love of the arts and used all forms of media – from cinema to literature, radio to theater - to spread his ideas, which easily found their way into the national curriculum. As Christopher Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit point out, his “influence was broad, deep, and lasting” (2005: 29).

This indoctrinating form of education created a variety of myths that emphasized sacrifice and submission to a dictatorial system that advocated specific social, economic, and political goals; namely, security through the containment of civil resistance, the propagation of capitalism, the use of the monarch and culture as educational devices to prove the superiority of Thai civility to ‘others’, and the idea that communism was anti-ethical to Thai-ness. The lasting grip of Wichit’s xenophobic nationalist view took root in the urban population and pushed its way into the provinces with economic development and religious conviction providing strong momentum and credibility. This process was reinforced by the proclamation that the interlocking foundation pieces of nation, religion, and monarchy were specified to be “the three pillars of Thai nationalism” (Payulpitack, 1991: 41) during the reign of Vajiravudh, 1910-1925.

#### *2.4.4 Movement towards the Democratic Process*

After World War II, came civil war, police states, military coup after coup – all essentially encouraged and largely financed through the patronage of the United States who supported brutal military regimes in exchange for anti-communist policies (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005). The nationalist culture obliged and the Chinese, many of whom had already been chased out by the Phibun regime, took to the streets in open fighting. With the aid of the USA, the state responded by permanently setting in place anti-communist policies. Buddhism was once again called upon to play a role in shaping the villager-mind and monks began to take on the role as ‘development monks’ in the *Dhammatuta Program* “which aimed at combating communism by revitalizing state-

sanctioned Buddhism, winning people's loyalty to the government, nation and king, and promoting national integration and development" (Connors, 2003: 60). The state also was funded to initiate *developmental democracy*, which involved the integration of Thai cultural characteristics into the conception of democracy. Michael Connors termed this project *Democrasubjection* and it was a social potion derived from concepts of community development and democratic administrative practices in order to develop outputs conducive to commerce and security. To this day, learning democratic principles have been made part of the national curriculum, but "Thai education reform emphasizes civic participation only as a servant to the marketplace" (Buasuwan, 2003: 247).

#### *2.4.5 Contemporary Thai Educational Reform*

Different nations have a variety of means to distribute national educational resources, but very few nations promote any other educational goals than those on the global agenda (Cheng, 2000). Thailand is no different and adheres for the most part to the call from the global institutions to accelerate the educational process in order to compete in the global market. This view sees students as "resources," "human capital," and "investments" – terms that are more fit for consumer products than for students aspiring to find meaning, significance, and personalized livelihood in a broad, new world of potential and wonder. Educational reform was hastened in 1997 when economic crisis hit Thailand and the first constitutional educational reform was adopted in the form of the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999). The expectation for this reform was to "redeem the country from the downward spiral, so that Thailand will

arise in the immediate future as a nation of wealth, stability and dignity, capable of competing with others in this age of globalization” (ONEC, 2002: i).

During the drafting of the 1997 constitution, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) made an advance in its course of decentralization by taking a deliberate and measured approach to reform. Pasuk Phongpaichit refers to the draft constitution as a “new social contract between the people and the state” (2001: 2). She has noted how the re-writing of the constitution was driven by, among other things, efforts to eliminate money politics and corruption. Two factions collaborated in creating constitutional reform – one representing the radical, working class and peasant resistance; and the “enlightened conservatives” (Phongpaichit, 2001:2), the new middle-class of modern intellectuals, business people, and bureaucrats operating within the economic, political, and academic systems.

The radical activists that had once advocated the overthrow of the state had capitulated to aspects of capitalism and now envisioned a civil society with provisions for human rights and a peoples’ “political space” achieved through decentralization (Ungpakorn, 2001). This once radical faction found an unlikely partner in advocating for a new constitution – liberal bureaucrats seeking to create the complex parliamentary, societal, and judicial institutions that would allow Thailand to negotiate the modern globalized world with them commanding the ship. The demands for a liberating and civil decentralization made by the radical element were met and paved the way for consultative input into educational reform by alternative voices. The conservative constituents saw the necessity to gut and re-build the corrupted governing systems in



order to form a stable government with structures that could formulate a response to the onslaught of globalized threats and opportunities in a modern, sophisticated manner. Both factions saw the necessity to decentralize and localize, and both got to suggest their design elements into the constitutional charter resulting in the inclusion of civil rights and liberties served by efficient governing structures.

When the Royal Thai Government (RTG) embarked on its ambitious journey towards decentralization in 1997, the bureaucratic leaders determined that its education system was inadequate to meet the challenge presented by the tsunami-like waves of global influences affecting Thailand's economic climate. The civil society advocates had been just as actively seeking social reform through education and cultural impetus long before the political and economic sectors began to sense the warning signs of immanent danger. A significant portion of the 1997 constitution contains provisions that placed a heavy emphasis on education as reflected by the constitutional mandate for new educational policy and the call for the incremental decentralization of Thai education. This process began in 1997 when the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) undertook comparative research in eleven countries, examining the benefits of decentralization policies to learners in these nations. The result of these efforts led to the 1999 Thailand Education Act (NEA) and subsequent Second National Education Act B.E. 2545 of 2002. It has been acclaimed as a model policy providing clear objectives and directions to achieve its goal.

The bureaucrats were alarmed at the dearth state of Thai education when they received news of how far behind Thai students performed in science and mathematics.

In Southeast Asia, Korea is a model used by which to measure one's relative educational development. Gerald Fry (2002) reported that early research reports indicated that Thailand was ten to fifteen years behind Korea when it was at a similar stage of economic development as Thailand. But the voice of educational reform had been heard many years previous at the village level and a steady alternative education movement was already in motion. Learning communities had already been established for two decades to provide opportunities for poor rural kids, kids at risk, home schoolers, peasants, orphans, refugees, and ethnic minorities. It was no coincidence that these communities were networked with the various social movements throughout Thailand and their voices were heard in the reform committees that gave input into the NEA.

Rie Atagi (2002) in her examination of Thai educational reform applauds the generally broad vision and ambitious design of the reform plan, but at the same time believes it to be situated in a policy formation stage and not advanced at the operational level. Four years further along, she might say the same thing as demonstrated by the great amount of resistance of rural educators who are reluctant to implement the reform. Issues – whether real or imagined – abound for the educators and they balk at the thought of surrendering their status within the government, managing their own schools with fewer resources, and still answering to the authority of a centralized state ministry. This is not the bottom-up approach as intended in the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999). Rie Atagi reminds us that “reform in the classroom cannot happen unless the whole system, within which education takes place, changes” (2002:16), but in just looking at the behemoth budget allocation for education alone – nearly 25% of the Thai

national budget (ONEC, 2004) - one can see why reforming the education system in Thailand is a complex and daunting task.

The core educational reform relates to transforming the learning and teaching required to fulfill the Education Act. The pedagogic recommendations in the Act favor a learner-centered constructivist approach that is thought to foster “higher-level thinking skills, and to enhance student motivation and self-esteem” with the expectation that students would begin “to think locally and globally simultaneously” (Atagi, 2002:52-53). The unfortunate fact here is that very few teachers have ever been exposed to these very complex teaching techniques nor are Thai students prepared to learn in such a manner. Thai students and teachers are already overwhelmed at the amount of material to be “consumed” to pass exams and they have entrenched meanings about what learning is – but these meanings are not explored much in the research field of Thai education. The potential of expected learning is to be elevated to global standards, yet teacher training and exposure to global and indigenous pedagogies are limited.

Thailand is near the halfway point of its 15-year National Education Plan (2002-2016), which focuses on “integration of all aspects of the quality of life, including comprehensive and balanced human development, and the forging of a society of morality, wisdom, and learning” (OEC, 2006: 17). Further, in melding economic and technological ambitions, the Royal Thai Government’s (RTG) intends for educational reform to create “a knowledge-based society as a pre-requisite for a knowledge-based economy” (18). Education reform is also expected to produce entrepreneurial-minded students, spur labor productivity, and develop the means to produce products and

largesse for the benefit of nation-building and job creation by “providing equal access to lifelong education and training, enabling citizens to acquire knowledge as assets to generate production and income... Education Builds the Nation, Empowers the Individual, and Generates Employment” (Ibid.). The “roadmap... for expediting educational reform” (19) advocated by the RTG has six main avenues:

1. development of pre-primary education;
2. reform of the basic curriculum and the teaching-learning process;
3. development of teachers and education personnel;
4. reform of vocational education;
5. reform of non-formal and informal education to support lifelong education; and
6. reform of higher education (19-22).

### 2.5 Historical Overview of the Origins of Buddhism

*Teachers enlighten the human soul.* – Old Thai proverb

Pre-Buddhist India was expansive; spreading far beyond its current geo-political boundaries to the western lands of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan and bulged to the north incorporating Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan into its socio-cultural and political influence. The land was divided into five major regions and sub-divided into many kingdoms and republics with the subjects ruled mostly in accordance with Brahmin moral laws. Society was not initially segregated by an inflexible caste system, and although the majority of people were not rich, wealth was well distributed. Villages were cooperative and displayed a strong respect for developing public good and living harmoniously, in spite of the typical expansionist battles between competing kingdoms.

Religious life, mostly forms of animism, encouraged a healthy moral life, and was a major component of people’s life. But over time, the moral health of India went into decline when the priests and teachers became corrupted by the enticement of the

self-importance of their position and the easily acquired affluence derived by their authority. The priests and teachers began to focus on more costly and complex rituals that only the monarchy and aristocrats could afford – in effect excluding the common man from religious life. The rich and powerful were – for a handsome fee – promised absolution of their sins in elaborate rituals that required more and more bloody displays of massive animal slaughter and conspicuous consumption. This left no incentive for the rich to be moral in thought or virtuous in deed – and most importantly, left commoners *impotent spiritual prey* for the prevailing customs of the rogue priests and hermits who spread destructive practices of sorcery, overly austere living, and assortments of ethereal beliefs and superstitions. Such was the moral environment just prior to the arrival of Guatama Siddhartha as described by Suraj Narrain Sharma (1994).

The time of Guatama has been estimated to be in the sixth century and is within an epoch referred to by Karen Armstrong (2001) as the *Axial Age*. This Age occurred between 800 to 200 B.C.E. and represented an influential global shift in perspective that took humanity away from monarchs and magic to a world in which humans “became conscious of their existence, their own nature and their limitations in an unprecedented way” (11). Religions began to be more reflective as opposed to magically dependent in order to float the unconscious memories of truth all humans share. Armstrong puts a slightly different spin on the moral environment elucidated by Sharma in this manner:

Power was passing from the old partnership of King and Temple to the merchants, who were developing a different kind of economy... The market economy also undermined the status quo: merchants could no longer defer obediently to the priests and aristocracy (20).

This new market economy that emerged also incubated dense urban centers of commerce, attracting villagers seeking to establish their fortune. Urban centers became the cauldrons of commercial activity, and though not completely bereft of moral compass, saturated with the thrill of ruthless ambition and spiritless production.

A spiritual movement arose by a “circle of sages... staging a secret rebellion against the old Vedic faith” (25). The secret spiritual chapters that “stressed the esoteric nature of this revolutionary lore” (25) were passed from teacher to student and were named the *Upanishads*, to sit near. The clandestine tradition became formalized as Hinduism and its core spiritual realization was that absolute reality (Brahman) was reflected in one’s deepest self (Atman). But, the spiritual nurturance offered by this elitist movement was once again not meant for the common man and a more populist movement arose in the forests. Wandering monks were raising questions about personal liberation, becoming legendary revolutionary heroes of the time. It was this forest heritage Guatama Siddhartha (also known as Sakyamuni or Shakyamuni, “sage of the Shakyas”) entered, first mentored by Jain ascetics (Patil, B. 2006) and then saturated with knowledge of Brahman. Although Guatama left his wife, child and future kingdom for the forest-mendicant life and whether this is factual or allegoric is irrelevant. What is relevant is that he set on a radical course that christened a new world and set an example for others who sought freedom from suffering. The enormity of his life was that

He had deliberately rejected his place in the old world by repudiating the life of the householder, which was the backbone of the system: the married man kept the economy going, produced the next generation, paid for the all-

important sacrifices, and took care of the political life of society (Armstrong, 2001: 28).

## 2.6 Buddhism as Reform, as Education, as Civil Society

*What does the modern intellectual – a person devoted as much professionally as temperamentally to the life of the mind – so often become, as Albert Camus wrote, “the servant of hatred and oppression?” What is it about the intellectual life of the modern world that causes it to produce a kind of knowledge so conspicuously devoid of wisdom? – Pankaj Mishra*

### *2.6.1 Teaching and Learning Reform Initiated by Buddha*

Buddha, according to Karen Armstrong (2001), was one of the world reformers who ushered in the Axial Age. His role was as founder of a very quiet and enduring world reform in consciousness, community living, and learning. The global social landscape was in flux with the rise of business people and merchants beginning to aggressively establish themselves as people worthy of significance and class. It was also a time in which people threw off valued traditional morals and acted unscrupulously in the pursuit of wealth, identity, and social position in a market economy. It was not so dissimilar as the contemporary world of global consumerism, capitalism, and the emphasis of individuality and modern identity in which personal benefits are gained at the expense of some one else.

The original Buddhist monks were just one of many ascetic bands of mendicants, except they walked from village to village throughout the year, including during the monsoon season – the only band of mendicants who did this. Most of the mendicants at that time held a variety of austere, Vedic and Jain beliefs and would share forest clearings during the monsoon season to lay up for the season. Many criticized the Buddha for this ceaseless activity and Buddha, seeing the wisdom of encamping during

the monsoon like the Jains, not only established a Buddhist lent period, but ordered his followers to congregate together isolated from other sects and mendicants and thereby created the first spiritual learning community in the Axial Age, if not in the history of humanity. A complex communal life with an alternate life style began to evolve – one that questioned the ability to become social servants and teachers spreading the word of kindness and compassion if monks could not treat each other with kindness in what came to be known as the *Sangha*. During this time, this was a radical reform because all levels of the social strata had been drawn in to the competitive and aggressive climate and one fought against the other. King Pasenedi was impressed with Buddha's Sangha and said of the monks

they live together as uncontentiously as milk and water and looking at one another with kind eyes... here I see Bhikkus smiling and courteous, sincere, and happy... alert, calm, and unflustered, living on alms their minds remaining as gentle as wild deer. (Pasenedi in Armstrong, 2001: 141).

#### *2.6.2 Learning as the Buddha*

Buddha acknowledged that he was not the first and only enlightened one and that he offered nothing really new - he merely found “a path of great antiquity, an ancient trail, traveled by human beings in a far-off distant era” (Samyutta Nikaya in Armstrong, 2001:82). He had realized that to find this path and follow this trail is possible for all humans, but it takes great skill and his discourses emphasized learning these skills through the integration of ones everyday living with the insight arising from meditation. He and his followers taught rural communities the skills that emphasized a pragmatic tradition of emancipation from delusory living as exemplified by leading a knowledgeable life of cultivated insight and moral wisdom. In short, Buddha was



interested in people becoming more sincere and authentic individuals, to live to their full potential as humans and less prone to following the trappings that lead to forgetfulness and disconnect from their fundamental relationship to others, to nature, and the cosmos.

Buddha and fellow monks taught according to the needs of each village and to every individual, creating a large collection of discourses, lessons, stories, conventions, community policies, etc. Committing the discourses, subsequent commentaries, and practices to memory required monks to develop enormous mental facilities and teach them to others. As Karen Armstrong (2001) has pointed out, discourses were orally transmitted utilizing a number of traditional and indigenous methods of learning and memorizing – some of which persist to this day as unacknowledged or under-appreciated, under-utilized methods of learning - including repetitive formulas, lyrical recitations, songs, creative dialogs, chants, story-telling, a variety of art forms and theater, community learning, and integrating lessons into everyday mundane activities such as working, eating, and walking. This is how Buddhism became a way of life, a shaper of personal and social culture, and not a system of belief, dogma, or faith.

This long tradition of Buddhism being associated with education in the combined form of spiritual and intellectual development is not to be segregated from everyday living – learning in a Buddhist perspective is considered living in continual development for personal and public good and according to one's own experience and understanding. There are no prescribed levels or lessons to achieve – there is only the persevering work towards freedom within (*not* freedom from) inter-related social and

cultural frameworks. These frameworks are given six geographic socio-cultural directions: east – parents; south – teachers; west – wife and children; north – friends, relatives, and neighbors; below (nadir) – workers and employers; above (zenith) – spiritual people. The Buddha said that one should worship these six directions and as explained by Walpola Rahula (1959), the meaning and significance of the Buddha's use of the word 'worship' is associated with sincere mutual respect, reflective acts also known as duties. All of the directional social groupings represent components of a cultural community in which we play all the roles at some point in our lives and that are constructed by reflective acts. Although the roles are not permanent and are worthy of the deepest respect since they also represent the integration of everyday living, learning, and spiritual practice. [NOTE: The indigenous peoples of America also referred to the Six Directions and the wakan/shaman, Black Elk, also knew them as the Six Grandfathers and Six Powers of the world.]

The two directions that most concern this research are the east (parents) and the south (teachers). Understanding the significance of these two directions illuminates how some features of western education conflict with Thai education and gives shape and some meaning as to why a parent would want to home-school their children. Buddha referred to parents as *Brahma*, the supreme spiritual concept of creation and consort of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Children are expected to show devotion and deep respect – 'worship' - for parents every day. Among the child's duties towards parents are to obey and take care of them into old age; be concerned about protecting family honor and prosperity; maintain relationships with parent's relatives; assist with family

ceremonies; and attend to the parent's funeral rites. Parent's duties include protecting their children from untoward influences; instill the value of education; counsel them in finding their vocation; guide them towards a good marriage/loving partnership; and provide them with an inheritance – whether material or social/spiritual. The relationship between teacher and student is punctuated by the deference of student to teacher, discerned as reverence and obedience. This relationship is one of mutual caring with the student providing for the teacher's provisions, noting the teacher's requirements for learning, and diligently applying themselves to learning their lessons. The onus of the teacher is to be mindful in shaping each student according to their learning needs, introduce good influences and encouraging strong, healthy relationships, and they should assist in securing appropriate employment for the student in order to extend their long-living learning (Rahula, 1959).

One may wonder what Buddha and his followers would teach since he thought that doctrines usually lead people astray, he had no theology or theories to defend, no psychological or emotional guilt or rewards wrapped in myths to present, he did not waste time on faith and belief because they do not have any intrinsic importance to one's personal transformation, and he found it useless to entertain the speculative (Armstrong, 2001). Buddha's interest was in getting people to cultivate skilled states that were mastered within one's own life through a subjective process that led directly to the experience of Truth, the abnegation of suffering. While it is true that there are enumerable Buddhist discourses, the greatest authority has always been accorded to

“experience, with reason second and scripture last” (Dalai Lama, 2005: 24). As the Buddha himself spoke:

So too, bhikkhus, the things that I have known by direct knowledge are more: the things that I have told you are only a few. Why have I not told them? Because they bring no benefit, no advancement in the holy life, and because they do not lead to dispassion, to fading, to ceasing, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. That is why I have not told them (Samyutta Nikaya 56: 31).

Since villages were primarily school-less and absolutely text-less, learning required villagers to seek out the monks and knowledge was passed orally, dramatically, artistically or through direct experience. The monks made the educational process easy because they made themselves vulnerable and dependent on being sustained by the routine practice of compassion of the villagers in the form of alms-giving. The Buddha did not require any prescribed behaviors to be a student but did recommend people take his five vows seriously: do not take life; do not steal; do not lie; do not take intoxicants, and avoid sexual promiscuity. The most important foundation skills to be learned were compassion, self-control, and mindfulness before ever learning meditation. In order to encourage compassionate self-development, Buddha’s approach to teaching was always varied and fit the context of every situation. He encouraged people to overcome their own confusion instead of expecting some authority to provide them with a correct answer. Usually, Buddha would ask people to reflect within for answers to their problems and to rely on the truth they already knew from their experience. An example of this can be found in how Buddha introduced to King Pasenedi what later was de-contextualized and become known as the more self-centered “Golden Rule” in the West.

One day King Pasenedi and his wife had a discussion in which each admitted that nothing was dearer to them than their own selves. This was obviously not a view that the Buddha could share, but when the king told him about this conversation, the Buddha did not chide him, launch into a talk of *anatta* (doctrine of the illusion of discrete personality), or preach a sermon on the Eightfold Path. Instead, as usual, he entered into Pasenedi's viewpoint, and built on what was in his mind – not on what the Buddha thought should be there... Instead, he told him to consider this: if he found that there was nothing dearer to him than himself, it must also be true that other people also cherished their “separate selves.” Therefore the Buddha concluded, “a person who loves the self, should not harm the self of others.” (Armstrong, 2001: 147)

The major emphasis of Buddha's reform was to cultivate the cardinal skills of compassion, kindness, and an understanding of how to experience one's own life in a manner that would lead to a happier life in a more just, peaceful, and favorable society. His manner of teaching challenged people to reflect on the radical contrast he proposed and re-attain the means to transcend the growing atmosphere of aggression, destruction, and personal buildup of useless identity in a society that bifurcated people's spiritual and material lives. More holistically, Buddha's favored state of learned humanity was how he identified himself – “as one who has woken up.”

### *2.6.3 Philosophical Girders: Buddhism as Education*

Buddhism is not a religion per se and it is more than a philosophy because its aim is, as Chris Pauling describes it, “to open our being to truths that go beyond the realm of reason, truths which are grasped as much by our emotions and intuition as by our intellect” (1990, 1997: 2). There are scholars who make the claim that Buddhism is a science of mind, based largely on its tradition of rigorous examination of mind and consciousness. More pointedly is the assertion by Jose Ignacio Cabezón (2003) that

Buddhism is an “interior science” imbued with a “verifiable technology of the spirit... complementing science whose object of study is the exterior world of matter” (49). Another complementary facet of the interface between science and Buddhism is in the “difference in method and similarity in content” (49) – science making use of its rational methodology of conceptual analysis to gather factual knowledge to be put to practical use; and Buddhism making use of experiential, non-conceptual methods of intuitive perception cultivated from contemplative practices that produce “transformative knowledge that brings about positive personal and social change” (50).

B. Alan Wallace (2003) has made the important point that some Postmodernists and *Buddhalogists* have attempted to devalue Buddhist teachings as un-scientific and un-academic from a scholarly and dogmatic point of view without realizing that crucial to the understanding of Buddhism is the direct experiences of intuitive realizations whereby the subjective becomes the object of study, a practice requiring years of cultivation with skillful teachers, usually in a community setting. Buddhism has always been closely associated with teaching, living learning, and education, mainly because monks have historically been the traditional source of learning in Buddhist Asia as far back as the time when Guatama and his monks lived in the forests and taught in the villages. The learning relationship in the community aimed to simply provide a path towards compassion and wisdom, the two key qualities that represent what Dzogchen Rinpoche (2007) terms as “the entire foundation, path and goal of Buddhism.” Lamentably, he says that the quality of compassion is what is missing most in contemporary schools.

Tzungming Cheng interprets the relationship between wisdom and compassion as a tandem and neither alone is sufficient in benefiting a learner, “compassion and wisdom are... as the two wings of the bird; one cannot fly without the other” (1998: 64). Both wisdom and compassion are not a matter of faith and belief, and wisdom is refined from knowledge. And while compassion is an avenue to empathize other’s suffering, it is wisdom that eradicates the source of suffering. There are three ever deeper iterative stages to integration of knowledge that applies to both compassion and knowledge, starting with acquiring knowledge from one who is already enlightened; verifying the knowledge through the Buddhist scientific method of applying logic, reason, observation - most importantly in the comparative study with ones experience; and finally, clarified through meditation. In order for knowledge to be transformed into wisdom, it must be confirmed as personal testimony. In delineating the order of knowledge, the authority of Buddhist scriptures or any formal observations by others “cannot outweigh an understanding based on reason and experience” (Dalai Lama, 2005: 24).

In the experience of one’s life, it is essential to identify ignorance, but ignorance according to His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, is not merely a lack of knowing, “it is an active misapprehension of the nature of things” (2007: 62-63). Ignorance contradicts knowledge due to our usual frame of reference about ourselves, others, and things. Our usual frame of reference assumes autonomous substantiality that is erroneously appropriated and attached to phenomena before understanding its fundamental emptiness. This assumption of autonomous substantiality gives rise to and reproduces

an inherent dissatisfaction with events because the assumptions that we apply to our lives do not act in accordance with the laws that are implied in those assumptions. “Ignorance binds us to suffering... [because] the ignorant mind does not question appearances to determine if they are correct, it merely accepts things are as they appear... and exaggerates states of goodness/badness of objects” (Dalai Lama, 2007: 63-65).

The wisdom of emptiness is a concept quite foreign to the materialistic Western way of thinking, often being erroneously interpreted as a nihilistic concept, and a very difficult one to grasp in general; however the concept of emptiness is related to the intersubjectivity and impermanent nature of all things. In precise definition, “Everything is composed of dependently-related events, of continuously interacting phenomena with no fixed, immutable essence, which are themselves in constantly changing dynamic relations” (Dalai Lama, 2005: 47). Cheng is more terse and describes the focus of realizing that the “wisdom of emptiness analyzes the transitional nature of phenomena, which is universal” (1998: 79). One must realize that emptiness is not a vacant, absence of life, but expresses the idea that material life is dependent on *mind* – defined by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (2006) as “phenomenon that is not body, not substantial, has no form, no shape, no color, but, like a mirror, can clearly reflect objects.” Understanding the mind is important because, as the Buddha states, “All things are preceded by the mind, led by the mind, created by the mind” (Kalachakranet, 2008).



The sequence of learning in a traditional Buddhist way starts with the cultivation of acquiring the wisdom of emptiness and no-self in which an object changes according to its conditions. Emptiness comes in many forms and attracts many associated contextualized characteristics, and is characterized by flux (Thurman 1976, and Cheng, 1998). Essentially, it is dual-dimensioned in that it is an ability to perceive clarity through the paradox of emptiness that is expressed in the *Heart Sutra* “emptiness is no other than form is also not other than form” (Amitabha Buddha Centre, 1991: 1 in Cheng, 1998: 81). A Student must awaken, become familiar with their-self, work to allow any sense of a separate *I* to dissolve and intuit it also as form; and the condition of form is to be realized as none other than awakened emptiness absent of any *I* and *other*. Once a learner has a grasp of this essential paradox, they are ready to acquire the wisdom of skillful means, one’s ability to traverse the path towards Buddhahood successfully, and as a duty of traversing this path, serving others.

The Ten Virtues		
Physical Virtues	Verbal Virtues	Mental Virtues
- no killing	- no lying	- not greedy
- no stealing	- no slandering	- not angry
- no sexual misconduct	- no double tongues	- not ignorant
	- no foolish gossiping	

Buddhist education was established by the Buddha as a recursive training sequence of discipline, meditation, and wisdom as a means to become skillful in living free. The foundation segment of discipline is based upon “the absence of attachment, anger, and ignorance” (Yin-shun, 1986e and Cheng, 1998) and is comprised of *The Ten Virtues* as delineated in the table above. Cheng also noted that the virtues also included notions such as protecting lives and others’ property broadened from the initial precepts of not killing and stealing. Nagarjuna (1979 in Cheng, 1998) delineated how Buddha prescribed the level at which these precepts were to be conducted: 1) Practice them personally; 2) Encourage the adoption by others; 3) Extol the virtues of these practices; and 4) Admire those who are diligent in their practice of these precepts. One can perhaps imagine how these engaging practices strengthened village communities, first through personal transformation and then by recognizing the meritorious attributes of self-discipline. It is also not a great leap to understand subsequent cultural patterns that developed as a result of these precepts.

The second element in Buddhist education was the practice of meditation. Cheng notes how meditation cultivated the means to develop wisdom in two related areas – through the development of the “one-pointed mind” to calm “disturbing mental elements” and “analytical meditation” that “eventually transforms knowledge into insights and insights into wisdom” (85). According to Cheng, Buddha saw meditation as an essential practice in developing wisdom and that wisdom was the only “real and effective instrument for uprooting problems” (85-86). The development of the one-

pointed mind stabilized, strengthened, and sharpened the mind to see things the way they truly are without traces of delusion or defilements.

The third element of Buddha's training, wisdom, encompasses three approaches, each generating their own aspect of wisdom. The foundational wisdom is cultivated through language and illustration of the dharma because some Buddhists claim that the other two aspects of wisdom will have a faulty foundation unless there is a solid understanding of Buddhist dharma. The second aspect of wisdom taught is through contemplation. This method involves the deep analytical focus of the conceptual dharma as an interconnected bond to all things. The third method is through meditation and direct experience, whereby the observer and observed are whole and undifferentiated.

#### *2.6.4 Buddhadasa and the Importance of Living Education*

Buddhadasa was a Thai Buddhist monk who has been compared to Nagarjuna (2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD), whose thought on *Causation* and *The Middle Way* have had considerable impact on Buddhist thought throughout Asia and was a significant influence on the foundations established in Zen Buddhism. Similarly, Buddhadasa has had a profound influence on Buddhist thought and influenced the development of *Engaged Buddhism*, a term coined by Thich Nhat Hanh, representing a practitioner's application of insights from meditation and the dharma to address and alleviate social, political, and economic suffering and injustice. Suchira Payulpitack (1991) has noted that Buddhadasa was the first Thai monk to come out of the temple to speak in ordinary language to the people and he was the first monk to be embraced by the political

progressives in Thailand and even found a place of respect among the socialist intelligentsia.

The Venerable Phra Buddhadasa is best known for his revolutionary spiritual thinking that ran parallel to Thailand's political revolution that ended absolute monarchy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His questioning of Thai Buddhism reinvigorated Thai intellectual activity by addressing issues related to modernization and traditional interpretations of Buddhism and their relevancy within the context of the social and political upheavals of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century society. His analysis of Buddhist doctrine and practice clashed with clerical and political authorities due to the manner in which his teachings gave question to the state's use of Buddhism to legitimize its implicate social order. Buddhadasa also emphasized education and viewed its purpose to teach children spiritual foundations, but viewed the increasing secularization of education as harmful because children began to be part of institutional efforts to make them components of industrial development at the expense of their human-spiritual development. Whether expressed or implied, his influence is germane to this research due to the mere fact that it is his students and a vast network of friends that have been central in reinvigorating Thai education through the promotion of alternative education, constitutional reform, and the integration of spirituality into the social fabric of Thailand. It is his – and the Buddha's - teachings emphasizing education as life experience, as work, and living self-responsibly that has been the heritage of the alternative education movement in Thailand.

Buddhadasa's reforms advocated a return to the intent of the original Buddhist approach of teaching people how to adapt to the modern world and realize the potential for transcendence from ignorance and suffering in this lifetime. One of his most notable commitments was to eradicate what he saw as the gulf between Buddhist teachings and doctrine; consequently, his interpretations challenged the conservative notions inherent in Thai Buddhism as an institution and as a means to cultivate one's life. He saw learning as a refuge that was integral to living the dharma, and in order to acquire true understanding, one must have education. Buddhadasa, however, being a rural forest monk, did not advocate classrooms, for he saw experience and nature as the greatest teachers. To Buddhadasa, life and work were the most important forms of education and they should be approached independently, responsibly, and diligently with mindfulness and care – not for merely developing a career and employment survival skills, but for true understanding and the liberation of all beings.

Buddhadasa, in seeking to make Buddhist doctrine relevant, began examining the meanings and language used in traditional teachings. He observed how the speech in Buddhist texts was complicated and that the religious language was impacted with extraordinary meanings that required skilled interpretation. It became evident to him that a major problem leading to the misinterpretation of Buddhism was due to the fact that its significance is found in spiritual meanings and yet are transmitted in ordinary language. Buddhadasa realized that the deeper intuited realizations of sages were illustrated through “borrowed” local speech and idioms, giving the words a level of spiritual meaning that was often overlooked. He referred to these spiritual levels as

*pahsa tham* or “dhamma language.” For the language used to referring to ordinary corporal life experiences, he identified as *pahsa khon* or “everyday language.” Buddhadasa stressed the need for learning both levels of meaning to understand Buddhist teachings; that is, so that the profound would not be taken literally and the profound could be applied to the mundane. In understanding both levels of meaning, one deepens one insight and begins to experience the depth of being human.

It was clear to Buddhadasa that spiritual meanings cannot be understood through study, but were instead realized as experiences in everyday living. Buddhadasa believed that one could attain enlightenment without being literate or through the study of the *Tipitaka* (Pali, “three baskets”; the Buddhist canon composed of three collections). He was quite adamant about equating work and daily living with the *dharma* (Sanskrit, “underlying order”; spiritual law; or Buddhist teachings), bringing the possibility of nibbana (Sanskrit, *nirvana*) to the common man through mindful practice in everyday living. According to Payulpitack (1991), nirvana is an ordinary word in India used in relation to humans, animals, and objects and generally refers to a cooling effect, or something that is rendered harmless. Its spiritual meaning is “a blowing out” or extinguishing the fires of greed, hate, and delusion. Buddhadasa’s application similarly possessed a two-leveled meaning in that it represented a natural cooling that exists at some level within all beings, and at the spiritual level nurtures one’s life so that they exist normally without obstructions or harm to oneself; that is, to understand the intersubjectivity and emptiness of all things.

### *2.6.5 Buddhism & the Intellectual Tradition in Thailand*

Education researchers have generally given scant comparative attention to how intellectual development of a society occurs and for the purpose of this research, how the differences between East and West knowledge formation might create problems with borrowing or transferring educational curriculums across cultural boundaries. Peter A. Jackson (1987, 2003) has made some very insightful conjectures about the intellectual tradition in Thailand and began his discerning study of the intellectual history in Thailand by examining the radical and profound influence of the Venerable Phra Buddhadasa.

The West's intellectual tradition rooted in its own classic Western reasoning and methodologies, which move from empirical observations to verification through rational processes is well known and is granted an authoritative position amongst all other traditions, leading to a preponderance of global influence within institutions. But the intellectual tradition of Thailand, and similarly other Theravadic Buddhist countries, has a vastly different history. Buddhism acknowledges reason, debate, and enquiry as part of the knowledge creation field and has a robust tradition of practicing debate and reasoning skills; but Buddhists give reason a different place of importance than western scholars. Buddhist thought regards reason as relatively insignificant or incomplete, particularly in relation to the powerful, transformative intuitive states of knowing. Reason is incapable of leading to insight; liberation from suffering will not be arrived at through logical analysis: and in general, reason is considered inferior to the more superior *suprarational* forms of knowledge that lead to sublime wisdom. Suprarational

wisdom is cultivated through experiencing levels of “absorptions” intuited during meditation.

In examining religious traditions and how authority has been used historically to formulate and restrain intellectual endeavors, Jackson (1987, 2003) noted that Theravada Buddhism has emphasized *orthopraxy*, an emphasis on correct practice, while the West has emphasized *orthodoxy*, an emphasis on correct beliefs. Heresy and the expression of correct ideals that honored Christianity’s authority to uphold universal principles – now in the scientific domain, was of great concern to the West and its development of catholic reason and intellect. This was in stark contrast to Thai Buddhist’s concern with process, most notably in the adherence to administrative and practical procedures of ritual and practice, which would seem to be conducive to a profundity of intellect to freely flourish. But instead of flourishing in Thailand, Jackson states that “rational enquiry into Buddhist doctrine, has not been regarded as a ‘profitable’ or appropriate intellectual activity” (2003: 17).

Jackson does not believe that the lack of intellectual development in Thai society was due to merely an era of stagnancy, but was due largely to how the Thai state has traditionally used Buddhism to fulfill political and ideological roles upon which to lay state foundations. This was achieved through the interpretational control of doctrine through state control over the organization and education of the *Sangha* (Pali or Sanskrit, “community, assembly,” refers to the community of ordained Buddhist monks and nuns), and consequently put a severe psychological restraint on enquiry and debate. Thailand’s state theology and the monarch’s authority over the purity of the Sangha was



a pattern established through precedent set by Asoke in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and has been used in Thailand to promote state security while simultaneously defining the roles of nuns and monks – mostly to restrict and exclude them from involvement in the matters of state/politics. It is this promotion of the monarch, state, and religion as an indivisible trinity that has limited individual interpretation of Buddhist doctrine and teachings. It has its equivalent political affect in the West with Christianity's creation of the nation-state and its driving forces of doctrine, science, and law that have determined the limit and range of thought, action, and rules of engagement (Loy, 2002).

#### *2.6.6 Education as Cultural Resistance to the Dehumanizing Society*

Western education and its reliance on reason and analysis of subject-object bifurcation have a limited perspective on spirituality and deeper dimensions of reality. The western view of spirituality is incoherent, mimics the dualistic and materialistic conceptions of reason and logical analysis, has no apparent indigenous spiritual traditions or foundations, and has been highly influenced on superficial levels through the borrowing of eastern spiritual concepts. The west's intellectual development has produced worthy achievements, but may have already reached its zenith since its achievements are now being confronted with increasing intensity and deleterious affect on environmental, social, economical, and psychological levels. Eastern philosophy, mostly anchored in Buddhist and Taoist traditions, has a close affiliation with learning and the perception of the underlying social, natural, and cosmological interrelationships, issues by and large neglected in modern education. Yoshirharu Nakagawa (2000) points out that, from a Zen Buddhist perspective, logical analysis is translated as *avidya*,

ignorance, and has to be transcended through contemplative methods in order to transform dualistic notions and a fragmented reality.

Holistic education is an alternative education movement that has a long history with many Western influences and now reflects many Eastern influences. Its early influences are the Enlightened naturalists and spiritualists: Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel, Jean Rousseau; the Transcendentalists: Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson; the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European educators: Francisco Ferrer, Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori; the Progressive Americans: Francis Parker, John Dewey; the 20<sup>th</sup> century radical revolutionaries: Paulo Friere, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Ivan Illich, and John Holt. “Holistic education has two kinds of knowledge which... has preeminent importance: experiential knowledge and competence” (Forbes, 2003: 28). This sentiment is reflected by many of the early influential educators like Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel who resisted the Renaissance tradition of book learning, mostly classical languages, because they all believed the learning from books was “knowledge acquired from representations of things, rather than from direct experience of the things themselves” (Forbes, 2003: 30). Most holistic educators believe that the over-emphasis of intellectual development in students is generally at the expense of the equally important, but neglected, social and emotional development. “Timeless learning” is the term John P. Miller (2006) used for an immediate moment of learning, much like insight, that integrates body, mind, emotion, and soul and makes a difference in our lives.

To make classrooms thoughtful places and to instill the importance to become compassionate and loving-kind people, teachers and instructors must make the idea of being deeply good and caring students a primary emphasis of the school place. Nel Noddings (1992) has been a leading advocate for the necessity of a caring school environment whereby the central focus is to explore questions of living with healthy bodies, hearts, and souls. Noddings emphasizes the goal of producing competent, loving people who are capable of bonding with those whom they affiliate and with those whom are truly different. She favors a deeper educational response to social problems and, like many philosophers, believes education should be a means to help people find their happiness in life within communities through relevance, meaning, interdependence, and mutual respect. “Establishing happiness as a primary aim of education may well guide us to an approach more compatible than sameness with democratic conceptions of equality” (Noddings, 2003:204).

The avoidance to address the caring environment creates an atmosphere that fragments the world into subject-object dichotomies whereby the imagined observer is separate from the observed – an act that is the seed of violence according to Jiddu Krishnamurti. From his perspective, education and social systems have formed an environment in which people are conditioned to be concerned about personal gains, certainty, and security at the expense of care for deep awareness of ones conditioning in dualistic conceptions of life – inner psychological movements of time at variance with outer manifestations. He views most school systems based on exploitation and “acquisitive fear” (1981: 12) that projects and procreates confusion and mischief in the

world through the psychological separation from others by the emphasis on individuation and identity. This psychological process signifying separation and disconnect from other “breeds antagonism, encourages divisions in society, and does not help to develop integrated human beings” (1981: 23). Education to Krishnamurti should instead be a process of fostering and caring for beings in order for them to be intelligent; but intelligence only comes from being free of fear, dismantling living in psychological time, and not relying on authority without the benefit of one’s own experience. To be free of psychological time includes the cessation of molding students’ minds for a conception of the future and reliance on past conditioning without concern for fostering their ability to deal on a deep, profound manner with present moments. It is the projection forward in time with pleasant imagery that ruthless mischief enters society because “ideals and blueprints for a perfect utopia will never bring about the radical change of heart which is essential if there is to be an end to war and universal destruction” (1981: 21).

Eastern educators such as Krishnamurti have had a large influence on holistic, alternative education, especially in the emphasis of a spiritual awakening to a greater dimensional and unified perception of living. In further addressing holistic education with a dynamic Eastern point of view, Nakagawa (2000) outlines the five dimensions of reality, each encapsulating the previous dimensions in the order: 1) objective – phenomenal world that is perceived with senses; 2) social – world of differentiation with separate meanings; 3) cosmic – fluid, non-linear world composed of nature, life, and the cosmos with “relationships that are perceived in synchronic mutual causality

and interdependence” (32); 4) infinite – the *absolute* beyond qualifications and conditions, also known as, among many various names, *nirvana*, *wu*, *Brahman*, *t'ai chi*, *the primordial state*, *mind*, and *essential nature*; 5) universal – the movement of contemplation: expansive exploration and drawing in of the deep levels of enlightened perception and the transformational contraction of all of the interwoven dimensions into the birth of inter-dimensionality.

Nakagawa believes that the five dimensions model of holistic education represents transformed reality in which there are no dualistic schisms between dimensions. He emphasizes that the dimensions are not hierarchal and “are interwoven and ever present, but the mind fails to recognize the wholeness of reality” (2000: 34). He considers Western theories to be more focused on the objective and social realities with some exploration in the cosmic dimension and “lacks systematic practice to transform the *worldly mode of being*” (2000: 175). The East, on the other hand, has been focused on the infinite and universal dimensions, while largely neglecting the objective and social dimensions. Nakagawa also notes the differences in means of action between East and West – unseen subtlety of the East versus visible movements of society in the West. Historically, the East has been concerned with *inner* transformation through contemplative practices with little attempt to transform social systems. The West has been quite active in efforts to transform society through critical dialogs and activism, attempting to create illusive social justice by conscious efforts, while the East has been heaped in the mystical tradition of “non-action.” Nakagawa notes that it is essential to “explore the deeper foundations of action that is liberated from dualistic

thinking” (213) – the West needing deeper contemplative insight in its conceptions of justice and the East needing to cultivate contemplative societies that manifest social justice.

Looking at society and education from a holistic educational point of view, Nakagawa observes that there are inherent problems in emphasizing the Western notion of the process of communication in educational systems; namely, interaction merely reproduces and reinforces the social platform from which it springs. In the West, this means that there is an emphasis on creating an objective and unique individual with attributes and substance that formulates the appearance of a credible identity. A social double-bind is created in that one is expected to “become” a free and independent entity and yet is not provided the facility to perceive the illusory social foundations of identity. Holistic education, however, emphasizes *communion* over communication process, involving multidimensionality. “Unlike communication, communion does not reproduce pre-established social distinctions, but it is open to novel experiences coming from deeper dimensions” (Nakagawa, 2000: 50).

## 2.7 Inspiring Education as a Social Movement

### *2.7.1 Free Schooling, Deschooling, Unschooling – Humanizing Society*

In a March 31, 2008 blog post on George Lakoff’s *Rockridge* progressive website, a discussion on homeschooling arose and one discussant expressed an adamantly virulent position against it. His position was based on the notion that homeschooling reinforces a conservative, religious-right world view – one in which public schooling fails and places the responsibility of schooling on parents, an imposition and

one that is misapplied due to the ineffective and unskilled abilities of parents to guide their children in learning. The discussant decried the state of schooling and claimed that there is no way to “control” quality of parent teaching or introduce kids to learn social skills. It is not unusual for the expression of this sort of position on homeschooling, but it represents a narrow and uninformed opinion of learning and one that ignores the radically progressive foundation of the Free School Movement, its relationship to the homeschool movement, and its far-reaching international influence, including Thailand.

Ron Miller (2002) has made a strong argument that the Free School Movement (FSM) has its roots in the very early Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and flourished from 1960-1972 as the flagstaff of the radical idealism that burst on American society in a whirlwind of cultural expression. Visionary educators were inspired cultural warriors challenging policy-makers who advocated using socio-cultural designs via schools as a means to harness society for the purposes designated by the elite, class-oriented cadre of academics, bureaucrats, and technocrats. These elite were (and continue to be) thoroughly engrossed with modernism, technology, and the scientific efficiency of social engineering. The FSM educators intended to “deconstruct culturally shaped knowledge” in order to illuminate the alienating, impersonal, dehumanizing, and undemocratic direction of society and the role school played in that shaping.

Educational reforms were calculated to achieve corporate-like distribution of educational tasks and more oversight and management of educators and school processes were implemented without insight into how to address social stratification or class inequalities. In response, a host of activist educators began to introduce alternative

means to humanize school and society, primarily beginning with the issue of civil rights. Among the many activists and their civil efforts were: James Lawson, who brought back Gandhi's principles from India; Miles Horton and Don West who pioneered the racially integrated Highlander Folk School in Tennessee that trained and educated for organizing labor movements and among its numerous alumni was Rosa Parks; Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. declared racism and social injustice unacceptable human practices and called for Black America to stand up with dignity; and Len Solo organized 200 volunteers to teach literacy and citizenship to 2500 African Americans at "Freedom Schools" in Mississippi. On the heels of these movements came A.S. Neil's liberated Summerhill school with its Freudian and Reichian influences; Paul Goodman, founder of Gestalt Therapy, rattled the nation with his psychological shakedown of society's new religion of technology and its underlying scientific obsession and destructive disaffection; Ivan Illich's stinging social commentary and his advocacy for de-schooling society by halting the institutionalization of economic development in every phase of human activity; and John Holt's unrelenting assailing of schooling and his foundational idea of un-schooling that led to the homeschool movement. The vision of all these activists were profound – as if they were given privileged information on future social calamities – and gave prescriptions of freedom and liberation to remedy authority and sterility in attempt to prevent the future social sickness already showing signs of becoming genetic strategies for self-destruction.



### *2.7.2 Ivan Illich and the Deschooling of Society*

It is not difficult to see why Ivan Illich had such a heavy influence on, not only activists around the world, but John Holt in particular. In addition, both Illich and Holt had an impact on the alternative education movement in Thailand. Illich's critique of schools and the increasing presence of international development agencies influenced many global educators and his presence in the FSM was large. His idea of deschooling inspired educational reform, yet the sort of reform he saw as vital enabled students to find self-development in locations that did not require administrative control. He advocated "participation in meaningful settings" with organic learning that did not create an abstract intellectual barrier for a student from what is now known as a community of practice. Much like Buddha's belief in self-responsibility, Illich said that the responsibility to deschool is with each individual and only the student has the ability to dispel the illusions conditioned from institutional learning.

Deschooling to Illich (1972) was essential in order to counteract the pernicious effects of society's relentless movement towards educational institutionalization and necessitated an explicit resistance "to separating learning from social control" (19). He perceived that most of society adopts an authoritative organizational approach to all of its endeavors, from problem solving at local levels to the development of political and religious policies, attitudes, and agendas towards injustice, inequality, and racial/cultural difference, both nationally and abroad. Schools are an institution whereby one – actually only a few – obtain the authority to determine the extent of their freedom to act meaningfully, while also determining those who are capable of reproducing the

elite cadre of leaders based on the measurement of values that are most similar to the institution's. Any values that are beyond measuring, like human potential and authentic character, are a risk and insufficient to merit consideration because they do not substantiate the tradition of learning espoused by the educational authorities. Such a system relies on the foundational belief that learning is an outcome of instruction (even though, according to Illich, this has been convincingly and thoroughly disproved) and that which is instructed must already have been enshrined and sanctified as knowledge-worthy by the institutional elite. We are conditioned to believe we can effectuate learning to be done *to us* and that we also can effectuate learning *to and within others* and thereby saving them and leading them to a higher level of development. This sort of development emphasizes measures and insinuates a complete mistrust in organic or indigenous forms of knowing, relates to production of "things of value" and creates what Illich referred to as the "Myth of Unending Consumption"(38). The demand created from this process amounts to participation in the global market, with all its frivolity and catering to endless desire and false notions of fulfillment, while "warehousing" and forgetting about global understanding of real human lack.

Illich found schools to be problematic because by their authoritative nature, they reproduce inequality and a vulnerability to acceptance of further authoritative institutionalization. They are promoted to be "false public utilities" yet are compulsory and fraught with ideological indoctrination and rule-creation that serve the technocratic elite. In Illich's mind, contemporary schools have modeled their modum of operation and social significance after the Christian churches throughout history:

It is simultaneously the repository of society's myth, the institutionalization of that myth's contradictions, and the locus of the ritual which reproduces and veils the disparities between myth and reality (1972:37).

Illich was not persuaded that educational reform is possible unless there is the realization that learning and social inequality will not be improved through the "ritual of schooling." Transcending the weakening effects of a consumer society is also not possible unless there is a further realization that it is the public schools themselves that reproduce such a society – regardless of what is taught and how it is taught. To Illich, educational reform will never address social or cultural issues until at least one generation of students have learned without obligatory curriculums. Illich definitively concluded that

Neither ideological criticism nor social action can bring about a new society. Only disenchantment with and detachment from the central social ritual and reform of that ritual can bring about ritual change (1972:38).

### *2.7.3 The Influence of John Holt – Learning by Unschooling*

John Holt was greatly influenced by Ivan Illich – both were inspired educators with far-reaching democratic and enlightened ideals. Holt and Illich's perspectives on education and reform (an illusory fad to Holt) are nearly identical and it led to a close personal friendship between the two. In a 1972 letter to Illich, Holt wrote,

In working for the kind of changes we want, for a convivial society and a non-suicidal technology, you and I may have slightly different functions. You may be somewhat more of a prophet and I somewhat more of a tactician (Holt, J. & Farenga, P. 2003:60).

Holt's "tactics" advocated a radical departure from the direction technocratic social engineers were reforming society. The elite in academia and business, the new

technocrats, were pursuing a modern ideology that used schools to produce corporate efficiency to replace the traditional assembly line skills of previous generations to produce a global technocracy crafted from free-market business principles. This was in large part an effort to fortify ranks in the Cold War against Communism and justify war (mis-) adventures in Southeast Asia. Holt believed that schools were being used to further what he saw as an advancement towards an “eventual American brand of fascism” consisting of ignorant authoritarianism and cultural totalitarianism.

Holt referred to the “American disease, a belief in unlimited progress, unlimited growth, unlimited greed” (Sheffer, S. 1990: 24) that has allowed economics to be the driving engine of modernity and steering people away from their true nature and its environment. This alienating process results in people and their environment both being socially and psychologically classified as of little worth or importance, except to stoke the engines that drive the national economy - mere components of the national machinery that was programmed to maximize social conformity and belief in the purity of profit at the expense of a sustainable future. Ron Miller (1972) saw Holt in agreement with Paul Goodman in advocating for a “thorough cultural renewal” (85) to remedy the social and cultural imbalances perpetrated by a technocratic movement that was rapidly advancing to global dimensions. Holt sharply observed:

All of these [modern societies] are basically alike... they all want the same things, they all worship the same gods: science, bigness, efficiency, growth, progress... I think that any society which is based on the notion of progress, growth, change, development, newer, bigger, higher, faster, better is almost inevitably going to move towards fascism because, in a nutshell, it arouses so many more hopes than it satisfies (Holt, J. in Miller, R. 2002:85).

Holt recognized that the technocratic movement of modernity with its institutionalization of ideas and socio-cultural management creates a schooling system that adopts an educational process with products that are remote from people's lives and are void of any existential sustenance. To Holt, the attempt to give universal meaning to anything from the educational process is inconsequential since meaningful learning is not a *deliverable* – it is something cultivated within an individual from living in an environment that emphasizes the experiences of feeling and realizing the importance of one's uniqueness, of one's sense of belonging, of doing things that are fulfilling, and of being connected to community(ies) that live according to integral values and ethics. To Holt, modern life without these experiences lead to psychological disabilities that are expressed in various forms of violence and destruction. "Holt insisted that social problems and violent conflict were closely associated with personal feelings of inadequacy, alienation, and resentment" (Miller, R. 1972: 87). The correct response to a corrupted society replicating itself through schools is to remove ones child from school as an act of civil disobedience. So while this becomes a political act, it is more than anything else a human act that ceases to contribute to a competitive system that creates endless conflict and violence.

Holt was an astounding observer of how children learn with his insights based on his experience as a teacher. He said that "there is no such thing as teaching – only learning... the word 'teach' implies an injection of knowledge" (Holt, J. & Farenga, P. 2003: XIX), a knowledge fabricated to fashion a specific perspective and belief. He interpreted learning as "making more sense of the world around us, and able to do more

things in it” and he considered children much more adept at learning than adults who were already conditioned to believe that they were already “learned,” having been through the “official” institutional learning system. Holt understood learning to be a life-long holistic, conscious life. He observed that children “do not acquire knowledge” as much as “they create knowledge as scientists do - by observing, wondering, theorizing, and then testing and revising these theories” (Holt, J. 1989: 102). Parents for their part could facilitate this learning process by giving children access to the world - including people, their beliefs, and their acts and by-products - without ideological prejudices.

He did not advocate sending kids out morally vacuous in the world because he thought that the real cultural knit of a society is found in people who were able to be “polite, patient, generous, forgiving... and able and willing to understand others and to see the world through their eyes” (Holt, J. & Farenga, P. 2003: 27). True to his unschooling philosophy, however, he didn’t think these “social virtues” were taught to children through discussion or forced cultural behaviors. He viewed these behaviors as “a kind of surplus, an overflowing, in people who have enough love and respect for themselves and therefore have some left over for others” (Holt, J. & Farenga, P. 2003: 27). These virtues were to be cultivated in the child’s community and most importantly, within their own family.

For Holt, the home is a natural place to start learning because it has the potential to model good social values and creates an environment that supports the necessary freedom to love learning and love life. In Holt’s way of viewing schooling, it is to be a

place where one experiences freedom – the sort of freedom to question and to find answers and to fail and to re-question. Holt advocated giving students self-direction, autonomy, and choice in their learning because people learn best when the decision of what, how, when, and why we want to learn is their own decision. For children, they have a natural inclination to want to be with and follow adults and Holt advised parents to allow children to be as much part of the adult world as possible, including making apprenticeships available to children.

Although many critics of unschooling/homeschooling claim that children lose important social skills, Holt was quick to point out how socially harmful schools are, especially considering how mean-spirited kids can be and how humans tend to act worse in groups. Children often reproduce bad social behaviors through group bullying and in reproducing the lack inherited from an absent home community that models social virtues and the requisite self-respect and curiosity to exhibit the development of civil character. Holt claimed that, not only were schools poor places to learn, but that homeschoolers tended to be much more responsible, more resourceful, and more holistically stimulated. From his own teaching experience he found that those who were more academically inclined “were with few exceptions frightened, timid, evasive, and self-protecting” (Interview with Gilman, R. 1984:46). But characteristically, the things that Holt professed everyone should learn was to be able to say ‘I’m sorry’, ‘I don’t know’, and ‘I was wrong.’

## 2.8 Social Movements Arising from Education

### *2.8.1 Modern State & Colonial Influence: Breaking Down Traditional Societies*

Education reform is not new in contemporary Thailand; it was first applied by King Mongkhut in the mid-nineteenth century and then again in the late twentieth century. Both were motivated by global pressures – the first in attempt to ward off colonial pressures through adoption of Western materialist and cultural frameworks, and the second time to be well-placed in the competitive global market motored by what Sulak Sivaraksa and others have labeled as the *scientism* of the West through bolstering internal control of culture and reinforcing the Western notion of knowledge and its transmission.

These reforms have had an obvious effect on the cultural and spiritual frameworks in Thailand and have been re-shaped to fit the purposes of the nation-state creation by urban bureaucrats and technocrats. The ethical issues of creating such a mechanism as the nation-state are usually deflected with patronizing rationale; and in the case of Thailand, the rationale has been premised on the idea that, due to the invasion of colonial forces in the region, the state had to preserve Thai “identity” by defining and aggressively “marketing” a very narrow ideal of what it means to be Thai. The ironic thing about this has been that Thailand had to colonize its own country to preserve it from a foreign colonization that may have been less spiritually and culturally intrusive. It is additionally ironic that reforms led to a more intrusive and perhaps confusing sort of colonial influence related to perceptions of the local, traditional self and the global, modern self.



At the vanguard of those defining ethical perimeters of reform is Sulak Sivaraksa. Sulak has elucidated how the reforms of King Rama V “marked the beginning of the decline of the traditional forms of knowledge and education that was centered in the temple and the home” (Sivaraksa, 2005: 65). This reform quashed the knowledge systems of local communities that were held together by the Buddha’s threefold training (virtue, mind, and wisdom) devoted to address community problem resolution, right livelihood, self-sustainability and the “art of cultivating happiness” (Sivaraksa, 2005: 65). The state’s purpose in reform, according to Sulak, was to fortify the nation-state apparatus with the power to be the sole author and proprietor of knowledge in order to subdue the autonomous organization of citizens at local levels and to homogenize cultural and spiritual notions through the scaffolding of prescribed state knowledge. Traditional knowledge systems were completely abandoned and the application of the Western colonial way of thinking was adopted, inflicting long-term psychological and cultural shock. The Thai elite have compounded this by viewing the local population as ignorant and in need of modern refinement as exemplified by Western development. This Western notion of modernism and development “smacks of imperialism... deeply rooted in old-fashioned, racially defined Europeanization, implying racial hierarchies” (Sivaraksa, 2005: 191) and when applied to traditional societies, it is like applying a poison without directions or counter indications – the effects are not known until severe and irrevocable damage appears.

Helena Norberg-Hodge has observed the same process occur during her three decades living in Ladakh, North India. She has noted how traditional societies

breakdown with sustained contact with the modern world in the form of “a loss of cultural self-esteem... the psychological pressure to modernize“ (Norberg-Hodge, 1999:113). Education plays a pivotal role in this disorientation process because it is almost universally assumed that schooling, particularly Western formal schooling, is beneficial to developing nations. Norberg-Hodge, however, has observed how Western education has entirely supplanted local indigenous knowledge and children begin to compete for “scarce specialized jobs in the money and technology-based global economy” (117). The Western educational model, with all its promises of development and better life, “cannot be emulated in developing countries – the resources are just not there” (120). The bigger question implied here is whether this Western model is sustainable anywhere as the world teeters on complete social, environmental, and economic collapse.

What causes Western notions of education and development to be so volatile according to Norberg-Hodge is that they are founded on principles extracted from the practices of colonialism and that their fundamental purposes are to enhance power, wealth, and personal success at the expense of someone else and/or the environment. It provides a vision that promises unspecified personal liberation and economic enrichment via beneficial technological breakthroughs; yet few dare question these assumptions, particularly the underlying assumption that human lack can be sated with means that only give rise to more lack ad infinitum. As Norberg-Hodge points out, creating developed systems suitable for the global modernization project requires an emphasis on production and competition that invariably leads to conceiving people and

institutions as components of a machine in a hierarchal framework that prioritizes, excludes, and marginalizes.

To Walden Bello, mechanical views of society with interchangeable parts represent the historical lineage of the Western concept of progress. The idea of progress and development is related to Western education and modernism bred during the European Enlightenment in which it was believed that a utopian world could be created as long as reason was applied. Reason was idealized to such a degree that it was believed that its application ethically allowed for the deconstruction of societies, the fabrication of desired social and political institutions, and the subsequent reconstruction of the society to a new evolved state. However, Bello sees a couple of problems with this arrangement in that everything related to tradition is deemed non-essential and inferior; and there is an assumption that human development up to the point of modernity had been borne out of ignorance and had been liberated by pure reason. Chandra Muzaffar (2005) concurs with Bello's historical evaluation of Western reason in relation to the concept of progress and claims that very few in the West have questioned their concept of progress and belief in science and technology as a key to modernization, but Southeast and Northeast Asians are beginning to question the path and its goal toward which these notions lead and the once "exuberant confidence" (115) in the efficacy and technological prowess of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western man has turned to be more doubtful.

An assumption that many Westerners hold is that their form of modernization and development is civilized and leads to social justice, a condition that can be imposed

by someone else through external conditions. Satish Kumar believes that this is a false notion because “the root cause of social injustice, economic inequality, and exploitation of the poor is the lack of compassion in society, not the lack of justice” (Kumar, 2005: 173). It is the imposition of justice that allows for a state or nation or a society to justify atrocities. Kumar puts the subject of Western civilization and justice in a sharper perspective: “A culture which colonizes and exploits the world, then uses it as a source for raw materials and a market for finished goods cannot be considered fully civilized” (164). Kumar sees this arrogant sense of importance of the West began in earnest during the Renaissance when humans were believed to be superior to all things in nature, later reinforced by the concept of evolution in which everything is believed to move in a linear progression with humanity at the pinnacle of all creation, alone and supreme in its dominion over all things. These notions have evolved into the belief that modern civilization is superior and “the aboriginal cultures to be backwards” (167). In contrast to evolutionary or creationist thinking, the root of Buddhist, Taoist, other Vedic traditions, and most indigenous thought is the idea that all things move in cycles and exist only in complex relationship to other things that arise interdependently and intersubjectively. Events are not defined in linear sequences, beginnings or ends, for these are artificially imposed limitations that do not reflect the interactive co-creation, or the interdependent cycles of nature. Western views reflect and support the notion that nature and man are separate, distinct elements and do not follow the same universal principles.

This view of nature as a mere component to feed the technology produced from a scientific perspective relies on objectivity, an abstract condition requiring alienation and a disassociated objectification of all things. Pankaj Mishra explains how this objectification process advanced the perspective that, not only is nature a *renewable resource*, but that society and change could also be objectively managed. The success of dominating environments and situations through the advancement of rational disassociation created a sense of certainty that “history itself, no longer seen as a neutral, objective narrative, could be shaped by the will and action of man” (Mishra, 2007: 64). Not only is the “notion that history is a meaningful narrative shaped by human beings” (64) absent from most indigenous traditions, but time is “rarely conceptualized as a linear progression” (Ibid.) within indigenous traditions as well. Buddhism, with its core principles of compassion and intersubjectivity, “is innately inhospitable to the Promethean spirit of self-aggrandizement and conquest that has shaped the new ‘historical’ view of human powers” (Ibid.).

#### *2.8.2 Non-West Traditions & the Bias of Western Traditions of Thought*

There are few Western or Western-trained academicians who wouldn’t deplore the idea of colonialism yet, ironically, few would concede that Western education played any role in colonial history and fewer yet would acknowledge that the current push of Western education across the globe has any similarity to the colonial legacy or is any way related to a global hegemonic perspective. Comparative education studies have highlighted cultural and societal differences, but these differences are seen to have

the same learning remedies through the “superior” approaches that have created the Western world.

Timothy Reagan (2000) has identified two common biases among education researchers that influence not only Western educators, but also powerful international organizations such as the United Nations, The World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank that have a large say in what will be researched and the sort of outcomes they find significant in the global economy – namely, cultural ethnocentrism and epistemological ethnocentrism. Both of these practices begin perceptual framing of the reality of a foreign society by using their own social norms. Cultural ethnocentrism is the unconscious and subtle crafting of cultural bias, prejudices, and assumptions into the study of other societies, including what and how will be studied and what and how evidence will be weighed and validated. Epistemological ethnocentrism is the bias “common to an entire field of study... the dominant *paradigm* in a field of study... [and] essentially establishes the parameters within which *legitimate* discourse may take place” (4).

To the detriment and exclusion of all other traditions, “the study of the history and philosophy of education... has focused almost entirely on a single educational tradition” (6). Indigenous and traditional forms of teaching/learning have been forgotten, or minimized in efficacy and significance and relegated to mostly collect dust in anthropological archives. Reagan attributes scholar’s transposition of meaning of *education* with *schooling* and the emphasis of literacy over oral practices as significant biases. According to Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1998), “the dominant

contemporary mode of knowing and thinking identifies reality with abstraction” (73); and Ivan Illich similarly declared that “both literate and illiterate people now live in the reign of the alphabetic mind” (Illich, I. in Esteva, G. & Prakash, 1998: 73) in which knowledge that was once an integrated feature of living in awareness is now a matter of conceptualizing things in a contextual-less frame of reference from a book. Modern man’s utilization of words and texts as tools have uprooted his knowledge from the earth whereby practical and transcendental experiences have been replaced by the abstract where knowledge does not necessarily serve the relationship between man and earth and man and the spiritual. It is this capture by the abstract that has prevented raising significant questions regarding education and whether schooling is the best tool for human development.

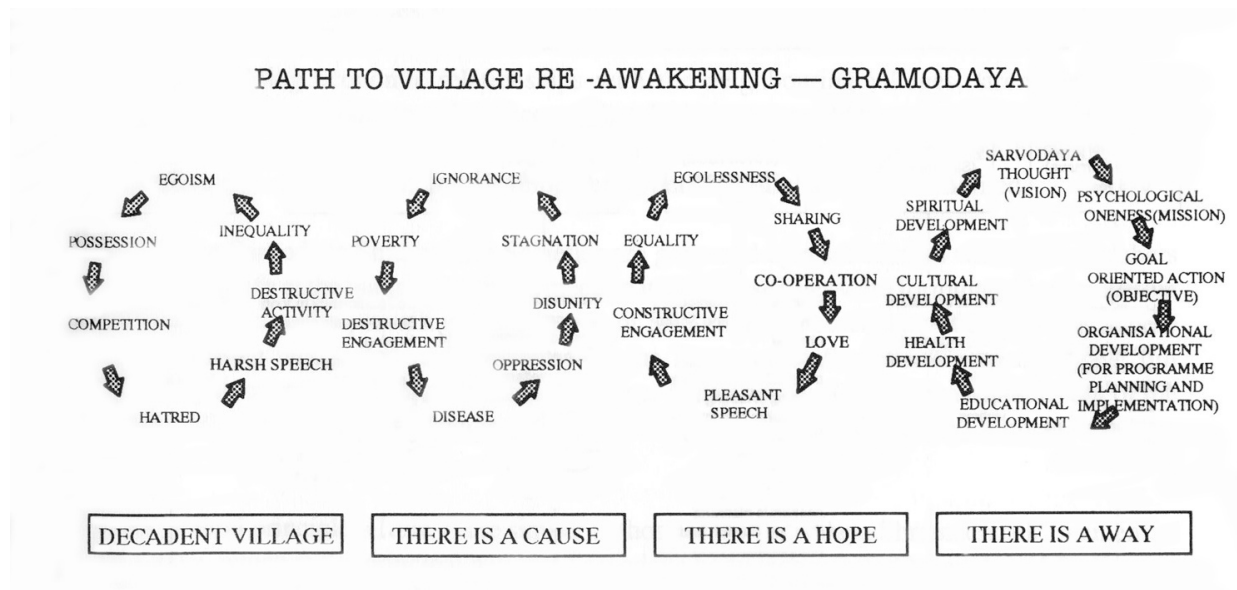
An example of how schools could be used to serve the inter-relationships between humans, their natural environment, and their spirituality can be found in Sri Lanka. The Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka is a movement that was formalized from an opposition to a dismal school system that produced a country wrought with violence instigated from ignorant issues of identity. Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, founder of the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement of Sri Lanka and also known as Sri Lanka's "little Gandhi," has won several international awards for his work in reforming village development. He has worked for peace in Sri Lanka for the past 45 years developing unique, self-sustaining village communities based on Buddhist “Elements of Social Development.” Ariyaratne (1999) advocates a holistic approach to reform that integrates principles that were invoked by Buddha such as:

- leadership including the *dasa raja dharma* (ten principles of a good ruler);
- participation, self responsibility, and social action;
- health – personal and communal;
- human rights and duties;
- environmental protection as a criterion of social progress;
- social integration – diversity as a resource to live in harmony, not conflict or advantage;
- making communities safe and prosperous havens for the vulnerable, i.e., women and children;
- peace – not just the absence of war – but reduction in the levels of greed, hatred, and ignorance and increase of non-greed, non-hate, and intelligence;
- and economics that make all community members prosperous and generous.

The movement was inspired by an educational reform agenda whereby Buddhist principles of education were summoned “as a corrective response to this [Sri Lanka’s] ineffective school system” (Ariyaratne, 1999: 20). Ariyaratne believed like Gandhi that education should be “for life, through life, and throughout life... [and] it is educating not only the head, but also the heart and limbs” (20). Contrarily to the Western tradition, Ariyaratne, like Gandhi, the Sarvodaya Movement, the growing Swaraj movement, and the Shikshantar Andolan Institute believe that modern schools look down upon the educational value of work and the dignity children learn through noble work in the community (not exploitative work). The mark of a progressive society – and one that gives stability against the derangement caused by colonialism - according to the



Sarvodaya Movement is one whereby all forms of education are integrated into people's lives. Spirituality and wisdom for a Sarvodaya community are at the heart of people's lives in order to release "the Cycle of Hope" (27), the means for village reform modeled after the Buddha's Four Noble Truths (see diagram below). In contrast to the Sarvodaya Movement, Bhikkhu Santikaro (1999) views educational reform in Thai education as fundamentally, a transposition of meaning between education and schooling. Schooling is the narrow domain of training teachers to apply state curriculum and sanctioned texts through trained instructors. Unfortunately, schooling is not necessarily part of a student's life-long integrated learning process in relationship to their community, but as a means to fortify the needs of the nation-state and their relationship to the global market.



(Ariyaratne, 1999: 27)

### *2.8.3 Buddhist Social Movements in South and Southeast Asia*

South and Southeast Asia have been the seats of momentous non-violent social movements, most notably starting with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Anagarika Dharmapala, and Mahatmas Gandhi. Their spiritual community liberation movements have been the inspiration of three key leaders: Thich Nhat Hanh, A.T. Ariyaratne, and Sulak Sivaraksa. All three were co-creators of the Engaged Buddhist movement and all three were at the forefront of anti-war activism in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Thailand and all three have been the inspiration of such notable figures as Martin Luther King, Daniel Berrigan, Thomas Merton, the Shikshantar Andolan community, Buddhist revivalists, and anti-war activists in Europe and the USA to name but a few. All three have been recognized for the activism that has had a profound influence on the region as well as the world. The social movements they advocate are not like Western forms of resistance social movements, but are oppositional movements that emphasize liberation from engagement without resistance.

Anagarika Dharmapala, like his colleague Gandhi, opposed the colonial occupation and cultural domination of the British in Sri Lanka. In response to the derision of the Christians and colonialists that Buddhism was too “other-worldly,” he set in motion the liberation of Sri Lanka through the successful revitalization of Buddhism. George Bond (1996), in describing the influences of A.T. Ariyaratne’s Sarvodaya (meaning *the well being of all, the awakening of all*) community movement, placed luminaries such as Buddha, Gandhi and Dharmapala as major contributors. Bond further posits that Ariyaratne’s approach was unique and conformed to the distinctive

cultural and situational needs of the Sri Lankan context. His community ideas were not generated to give an answer to global need or lack, but were intended to resolve the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities and transform them through everyday right living, much as Gandhi expressed in his motives “The spiritual law expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life” (Bond, 1996: 123). Vinobe Bhave, Gandhi’s successor and Ariyaratne’s mentor, provided the symbolic motto to Ariyaratne’s social movement, “Firstly, I want to change people’s hearts. Secondly, I want to create a change in their lives. Thirdly, I want to change the social structure” (Ibid.), thereby establishing a system that called for dual liberation – social and individual.

The Sarvodaya movement was supported widely, mostly by European donors and Buddhist associations, and by 1985 had been adopted by 8000 villages, “which represented one third of the island’s villages” (136). As war intensified during the 1980s, the movement was used by political factions and then eventually “boycotted” until 1993. But, as Bond concludes, the success of the movement in Sri Lanka was due to the fact that Ariyaratne “discovered that development required spiritual rather than material goals as a basis” (141).

Thich Nhat Hanh was such an influence on Martin Luther King that he nominated Thich for the Nobel Peace Prize. Thich, a novice in the Zen tradition of Buddhism, founded in 1965 his own order, *Tiep Hien Order, The Order of Interbeing*, “designed as a manifestation of Engaged Buddhism” (King, 1996: 323) and was the beginning of his development of the “Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism”

(Kalachakranet, 2006). Soon afterward, Thich embarked on a tour to nineteen countries to implore the ending of the Vietnam War. The tour included talking with top USA Senators and House of Representatives, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Canadian Parliament members, and European Catholic Cardinals. It was when Thich was in Washington DC that he presented and published his “Five Point Proposal to End the War.” The tour and its dialogues became the basis for his landmark best-seller book, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. During exile in France, he became part of the Buddhist Peace Delegation that performed various activities including efforts to rescue the “boat people” until Singapore and Thailand put a quash on their activities.

Similar to the response to Christian colonialism, Vietnamese Buddhists demanded an end to inequalities and hostilities and arrests of monks and nuns with the expectation of equal legal status as Catholic priests and nuns. These escalations of hostilities towards monks and nuns led to the infamous series of self-immolations, “mocked as *barbeques*... as widely reported in the American news media” (327). Monks and nuns began to be the refuge for the poor and villagers and orphans – anyone who suffered, Buddhist monks and nuns stepped up to rebuild or rescue. Sallie B. King (1996) perceived two action principles in wartime advocated by Thich – “stop all killing and acute suffering as quickly as possible and to ameliorate suffering when stopping it is impossible” (342); and “non-separation from all parties involved in conflict... both a refusal to take sides with one party against another and a commitment to work toward reconciliation and healing.” (344). While this may seem like a combination of ambiguity or a version of “turning the other cheek,” these were acts with no

intentionality other than the imperative of compassion shown to all beings, responding to the suffering and need of the moment.

#### *2.8.4 The Swaraj and the Shikshantar Andolan Movements*

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore used the term *Swaraj* in relation to the Indian liberation movement from colonial England. *Swaraj* is a Sanskrit word that has two meanings, “self rule” or “radiance of self” (What is Swaraj? Web site, n.d.) and referred more to self-rule as opposed to political independence. Gandhi’s famous *Hind Swaraj*, advocated more than the expulsion of the British, he claimed the entire British spiritual and social foundations of their colonial institutions were unjust, immoral, exploitative, and disaffected and needed to be expunged from the Indian psyche and replaced with regenerative Indian traditions. Contemporary *Swaraj* movements advocate similar liberation from institutional thought (colonial mind) through individual and collective reclamation and ownership of their own learning and life-expression for there is no one universal means of development. Movements have formed throughout India, Pakistan, Tibet, Thailand, Malaysia, Africa, and Latin America inspired by not only Gandhi and Tagore, but by many individuals such as Arundhati Roy, Satish Kumar, Ivan Illich, Vinoba Bhave, Dalai Lama, Walden Bello, and Aldous Huxley. Among some of the groups inspired by and applying the concept of *Swaraj* are: Jeevan Vidya, Multiworld, Institute of Development Studies and Practices - Pakistan, Institute for Intercultural Dialogue, Honey Bee Network, and the Shikshantar Andolan.

The Shikshantar Andolan: The People's Institute for Rethinking Education and Development is a Swaraj movement that has formed a community of "learning activists" (Jain, n.d.) fostered by Vidhi and Manish Jain in response to the damage done by the culture of schooling. The name of the community, *Shikshantar Andolan*, is a combination of words – *shiksha* meaning "learning as living and living as learning", *antar* meaning "transformation", and *andolan* is a shortened version of *jeevan andolan* meaning "an agitation or movement showing up in our own lives." Manish has a background working with, among others, UNESCO, World Bank, USAID, Academy for Educational Development, Harvard Institute for International Development, and Morgan Stanley Investment; while Vidhi has worked developing and designing rural village programs to provide inclusive services in schools for children with special needs. Both of them believe that they were asked to promote a global system of "factory-schooling" that did more harm than good. To them, global schooling system are tied to global markets and states, promoting a "destructive kind of Progress" that alienated young from old, divorced all from Nature, and left cultures too weak to maintain diverse and unique perspectives.

Shikshantar believes that the problems associated with progress and modernity have not been adequately addressed by education and that, while schooling has been advocated as a cure to global ills, it has become part of the problem. The commercialization of schools "around the world... serve to stratify society, glorify militarism, devalue local knowledge systems and language, manufacture unsustainable wants, breed discontent and frustration... and dehumanize communities" (Jain, S. &

Jain, M. n.d.). Most nations decry the lack of education as the breeding ground for ignorance and destruction, Shikshantar makes note that the real threats in the world come from the “schooled” and not necessarily from those who are said to be illiterates. Their community is devoted to “unlearning” such things as: blaming others and instead owning and “celebrating” mistakes and errors; unlearning the conditioning imposed by school and media of working with your hands and physical labor; unlearning the disconnect with the power of Nature; unlearning the oppressive relationships found in institutionalizing society; unlearning biases and prejudices; and unlearning the disrespect of monocultures, whether they are “master plans” or formulas for success. Shikshantar has defined the elements of schooling that they believe have created a global culture of harm.

*The Culture of Schooling:*

- 1) Labels, ranks and sorts human beings. It creates a rigid social hierarchy consisting of a small elite class of ‘highly educated’ and a large lower class of ‘failures’ and ‘illiterates’, based on levels of school achievement;*
- 2) Imposes uniformity and standardization. It propagates the viewpoint that diversity is a problem, which must be removed if society is to progress;*
- 3) Spreads fear, insecurity, violence and silence through its externally-imposed, military-like discipline;*
- 4) Forces human beings to violently compete against each other over scarce resources in rigid win-lose situations;*
- 5) Confines the motivation for learning to examinations, certificates and jobs. It suppresses all non-school motivations to learn and kills all desire to engage in critical self-evaluation. It centralizes control over the human learning process into the State-Market nexus, taking power away from individuals and communities;*
- 6) Commodifies all human beings, Nature, knowledge and social relationships. They are to be extracted, exploited, bought and sold;*
- 7) Fragments and compartmentalizes knowledge, human beings and the natural world. It de-links knowledge from wisdom, practical experiences and specific contexts;*

- 8) *Artificially separates human rationality from human emotions and the human spirit. It imposes a single view of rationality and logic on all people, while simultaneously devaluing many other knowledge systems;*
- 9) *Privileges literacy (in a few elite languages) over all other forms of human expression and creation. It drives people to distrust their local languages. It prioritizes newspapers, textbooks, and television as the only reliable sources of information. These forms of State-Market controlled media cannot be questioned by the general public;*
- 10) *Reduces the spaces and opportunities for 'valid' human learning by demanding that they all be funneled through a centrally-controlled institution. It creates artificial divisions between learning and home, work, play, spirituality;*
- 11) *Destroys the dignity of labor; devalues the learning that takes place through manual work;*
- 12) *Breaks intergenerational bonds of family and community and increases people's dependency on the Nation-State and Government, on Science and Technology, and on the Market for livelihood and identity (Shikshantar Andolan: The People's Institute for Rethinking Education and Development. 2000).*

#### *2.8.5 Thailand's Tradition of Social Movements*

Thailand has traditionally been an agricultural-based economy built on the labors of rural peasants, but unfortunately, the distribution of wealth from production has been a source of dissent and unrest. Land rights and inequalities have been issues leading to organized dissent and, although rural Thailand has a tradition of social movements and resistance to this exploitation, they have generally been disorganized, localized, and ephemeral. (Missingham, 2003) The manner of how the rural sector mobilized matured during the heady times during the 20s and 30s. Ho Chi Minh took refuge in rural Northeast Thailand from 1928-1929 during Thailand's large social movement to depose the absolute monarchy and was influential in the growing resistance among the rural population, particularly among the ethnic Vietnamese in Northeast Thailand (CRHP, 1996). It was after the government was overthrown in 1973



and the bloody massacre of 1976 that the Communist Party of Thailand (CTP) emerged with more vigor from its mostly Chinese membership through incorporation of students and peasants.

Universities expanded during the 60s and 70s and enrollment included more rural students, invigorating the cultural and social capital of the rural communities. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many composed of students and former CTP members, began to have a greater presence in rural areas and were also established at national and regional levels (Missingham, 2003). The density of this rural network grew, and so too did the organizing functions of building trust and the transition towards large-scaled cooperative and normative pursuits, characteristics of Putnam's social capital of a *horizontal* group capable of spreading resources and power across a wide-range of activities (Krishna, 2002). Villages and rural communities found reciprocal relationships essential as a survival strategy in response to threats that arose from the post-global invasion during the Vietnam War. The Thai economy turned toward an industrial model and resources for this transformation resulted in large-scale social and environmental changes that put Thai rural areas in crisis as they faced a deteriorating resource base on which to sustain livelihood as forests and waters were laid to waste by marauding *entrepreneurials* scavenging for wealth. Rural communities became increasingly dependent on off-farm employment, first from seasonal migration, then from the permanent migration of young people to urban areas with up to 70% of teenagers leaving their home villages (Jones & Demaine, 1998). Rural areas, then,

became the resource bin for the urban drive to industrial modernity, creating a sort of *agricultural ghetto* in the hinterlands just outside the limits of urban reach.

The effect of this *ghettoization* of the rural was an expanding network of NGOs linking through activism and grassroots politics. NGOs became focused on community development and strengthening the capacity of rural institutions. This was manifested in many innovative rural projects initiated by national and international NGO agencies and were followed by government actions that took one step forward and two back. Previous to the formation of the Assembly of the Poor (AOP), a large coalition of Thai NGO-led social movement, various assemblies and federations of the rural poor were formed to offset environmental and village calamities, most notably the building of dams that displaced villages and irreparably damaged eco-systems. With the overthrow of the Suchinda government, these became the watershed events that allowed the Thai media to portray a sympathetic picture of the struggle of the rural population and the popular urban movements as efforts to bring about a civil society played a crucial role in capturing the hearts of the Thai middle class.

#### *2.8.6 Thailand's Tradition of Social Movements – The Spiritual Aspect*

Thailand has a long tradition of opposition to force as a spiritual concept of transformation. In order to understand the significance of the spiritual leadership in Thai popular movements, one must understand that there is a strong relationship between Thai culture, Buddhism, opposition to colonialism-imperialism-exploitation, and the concept of social progress. Accounts of social reforms abound in Thai history with a number of the major characters played by Buddhist monks, particularly those who have

supported the peasantry and attempted to preserve the environment and uphold land rights of the poor.

The spiritual significance of agitation is exemplified by the accounts of the “Holy Men Revolts” (Chatthip, 1984 as cited by Missingham, 2003:21). Peasants from Northeast Thailand organized around powerful men that exhibited an extraordinary amount of the Buddhist concept of merit – spiritual goodwill and power. These revolts were similar to many of the accounts of Thai revolt in that they opposed central hegemony and exploitation of farm labor. Monks wandering and living in the forests and jungles from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present have led various rebellions and popular movements to aid the peasants and preserve the environment. Phra Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has remained a revered figure as a monk who led the popular movement to create a modern Buddhism that emphasized social development and a civil society (Payulpitack, 1991). His radical movement during the 1930s coincided with the radical political movement of Pridi Banomyong who led the movement to unseat absolute monarchy in Thailand.

Buddhadasa and Pridi influenced and mentored many of the student agitators from the last 40 years, among those Sulak Sivaraksa, 1995 winner of the Right Livelihood Award (aka Alternative Nobel Prize). Sulak has formed the Spiritual Education Movement (SEM), an Engaged Spiritual and Buddhist education movement that advocates transformation of self, while awakening to social justice and environmental sustainability. If Sulak is to be considered the conscience of contemporary Thai social movements, then his SEM is a reflection of their core

principles. He has been a vocal critic of Thailand's government over the years, particularly the military regimes and the elite rulers that condescendingly rule the rural population. He has been arrested by the military government for lese-majeste and been facilitator for numerous NGOs whose principal activities were to bring to the "cultural staging area" the discourse about Thai culture, community, and equitable sharing of power and wealth. In another words, a "middle way" society between capitalism and communism that is rooted in social justice.

Sulak has appreciation for some aspects of the innovations introduced by the West, but has taken to task the manner in which Thai people have appropriated Western consumerism, greed, and elitist demonstrations of power, which he insists are not inherently Buddhist or Thai cultural aspects (Titmuss, 2003). This has manifested in his advocacy for a change in Thai education, an education that needs to inspire the wisdom of local knowledge and abandon the cleverness of aggression, power, and corruption – aspects of the military, the elite, and Western imperialism that have suffused Thai culture and its education system.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology of Research

*In Buddhism, reasoning is never divorced from a particular context... the domain of inquiry in Buddhism is not limited to the objective. It also encompasses the subjective world of experience as well as the question of values. In other words, science deals with empirical facts but not with metaphysics and ethics, whereas for Buddhism, critical inquiry into all three is essential* (Dalai Lama, 2005: 34-35).

#### 3.1 Assertions Regarding Thai Buddhism

There are some important assertions underlying this research regarding Buddhism, in particular Buddhism in Thailand that need to be brought to the forefront. One is that Buddhism has been made into a state religion in Thailand in what appears to be an effort by the elite to subdue social movements formed against nation-state building – perhaps even using the reform utility that acts one and the same to make religion as both state builder and civil-emasculating nation builder. Yet historically, Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that has advocated radical personal, political, and social reform and liberation. The inference made in this research is that there is a relationship between religion and spirituality, but that a distinction exists between them. One distinction is that religion appears to represent the stability of making the unknowable certain, while spirituality represents the wisdom found in insecurity. Additionally, this research views Western and East Asian religions, spirituality, and cultural thought as distinctively different Western Abrahamic religions (Christian in this research) have similar sources in pre-Babylonian myths and later shared regional cultural traditions. Similarly, East Asian religions have familiar roots in ancient Vedic civilization with later Shramantic influences of Jainist, Hindu and Chinese Taoist

thought. It is my assertion that these historical patterns of spirituality, culture, and education have left indelible traits making the Eastern and Western cultural differences real and discernible, possibly even at the root causes of some of the complications that arise out of globalization in Asia as we currently know it. It would also be remiss to omit the idea that there have been interactions between these families of thought, East and West, and there are indeed shared spiritual attributes, East and West.

One additional assumption that has become a theme in this research is the idea of history having a repetitive or patterned quality composed of events that seem to display different details, but having significant fundamental similarities. Some historians give significance to eras, epochs, measured intervals, and the repetition of historical episodes, but this research also includes a Buddhist concept, *cyclic existence*, usually associated with human potential to transform towards omniscience, but in this research is transferred to repetitive historical societal episodes. Cyclic existence is the Buddhist expression usually attributed to a human being's perpetual "movement from one life to another" (Dalai Lama, 2007: 62) and living in contradiction to knowledge by "relying on appearances" that "superimposes onto persons and things a sense of concreteness that, in fact, is not there," (63) thereby impeding genuine change. In this research, the term is also applied to aggregate human activity supported by Buddhist teachings and quantum physics that assure us we are "a process, not a product: each an 'individuality' ever rising and passing away, every one of us a 'network of mutuality' as Martin Luther King Jr. famously said" (Johnson, 2007: 291). B. Alan Wallace explains that the process of "our existence is invariably *intersubjective*, for we exist in a causal

nexus in which we are constantly influenced by and exert influence upon the world around us” (Wallace, 2007: 109).

### 3.2 Towards a Definition of Spirituality

G. I. Gurdjieff’s analogy of a person who grew up without a spiritual awakening in their youth: *He can be compared to a carriage with a horse and driver but no master; therefore no one to determine where the carriage should go or whom to serve. Such a carriage can only become a hackney carriage that can be hired by any chance passer-by.* J.G. Bennett (1984: 68).

The term spirituality has been a term used in close association, if not interchangeably, with religious doctrine, dogma, and beliefs. In Western literature it is often associated with religion and faith-based structures and systems that decidedly judge a person’s moral, psychic, and social levels, as well as a person’s ultimate worth as a being in this life and beyond. Among East Asian “religions,” particularly in Taoism, Jainism, and Buddhism, there is generally not much of an emphasis on the spiritual or social status of individuals placed within a hierarchical framework. That is because everyone is considered in a state of continual development with an acknowledged relationship between all beings through the recourse of their actions over time, even beyond this lifetime. Eastern religious thought emphasizes unifying principles and the goal of liberation from the paradoxical pain and pleasure of life, while the Western religions emphasize a materialistic, yet fragmented moral vision with accompanying judicial certainty enacted by individuals with the goal to become reunited with an other-worldly-family that had previously cast them out. And while the majority of liberal-thinking religious people in the world assume similarity of spiritual

nature in all religions, few talk of the distinctions among cultural variations of religious-based spirituality and how these formulate thoughts and perceptions of reality and how they may be related to historical patterns of violence, control, and subjugation. Sadly, the assumptions of peace, prosperity, and goodwill as the refined face of religious-spirituality have eluded humanity for thousands of years.

### *3.2.1 Roots of Western, Christian Spirituality*

Western contemporary spiritual principles have their roots in the Medieval Ages and according to David Loy (2002), the Papal reformation of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is considered by many to be one of the most significant events in European history, if for no other reason than it was the founding of modern civil law and the unintentional creation of the nation-state. This reformation was not only secular in replacing natural law by systematizing canon law and allowing the Church to declare secular authority, but it was also a spiritual shift in that canon law imposed a redefinition of sin and punishment, death, and manifesting the potential for achieving partial redemption in the present. Secular crime was a violation of the state and God's justice became the function of a secular head of state; hence, the echo-call of the nation-state – the jurisdictional canopy under which God's earthly representative determines and administers heaven's judicial preferences in matters of spiritual, secular, and material well being of all those living under the canopy.

“Law was seen as a way of fulfilling the mission of Western Christendom to begin to achieve the kingdom of God on earth” (Berman: 521 as quoted in Loy, 2002). The Pope, being the spiritual intermediary who determined human salvation called on



all Christians to rescue Jerusalem from *infidels* in the name of God, an extension of the “long arm” of spiritual law. Christian Saints and prophets began to envision utopian societies that would prepare the world for a colossal spiritual finale. Apocalyptic millenarianism, the belief in the purification of this world by the transcendent, found its place in the same reasoning that spawned the belief in progress and movement towards utopia. Loy (2002) relates how Christopher Columbus, among many other explorers, was an avowed millenarian influenced by 11<sup>th</sup> century prophecies and one who felt compelled to colonize and convert in order to bring about a successful apocalypse. Medieval Europe, with reason embedded in its faith, propelled science to seek the future utopia through rational progression and among the apocalyptic scientists of the time were Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton. And although the anticipated apocalypse did not occur, Loy notes that

The West we know was created when our lack became channeled into creating the future, but the persistence of movements after the eleventh century... shows that progress did not simply replace apocalypse as our social solution to lack. The idea of progress grew out of millenarianism, and retains the traces of its origins. The relationship between them remains uncomfortably close (2002: 61).

### *3.2.2 Investigating Contemporary Western, Christian Spirituality*

With its origins in the Medieval Ages, the manifestations of the Inquisitions, the Holy War, pogroms, the burning of witches and heretics, colonialism, and Manifest Destiny, Western spirituality has inherited an onerous composite of *cultural genetics*, deeply rooted cultural patterns embedded in unconscious traditions. And although there is an increase in Western research on the topic of spirituality, it still remains in search of

contemporary definition, cultural purpose, cross-cultural effect, and proximity to education. Comparative studies regarding spirituality are uncommon, which accounts for a generalized, if not dominate Western perception of spirituality that is rarely separated from religious practices. The widely held assumption is that spirituality is a universal typification as the universal face of goodwill that possesses insignificant cross-cultural differences in terms of features, intentions, and objectives. It is likely an assumption in need of challenge because it is analogous to saying that everyone knows and likes to eat good food and then making the assumption that global cuisines, with all their various cultural and historical significance, all the different manners of preparation, all the surrounding agricultural production, and all the health-related properties, are the same and have the same affect. This is a known false assumption and the assumption of spiritual similarity must also be more carefully examined.

### *3.2.3 Research in Search of Spiritual Definition*

There are a growing list of books, articles, and research projects on spirituality (not religion, per se) – mostly in the Western, Christian-oriented markets. There are few cogent definitions of spirituality and authors often attempt to universalize the spiritual experience and/or practices. In closer looks at the definitions of spirituality, one can see the Western keenness on defining and encapsulating in words with the liberal borrowing of concepts from the Eastern, mostly Shramanic and various indigenous traditions, yet having so little in common with these customs and practices. In fact, most of these traditions have suffered extreme prejudice and suppression by the Western religions, and it is truly ironic that authors try to claim them as their own. Most definitions have

tried to “scrub” the harsh history of Christianity and few have acknowledged their historical roots, except through biblical references. It is to be noted that it is not with the intention of debasing the Western belief systems that I look at texts on spirituality, it is done with the intent on perceiving difference and perhaps giving clues as to why there is a difference even when claiming similarity.

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA initiated a multi-year research project on the spiritual development of undergraduate students in 2003 and in subsequent years has followed-up with college freshman and faculty. In the past few years, Jennifer Lindholm and Helen Astin (HERI team members), have examined the “interior” life of faculty, its importance, and asked whether student-centered teaching methods are shaped by a teacher’s spiritual beliefs. The research was massive in terms of the number of participants – over 65,000 faculty and 112,000 students in 2004-5. The students filled out the survey at the time of matriculation and the results measured the perceptions of the participants’ own beliefs and values related to the term “spiritual.” There were not any definitions of spirituality given to the faculty or student participants and it is not known if the researchers assume that it is a term known by all participants and whether they all share a common definition regardless of cultural or ethnic background. The respondents seemed to have used the term religion and yet the report stated that students place a “high premium on *spiritual* development” and had expectations that “the college experience will support them in their *spiritual* quest” (Spirituality in Higher Education, 2004). It is not known if the students meant a support of their *religious* development/quest or meant something entirely different. The 2004

report, however, ironically mentioned that universities “appear to be doing little either to help students explore such issues or to support their search in the sphere of values and beliefs” (2004) although students and faculty alike overwhelmingly claimed to be spiritual and that there was a relationship between this spirituality and student-centered teaching/learning. In attempt to counter any criticism about the Christian, western bias in the HERI’s study, Alyssa Bryant (2006), also a HERI researcher, examined non-majority religions. Her method was to ask international students entering US universities - again without definition - about religious practices and beliefs and interchangeably classified them as “spiritual.”

The faculty survey had no specific questions concerning spirituality, only some optional choices related to beliefs and philosophies. The majority of the thirty-five questions related to general university and staff information, educational goals, and course practices. There was no information on the additional twenty questions that were sent only to select participants. The relationship between the spirituality of university faculty and the teaching of student-centered methods seems thin and must rely on a large amount of inference. The researchers developed “spirituality scales” that are intended to “measure related perspectives and behaviors.” The scales score the faculty in these areas: spirituality (“defined as growing spiritually or considering oneself spiritual”); focus on students’ personal development; civic-minded values; civic-minded practice; positive outlook in work and life; student-centered pedagogy; and diversity advocacy. In measuring the spirituality of faculty, the researchers said in a bewildering manner:

As might be expected, more than two-thirds of highly spiritual faculty (70%) also describe themselves as religious to ‘a great extent’... despite the strong positive relationship between spirituality and religiousness, a significant minority of highly spiritual college and university faculty are not religious.

In another large-scale project, Karen Yust, Aostre Johnson, Sandy Sasso, and Eugene Roehlkepartain (YJSR) in 2006 compiled a book of “Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions” in attempt to define a global summary of spiritual traits. They acknowledged how spirituality to some is expressed as a source of meaning, purpose, direction, and devotion; to others it is a commitment that claims to require an act of violence; and to yet others, the advance of rationality and scientific endeavors have educational precedence and exclusive dominion over religion and spiritual notions. YJSR consider spirituality to be “the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred – something greater than the self.” Additionally, they have listed many traits of spirituality, including: a connection to self and others; related to change and growth that is cultivated and/or requires nourishing; is not a predictable or linear process; community and relationship are essential aspects; behaviors defined by ethics; and conceptual understanding that cuts across multiple disciplines.

Their study concluded that they merely scratched the surface with the variety of beliefs, practices, and interpretations across the globe. They acknowledged that they were beginning to see a range of differences that need to be examined, particularly since there are many communities that have had no voice to explain their traditions. They also saw the need to enlarge the comparative scope of the cross-cultural ramifications of

religious practices across continents, e.g., Israeli Jewish traditions and Jewish traditions in the USA. In concluding, they advocate a broader framework beyond mere rationalism, by creating a cross-disciplinary “chorus” composed of theological, social science, and developmental voices.

Leona English (2005) has examined spirituality and its relationship to Western adult education and notes how “spiritual impulses” and “the social gospel” spurred social movements across the globe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She has observed how the current literature from adult education focuses on the relationship between social change and education with the motivation found in “spiritual” practices. English acknowledges the Western influences in adult education – Friere, Illich, Horton, and Lindeman among many – and also includes the adult education aspect of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Buddhist village movement by A.T. Ariyaratne. English has accepted the possibility “that there may indeed be differences between the religious and the spiritual,” and bases her ideas in the belief that “the greater social good” demonstrates an intertwined approach of spirituality and personal concern for society. She acknowledges the colonial history of Western religions across the globe. English’s notion of spirituality as “... an awareness of something greater than ourselves...” is a notion that caricaturizes humans as identities alienated from their most essential aspect, spirituality, acting unaccountably and dependent on an outer authority to realize their own essential spiritual attributes.

Elizabeth Tisdell has written a number of books and papers on spirituality, most recently (2007) on spirituality in higher education. Tisdell advocates “a new approach

to critical multicultural teaching in higher education, to one that emphasizes social justice, an end to oppression, and spirituality.” Thematically, she addresses the lack of discourse regarding culture, diversity, equity and spirituality and she favors the integration of scholarly rationality and intuitive, spiritual approaches in the classroom. She draws upon other Westerners who “Nearly all... focus on its role in creating *ultimate* (my emphasis) meaning, in being more authentic, and its connection to creativity.” Her summary of spirituality refers to seven points: 1) a bond with God/life force; 2) wholeness/interconnectedness of all things; 3) on-going development of identity to become more “authentic”; 4) knowledge construction through “symbolic processes” (Fowler, 1981 in Tisdell, 2007) and inventive, artistic cultural expressions; 5) is not religion, but there is some overlap with religion; 6) an ubiquitous force, though not always apparent, in all learning environments; 7) and the spontaneous nature of a spiritual experience.

In explaining spirituality, Tisdell talks about how it focuses on the personal experiences of things that give people opportunities to make their own meaning, while in contrast, religion tends to be an “organized community of faith” that attempts to nurture a sense of spirituality, but also advocates a prescribed code of behavior that leads to “salvation,” but that it is often authoritarian and implants a sense of inferiority. Her idea is that religion provides the fermenting material that memory uses to make meaning at unexpected moments through various creative forms of art, music, ritual, story, etc. It is the symbolic culture that stimulates memory, instigating an “unconscious

structuring process,” an inspirational identity process of faith placed in the “authority beyond” to provide cultural tapestries of goodness.

Tisdell’s perspective on spirituality is expansive, but has features, like English, that one could say reflects a Western perspective. The biggest feature that sticks out is the duality of her conceptions and how one must create an identity that acts and affects the world, merely in order to substantiate a sense of reality and certainty to counter the existential sense of lack, insignificance, and injustice. It is an outer something that intercedes in order to acquire the necessary power to dominate and control ones environment. Much of the aim of Tisdell’s spirituality infers an adaptation to a social majority – an elite group of those engaged in activities established as the norm in order to actualize a state of positivism that pleases self in order to minimize the intrusion of inherent conflicts and reifications. In other words, her Western spirituality is *soft and sweet* in that it resists aspects related to deep revolution, doubt, suffering, and the embrace of the darker side of life – it relies on inspiration, catering to those who seek to *feel good about themselves* and *being positive and willful* in ones approach to life – it is all about *someone* knowing, thinking, acting, and creating. It is not about being, it is about being *something* and doing to *someone else*.

Elfie Hinterkopf has advocated for an integration of spirituality into the counseling process utilizing Gendlin’s theory of experiencing. Gendlin, according to Hinterkopf, believes that a spiritual experience involves a “transcendent growth process to move beyond one’s former frame of reference in a direction of higher or broader scope, a more inclusive approach” (1998). Although Hinterkopf stages spirituality in the



psychological realm of “transpersonal experiences” that filters through to the sentient body in the form of subtle feelings of energy, she acknowledges that different societies with cultural influences experience spirituality in a different manner. She gives the example of the Western ideals of self-transcendence, unity and love for others; while the Japanese experience spiritual growth as a process of developing a “more healthy egocentricity, more of a sense of individuality and separation... Japanese people may have the reaction that they don’t need spirituality” (Ibid.). As a Christian counselor, she affirms Daniel Helminiak’s (1987) notion “that psychological growth and spiritual growth are synonymous” but she has bifurcated growth into the *content* of spiritual experiences (inspirational) and the “psycho-spiritual change *process* in which many growth events occur.” Her reasoning for the distinction between content and process of spiritual definitions was to prevent exclusionary judgments that inhibit the growth of individuals as manifested through the vital life force.

A spate of Christian theologians and writers has boldly asserted their claim to an exclusive spiritual ascendancy. One such theologian is John Milbank, a contemporary religious radical that is controversial for the reason of his movement, *radical orthodoxy*, which is critical of modernity and reasons that most forms of social theory are unscientific and rooted in an ethos of violence. He claims that there is great tragedy embedded in modern theology because it has relinquished its lofty spirituality to “conform to the secular standards of scientific objectivity” (Malcolm, 2000). Malcolm contends that Milbank believes that the secular is corrupted in origin and has spliced two sources for its lineage in order to deal with deep-seated human conflict: one is

“heretical” (non-conforming Christian) and the other “pagan” (thoroughly non-Christian). The heretical branch of secularism (the view of orthodoxy) represents the platonic ideals that animate acts emanating from desire. These acts are dependent on civil law to restrain the competitive impulses to dominate and gain an identity of significance. The branch arising from the pagan line (the view of liberalism) represents the politically correct republic whose moral imperative is to maintain institutions in order to protect the idealism of rationalized ambition.

A sociologist that has made a stir concerning spirituality is Robert Wuthnow. Wuthnow is a sociologist with an interest in the decline of the Christian church in the USA and its relation to the growth of the middle class financially and the change in social climate. His research revealed that most US citizens believe that greed is a sin yet they have conflicting feelings regarding the expectation to pursue material well being. Like Milbank, Wuthnow believes that Christianity is at odds with secular society; however, he still believes that the USA is very religious even though it is also a very secular society. He uses the word religious interchangeably with spiritual, defining it as a personal relationship with God and everything that encircles this relationship, i.e., prayer, church service, acts of faith, organized religion, etc. This definition would certainly exclude many non-Christians even though the USA has a growing population of non-Christians. Wuthnow dismisses this notion by saying that Christians’ reaction to non-Christians is “indifference” albeit a challenge to “true Christianity” (PBS, 2002).

As a culture we’re only beginning to face up to the sense of doubt we have... about ‘truth’... Christians have thought that they had the truth, and that other people didn’t have the truth in the same way. And now, Christians are not so sure... (Ibid.).

Wuthnow notes that Christians are asked to be more tolerant in the multi-cultural composition of the USA, but the more they are exposed to comparative religious perspectives, they are seeing differences and beginning to question what the Christian teachings really mean, even though an overwhelming majority of respondents in Wuthnow's research still think that the best way to know God is through Christianity. Wuthnow acknowledges that the market has enlarged the "places to shop for spirituality" and that organized religion has lost its monopoly over spirituality. It is also the market that caters to the American "impulse to get things as quickly and easily as possible."

#### *3.2.4 Spirituality in a Buddhist Sense*

There is no definition of spirituality in Buddhism, primarily because emphasis is placed on the experience of ordinary being, not conceptual certainty. Spirituality in Buddhism pertains to developing qualities, skills, and habits that allow one to live in contentment. This contentment is not at the expense of anyone else and is not dependent on the pursuit of any external goals or objectives – it is the happiness of perception and engaged interrelationship. "Buddhism doesn't begin with lofty concepts like God, sin, or transcendence. It starts with the simple, undeniable fact of suffering" (Dalai Lama, 2007: 61). This suffering is the endless dissatisfaction with life and the wanting of reality to be other than it is. This, the first of the Four Noble Truths, is related to the fact that suffering arises with the belief in and attachment to intrinsic, non-substantial existence; but thirdly, this suffering can be transformed when one finally becomes skilled on the Noble Eightfold Path.

Ranjit Hoskote (1991) says that there is potential for positive skill development, but that transformation will not happen without deliberate ethical conduct that is evaluated through dispassionate contemplation. Similarly, Joan Halifax Roshi (2004) has stated: “we cannot eliminate the so-called negative forces of afflictive emotions. The only way to work with them is to encounter them directly, enter their world, and transform them. They then become manifestations of wisdom” (179). And while the Eightfold Path sounds like a prescription of moral law or doctrine, more than anything it describes the attributes one is to cultivate on the Path. The skills on this path are in three primary areas – wisdom, ethics, and mental acuity, and they embody coherence of perspective, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

The heart of Buddhist spirituality would be the Four Sublime States, also known as the Four Immeasurables and referred to as divine abodes (of Brahma) and boundless states. “They are called *abodes* because they should become the mind’s constant dwelling-places where we feel *at home*” (Thera, 1994:1). The four abodes/states as taught by the Buddha are: Loving kindness (*metta*); Compassion (*karuna*); Sympathetic joy (*mudita*); and Equanimity (*ubekkhā*). These states are taught as subjects, sequentially, and applied as purposeful attention during meditation in order to give the mind an inclination to these moods and further develop the “culture of the heart” (Thera, 1994). Thich Van Ly (1997) reminds those seeking spiritual refuge that “compassion is the key to our spiritual life and gives us the opportunity to develop our own Buddha nature... it is the key virtue of Buddhism.” Aung San Suu Kyi when talking about human development quoted the Tibetan Yogi, Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangrol:

“One with compassion is kind even when angry, one without compassion kills even as he smiles” (Tshogs-drug-rañ-grol, Ricard, Wilkinson, & Abrams, 1994).

*The abodes in a matrix with indications and contra-indications and opposites.*

Immeasurable	Loving Kindness	Compassion	Empathetic Joy	Equanimity
Proximate Cause	Perceiving the loveableness of sentient beings	Perceiving the helplessness of sentient beings	Perceiving the joys and virtues of others	Perceiving the responsibility for one’s deeds
False Facsimile	Self-centered attachment	Grief	Hedonic pleasure	Aloof indifference
Opposite	Malice	Cruelty	Envy	Attachment and aversion
Sign of Success	Animosity subsides	Cruelty subsides	Cynicism subsides	Attachment and aversion subside
Sign of Failure	Selfish affection arises	Sorrow arises	Frivolity arises	Cold indifference arises

(Wallace, B., 2007: 123).

### *3.2.5 Spirituality: A Comparative Look – West & Buddhist*

“Spirituality... is the union of wisdom and compassion” (Dalai Lama, 2005: 208). His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, said this in referring to the necessity of aligning human values to the science and technology that is shaping the future through the motive of understanding and creating a world leading us to peace and prosperity. But whose values and who will determine the values?

In trying to answer these questions, it becomes important to understand spiritual perspectives. For the sake of this research, it is particularly useful to look at the

differences in how spirituality is conceived from Western and Buddhist perspectives. It is particularly important when looking at issues related to globalization and education because it begins to answer the question of whose values and how they are being determined. The list below is a comparative view of traits associated with spirituality from a Western perspective and the Buddhist perspective.

Western	Buddhist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on mental faculties + outward orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on psychological + contemplative orientation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consciousness is a function of the brain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consciousness is distinguished from mental factors</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mind is a brain function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mind is primary and pervasive</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close relationship with law, commerce, and science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close relationship with education and psychology</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important to idea of progress + technological development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important to ideas related to peace and happiness</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective that seeks positive and least troublesome people and events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective that values friendship – manifested in people and events</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on outer behaviors + habit formation/conditioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior guided by inner compass + character formation/manners</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on changing others' lives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on changing oneself</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizes hope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liable to be fatalistic</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attuned to morality training + devotional prayers/songs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attuned to self-restraint + meditation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morality closely associated with body functions + body is impure yet sacred part/vessel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morality closely associated with personal welfare vs. communal good + body is reflective of the whole</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks salvation and focus is up and out to a God/higher power/force</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not point up or out to God, but inward to intricate dynamics</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral concern for right and wrong + adjudication of good/bad = guilt/innocence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral concern for skillful/unskillful acts + evaluation of merit = ignorance/knowing</li> </ul>

*Western & Buddhist comparative spiritual perspectives (continued from p. 121)*

Western	Buddhist
• Bad/immorality = punishment + punishment as “incentive” to be good	• Ignorance/unskillful = understanding + compassion as means to subtly teach
• Love and kindness (with conditions)	• Love and kindness (unconditionally)
• Fragmented (individuated) world view	• Intersubjectivity
• Identity + self-expression as means of social significance/familiarity	• No-self + realizing limitations and good habits as cultural familiarity
• Importance of certainty + rational control of reality	• Paradox + reasoning observer that becomes the observed
• Ends are important + achievement determines significance	• Importance of motivation + the means are more important than the end
• Rational + respect for scientific method	• Intuition + respect for indigenous knowledge/experience
• Rooted in apocalyptic thinking	• World reflects humanity’s dispositions
• Nation is sacred	• Nation is contrived
• Social justice as an act of redemption + betterment is quantified	• Social justice as an act of compassion + betterment of all humanity
• Ethnocentric superiority	• Ethnocentric inferiority
• Materialistic + observable proofs	• Matter and mind co-dependent
• Inspirational	• Radical aloneness
• Emphasis on changing others	• Emphasis on changing self
• Importance of norms and standards	• Importance of mindfulness
• Powerful symbols + the unconscious is center of art	• Symbols of reality + consciousness is center of art

### 3.3 Softening the Blows from the Global through Spirituality

This research has presented the idea of reform utilities – culture, Buddhism, and education – used in order to shape Thai society. The reason these utilities were effective was because Buddhism has traditionally been associated with education and culture. Thais often claim that if one is Thai, one is Buddhist. Thai culture has always revolved around Buddhism and how it has fit the needs of the community. The precedent for Buddhism as education is rooted historically. Many academicians give Confucius credit for shaping modes of Asian learning, but the fact is that Buddhism has also been closely associated with education and learning in Asia, perhaps even more so than Confucian schools. Venerable Master Chin Kung (1989) in a talk explaining his understanding of Buddhism as an education rather than a religion, said that when Buddhism spread to China in 67 AD, it was by invitation from the Chinese Emperor, precipitated by its reputation as an educational system. Confucian schools under the ‘Li-Bu’ ministry did not exist in every village, but a Buddhist school, under the ‘Bai-Ma-Si’ ministry, was everywhere to be found in China until as recently as two centuries ago. Since the time of Guatama, Buddhism has been a radical means of becoming educated, an enlightened transformation and movement that begins in ones relationship to all beings. This requires a holistic approach to learning from life – an approach that associates spirituality with living ones learning.

Thai Buddhism has encapsulated culture and education, and has not only had the state use it as the key reform utility to create a nation-state, but the alternative education social movement has also utilized Buddhism and transformed it into a



*spiritual utility* to confront global intrusions viewed as threats to traditional Buddhist culture. It is not dissimilar to the colonial context surrounding the reform initiated by King Mongkut in mid-nineteenth century after Western Christians debased Buddhism intellectually, morally, and spiritually. It is this historical pattern in two different contexts that makes this research related to Buddhism/spirituality and education relevant and significant.

### 3.4 Research Design and Methods

This research began in 2003 when I was in Thailand for a preliminary and exploratory research assessment. Just before returning to the USA, I visited a friend at the Thai Ministry of Education in which our conversation turned to the Ministry's progress with reform. In the course of the discussion, my attention turned to my interest in formal and non-formal education to ethnic tribes, refugees, and migrants. From what I could gather, there was little or no provision for educating these populations. Upon return to the USA, I recalled my own work with Burmese refugees and how I had looked in to establishing a homeschool education program. It made sense to do an Internet research on homeschool in Thailand. I found some resources including an American homeschool association in Thailand and the Thailand Baan Rian Association (now Baan Rian Thai Institute), but when I wrote them, e-mails either bounced back or remained unanswered. I did find one Thai education discussion list and when I looked in on the activity, there were two posts of a conversation led by a young Thai lady explaining her homeschool experience in Thailand. Little did I know then, but this was when my dissertation research began in earnest. The young Thai lady, Pichamon "May"

Yeophantong and her mother, Pannada Yeophantong, were my first interviews in 2004 when I returned to Thailand for my pre-dissertation research trip.

Previous to my pre-dissertation research trip in 2004, I did extensive research on homeschool in Thailand and discovered the close connection to Thai alternative education, in general, and a related emphasis on Buddhist spirituality. I had found both of these – and in relation to one another - in Sulak Sivaraksa’s Spiritual Education Movement and Rajani “Mae Aew” & Pibhop Dhongchai’s Moo Baan Dek (MBD), also known as The Children’s Village School. I began corresponding with both Mae Aew and May, getting additional resources and networks of people involved in alternative education. May contacted Baan Rian Thai for me and this led to correspondence with them. I also learned from May about how Mae Aew was a pivotal figure in the homeschool movement. May also enlightened me on the specific significance of the Education Act of 1999 on homeschooling and parents, and key political figures in the Ministry reform such as Rung Kaewdang. Her and her mother’s information were like torchlights aiding my journey of discovery in a darkened terrain.

By the time I made my 2004 pre-dissertation research trip, I had a large list of people to visit. As I progressed on this one-month trip, connections between people, ideas, and philosophies began to take shape. As an example of how connections began to rapidly multiply, while at Moo Baan Dek, I met Nuttarote Wangwinyoo who was giving a training workshop to local village farmers on sustainable agricultural practices with a Buddhist perspective. In talking with Nuttarote, I learned that he and his uncle, Wisit, had established alternative education organizations. Later on that trip, I found out

that Sulak Sivaraksa was one of the major influences of Mae Aew and that Wisit and Nuttarote also had deep connections to Sulak. Wisit was associated as a student activist mentored and employed by Sulak. Mae Aew was also a student activist associated with Sulak and she, in turn, became involved with social movements associated with displaced people affected by dam building, political violence, and natural disasters by setting up alternative village schools. Mae Aew was also at the center of homeschooling in that Moo Baan Dek was the means for homeschoolers to meet the governmental requirement of registering officially in a Thai public school. As I progressed from one participant to the next, I continued to make further conceptual connections between various people, their educational philosophies, political beliefs and activism, reasons for preferring alternative education, and their spiritual and cultural values.

Before I made arrangements for a third trip to gather data in Thailand, I made a firm decision to utilize a qualitative approach as my methodological tool – a decision that was made just prior to my 2004 pre-dissertation research trip to Thailand - because it was a method that fit the objective of examining what I was seeing as the ever-widening shared values of alternative educators and social activists and comparing these values with those who are proponents of implementing the educational reform that is advocated by many policy-makers world-wide. It was not surprising that in my yearlong data collection, the intricacy of the network of alternative educators became expansive and it became easy to find participants. In examining notions of spirituality, it becomes necessary to look at beliefs and values from many vistas in order to avoid a narrow generalization that does not explain broad divergences of thought and action. In the case

of Buddhism, it is fitting to create fuller contexts within contexts, as this is the process of subjective investigation that leads to a more holistic, intersubjective insight into the experience of the objective.

After another year of research in Thai decentralization and educational reform, historical social movements in Thailand, contemporary Thai politics, Thai village schools, education from the United Nation's perspective, and educational reform in other developing nations, I was prepared for one-year of research consisting of personal interviews, site visits, case studies, and review of historical, cultural, and educational sources. I developed a list of approximately 35 participants either previously contacted or recommended by my primary participants (those related to Sulak, Mae Aew, or May/Thai Homeschool Institute) that would be interviewed. I categorized the participants into different classifications of roles, e.g., alternative educators, educators in formal settings, administrators in formal settings, Ministry and international organizations (UN), homeschool parents, homeschool students, etc. I gave myself flexibility in knowing that my participant list would expand, so developed a series of possible interview questions covering a variety of areas related to my research, e.g., culture, spirituality, educational values, etc. (see appendix A).

It is also necessary to point out that, once I did conduct the interviews, the questions were intended to be adapted to each individual and I did not always ask the same questions in the same manner. Sometimes the interview would go in unexpected and, usually, pleasant directions and I would ask perhaps only a few of my prepared questions. After I explained my research and what I wanted to know from them, I often

allowed the participant to tell their story and guide how I formulated my questioning. I did maintain integrity to my inquiry and questions were fashioned in the same thematic areas of alternative education, reform, spirituality/Buddhism, globalization, and social movements, but the participants were allowed (and preferred to) tell their stories freely.

The yearlong data collection included over 80 official (recorded) interviews and perhaps an equal or even greater amount of informal, unofficial (unrecorded) interviews; and of the 80 official interviews, approximately 60 of them were personally transcribed and another 3-5 were done by a professional transcribing service. The data collection also included site visits to over 10 public schools (village and urban), multiple visits to 5 alternative schools, and 2 case studies of alternative schools with stays of 6+ weeks each. International agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF were visited two times each. After the transcriptions were finished, interviews were assessed for similar themes and patterns of responses. The approximately 15-20 interviews and case study notes that were selected for further analysis were those that provided the most information related to the themes of my inquiry and/or fit within and summarized the networked alternative education movement best. I decided to keep interviews mostly intact with a minimum of interpretation in order to preserve the participants voice. This was further accomplished by sending the written text (as they currently appear in this document) to the selected participants and asked if I had accurately detailed the contents of our conversation(s). Some participants sent back a few helpful corrections, but many did not reply and it was assumed that that meant they were fine with the content, didn't care, or had no time to read.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

#### 4.1 Education Reform Perspectives from Formal Education Sector: Voices from Inside

*[The Royal Thai] Government education policy is integrated with the overall policy on social development and is called, “Policy on Quality Human and Societal Development: Building a Lifelong Learning Society.” The 4-year Bureaucratic Administration Plan (2005-2008), also emphasizes improvement of the country’s human resources in terms of knowledge, morality and ethics, as well as readiness to respond to the measures required to ensure the nation’s development and competitiveness. - Office of the Educational Council, Education In Thailand 2005-2006.*

##### *4.1.1 Dr. Siriporn Boonyananta, Deputy Secretary-General, OEC*

Explaining how education was strategically placed in the 1997 Thai constitution, Dr. Siriporn said, “Even before drafting the National Education Act (NEA), this office did 42 pieces of research about various issues needing to be considered to be put in the Act” The Thai constitution previous to the one drafted in 1997 had very little content on education and Dr. Reung Kaewdang of the MOE/Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) [now Office of the Education Council (OEC)] initiated the idea of putting education at the center of the constitution. ONEC search other countries’ constitutions to examine how education was treated and then put together their ideas to the constitution-drafting group. Mae Aew and Professor Somkiat Wimol were able to get the drafters to put education into the human rights section. At about the same time, “the Thai Farmers Bank did a big report on education in the global era and what Thailand should be doing to get into a better position in the global marketplace via education.” So papers were written and presented to small drafting

groups consisting of 10-15 members, who lobbied other draft committees and then presented the ideas at public forums in order to get it ratified.

But, based on past experiences, “some attempts at education reform failed because the government didn’t follow what we put in the plan.” This sort of complexity of policy implementation has been an on-going process as exemplified by the use of the term “free education.” Politicians have been vexed by this terminology because it was contentious and did not match different people’s experience of free education. The term “free education” had to be changed to “with no charge” to indicate that there are no tuition fees for school. Interpretations were left up to the discretion of the school, and it has remained a problem because parents complain about the expenses schools charge for additional services, e.g., English classes, computers, materials, etc. This has led to the MOE re-examining new ideas regarding subsidizing schools.

“We are working according to the Education Act. We cannot say we are completely satisfied with progress so far, but I can say we are still on the way.” This is how Dr. Siriporn described the present (2006) state of decentralization and educational reform in Thailand. She further remarked that some of the things envisioned in the NEA had been implemented, but many were still incomplete. She was proud of the fact that central authority have been devolved to 175 Education Service Areas (ESA) but that the majority of the ESA offices were not functioning well and were “reluctant to do their part.” She suggested that the functioning of the ESA is a key component in the government’s educational initiatives “because decentralization is one of the major issues we would like to have with the Education Reform Act” but it was implied that

there is questions as to whether the ESA would remain a problem or not. In speaking on behalf of the Minister of Education, Dr. Siriporn said, “Dr. Wijit believes that schooling is the most important institution” and that the schools needed the advice and counseling of the ESA. This sort of devolution is seen as an empowerment of local people, even though the ESA officers are not necessarily representatives of local people.

In a slightly veiled rebuke to teachers, Dr. Siriporn remarked, “Educators must learn that they are not the gods who know everything – they should learn to listen, not only to parents, but the local wisdom and all the people in the marketplace.” The remark perhaps could be interpreted to indicate where the Ministry saw teacher resistance or the weak link between teacher and the reform ideal. “Teachers used to be regarded as the great parents who know everything. Now we’d like to shift the paradigm.” Dr. Siriporn was asked what reform issues were teachers protesting in the November 2005 demonstrations. She said that some of the teachers were upset about the new administrative scheme in which some of the MOE teachers would be transferred to the community level under the Ministry of Interior (MOI) believing that they will not get supplementary income received under the MOE. Some of the other teachers were angry because of the way primary and secondary levels were administered in conjunction. The majority of representative director heads at each ESA office are composed of mostly a majority of principals and teachers from the primary school level. The secondary level principals and teachers believe this is unequal and results in unequal distribution of resources and assistance. The teachers have asked the MOE to provide one more



secondary school representative for each of the 76 provinces and Dr. Siriporn said this was being negotiated.

Dr. Siriporn reported that there are 33 families and 44 homeschoolers officially registered with the MOE as of November 2006. There are an additional 200+ families who want to register with the ESA, but “the ESA doesn’t know how to register correctly and they are not sure parents are capable of teaching.” Moreover, the ESA offices, for the most part, are reluctant to provide resources or assistance to home-schoolers. “Teachers in schools and at the ESA have bad attitudes about homeschool.” The misconceptions and prejudices surrounding homeschooling at the ESA and with Dr. Siriporn are apparent and make their attitudes and beliefs about the role and importance of school as a social and cultural institution evident. “Homeschooling is, at best, complementary or supplementary knowledge or skills... My personal belief is that, except for exceptional cases, kids should go to school.” The ESA believes that homeschoolers don’t learn to be social or to be part of Thai society and Dr. Siriporn sees the support of 40-50 fellow students a supportive environment in which to learn and perhaps to create networks for future societal or employment purposes. “They have peers, learn how to work with bigger groups of children, and the atmosphere at the school is helpful to work towards their future after graduation...” A short time later, Dr. Siriporn, in a terse tone, summarized the seminar in which homeschoolers testified that “they learn more at home; they don’t have to get up early to go to school; students learned by themselves, some believe public school did not provide relevant education.”

Dr. Siriporn told me a similar tale as Maw Pawn of Panyotai Waldorf School when groups of alternative educators were invited to the MOE for a summit. Dr. Siriporn recounted how her and most of the staff at her office were full of anxiety as they were frantically searching web pages on alternative educators and protestors, that only served to increase their worry because the image they fabricated from these searches was of an unruly mob, pirates, and mad lunatics. The office was full of trepidation before the meeting, but once they met Mae Aew, Maw Pawn, Yuthachai Chalermchai, and others, their fears were completely dispelled and many friendships were forged. It opened dialogue and led to the current semi-progressive climate that still works on coming to a consensus on educational reform.

#### *4.1.2 Ajahn Chinnawat, Principal of a Rural Village School*

Ajahn (Professor/Respected Teacher) Chinnawat, a respected educator among his peers and a visiting scholar grantee to the USA, has many years experience as teacher and principal. He is currently a principal at a village school in Northeast Thailand in one of the poorest areas in Thailand. His evaluation of Thai education reform is not uncommon to many rural and village educators, where teachers and schools have few resources and perhaps having many more concerns than urban educators and seemingly holding a different set of outlooks on education and reform than the Ministry of Education. His demeanor and care comes across as sincere and he did not express any agenda except to do his job well, care for his teachers, and give an opportunity to his students. But it is a struggle for him and much of it is related to

financial restraints, interference by the local ESA, and the unresponsiveness of the MOE to his school's needs.

Motivating Thai teachers is a slow process and Chinnawat uses a comparative assessment of this process – “you can't order or demand... the Western way has rules and regulations to force change, but Thais need much more flexibility.” In assessing the quality of the teachers, Chinnawat says that they “do what they are paid to do – instruct – and not a bit more. [Their attitude is] I do a lot but get paid the same as someone who does so little, why should I make effort?” This is how Chinnawat described his teachers and, in general rural teachers. The majority of teachers in rural and village schools are just putting in time waiting for their transfer to a “better” urban school. So, “they have absolutely no heart to develop this school. Even me, if I am offered an opportunity, I will take it.”

Chinnawat, while commiserating with the situation of teachers, also has the burden of inspiring them and keeping the school viable in the eyes of the MOE. “Teachers sacrifice time away from family. Elementary teachers are to be pitied - they have no money and they must pay for things like ‘sports day’ or materials with their own money.” Teachers, seeing the poverty and need of most of the kids, buy them clothes and books. The lack of financial wherewithal is spread even further – the school is not adequately funded and any additional funds that are found are saved for the kids. The school hasn't funding to fill vital positions like janitors, maintenance workers, or gardeners, so the teachers and Chinnawat end up performing these duties on top of their

teaching responsibilities. “If I ask for funds from the ESA, they say other schools do fine, why not you?”

Chinnawat explained that kids whose parent’s have a little money send them to a school in the city – and there is bus service to do this. “But most of the parents who send kids to my school have no money and many of them go to work in Bangkok. They leave their kids with grandparents and send money back to support them.” This is indicative of the general national rural/urban split, but also accentuates “the inequality and injustice between rural/urban schools and it leads to lousy education.” Chinnawat said that “the problem is that education doesn’t really benefit the poor, rural child very much at all – they don’t need it for their work, ” in most cases, farming, which is very much looked down upon. It is only smart kids or those whose family has money that have a chance to finish high school. If they don’t get to high school they work on the farm, in the food industry or in a factory. But Chinnawat did not glorify completion of school because “higher educated people sometimes don’t get any more money than a fourth grade graduate... and some illiterate people are happier than educated people.” Based on his work in rural and village areas, Chinnawat says that going to school just enough to become literate is important, but the most important things imparted in school involve manners and cultural norms and how to act and how to speak in specific situations to people with respect and kindness.

The MOE has standardized 70% of the core curriculum to be used at all schools, while 30% is to be composed locally by teachers with contents from “local wisdom.” At rural schools, teachers must design and develop curriculum for eight subjects – the

same as urban teachers, but urban teachers have more resources and more opportunities to share with other teachers. “So, rural teachers copy curriculum from many resources – some not very reliable.” An aspect of local curriculum design necessitates community input from the community education committee. To Chinnawat, the concept is great, but it hasn’t been as successful as its potential indicates. The committee has a lot of power to raise money and coordinate local wisdom initiatives. The limitation has been that the committee looks at the responsibility “as a joke – they view themselves as an ATM for the school.” In general, the local community begs off any responsibility for school involvement by saying, “do whatever, you know better than me.” Chinnawat claims that bigger communities do well and the students are better served and they have some sort of future.

When I asked why the community needed to raise so much money, Chinnawat explained school funding and the role the ESA plays in this. The RTG pays 1700 baht (approximately \$50) for each of Chinnawat’s 47 students and this is supposed to pay all school-related expenses including payroll. *Pah-Bpah* is a traditional means to get the community to raise funds for the local *wat* (temple), but is now used to raise money for schools. In some cases, this is looked on as a cultural faux pas, or an apparent, slightly embarrassing begging event. The success of this *pah-bpah* is critical for a principal because raising money is now a primary indicator of good management in the decentralized education system. The ESA visits every school and examines the student test scores, the school environment, teaching methods, and the amount of money raised. It is necessary to realize that the ESA is composed of people who were in high-ranking

positions in the provincial education system and displaced by decentralization. An ESA official, therefore, has gained his position by way of a cultural practice of “saving face.” These officials, being a part of past cultural practices that demanded “tea money” as part of their patronage, now appropriate a portion of funds intended for the school, already operating on shoestrings. In Chinnawat’s view, the school should be getting its full funding from the MOE and the ESA should be abolished since he already has direct contact with MOE through the Internet. He also believes that the community should be evaluating the school since it is their children and their money.

In wrapping up our interview, I asked Chinnawat to give his account of the October-November 2005 teacher’s demonstrations at the MOE in Bangkok. The RTG wanted local Ministry of Interior (MOI) offices (*aw baw thaw* in Thai) to absorb and have authority over education in addition to their local services in the area. The teachers throughout rural areas objected to this transfer scheme due to the fact that educators would no longer be government officials and lose some of their financial benefits. The most important issue, however, was the stipulation that, with only a sixth grade education, a person could run for election to the *aw baw thaw* board. In fact, many of the educator’s students were getting elected and this became an issue of respect, dignity, and social status. The idea of older teachers being ruled by their students, which did occur frequently, was completely unacceptable. This was the straw that led to the demonstrations, eventually disbanded when then Premier Thaksin Shinawatra promised to work on a solution. The transfer is on-hold.

#### *4.1.3 Ministry of Education Officers – Interviews & Focus Group Session*

I have visited the MOE many times over the past five years, first to visit my friend and then after subsequent visits was invited to give a workshop on qualitative research. The workshop was met with great enthusiasm, as was the interest in my research, leading to more friendships and discussions about educational reform. In developing these relationships, I noticed themes related to change and expected change based on perspectives acquired from overseas PhD studies. During one discussion with a group of MOE officers, I suggested a focus group interview to discuss these themes and it was met very favorably. The following is from a group interview of four officers and several individual interviews.

When I asked my friend, Rin (not her real name), of her experiences and thoughts about her work and educational reform after returning from gaining her PhD in the USA, she gave her replies openly and honestly.

What I learned in the USA doesn't work here. We try to change. We set up a very beautiful goal with a beautiful objective, but in reality, it's not what we dream. I'm disappointed with this reform... Decentralization in Thailand is not real decentralization – it takes place in the document, but not in practice... Decentralization is a USA application in a Thai context that doesn't fit.

She explained that the intent was to devolve education to the local level so that the design of curriculum would meet the needs and conditions of communities, but there has been little success in this regard. The reasons for the lack of success are several: “First of all, the central office [MOE] is still in control of most decisions and local authority [ESA offices] have no experience. The school teachers and [ESA] officials

have no experience to design curriculum.” They are not used to leading a change process and would prefer to follow the ready-made curriculum and teaching techniques because, being inexperienced, they lack confidence, don’t understand their new roles, or the how these roles fit into a systematic process.

At the MOE level, central planners change their plans frequently, “they don’t have a long-range plan and they change plans every year.” The frequency of new appointments of a Minister of Education – seven over the past seven years (as of 2006) is also a major problem “because they don’t understand education – they are political appointments.” Out of those seven Ministers, only two have been educators or knew education issues. Observing this environment at the central office and in her field visits and training, Rin says that, in order for change to occur, “we must start at the central office. I don’t even think high officials really understand what direction we should go. They just do what they want with no [strategic] planning. We need to train the people here first.” The introduction of a new textbook by some unknown person who did not consult with the curriculum and instruction unit, introducing unverified, contrary concepts was just one example Rin gave me of the many uncoordinated activities at the MOE.

The group of four officials in telling their stories did not vary in critical assessment of educational reform in Thailand. Like Rin, the four officers are among the elite few in Thailand who had received their PhDs from overseas universities in Australia, USA, Europe, and Japan. Like the elite from a century before, the significance and importance of their cross-cultural experience altered the way they



viewed Thai society and their work. The point was made that, even though Thais are exposed to millions of tourists each year, there is a limited authentic interaction with foreigners. “Thais don’t think that there is much difference [between people] and that people are all the same. They get ideas from TV, but don’t really know multi-cultural perspectives.” They all told of their shock going to other societies and were equally shocked with their re-entry back to Thailand, even feeling great discomfort being back. They learned new ideas and perspectives and expected to apply all the new theoretical knowledge into their work in the MOE, but to their dismay found that no one was prepared to change because no one had the same cross-cultural adjustment and re-adjustment process. The group often spoke of their fellow Thais as if they had shed that identity and that the world had all shifted its principles in unison. In describing the return to MOE, one official said

We talked the same things as before, work the same as before; but even though we have reform, nothing was really different. In the content, nothing was substantially different. Why? - Because there are limited ideas, concepts, knowledge, and ways of working here. They [Thai people] didn’t catch up with the world and kept a very narrow view.

All the officers said they tried to introduce new ideas and attributes they thought were necessary for students to learn in order to navigate in the future. They told of being criticized for trying to make Thai people change into foreigners, while their Thai counterparts increasingly tried to change English curricula into Thai with Thai meanings. An example was when they introduced the term *critical*, as in critical thinking, their colleagues interpreted this term as something representing an “unhappy” interaction or a negative, aggressive trait embedded in Western education and was not

looked upon as desirable. Even though it was an emphasis in the National Education Act of 1999, it was an unknown concept, a difficult concept to translate into Thai culture, and remained misinterpreted and misused.

When we began talking about reform, I was shocked to hear from these MOE officials something that many of the alternative educators had said, “As long as the government is involved in reform, it is bound to fail.” Even though the officers saw change upon return to their positions, they also saw how things hadn’t changed despite everyone’s great hope and excitement about potential change. Change came in the form of decentralization and reform that required MOE offices to be collapsed and combined. But in combining these division offices, they became huge departments and made “the working process longer, slower, and more hierarchal – most people say it is worse than before reform.” They pointed out that the top officials could not accept the fact that it was not fitting properly anywhere – “failed” in the interviewee’s terminology. They thought that the designer of the reform had conceived an extreme decentralization that few in Thailand understood and one that the nation was just not prepared to implement.

We didn’t develop our current sense of modern self from our own history. We borrowed systems from abroad. We didn’t have the foundation about education reform and those of us taught abroad do not have the authority to do anything... At the MOE office we talk about quality in education, but we don’t know how to make it happen. When we make policy, we grab the best ideas out there [in the broader world], but don’t know how to implement them... There has been a lot of conflict created by reform – conflict of thought, what is right and wrong, the working culture, and the whole idea of education.

Just as Rin had said that decentralization and reform was made even more difficult by the endless parade of Ministers and the uncoordinated work, these officers told me their

own version of the Sisyphean tale, told with tones of great hurt, disappointment, and a tinge of anger.

All the good work at MOE is left scattered behind with every new Minister and then we must all begin working hard again. Policies change all the time – it's a waste of time, money, and energy – all the good work thrown out after every new ministry appointment. The Ministers rule according to personal goals without counsel or without review of our work.

One officer whose work brings her into close contact with the Education Service Areas (ESA) and school councils said she saw hope and potential in both if they are given more authority and training. She believes that if the local communities can empower themselves, they can control the local government and rid the community of corrupt officials. She believes the key is in making school councils stronger forces of involvement, but no one in MOE or in the schools have done much with the councils and they generally meet only once a year. The councils are composed of approximately 15 people: the school principals as secretaries of the council, two teachers, and the remainder are community members (alumni, community leaders, and parents) are alien concepts and their function and potential are unknown to the teachers. The MOE is giving fewer funds to schools and the schools are expected to utilize the community to become more involved in fund-raising and management of the educational process. But part of the problem in this regard is that most Thais believe education is a means to advance one's career, not for life-long learning. So, the schools belong to the community on paper only, and teachers and principals – particularly rural and village schools - have increasingly more expectations, more duties, more pressures, and fewer resources to accomplish all these extra demands.

When I asked about the teacher's protests of October-November 2005, the officers gave me a fuller picture with some historical contexts and some of the power dynamics at the local level. The MOE reform required transferring 30,000 schools to the *aw baw thaw*, the local government administered by the Ministry of Interior (MOI). The teachers resisted this move because they wanted to remain central government officers and keep their status, retirement benefits, and the potential to make additional income through various MOE opportunities. Most of these teachers are older and either went through the last set of reforms 40-50 years ago or had relatives, friends, or mentors who did. Those teachers tell of how dreadful those times were because the power of leaders was so great that they ordered teachers to do what they wanted, even if it wasn't right or moral, or lose their jobs. Many of the current *aw baw thaw* officials are "gangsters" and act like the old authorities that bullied the teachers in the past. It is not a secret that some people "must kill before getting positions of office" at the *aw baw thaw*. So, teachers have a deep fear and dread of being under the control of these people. The problem now is that this corrupt influence is passed on by other means – "buying" the *aw baw thaw* position, corrupt *aw baw thaw* officials acquiring educational upgrades and passing their "mafia" to their educated children who will eventually take over the office.

In closing, the officials expressed neither hope nor despair – merely perseverance and understanding of the steep climb ahead of them. "I work with educated people, but feel powerless. I am just one among many people in a gigantic Ministry, powerless..." When asked if reform was hopeless, they all remained silent,

perhaps too frightened at the prospect of losing all meaning of their education and of their efforts. Their perception of the complexity of change and reform reaffirm the observations of Michael Fullan, and as one officer said with nods of agreement from all:

Something is wrong with the policy – the reform was carried out without preparing people. The top officials didn't care about the readiness of people – they just said that this is the time and you must do it. Even the people want decentralization and make decisions at the school level, but the system is not well planned... I think the wrong standard is generally applied to reform. Originally, Thai reform was launched to improve the low quality of schools, but perhaps we here at MOE have used the wrong standards.

## 4.2 Alternative Education in Thailand

### 4.2.1 Franchise & Local Alternative Schools in Thailand

There is a growing number of alternative schools in Thailand – both local Thai schools and international “franchise” alternative schools. According to Rajani Dhongchai (Mae Aew), there are 240 official alternative schools in Thailand as of 2004. A partial list of some of the better-known Thai alternative schools includes:

- Moo Baan Dek
- Panyothai Waldorf School
- Piti Suksa Montessori School
- Sathya Sai School
- Summa Sikha (Santi-Asoke) Schools – nine schools in nine districts
- Roong Arun (Buddhist) School
- Baan Rak
- Armattayakul (Neo-Humanist) School
- Wat Siripong Dhamma Nimit (Waldorf and Buddhist)

- Meenprasat Wittaya (whole language)

Thai alternative educators have classified two different types of alternative schools in Thailand - *alternative* or *private*. The private alternative schools are generally labeled as “franchise” schools and are characterized by the appearance of international prestige with the designed intent to bring long-term, sustainable profit to the school owners and high social status and access to more opportunities to the alumni. Local alternative schools are characterized by community representation of activists – or, more aptly, concerned parents and citizens - who see education as a means to achieve higher goals pertaining to spiritual, cultural, or political well-being, leading to broader civic participation and proportional “fairness” to all within Thailand.

Franchise schools are sanctioned by the Ministry of Education (MOE) once the owner – generally, an international entity – pays the Royal Thai Government (RTG) a fee near, or in excess of, one million baht (about \$30-50,000 USD); has a Thai partner; has a Board of Directors that are highly-placed in Thai society; and can prove their curriculum is sanctioned from a developed nation’s formal school system. Most of the franchise schools are imported curriculums (many MBA and business programs) from Taiwan, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States. These franchise alternative schools, once sanctioned, are free of government assessment and can adapt their curriculum to suit their purposes. They become elite academies that serve to get students to pass exams and learn a foreign language, generally English. The trouble these franchises produce for local alternative schools is that they have created an impact at the MOE and undercut the efforts of local alternative educators by better

serving the interests of decentralization and privatization of the RTG. The MOE can thereby put local Thai alternative schools (including home schooling) tighter in their grip and hold them to higher and stricter standards.

The other trouble to local alternative schools brought on by these franchise alternatives is philosophical and how this philosophy is distorted by the reflection of the current national and cultural purposes of education. Local alternative educators have emphasized that it is not just about the presentation of curriculum – it is also about a way of looking at the world, of realizing ones own sense of purpose, of the how's and whys of teaching and learning, of making schools integral focal points of community building. In many local alternative schools I visited, parents have become “empowered” by the decentralization of education, but this amounts to asking alternative schools to focus more on merely the academic – the head - and not the holistic mind, body, soul link to which most alternative philosophies adhere. It is this challenge, the one in which decentralization has served the purpose of strengthening central government authority over issues related to culture, education/development, and spirituality that is most difficult for alternative educators and communities to accept.

#### *4.2.2 Sathya Sai School*

Sathya Sai School was established in 1991 on a semi-isolated large track of land about 8 kilometers west of Lamnarai, a very small town in the middle of central Thailand. The school and dormitories are at the base of a small mountain where a small *wat* rests – one of the few wats in Thailand that has a Buddha relic interred on its grounds - giving the wat and the grounds of the school an auspicious and spiritually

significant locale. A river, a runoff from three main rivers – Ping, Nan, and Chao Phraya - that conjoin in nearby Nakhon Sawan, cuts through the southern end of the school and winds around up the east side of the campus. This part of Central Thailand was an important part of the mysterious Dvaravati era, 600-1100 AD, populated by Mon, Burmese, and Khmer people, and was heavily influenced by Indian culture, particularly regarding cultural and the mystical, spiritual aspects of Buddhism. The name *Dvaravati*, is a Sanskrit word meaning “gateway to the port”, and is thought to refer to the ancient and legendary lost city of *Dwarawati*, also *Dvaraka*, (modern day Dwarka), home of Lord Krishna, in central-western India that was submerged six times. The era was short but very culturally influential in the region, particularly related to art and architecture and the confluence of Hinduism and two sects of Buddhism.

It is also worthy of note, that during the construction of Sathya Sai School, a rather large ancient village was discovered underneath the grounds after the workers frequently saw apparitions that pointed to the site. Village legends abound about paranormal powers surrounding the mountain at Sathya Sai and its twin peak one kilometer to the east. Over the years, many students, workers, staff, teachers, and visitors have claimed to see various spirits and experiencing mystical and paranormal events. During my site visits to the school, there were a few paranormal events and the school, for the first time, brought in local monks to do a traditional Buddhist ceremony to appease the spirits and bless the school.

Sathya Sai School is not a franchise school and uses the Thai national curriculum augmented with its own emphasis of human values-based education and



highlights five overarching values: truth, right action, peace, love, and nonviolence. The school has a spiritual/philosophical association with Sathya Sai Baba and his Educare schools. The Educare website, whose banner declares “Love all, serve all. Help ever, hurt never... There is only one religion – the religion of love” describes The Sathya Sai schools thus:

... A private international network of philanthropically funded schools providing free education. The Schools foster unity of the three major aspects of the human personality—thought, word, deed—and that turning the mind toward God, Goodness, or conscience results in good character. Education in human values as modeled by the Sathya Sai Schools is based on values as inherent human qualities to be drawn out of students, rather than information to be acquired. This is the concept of *educare* (Latin, to draw out). Human values are consistently integrated into traditional subject matter disciplines. This promotes use of academic knowledge by students for the welfare of all. Education in human values includes focus on the human spirit, that is, life in a deeper sense, which includes, but does not overemphasize, preparing for a living economically.

Sai Baba believes that the downfall of a society begins when it establishes profit enterprises from life’s essentials - food, housing, or school. Therefore, Sathya Sai School is technically free, although the money charged to the parents merely covers room and board for a full year. It should also be noted that the school fees do not cover all the school’s expenses and it is heavily dependent on donations and the small funding provided by MOE for each student in Thai-authorized schools. The school fees are affordable for most Thai families, but there is only limited financial assistance available for the poor, and the waiting list for enrolling is quite long. There are many middle and upper class parents from all corners of Thailand who send their kids to Sathya Sai School and they have various reasons for enrolling their children in the school. The

primary reasons are related to keeping their children away from bad influences in public schools and urban centers, and a desire to have their children learn Thai culture and have a Buddhist education. In addition, parents are given a short, 2-3 day course in parenting and educating from the human values approach.

As of 2006, there were more than 300 students living at the school. Their living accommodations have been in the process of change to family-style dormitories, but are not complete and are in a holding pattern due to a lack of funding. The younger girls are housed in a cluster of tidy four-story dormitories at the base of the mountain across from the meditation center and near the school and cafeteria. The boys are about 2-3 kilometers away from campus in a very over-crowded and barely functional dormitory, but very near the newly constructed assembly hall. The boys' bunks are lined next to each other with absolutely no personal space, with an estimated number of 50 to a room. There are a few dormitories for seniors and they are located near the river and are situated between the teacher dormitory at the west end and the meditation hall and girls' dormitories on the north. (see Appendix B).

The school has won awards from the RTG for being the best Buddhist school in Thailand, but there is no training in Buddhist dharma. There is, however, daily meditation practice and *bhajan*, devotional singing. The school has adapted the Thai national curriculum to the human-values approach, which is a child-centered means to instill "the five universal values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-Violence" (Jumsai, 2003: v). The school has been in the process of adopting Dr. Artong Jumsai's "Human Values Integrated Instructional Model" that has been inspired by and

adapted from Sai Baba's conception of human-value education. Dr. Jumsai in talking about his interview with Sai Baba summarized his view of education in this manner: "The end of education is character" and "must bring out the five human values of right conduct, peace, truth, love, and non-violence" (2003:5).

Dr. Artong Jumsai was the inspirational leader and one of the original developers of the Sathya Sai School alternative school based on the spiritual concepts of Sai Baba. Dr. Jumsai is a trained scientist, among the most gifted to have come out of Thailand. In addition to being a trained scientist, he has served as a Senator and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs within the Royal Thai Government. Dr. Jumsai worked for NASA during the Viking space project and is credited with the design of the automatic landing gear of the Viking craft. Dr. Jumsai tells the story of how the design of the landing gear had been problematic and a solution was not forthcoming from anyone. Dr. Jumsai said that he went into isolation and meditated and it was during this meditation that he intuited the correct design. He has since successfully used this technique in other situations, notably related to Sathya Sai.

Dr. Jumsai used these experiences to catapult his ideas about what he believed were necessary, though missing, components of modern education. He began to develop the idea of the "Intuitive Learning Concept" and earned another PhD in education based on his experiments with the integration of his intuitive model with Sai Baba's Human Value Education. In developing his model, Dr. Jumsai kept in mind what Sai Baba had told him, "Values cannot be taught, they have to be brought out of the learner." Dr. Jumsai wanted to avoid making the mistake of others who teach morality and ethics –

students are good at memorizing the conception, but are unable to integrate them into their lives. So his model emphasizes a child-centered learning approach in which a warm, safe environment is the incubator for a student's unfolding as a "good human being." The five human values were to be integrated in the classroom, in extra-curricular activities, and presented via the *Direct Teaching Method* (see Appendix C), an approach that uses five techniques: prayers, meditation, story telling, group singing, and group activities. The steps in the learning process according to this model are: 1) interaction with the environment (perceived through the 5 senses and stored in sub-conscious); 2) interpretation (conscious association of data in sub-conscious); 3) understanding (recognition of the sub-conscious by the conscious); 4) reinforcement (strengthening sub-conscious memory); 5) modification (comprehension and foresight); 6) modification through discrimination (moral will and inquiry); 7) intuition and conscience (access to super-conscious and *un-directed knowing*). For Dr. Jumsai, the key step is the intuitive because it is a form of knowing that has no temporal or spatial boundaries. The energy from this movement further refines the earlier steps in the learning process.

In visiting Sathya Sai, one cannot help but feel it is a special place. One is quickly engulfed in wholesome children's energy and it is obvious they are at the center of all activity. The first place of arrival and departure is usually the cafeteria because that is where the van from Bangkok drops off people. The cafeteria is a large open pavilion hall separated into three segments – the kitchen, the small staff and guest dining area, and the large children's section. The children's section has approximately 5

rows of tables set in groups of about 20 kids and about 3-4 sections in each row. At the far end of the pavilion in front of the children is a large raised dais of 3-4 tables where the principal and special guests sit. Before every meal, the principal or a student would lead the entire pavilion in a silent meditative moment; a prayer of thanks to teachers, parents, and nature; a chant to Sai Baba or other spiritual concept, i.e., love, peace; followed by another quiet minute or two until the principal was satisfied that the students had sufficiently slowed down and controlled their energies. Then students began to eat or line up to get their food. During the meal, a rotating group of teachers monitored for order and supervised children's clean up of tables and washing of the dishes.

In between the students and staff area is a half-wall approximately 3.5 feet high and this is where kitchen staff and student volunteers ladle meals onto metal plates from big pots of vegetarian food and rice. Most dishes contain local mushrooms, vegetables and frequent soy-based proteins and seasonal fruit. The school does grow its own rice in several large paddies that surround the school, tended by local villagers. Some of the mushrooms and vegetables are also grown at the school. Everyone may take as much food as they like and never during any of my frequent and long-term stays was there ever a shortage of food. What was also immediately striking was the acknowledged importance the kitchen help had in caring for the children. More than occasionally a student would come up to a kitchen staff and seek a comforting hug or advice on some issue or another. Everyone that arrived or departed were first known by the kitchen staff

and all events at some point involved the food pavilion as food plays a central role in Thai customs.

The innocent curiosity and friendliness of the students is immediately evident as they would come up to guests and in their sometimes limited English (and Thai if you spoke), would ask your name and where you come from. It was also not uncommon for the young children to walk with you and take your hand and talk. One young precocious girl, *Lek*, took a liking to me and would always run up to hug me or take my hand when I was walking. Boys would try to show me their goodness and their athletic prowess and they liked it when I played basketball and soccer with them and this established a quick rapport. The friendliness, warmth, and good-heartedness of the students was obvious and phenomenal.

Lest one thinks that the school would be a pedophile's haven, I have been told that there has never been an incidence of molestation and if ever this sort of thing were reported, the person would be immediately thrown out. As an American male educator, this shadow of pedophilia hangs over every move by a male teacher in public schools and the mere act of showing innocent affection such as allowing a child to hold your hand or allowing them to lean on you or hug you would likely result in dismissal or endless suspicion and scrutiny. My Iranian-Canadian friend at Sathya Sai also confronted this same conditioning and initial rigid response to the children's overt affection. It was a nice experience to be free of this shadow and interact with these children as one providing loving guidance and not interacting with them thinking I was going to be suspected of being a pervert. This allowed for a variety of interactions with

the students and it freed me to exercise my role as a loving and caring role model, and also allowed for a more judicious and gentler response to the student's infractions and childish errors.

The days for students starts very early – usually before 5am to attend meditation and drop off their laundry baskets at the laundry center next to the devotional center. Every student is required to attend the one-hour morning service, which consists of meditation, singing of spirituals, and story-telling. The boys were seated on the right side of the floor and were patrolled and disciplined for sleeping or being less attentive more than the girls, although the girls displayed the same behaviors. When I asked about it later, different teachers told that the boys needed more discipline than the girls because they were more adventurous and curious in ways that defied the norms. It made me wonder if this was a gender bias that worked against both boys and girls.

The session had an adult leader who would give students guidance during initial moments of meditation, suggesting peaceful, soothing thoughts, attributes, and intentions and then allowed students to meditate in silence. I believe the silent meditation was not allowed for too long for fear that the students would fall asleep, which certainly did occur to some. The meditation was followed with a variety of songs – mostly Hindu devotional songs, but also included Thai inspirational songs, and English spirituals. Depending on the mood of the musicians – a small band of mostly older students and Lorraine Barrows, a very skilled teacher, human values curriculum designer, and original school board member - were very upbeat and required clapping or interesting rhythmic vocals. The students knew all the words and everyone seemed to

enjoy this activity because there were none who were silent and sitting still. The service wraps up with the singing of the national anthem and salutations to the King and Queen of Thailand, preceded by story-telling recited in both Thai and English by a leader – Lorraine, the head Thai teacher, or if he was not traveling, Dr. Jumsai, an exceptional story-teller. As a summarized example, a story told in a lively manner by Dr. Jumsai went like this:

There was once a rich man in a village who suffered from a constant headache. He announced to the village that he would give a large reward to anyone who would cure his headache. Many tried and many failed, until one day a holy man came and told him that it was easy to cure him. He advised him to see the color green everywhere he looked. The next day the rich man had painters paint the whole town green, the tailors and cloth-makers to make nothing but green fabrics. He was rich and bought everyone new clothes and paint. The rich man saw green everywhere and his headache soon eased and subsided. A few months later, the holy man came back, but was confronted by the villagers because he wasn't wearing green. The holy man defied their notions of correctness and made his way with difficulty to the rich man. He said to the rich man "Why have you spent so much of your wealth trying to change everything and everyone around you? All you ever needed to do was put on a pair of green-tinted glasses!" There is no need to change others or everything around us, all we need to do is to change ourselves first and everything around us will appear different.

Teachers, the intended role models, are good people, but some seem to regard their position at Sathya Sai as a mere job and do not make themselves available after their classes. Part of their problems lie in the fact that Sathya Sai pays a little bit less than public schools. What makes it slightly more preferable is that their accommodation and food are provided for at Sathya Sai, and the disposition of the students and fellow staff make it a bit more appealing than the rough and uncouth public schools. In talking with the teachers, their disenchantment at Sathya Sai is the lack of educational



leadership from the principal, who, as revealed by several teachers, does not seem to understand the teachers or their educational process much at all. She is a professional administrator and mostly replaces Dr. Jumsai at district and regional meetings and the like.

To add to this feeling that they have no one to go to for counsel, they don't feel confident in teaching the human values method and most do not use it for this very reason. The values that they are supposed to incorporate into their lessons include: cooperation, dedication, forbearance, morality, responsibility, reverence, virtue, discipline, acceptance, devotion, and kindness; but many teachers haven't fully incorporated them into their own lives and only a few have had sufficient guidance. The teachers have asked for training, but there is a lack of time to conduct training, especially now that Sathya Sai has started up a Master's program in Human Values Education and there is only a narrow window to do a short in-service training and this is a time when most teachers want to go home to visit their family. Lorraine is helpful to other teachers as she has a wealth of experience and is great at making materials and designing human values curriculum, but is quite active in teaching and acting as de facto principal and counselor to students. The deeper problem, however, is more likely cultural because as one teacher told me "Dr. Jumsai tried to create a sort of international school and it is contrary to Thai culture." She went on to explain to me that parents in Thai society don't encourage their children to self-enquire and the other teachers don't ask students questions.

In my time in the classrooms, I found that most of the teachers were hardworking, but not inspired or inspiring. Not many knew techniques in getting students to participate and some told me that they tried many techniques but students didn't like those approaches. Teachers teach subjects academically, not how it is applicable in the real world as suggested by Dr. Jumsai's model. The more kind or strict teacher must teach lessons on an individual basis as if in a counseling session. To my surprise, I even took over some classes on a couple of occasions when teachers did not show up for class. For one period during my stay, there was a problem with teachers not showing up for class. Other visits didn't have this problem to the same degree, so it was probably an anomaly due to a mixture of holiday travel problems (always difficult in Thailand) and personal issues. Curiously, during my multiple visits and stays at the school, there were some teachers I never saw except when I visited the classrooms. There were only a few who attended the bhajans, the meditation services, or any of the extra-curricular activities with regularity. The one exception was at *Loy Krathong*, the annual festival of floating lights held on the 12<sup>th</sup> full moon that rivals the *eid khabir* celebrations in the Muslim world for artistic expression. Loy Krathong is a well-loved festival of almost all Thai people and there are a variety of cultural events, parades, games, dancing, and the decoration of krathongs, rafts traditionally made of banana tree rounds and decorated with flowers and elaborate folded ornamentations made of banana leaves.

Teachers confided in me that there were many girl-boy problems, which didn't surprise me in the least. Actually, I expected much more, but it is a difficult thing to

deal with in a manner compatible with school philosophy. I was also surprised that there are no sex education classes – not just about sexual conduct - but actually knowing about your body and ones responsibility to be healthy. The younger teachers think it is not right to keep students in the dark and to forbid them entirely from expressing tenderness between each other. The students, however, do not know how to express themselves tenderly with soft kisses and hand holding, but there is a growing problem with clutching in run-away desire. There were a couple instances of a boy luring a girl into a locked classroom at night and then hiding in the bathroom to evade discovery. Punishment was avoided, but the problem was brushed under the carpet and this sort of incidence will likely occur again.

The teachers find that students' "bad behavior" spikes after they return from home at the school breaks. The teachers I spoke with say that the students see a lot of movies and TV, go off their vegetarian diet, eat large amounts of refined sugar and junk food, and get spoiled (or abused) by their parents or relatives. The teachers have a very difficult time dealing with behavioral problems during the first 2-3 weeks after every semester break. But aside from this brief period of misbehavior, just about everyone I talked to at the school admitted that the students didn't do well academically. I was always reminded, however, of how the school emphasizes the unfoldment of the student's goodness. Lorraine told me "the world is full of clever people, but not necessarily good people, making many people suffer." She did note that "when students are taught how to be good, they concentrate better and they do better academically; but many schools are realizing now that it's just not academics that are important." Lorraine

has been at Sathya Sai since its inception and says that of the three batches that have gone from start to finish at Sathya Sai, every alumnus had gone on to university or was a leader in their community after graduation.

As for leadership, the school seems to rely on the four or five international teachers to model the values and demonstrate good instructional skills. There appears to be a schism between the Thai teachers and the international teachers. This is probably due to a basic mistrust and shyness Thais have for international people and the semi-closed society many Thais often prefer. Teaching is an occupation that is traditionally performed via “chalk and talk” and the “sage on the stage” approaches. The nuances and strategies to motivate expression are very alien to Thai society and do not coincide with the norms in the everyday world. So, the influence of international teachers on Thai teachers may not be substantial; however, the students seem to appreciate them perhaps for different academic and emotional reasons than most of the Thai teachers. This is not to say they learn more from them, but they may find them easier at times to approach and be around. Thai teachers can be severe and appear un-loving, but are quite caring in a different cultural manner. The Thai teachers want the students to fit well into Thai society and are protective of the students’ experience in an environment that seems alien. What is not alien are some of the concepts that are found all over the campus – on bulletin boards, in tales by Dr. Jumsai or Lorraine, or in the songs they sing. One such example heard widely is:

If there is righteousness in the heart,  
There will be beauty in the character.  
If there is beauty in the character,  
There will be harmony in the home.

When there is harmony in the home,  
There will be order in the nation.  
When there is order in the nation,  
There will be peace in the world.

#### *4.2.3 Santi Asoke School*

The *Santi Asoke* (Santi – Sanskrit, “peace” and Asoke - Sanskrit, *ashoka*, being free from all suffering) reform movement was established in 2519 B.E. (1976 A.D.) by Phra Bhodhirak (variation - Phothirak) who denounced the Thai Buddhist Sangha for its failure to serve its social obligations and its moral turpitude (Essen, 2003). He was subsequently arrested in 1989 for charges related to arrogance and heresy and then expelled from the Sangha and forced to disrobe. He never publicly disrobed and instead, took off the traditional orange robe and donned brown robes. The movement was already set in motion in 1976 with the gift from a woman who donated a house with approximately 9 acres in the Bangkok metropolitan area. This is the current site of the main ashram (school/temple/community) housing 300 nuns, monks, lay people, and students although it has now spread to at least 9 provincial cooperative communities around Thailand. The cooperative community model is supported by the emphasis on *buhn niyom*, preference for making merit as opposed to *tuhn niyom*, preference for making capital. The idea of *buhn niyom* is rooted in both concepts of self-reliance and self-sacrifice for the benefit of the wider inter-related human communities and societies. This is in direct opposition to capitalism; sometimes “noble profit” equates to a very small or even negative material profit, yet Santi Asoke has proven to be successful as it

continues to thrive and grow. An Asoke slogan than might epitomize their lifestyle is “consume little, work hard, and give the rest to society” (Essen, 2003).

The Asoke community marks civility by its spiritual sophistication and not by material wealth, knowledge, or power – wanting more than what is enough in any of these areas is futile, irrelevant, and are the seeds of human destruction to the Asokes (Sangsehanat, 2004). As in most views of Buddhist education, the individual must develop both the material skills (founded on the four material needs) and the spiritual skills as outlined in Buddha’s Eightfold Path. Bhodhirak’s idea of development for the individual emphasizes nine qualities: live simply; adapt easily to all conditions; be satisfied with little; be content with bare necessities; rid oneself of defilements; strictly follow Buddhist precepts; always act composed; refrain from all acquisitions; remain diligent (Asoketrakul, 2003). The communities are very strict and everyone is required to refrain from imbibing alcohol and tobacco, eat only one vegetarian meal a day, work, attend dharma classes, community meetings, and keep a written journal. Phra Bhodhirak was greatly influenced by Buddhadasa and the strict character of the movement could be summed by Buddhadasa’s phrase “Dhamma sweeps the heart while the broom sweeps the ground” (Essen, 2003).

I met with the Principal of education – a Buddhist nun; the head monk of Buddhist education, Samana FahThai; and the lay head of the non-formal education, “Dhaboon,” on a monsoon day in June 2006 at Santi-Asoke, Bangkok. Our half-day conversation began with a critique of Thai public education, “Public education is only theory and no practice... and teaches students to take from others, not to give, and it

teaches students to become addicted to material goods. It has been this way for a long time and now Thai students think this is the goal of education and what will make them happy.” To these three educators, this emphasis on material goods has created many problems for Thai society manifesting in the form of competition in every aspect of daily life. The Asoke alternative education focus is to develop morality, hands-on learning, and material knowledge embedded in moral foundations and hands-on application. The Asoke educational curriculum is unique in that it is not theoretical and requires application in everyday living. Its uniqueness is that it is not a process of endless study and intellectual endeavors in order to pass exams and compete for limited high status positions. The Ministry of Education has approved the Asoke curriculum and is closely watching the new Asoke curriculum from Ubon Ratchitani province as a possible alternative curriculum for rural public schools instead of the current Western curriculum. However, the problem in test runs in public schools is that the teachers cannot reproduce the success of Asoke due to lack of past experience and current training, incongruent/unsupportive environment, and lack of motivation among other problems.

One feature that the Asoke group proudly talks of is the essential element of work in the life of students. Every Asoke school/community/cooperative operates vegetarian restaurants, organic food stores, retail and wholesale stores, print shops, and other various businesses that operate on the principle of *buhn niyom*. It is also pointed out to me that the majority of produce used in the Asoke restaurants and food stores is organically grown by the students and community members and, in some cases, the

restaurants are run by the students themselves. The curriculum includes training in organic farming, making organic fertilizer, sustainable living, and *garbology*, the study of recycling. To enhance this educative process, the curriculum also includes video and multi-media production. Dhaboon said that students are usually at Asoke for 6 years, so they acquire a number of valuable life-living skills during that time.

Asoke students, like their counterparts at the public schools are required to take the National Test (NT). The tests are generally comprised of questions that the public school students spend years memorizing – none of the questions relating to application and practice. Dhaboon joked that it was unfortunate that the NT didn't have a "hands-on test" because the Asoke students fail at the same rate as the public school students (50%). The bright part of this for Asoke students is that they didn't have to spend endless year-hours in a stressful climate and they have valuable hands-on skills to compensate for the "lack" of academic acumen. Statistics have proven, however, that 100% of the Asoke students who have taken the university entrance exams have passed – and this is phenomenal when one considers that the national average is only 1 or 2%. Asoke alumni are highly sought after and they usually are offered top positions. They characteristically stand out – their manners, their demeanor, the way they dress – all very well-mannered and modest.

The Bangkok Asoke School is split evenly between boys and girls – 42 of each. The teaching is mostly modeling method – "whatever you say and teach, you must also have done. You always start with yourself first – in learning and in teaching." There are four types of classrooms: 1) normal (chalk and talk); 2) two-a-day (A.M. and P.M.) in



sermon hall with monks on a stage and students and lay on floor; 3) on-the-job and out-in-the-world; 4) Asoke activities and celebrations where subtleties are learned. “Confessions” on rule breaking are held every 15 days and it is referred to by a half-English title, “check-see-oo” in which everyone examines the moral conduct based on the five precepts of Buddha. If you have done wrong, you must confess to the community and this serves as moral evaluation. “If you see a child’s weakness, you must correct it.” If students break the rules, correction is done to move the students in another direction. But there are four levels of punishment: 1) talk/discussion with a warning and a condition; 2) student must do good to atone; 3) hit the student (doesn’t happen often). Before a student is hit the teacher committee must contemplate this action and they’ll decide who hits the student with a stick on the butt. Teachers are not allowed to hit without this process and students must explain why they are going through this and then *wai* (traditional Thai bow of respect) the teacher. The teacher must not ever do this in anger and also must explain why they are hitting the student. The fourth level of punishment is expulsion.

Kids are not allowed to wear Western clothes, shoes, or jewelry. They wear the traditional Thai cotton denim cloth (*maw hawm*), walk barefoot or with sandals, talk politely and treat others with respect. There are no Coca-Cola-type drinks or other global goods and fashions, “we teach the students examples of Thai culture and the Buddha lifestyle taken from the Buddhist texts... to live a simple life without unnecessary material things.” Dhaboon characterized the representational behavior as “teaching students to give good things to others, just like giving food and respect.” The

school teaches the disadvantages and bad habits that are inherent in a capitalist, consumer society and the great damage it does to the environment. “We teach how to economize life, not to destroy the environment.”

Both parents and students must agree to enroll and parents must also be involved if they send their kids to Asoke. The parents must attend a Buddhist morality course and the kids must become vegetarian. The three groups of kids who attend Asoke are kids of Asoke member parents, kids with parents concerned about the bad social atmospheres in public schools, and kids from poor families. There is no tuition or fees – it is free – and all teachers and principals receive no salary. The Royal Thai Government supports all schools in Thailand but only give enough to cover 5% of the expenses. “That’s why we need to teach the kids to survive and work” Dhaboon joked, truthfully, however, this is no joke.

After touring the facilities, the warehouses, the printing shops, the food store, the restaurant, talking to the charming students and near the end of our day, Dhaboon told me that, in his experience, “if you can teach kids up to a certain point, they will never change their mind for bad – they will always be above bad habits.”

#### 4.3 The Voices of Thai Alternative Educators

In order to nurture these positive trends inherent in the nature of mankind, ‘Alternative Education’ addresses the whole being – head, heart, and hands – while respecting the various stages of development of the individual person, child, or adult, and the social context of the educational challenge... Inner peace and independent happiness can only be invoked when education is attributed an independent position in relation to the state, business, and NGO sectors. ‘Alternative Education’ from an independent position will develop an equal positive attitude toward the reality and transformational potentials in these three distinctive sectors of society. When the independent

nature of education – primarily serving the developing child and its aspirations to be happy, and the world to be adjusted to that aim – will be fully recognized and given adequate shape in the social context, ‘Alternative Education’ will evolve into genuine ‘Peace Education’ (Payutto, P. p. 408: 1999).

#### *4.3.1 Rajani Dhongchai “Mae Aew”*

Moo Baan Dek (MBD) was the first official Thai alternative school, founded by Rajani (Mae Aew, pronounced *meh ae-ow*) and Pibhop Dhongchai in 1979. Rajani and Pibhop were disenchanted schoolteachers in the Thai formal education system when they decided to create their own school away from the urban centers that would emphasize “the four basic necessities of life, individual rights, innate freedom, love, and mutual understanding” (R. & P. Dhongchai, 1997: 59). They were influenced by several educators from the East and West, namely John Holt, A.S. Neill, Paulo Friere, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Julius Nyerere, and E.F. Schumacher., and by Buddhist educators such as Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu Payutto, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Thich Nhat Hahn. It is also significant that Phibop was a student-teacher under Raew Kaewdang, author of the 1999 Education Act, and worked for Sulak Sivaraksa, who was also an inspiration to create MBD. The objective of MBD was to adjoin the ideas of A.S. Neill’s Summerhill School with Buddhist notions of education. MBD gained government approval by incorporating the Thai government curriculum (half time), emphasizing MBD as a “child development center,” and assembling a powerful board of directors with the placement of luminaries such as Dr. Sem Pringpuangkeow, Dr. Prawase Wasi, and respected locals such as the head of the police department, and village leaders.

I had been to MBD a few times over the last four years and the last two interviews I had with Mae Aew in 2006 were bookend studies – one was an account starting from the historic roots of the school that closed with her current projects; the second interview three months later, began with a focus on her new projects and returned to talk of MBD. Mae Aew, in talking of the Education Act of 1999, said that a small group of alternative educators got together and attended the public hearings relating to the drafting of the educational component of the 1999 Thai Constitution. The public hearings were the idea of Rang Kaewdang, a political party representative and eventual Deputy Minister of Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), and also the one-time teacher who supervised Pibhop. The alternative group eventually drafted a paper outlining their educational concerns and what they wanted to see in the new constitution and sent it on to Kaewdang. The alternative network became more influential as their recommendations were passed to the political party sub-committee, then on to a 44-member education committee where their recommendations were used to fashion the Education Act of 1999.

After the Act was finalized, the alternative education group pushed forward with a number of measures to change outdated or restrictive home school and alternative school rules. A “Life-Long Education” bill was drafted and has stalled in the senate for a number of years due to political uncertainty, upheaval, a military coup in 2006, and a newer constitution ratified in 2007. Pibhop believes that reform will always fail if the government is involved because reform requires freedom of methodology to truly discover reform principles. The need for reform is now no less critical, particularly

when only about 15 out of a million get high levels of quality education. According to Mae Aew, public education offers little quality to the majority of students because teachers give absolute answers and students have no discovery process; students are taught only way and think only that way; the educational environment is all about competition; and education feeds into the inferior/superior power structure in which students learn fear and develop bad relationships. Many students falter under the stress of the ponderous number of required subjects – eight areas of knowledge and twelve subjects – a huge demand that is compounded by the fact that none of the subjects overlap, encouraging a fragmented view of knowledge. Most students study endlessly for exams then forget what they learned because their knowledge is neither integrated into the curriculum nor into their lives.

In addition to the inherent weakness of the academic and social aspects, Mae Aew said that the government refuses to give up its control of this dysfunctional system as decentralization has just spread its authority to local Education Service Areas (ESA), comprised mostly of retired officials and people with vested interests. Private companies, mostly composed of old, conservative educators who have no understanding of alternative education or modern education, now evaluate the schools. Dr. Prawase Wasi, a close friend of Mae Aew and Phibop and an influential Thai public figure, says that the government forgot to reform educational methodology and felt satisfied in only reforming and decentralizing education administration and the curriculum. The learning process is still not a choice – it reflects the authoritative and inequitable denial of rights, particularly to the poor or those who do not fit into the competitive mainstream.

Mae Aew told me that MBD was conceived because Pibhop had been opposed to authoritarian systems and believed right education has the potential to overturn bureaucratic systems by creating environments that give freedom to children and assist them in becoming political and well-developed people. But during the first three years at Moo Baan Dek, the children were not taught any self-discipline skills and local villages looked at the youth with wary eyes. Since this time, villages have come to appreciate the school and the kids and businesses in Kanchanaburi (the closest “big” city) hire MBD graduates because they are more responsible than local youth.

MBD grads are usually orphans, refugees, or poor village kids, so their manner of speaking is more direct and less polite, but more honest and fair-minded. This “clear-speaking” and fair-mindedness has its roots in the political and social awareness developed through the implementation of a student court. This “Children’s Court” in which the students – without the interference of adults - would organize weekly court meetings to work out transgressions and concerns, was always an impressive experience for me because of how well-conducted these sessions were, especially considering many of these children might be considered “unruly village kids” by city people. Three to four arbitrators representing various age groups were selected and any child was free to bring up an articulated case against another student. The offender had an opportunity to give her/his version of the incident and then the student body could either give corroborating evidence to either side of the dispute. These were not designed to be passive, quiet events – and they weren’t. They were lively and all students were attentive and engaged, with those speaking not overstating a situation nor speaking out

of place or interrupting (arbitrator's are keen to keep order in this regard). The arbitrators usually recommended a resolution that usually included a denial of snacks for a specified number of days (a harsh penalty, to be sure!). In the cases I saw, the offender was asked to give an apology to the offended, and this was always given willingly and sincerely. The situation was completely resolved with no lingering resentments or psychological trauma after the ordeal and the kids resumed their boisterous and playful child-life.

A typical day for the students begins at 6 am when they rise and clean their house; at 6:30 am, they go to work on the farm to release energy; at 7:30 am, they return to take a shower and go to the canteen to eat breakfast; after their meal and the dishes and canteen are cleaned, the students go to the meeting pavilion where they sit in meditation after singing the national anthem and singing other songs of their choice; and finally, the kids take turns massaging a partner's shoulders so they have the opportunity to touch one another in a meaningful, but innocently, kind, and caring manner before going off to classes.

Mae Aew believes that the Thai curriculum is very weak and not good for life skills but good for developing businessmen and the study to become good industrialists. Mae Aew said that if a school doesn't teach life skills, then morality is missing – students who pass thru this sort of immoral system are good at making money but not good at being friends to others. The Thai curriculum is choppy with no connecting pieces – student goes from history to economics, but all have different content with no overlap. Mae Aew, along with several educators have said that Thai public schooling is

too much work for kids with homework in many, unrelated subjects so kids have many tasks at night. The MBD curriculum has the Thai national essentials in it, but it is augmented and unique: for grades 1-3 (mindfulness theme) focuses on meditation and art; for grade 4 (food theme) focuses on farm work, growing/raising food, cooking, and a healthy diet; grade 5 (home building) concentrates on home-building skills, learning calculations and making bricks; grade 6 concentrates on learning about herbs and food production. MBD recruits teachers from Thai universities and they generally come for one week of student-teaching with only a few teachers staying long term. Many parents want their student-teacher kids to come back to BKK to help with family business or be a bureaucrat or have a life of certainty. The students at MBD don't seem to have any homework, unless one considers interacting and playing in that category.

Mae Aew's focus over the past couple of years has turned to the Morken people, an indigenous Thai group that is commonly referred to as the *Sea Gypsies* of the Andaman Sea. The Morken were probably hit the hardest of any peoples in Thailand, yet have received the least attention and assistance after the tsunami of 2005. The Morken, who rely on a long tradition of fishing, have been unable to fish in their traditional waters because of the decimated fish supply due to the destruction of the coral reefs by the tsunami. To make the critical situation worse is the fact that the RTG has never recognized the Morken as Thai citizens and have denied any medical, social welfare, or educational opportunities to them. Since the tsunami, the Morken have dropped into abject poverty and their diet consists mostly of rice and sometimes is supplemented by seashells found on the beach. In 2006, thirty children died of health-



related causes, i.e., cholera, diarrhea, yet when they have applied for health care, the Provincial Public Health said they had no money for “outsiders.”

The men have resorted to working with international fish companies from Taiwan, the Philippines, and Burma to do “fish bombing” or placing explosives in the water to kill a large number of fish at one time. Unfortunately, this is a quite dangerous occupation and many Morken are now not only in abject poverty, but are handicapped as well. Traditionally, the Morken have always had the misery of being mistaken for Burmese and are often captured and sent to Burmese jails for between seven and ten years or never to be seen again. Only in the recent past has the *aw-baw-thaw*, the local village authorities helped by providing non-formal education in boat repair.

Mae Aew mentioned that there were many alternative and home school education arising in the South of Thailand, including many alternative farm communities, but very little in the southwest near the Andaman Sea, particularly with the Morken. Consequently, Mae Aew has been developing three projects with the Morken, starting first with a health program as the health conditions are “pitiful.” She has also started up an alternative school because many Morken drop out at grade 2 or 3, functionally illiterate, and go out to sea to work. Her aim is to get them reading and writing in order to develop some business skills to keep them in traditional fishing. She has tried to integrate Morken indigenous knowledge, i.e., knowledge of weather and sea patterns, and navigation, into the curriculum. She also has put a teacher-training component in the curriculum so they can teach each other and preserve traditions. The other project is to create an organic farming community so the Morken can help renew

the environment, grow local trees, develop garden community to grow organic vegetables and fruit to eat and to sell as a business. Another cluster-project she is trying to pitch to *aw-baw-thaw* or some NGO is to help create a Morken museum with sea crafts and a handicraft center in addition to the development of eco and cultural tours in effort to preserve Morken traditions.

Just before leaving Moo Baan Dek the last time I saw Mae Aew, I said, “Mae Aew, you look tired. You are trying to do so much - aren’t you tired of helping everyone who has been left out by society?” She replied wearily and with more than a tinge of sadness, “Yes, I think it’s almost time for the next generation to take over.” But the sadness was not because she is preparing to eventually give up her life of service, it is the fact that there is no “next generation” of activists to take up the duty of service to society – they are all competing to be individuals in the global world.

#### *4.3.2 Maw Pawn and Janpen Panosot*

Maw Pawn and Janpen Panosot are the founders and directors of the Panyotai Waldorf School in Bangkok. Although they were not originally trained to be educators, they became pioneer homeschool parents and became certified in Waldorf education mid-career in the early 1990’s. They opened the Panyotai Waldorf School in 1996 with a handful of students, including three of their own children, in a small rented house in a small suburban village on the outskirts of Bangkok. They have steadily grown and have a current enrolment of over 200, adding one class level a year with the first high school graduation scheduled for 2010, and have just opened their new school building last 2007. The building, designed by the parent of a Panyotai student and partially built by

all parents, reflects much of the school's philosophy – traditional Thai knowledge applied to a modern design built with community involvement and support. After many years of operating beneath the official building requirements for a school, Panyotai has now been officially certified by the MOE. The school's website describes the school's philosophy and rationale:

Panyotai Waldorf School educates children according to the pedagogical principles of Rudolf Steiner, adapting them to the cultural tradition, social context, and the needs of youth in contemporary Buddhist Thailand. It started out of concern about the devastating effects Thailand's rapid industrialization have upon the health and development of its young. The forces of materialism have pushed poor children into exploitative labor and prostitution; economically disadvantaged children are pressed ever earlier and harder towards material achievement and fierce competition... the wish to enable children to enjoy healthy childhood and to grow into whole human beings has led to the founding of Panyotai in the belief that good education can heal and support a healthy society.

Maw Pawn and Janpen have a long history with social action, having come out of the 1970's era student activism. They both became involved in the 1999 re-writing of the Thai Constitution (since abolished in late 2006), which emphasized the importance of education as a key feature of Thai society. About 6 months before the Constitution's abolishment, Maw Pawn told me, "the Education Act of 1999 [author's note: Act's status is uncertain after the new constitution of 2007] " is the best thing we've ever had – it's beautiful, but I doubt it will ever be put into practice." The Act states that the aim of education is to make every student fully human, guarantees education for all Thais, and specifies that parents are to have the duty of being involved in the education of their children. Maw Pawn added that the author of the Act, Reung Kaewdang, "is a product

of Western education and ideas, so he tried to implement many modern education development products that, in the long run, will fail if we don't do it properly.”

Maw Pawn, in explaining his involvement with the Act, said that he read the 1997 draft Constitution, which stated there needed to be a new education bill, and saw the draft as a sign of danger. The RTG had public hearings and Maw Pawn contacted other alternative educators, i.e., Yuthachai Chalermchai, Mae Aew and her husband Phibop, to form a network and attend the hearings. They all joined the committee to give recommendations to be incorporated into the final draft. Over the next year after the hearings, Maw Pawn was involved in getting the bill ratified, but stepped aside because the process became obtuse – processing every piece of the regulation in front of three committees without results. He decided to “develop an example of alternative education and show how good it can be.” Others in the network stayed on and the Act was passed, but Maw Pawn views it with bittersweetness, “even though we’ve had the law for seven years [in 2006], it is still not in practice.” Maw Pawn saw the reform in the Act as a bureaucratic one, but not a change in the means to learning itself. “The government cannot enact the reform because they have absolutely no idea about how to do the education part... There is new information in the textbooks, but there are not new ideas in teaching.”

Maw Pawn, in being true to the teachings of the Buddha, believes a large part of learning is gained from experience and having the freedom to learn. “Schools should learn from their own mistakes and out of that learning, new things arise. But the education system has to enable them to practice their ideas and the schools must learn

that there is a difference between the ideal world and the real world.” In Maw Pawn’s idea (and example) this learning process - free of fenced notions, no ideals to live up to (or down to), restrictive old fears, standards used to compare, or punishments for failure - is critical, not only because schools need to know success on their own terms, but failure to allow this learning will ensure that “the whole system will not step forward.” A problem facing people who seek to educate, however, is that the MOE believes “they are the sole authority on education and they are the only ones who know about education.”

Maw Pawn told me that during the drafting phase of the Act, the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC, now OEC) were afraid of the alternative education group and feared they were “destructive radicals” as historically portrayed in their Internet research. Once the ONEC people met the alternative education people and heard their stories, they understood and became friends. Yuthachai Chalermchai became close to Kaewdang and formed the home school association. Mae Aew and Phibop formed the regional Alternative Education Network; and a new legislation, “Life-Long Education Bill,” was drafted and set in motion [status still unresolved]. It was this process of making friends that smoothed the eventual passing of the Education Act. What Maw Pawn and Janpen have told the RTG is by word and deed – “let people learn how to educate... don’t allow the state be an obstacle to this process. Those who can educate well will only get better; those who can’t do well now, will be able to soon enough.”

#### *4.3.3 Wisit Wangwinyoo*

Wisit deserves mention here in the alternative school section because of his involvement as one of the initial founders and board members of the Piti Suksa Montessori School, and his multiple small-scale alternative education organizations. The organization in which he was most active during 2006 was the Kwan Muang community, or “The Institute” as it was referred to. I met with Wisit for individual conversations on two occasions and attended The Institute community’s meetings on several days during my semi-regular visits to Chiang Rai. I was fortunate to meet with the entire community on my first visit and they warmly offered their views, outlined their intentions and activities, and patiently answered my questions.

The Institute community explained to me that they saw a very real collapse of the social benefits of public education in the small town of Chiang Rai and throughout Thailand. They mentioned that the biggest problems with teen youth had become drinking, drugs, sexual impropriety, and violence, particularly among the vocational education kids. The reasons for this was due to the fact that the majority of vocational kids come from poor families; they were poor academically with schools conditioning them to feel inferior; they had no career futures despite receiving training; and vocational teachers – gang members themselves, encourage gang activity and fighting against rivals. Public schools in tiny Chiang Rai were also hotbeds of violence and establishing pecking orders and social stratification based on academic success and family financial wherewithal. The demand for alternative schools in Chiang Rai is great – and there are at least two well-established alternative schools in Chiang Rai – but the

expense to keep them afloat is great and the average Thai has little chance of affording the price of an education in an alternative school.

The Institute was most active in a project teaching dialog, a concept that was inspired by Dr. David Bohm, considered to be the grandfather of quantum physics who neared a unified theory before his death; highly regarded among scientists; friend of Einstein, Krishnamurti, and the Dalai Lama; and philosopher who espoused a holistic view of the universe. David Peat (1987) once said about Bohm:

Believing that the nature of things is not reducible to fragments or particles, he argues for a holistic view of the universe. He demands that we learn to regard matter and life as a whole, coherent domain, which he calls the implicate order.

Wisit and The Institute are trying to apply Bohm's conception of the "implicate order" through dialog and as a means to transcend conditioning and facilitate the potential of a social unfoldment of implicate meaning. As Bohm suggests,

Consciousness is unfolded in each individual. Clearly, it's shared between people as they look at one object and verify that it's the same. So any high level of consciousness is a social process. [Since mind and reality are held together with meaning] I say meaning is being! So any transformation of society must result in a profound change of meaning. Any change of meaning for the individual would change the whole because all individuals are so similar that it can be communicated.

Wisit told me that it isn't characteristic in contemporary Thai society for people to talk to each other on deep levels. Wisit sees the high incidence of family problems and violence as indicative of the loss of capacity to dialog between people due to various modern influences – most notably acted out in public education. The Community's dialog project aims to teach Thai people how to interact in order to

“create open space to be more purposeful and meaningful” and to allow organizations and companies to be more supportive of spiritual development and thereby create more dynamic institutions and happy and healthy workplaces. Some of the benefits from the dialog training is that the institution “becomes a giving environment, fosters cooperation, promotes equity as opposed to hierarchy, and develops a place that emphasizes personal and group growth.” Another of its aim is to establish *communities of practice* (COP) in which support systems are established to encourage people to gain mastery over their lives through community (not necessarily a place). Wisit sees the work as essential in order for “the spirituality of Buddhadasa to take on a new voice for the new generation.”

In his critique of public education, Wisit says that

Public school classrooms are run like dictatorships with one-way communication relying on memorizing facts and ideas – a stupid way of learning. The teachers are clever, but stupid because they can only teach superficially – not holistically or profoundly.

Thai education has adopted – or had forced upon - the Western education system, which Wisit sees having taken away “Thai-ness” from students. Western education in Wisit’s experience has proven to be “like putting fish in a can” because “it follows the factory model of education and puts students on the conveyor belt to their future.” Standards established to measure the relative and comparative educational success of learning pre-defined objectives are also “part of industrial production and the production of people to be like machines.” This complicates the fact that no one in contemporary society “openly or sincerely talks to one another” both in Thailand and in the West. The partner



of mass education – the media – “tells everyone how to live – usually wrongly – and takes the family apart in so many ways.” Wisit sees the dialog project as one means to restore the Thai family as a community institution, whereby all children become yours.

#### *4.3.4 Alternative Administrators - Chiang Rai Meeting*

I was fortunate to be in Chiang Rai during my case study of Piti Suksa Montessori School when a brain-based learning workshop took place. The principal of Piti Suksa, two board members of Piti Suksa, and three workshop participants met with me in a local café to talk about education in Thailand and their alternative views. I focus here on the three workshop participants – one, a former Ministry of Education official and now an alternative educator; another was a former nurse and now alternative education teacher researching Buddhist principles for education; and the third participant was a former public school teacher and alternative education teacher. It was a surprising conversation because the educators were already ramped up from the workshop and so many concerns spilled out, specifically related to the path already taken and the one ahead for education and the youth of Thailand.

The ex-MOE official was the most harsh critic of education in Thailand and strident in her belief for the necessity of a different course. She said that she left the MOE because she was stifled and she grew weary of the RTG’s mis-use of education to link to the movement towards learning to accept consumerism and a materialistic view of life. Her critique of the current reforms is that they are a means to create the machinery for social mass production, a capital investment that is very far from the real philosophy of education and learning. One of the major outcomes of this educational

machinery is young people are conditioned to be uninspired, uncreative, unquestioning people who wait for someone to tell them what to do. Children have not learned to make decisions based on natural learning processes and society's overly coddling view of youth is disrespectful of them.

There are so many complaints from CEOs and they ask, "What's wrong with our education? Why do we produce these kind of people?" Nothing changes if you recruit the new one, you need to train them again and again because they don't understand how to work. Their education never teaches them how to live and work – they teach them the letter, the word – nothing that they do is for preparing for their life or the real world.

The former nurse and now alternative administrator/teacher has studied a variety of alternative educational theories and likes the manner in which the Montessori method focuses on respecting the child as a human being and gives them the freedom to learn from nature and to choose their level of learning. In this process, she sees that a child will learn to respect oneself and respect the individuality of others, especially when the classroom reflects the outside world with an inclusive environment of mixed ages, diversity, and promotes a variety of social skills. She says that the Thai public schools don't reflect this type of environment. The emphasis of schools – and now especially by parents – are for higher and more rigorous standards and assessment procedures. This emphasis is completely contrary to almost every alternative education method because it measures very little of a child's true developmental level, or what a child really learns, and what is important to learn, except for the materialistic point of view that emphasizes acquiring selfish-concerns and social status.

The former public school teacher and now alternative teacher quickly noticed in her teaching career was how difficult it was to get children to understand what she wanted them to learn. This led to her on-going research in Western contemporary teaching-learning methodologies, including Montessori, brain-based learning, and Waldorf education. She is more recently concentrating on the dharma of Buddha. She said that she came to realize that a teacher, once after learning about education, must most importantly understand themselves first, “to be firm within their soul and human spirit – that’s how knowing will come.” She says she doesn’t follow Waldorf ideas as much as before but keeps exploring how people learn.

Everything opens my mind to understand how children will develop themselves, not just according to my idea. Education should try to make Thai people be themselves, to be independent and not just listen to others, to always be a follower.”

I asked the educators what are some of the missing elements in the current educational field of Thailand and this provoked a thoughtful discussion that extended beyond the borders of Thailand to a global level. The insights projected the need to address in some capacity the over-population of the world; the lack of resources for families; social problems of poverty, class, lack of diverse outlooks, poor social and cultural conditions; the aggression and selfishness displayed over limited or hoarded resources and opportunities; and the destruction of nature and other species. The educators agreed that the most difficult thing for teachers today is determining where the fine line between teaching and indoctrination lies. This is complicated by how contemporary education is currently ruled by international ideas that dictate for teachers

what is real and necessary to know and what “is manufactured for them by the belief industry.” It was noted that Buddha emphasized cultivating individual development and freedom and teachers need to cultivate freedom in children’s minds in every subject. Thai students need to know more about: our limitations as a species, as individuals, and as a society; how to give more than take; how to communicate with each other better; how to be innovative; how to change habits; learn new alternative technologies and energy sources; and how to be better caretakers and users of our natural resources.

All three believe that education reform would better be served without the MOE and allow community committees to operate freely. They all agreed that there is a need for an “education revolution, not reform because reform is too illusive, too late, and too slow” to be effective. The educators were asked to give three recommendations for education in Thailand, which was a real limitation on their part; but their ideas were solid and coherent with their experience. Their recommendations, in no order or association to the educator are as follows:

- Need a peace curriculum because competition leads to aggression, which leads to violence and war. We need to instill and cultivate peaceful minds into youth as early as possible;
- Students need to learn to depend on themselves, but not to harm others, and use their own skills to survive, i.e., growing own food, building “green” houses, etc.;
- Manage our thinking for better affect – we have over-developed our thinking that concerns itself with identity and survival but have ignored the potential in other areas of thinking;

- To learn how to experience transcendence through contemplation and introspection;
- Treat every child as unique;
- Integrate every subject within the curriculum;
- Create as many curriculums as there are pupils, just as in the Montessori method;
- Need the freedom to choose to learn when, how, and what with guidance from parents and teachers so adults can also learn from their child;
- Learning should not be an *outcome* of education by someone else – one should explore, discover, and learn our world by ourselves;
- Dismantle the MOE and how it controls schools;
- Encourage more Thai alternative schools to open;
- Train teachers how to empower their spirit and be more contemplative.

#### 4.4 Home Schooling Parents in Thailand

*I don't see home-schooling as some kind of answer to badness of schools. I think that the home is the proper base for the exploration of the world in which we call learning or education. Home would be the best base no matter how good the schools were... The school is a kind of artificial institution – a supplementary resource – and the home is a very natural one. There are lots of societies without schools, but never any without homes. – John Holt (1980 interview with Marlene Bumgarner).*

##### *4.4.1 The Pioneers of Homeschool in Thailand*

Homeschooling in Thailand arose during the 1980s and 1990s with a number of pioneering parents, initially led by the first home school parents between 1985 and 1987 (2528-2530 BCE), Phibop and Ratjani “Mae Aew” Dhongchai (founders of Moo Baan

Dek) and Dr. Chatchuang Chuthintorn. The second group of homeschool parents appeared circa 1992 (2535 BCE), with Krusom and Sayarm Peungudom (associated with Pititsuksa Montessori School of Chiang Rai) and Maw Pawn (Dr. Pawn/Porn) and Janpen Panosot (founders of Panyotai Waldorf School) homeschooling their children and becoming major figures in the Thai alternative school movement. In subsequent years, the homeschool ranks were filled by Wisit Wangwinyoo, and Uthaiwan and Yuthachai Chalermchai's to name only a few. As of 2006, there are over 64 officially-registered families (76 students, 51M/25F) and 70+ pending homeschool families registered at MBD with many more families schooling their children outside official registration – many of these families in the south of Thailand choosing homeschool due to the terror attacks at schools.

In talking of homeschooling in Thailand, one must place Rajani “Mae Aew” & Pibhop Dhongchai at the center of the discussion because, initially, the homeschooling of their own son coincided with the creation of the first Thai alternative school, Moo Baan Dek (MBD) circa 1979. A few years later, the Dhongchai's and Dr. Chatchuang commenced the formal homeschool precedent by establishing MBD as the institutional hub whereby homeschool families could enroll their children at MBD in order to legally teach their children at home. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Pibhop and Rajani got their inspiration from many individuals, from Dr. Sem Pringpuangkeow, Dr. Prawase Wasi, and Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand to international educators such as John Holt, the Summerhill School in Great Britain, and advocates of child-centered learning methodology. Since the inception of Moo Ban Dek, Mae Aew and Pibhop have been

able to establish the *Foundation for Children* and the *Children's Village School* in support of orphans, disadvantaged youth, refugees, and now, homeschool families. They have assisted alternative schools and homeschool parents with curriculum and resources. It has also been their activism and political efforts that enabled the passage of important alternative education initiatives and constitutional laws.

It is also very important to emphasize the large number of non-registered homeschoolers and their significance. It cannot even be estimated the number of non-registered homeschool families, but many of these *homestudents* are making great contributions to Thailand in educational and social contexts. The many homeschoolers along the Burmese border and in the South of Thailand are offering quality opportunities for children to gain an education either denied by the Thai state due to citizenship restrictions or, as in the case of the south, the insecure and unsafe situation of schools used as points of conflict and contestation. In this section, home school families Yeophantong, Wangwinyoo, and Peungudom portray the sort of civil disobedience advocated by both Illich and Holt in response to uncreative, mind-numbing, and inhuman systemization. There are hundreds of these stories, but theirs are the tales of trailblazers and ones that stand out as roadmaps for future families seeking the liberty found in purer forms of learning.

#### *4.4.2 Yuthachai Chalermchai – The Gatekeeper*

Yuthachai Chalermchai is the co-founder and Chair of the Thai Homeschool Education Center (Baan Rian Thai Institute) at the Office of the National Educational Council (ONEC), Ministry of Education. Homeschool parents formed the Center in

2000 and it is considered as a sort of NGO since it acts independent, but has had some government support. In 2002-2003, with the support of Dr. Rung Kaewdang, a chief architect of the 1999 National Education Act, the parents were given an office at the Office of the Prime Minister and were provided with a welcomed modicum of general support. However, in late 2003 or early 2004, the Center was transferred to the Ministry of Education where they languished in an atmosphere of a complete lack of support from the ONEC. The Center subsequently moved out of the Ministry shelter and rented its own office in order to act independent of any governmental influence.

Yuthachai was chosen as the Chair of the Center due to his long-time advocacy and the three previous research studies (and other on-going research projects) he has done on homeschooling in Thailand. Over the last five years, Yuthachai and the Center have instituted a change in the law, but are still seeking a change at the policy level. Aside from its advocacy work, the Center functions to help current homeschool parents with problems or referrals and to provide interested parents with information regarding the potential benefits and drawbacks to homeschooling. The Center also arranges meetings between current homeschool families and parents interested in starting their children in a homeschool program. The Center puts together a monthly newsletter that suggests curriculum and planning ideas for parents with the curricular emphasis to provide “real life” education (experiential, i.e., understanding biology principles by going out to rice paddies, etc.) with the goal to develop “perfected humans” that live “beautiful lives” in accordance with Buddhist values, morals, and ethics.



At one of the meetings I had with Yuthachai, I met the younger of his two sons, Santor (pronounced *Sahn-thaw*), who along with his older brother were both homeschooled. They both have been successful in furthering their studies at the university level. Sahnthaw attends Mahidol University in the Music Department and has spent over a year in China studying Chinese and furthering his interest in international music. He now frequently travels with a group of Thai exchange students to China in an informal study group developed by Yuthachai.

#### *4.4.3 The Genesis and Current Status of Homeschooling in Thailand*

Yuthachai's account of homeschool history in Thailand begins in 1985 (2528 BCE) when Dr. Chatchuang Chuthintorn, a devout 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist, returned to Thailand after completing his doctorate in the USA. He refused to send his children to Thai public schools due to his religious principles. So, he began homeschooling his children in 1985 until someone turned him into the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 1988. The person who turned Dr. Chatchuang in to authorities disagreed with what Dr. Chatchuang was doing, making claims to the MOE that he was a "mad doctor" and was keeping his children locked up. The MOE investigated and found that his children were happy, spoke three languages (Chinese, English, and Thai), and were very well educated. Facing legal sanctions, Chatchuang strategically calculated that he could legally homeschool his children if he registered them in a bona fide public school and clandestinely hid the fact that he was homeschooling his children. He located the Dhongchai's and registered his children in MBD and proceeded to homeschool with the complicity of the Dhongchai's.

Dr. Chatchuang and the Dhongchai's together, along with other alternative educators and activists including Yuthachai Chalermchai and Maw Pawn & Janpen Panosot, have petitioned the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and the MOE to reform education policies. They were instrumental in providing input to the writers of the educational decentralized reform of 1999 and affected the process enough to have the drafters include provisions that would change the law regarding alternative schools and homeschooling. It is now legal to homeschool, but with restrictions that still necessitate registration through Moo Ban Dek. Starting in 2006, however, parents were allowed to go to the local Education Service Area (ESA) office and register their children as homeschoolers and, in return, were supposed to get some financial support from the MOE and any educational support needed. The law states that parents must have at least a Bachelor's degree or enough academic/teaching experience to prove that they can teach their children adequately. The parents must also hand in an educational plan to the district office and show yearly progress, generally by a test administered by the district.

The registration of homeschool families at the district level remains very problematic and many of the district officers have no knowledge of homeschooling and are unconvinced it is necessary. The 70+ families who are still pending official registration must still enroll at MBD to homeschool legally. The promised funding to homeschool families by MOE was delayed for many years, but as of 2006, parents now receive an allotment from the government similar to what the public schools get for every student (approximately 1700 baht or \$50 USD). Other obstacles faced by homeschool families are the fact that, even though they pay taxes, they gain none of the

benefits - their children cannot enroll in a Thai public university unless they have a GPA and have taken all the required exams specified by the MOE. But they can only take the direct entrance examination to some public universities in a specific field such as Music. Homeschooled children are also not allowed to receive scholarships at Thai universities and can only enroll into universities with international programs – usually requiring a high proficiency of English language. For boy homeschoolers, they are unable to take the required military-oriented class that is taken by juniors at a public high school and therefore liable to be drafted into the military at the age of 18. Homeschool mother Pannada Yeophantong has pointed out that the military of young boys can be three difficult years of having to generally mix with thugs and ill-mannered boys – three years of wasted time that could be put to better advantage.

It has been no secret that the majority of district officers do not support homeschooling and hold irrational and uninformed views of homeschooling. Much of Yuthachai's current role is to provide workshops for district officers on how to proceed with the legitimate principles and guidelines of homeschooling and how to further strategize for its integration into the RTG educational system. In May 2006, I attended a workshop developed by Yuthachai and hosted by ONEC and held at the ONEC Offices. About 10 important MOE officials and 50 key ESA officers attended the workshop with the objective of commencing the discussion of strategizing the implementation of homeschool policies and procedures at the ESA offices. Yuthachai's outlined agenda items and objectives included: correcting misapprehensions about homeschooling; the need for homeschooling to connect to higher education; the need for government

support; the need for procedural guidelines; modernizing homeschool policies; and the certification process.

While it may be true that the majority of homeschool families have not registered with the MOE, Yuthachai presented current statistics on numbers of officially registered homeschool students and their location: 76 registered homeschoolers, 49 were in central Thailand (32 in Bangkok); 13 were in the north; 12 were in the northeast; and 2 were in the south. The breakdown in ages were: 1 to 6 years old – 14; 6 to 11 years old – 43; 12 and up – 20. The strategy for prioritizing the promotion of homeschool information dissemination by the RTG was devised beforehand. The cities and districts that were to receive attention were: Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, Prathumthani, Nonthaburi, Supanburi, and Samutprakan – all located in central Thailand near Bangkok. The strategies and objectives define the audience, media, and message to facilitate the support and knowledge of homeschooling. Although the group seemed listless and bored (many participants openly sleeping or talking with their neighbors), the hard work of Yuthachai is creating a momentum that the MOE is utilizing and following up with implementation strategies. Yuthachai also seems to be the perfect player in this role as he is patient and positive, knowledgeable and persuasive. The slow change will probably not wear Yuthachai down or veer him off course and the homeschoolers in Thailand will thank him for his bamboo-like flexible strength because the homeschool movement has a long path ahead.

#### *4.4.4 Pannada Yeophantong*

Pannada's story is rich in educational value and what she learned has served her children very well. Her tale begins as a child who never had to do much – everything was provided for her and she never had to learn the value of the mundane. Her family was wealthy enough to afford four or five servants and a driver. A life that many Thais aspire to yet her lack of life skills makes her feel “a little disabled” to this very day. “I didn't want this for my children. It's lucky to have a good life, but you are not prepared for the real world. It's very difficult and very tough, especially psychologically, but you have to learn this.” This experience of hers – going from a protected life to one that was crushing – shaped her educational philosophy to include the practical. “I try to protect my child by making them realize these things: you can't belittle; you cannot underestimate; you cannot think you will be lucky all your life – it's difficult being a human.” Pannada was adamant about instilling a value perspective about learning to her children “money is good, but education is more important because it remains with you forever and no one can take it away from you... there is no point in struggling so much to become like others (living only for the pursuit of money).”

Pannada's well-to-do family valued education and had the wherewithal to provide her with an elite education at a private, all-girls boarding school. The school had an esteemed reputation and met the highest Thai academic standards, so in this regard, did not differ much from the public school curriculum. The curriculum was taught by “professional” teachers (as opposed to public school teachers who are often under-skilled and unmotivated) and offered English language as a main curricular

component. For Pannada, however, it was a very disappointing school experience, which certainly stifled her academic potential by the over-emphasis and application of discipline. Pannada described her experience at the boarding school as “torture.” The discipline was military-like and regimentation was rigorous even though this school was considered one of the best private schools in Thailand. It had a prestigious reputation in which every parent dreamed of sending their daughter, a place where “They make a lady of you.” Pannada said that it was not a family-like atmosphere and there was a strong emphasis on punishment. Pannada attended the boarding school from the age of nine until the age of thirteen when her mother died.

Pannada expressively recounted her school experience of how she was emotionally, psychologically, and physically (non-sexual) abused and how she still suffers from the trauma of these events. Abuse was rendered as a means of sorting her and classifying her as a “trouble-maker” in need of “a lesson”, which became not one lesson, but many unfortunate cruel lessons. The most cruel school punishment was when Pannada’s mother died and the Headmistress did not allow her to go home during the weekend because she scored a 74.5% on the final exam and the school required a 75% to go home. Pannada eventually “escaped” from the school, but not before sinking down into a long, deep depression. Her father eventually took her out of the Thai school system and sent her to New Zealand to finish the last few years of high school.

She saw a great difference in how students were treated in New Zealand and how skilled and kind the teachers were. But the damage from Thai schooling was already done. Pannada noticed how her personality was deformed by the regimentation

and punish-orientation of Thai schooling and she didn't develop positive life skills – she began hoarding food and candy (not allowed to have at the boarding school); she noticed that she and the other boarding school girls had no interactions with men and eventually in their adult lives developed poor relations with men and “catty” relations with other women; and her distrust of Thai schools and teachers became firmly entrenched, “I don't like teachers. I don't trust them. I don't really care much for schools.” In contrast, during her youth, it was self-instruction and exploration that took on significance and perhaps a precursor to her homeschool parenting was reflected in her father's interest in the value of collected knowledge and reading. He bought seven different types of English language encyclopedias, which she frequently read to sharpen her English language skills and to learn of the wider world. The lesson she has learned from her schooling and self-study is that “if you're really impressed with something, you can do it well. But if you force me to learn, I will be bad at it.”

Pannada's patience and tolerance for public schools resolutely ended when a teacher at a Thai school took a construction site stick and beat her eight-year old son until it broke for a very minor, inadvertent infraction. Thai law at that time required that all children were to attend four years of primary school and once this requirement was completed, Pannada withdrew her son and daughters from the Thai public school system and enrolled them into an international school in Bangkok. Pannada eventually moved all four kids to New Zealand, Singapore, and Fiji to start small businesses and put her children on an educational odyssey that became epic.

May was enrolled in a New Zealand pre- and primary school for about three or four years and Pannada began to sate May's curiosity with picture books. English books were expensive, so she supplemented the home environment with educational TV and had May watch the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet. Pannada would interact with May after watching TV and discovered that she was interested in these programs and could tell her what the program was about and even remembered the scientific names and concepts. May's siblings helped a lot in homeschooling her, particularly in maths (at one time May's weakest subject) and science. Her brother was good with English and grammar and helped her refine her English skills. Pannada sent May to early childhood art classes to fulfill this important subject – one that Pannada emphasized all throughout May's education. Pannada perceived the substance of a well-rounded curriculum and didn't create conditions that would lead to a sterile mind, "There was no routine at all, I just made sure all important subject areas were covered, particularly reading and English as a first language." In order to make learning relevant and to create interest, Pannada and the kids would do activities like devising scrabble-like word, letter, and identification games that required quick thinking more than a mere knowledge of vocabulary.

Pannada's participation as a learner in May's education was a critical factor in May's successful homeschooling program. Pannada approached the learning process like a mother bird that first digests the food for her fledgling:

I didn't teach May like she was in a classroom. I checked out books from the library, read them, summarized them, decided what things May needed to know, then gave it to her chapter by chapter.



She learned from her own experience that children learned best when introduced to learning through “the real world” first and foremost. So, for developing the need to make knowledge practical, Pannada taught the kids how to cook and augmented her lessons with visits to her cousin’s house, a professionally-trained French chef. Her cousin would take the kids shopping and teach them how to select quality products, their value, the calorie content, expiry date, comparing prices – big and small, etc. Pannada would then incorporate maths into day-to-day events, making it a less intimidating subject.

When Pannada determined it was time to return to Thailand after eight years, there were many educational concerns she had for May. May had no middle school education and would have had difficulties in graduating. Her Thai language speaking skill was good, but her Thai reading and writing skills were not sufficient for middle school in Thailand. Pannada did not want May to do homeschooling in Thailand because she was afraid that the Ministry of Education (MOE) would impose too many requirements and restrict May’s academic potential. Pannada began looking at alternative schools, but most were either too expensive, too far away (2-4 hours in traffic), not good enough quality, or a combination of all three. She said that international schools, aside from being prohibitively expensive and elitist, are not as good of an educational environment as one might expect. She believes they are but “gimmick” schools and places where spoiled kids learn their privileged places in society. Instead, Pannada decided that May would first try to sit for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) exam to see how she fared. At age

eleven, May passed the IGSCE exam – one designed for students between the ages of 13 and 18, but generally taken by UK children between the ages of 15 or 16. This gave May a boost in confidence and she “blossomed and became greatly excited about learning.”

While the issue of high school attendance in Thailand was resolved, the prospect of enrolling into a Thai university program was also problematic because a student needs to pass all Thai exams in order to enroll in a Thai university. The test to determine in which faculty and program one was to enroll was also not an option for May. She could enroll in a Thai university’s international program, however, and she enrolled in the well-respected Thammasat University’s *British and American Studies (BAS)* program in the Faculty of Liberal Arts at the age of 14. Pannada and May maintained a similar approach to university studies as homeschooling – building upon their relationship of trust, confidence, and sharing the learning of life and living a life of learning. Pannada and May depict a prime example of family learning, life-long learning, and what Buddha referred to as the “worshipping of the six directions.”

#### 4.4.4.1 Pannada’s Educational Perspectives

Pannada is a firm believer that learning best takes place in a community of learning, much as she created with her own children. She believes that education of a child really begins with a parent, “The most important person that can teach the child is the parents themselves.” But to be truly successful in homeschool, the parent must know the student and allow them to lead the learning process. Pannada does not hesitate, however, to say that children need to be taught “how to be a good person, but

you can't expect that from school anymore.” In her opinion, the public schools are overcrowded and teachers are too beset with their own problematic situations to demonstrate caring attitudes in order to elicit the individual student's best. Most likely they are unable to be caring enough amongst such a large body of children, leaving most children adrift and uncertain and incapable of finding their vocation or passion in life.

I believe each child has one good thing in them by nature, but they don't know it and it's difficult for them to know if parents don't help... Parents need to pay more attention to their own children and see how to help them the best.

Pannada knew her children's character, temperament, and their aptitudes and approached their learning process as a friend and mentor who didn't have a pre-defined approach or remedy – she got to know her children, did not speak down to them, and created a bond of trust. “I talk to May as an adult and I don't use child's words... Since she was small I told May that we were friends because we share everything. I can talk to you and you can trust me.” This bond based on sincere care was important because Pannada has seen many Thai parents who have good intentions, but fail their children by substituting material comforts and expensive goods in exchange for the more valuable mentoring of how to be truly happy in life.

So many people who think they are living rich, driving a Mercedes or sitting in a big house, they just may not be as truly happy as we. Even if you have one plate of rice and an omelet, it can be more delicious than an expensive steak. If it makes you happy, that's enough. Just try to be happy, that's all.

Pannada's distrust for the Thai public school system is great because she doesn't believe it is preparing children in how to deal with their life, particularly given their individual skills, limitations, and disposition. She views this as a major flaw in the education system because "In this generation, life is going to be very tough and the weak will never survive. A real education will help them survive." But she sees schools being impeded by the emphasis of regimentation of hours, clothes, shoes, ways of thinking; the socio-cultural condition processes; and the irrelevance of many subjects, i.e., chemical composition of fertilizers. In addition, a child's time of freedom to enjoy life as a child and how to learn to enjoy life is almost completely absent from Thai schools.

Public schools demand too much of a student's time with too much homework and exam-study. There are far too many subjects and kids do not learn to play enough in schools, get insufficient rest, and must get up too early to get through traffic. The schools are not flexible and the kids get socialized – much of it unimportant because it is negative. One of the most important things that is almost completely absent is art and creativity – painting, music, dancing.

Although Pannada estimates that she has spent as much or more on homeschooling than May's attendance at an international school, she believes it is worth it. All the false notions of homeschooling, especially related to the lack of social networks are not measures of success to Pannada, "If you're a successful human, you'll have many friends around you. Homeschool won't change that." Pannada's final argument for successful homeschooling is personified by May's approach to learning:

Every day, every moment that May is doing her studies she enjoys it. She enjoys going to her classes. I don't have to wake her up. She complains class is too short – 1.5 hours is not enough! She comes home and starts in

by reading further into topics that interest her. She knows when to stop, when to play, when to meet with people. If you do this, then of course, you will be a successful person.

#### 4.4.5 *Wisit Wangwinyoo*

Wisit Wangwinyoo is a home school parent, co-founder of an alternative school in Chiang Rai, community builder, and social activist. He is a long-time friend of Sulak Sivaraksa whom he met in high school, a student of Buddhadasa, a colleague of Dr. Prawase Wasi and Phibop and Rajani Dhongchai among many other activists, and inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh. Currently, he and his nephew, Nuttarote, have developed a number of foundations to facilitate their varied work involving the development of communities of practice through dialog, ecological management, and sustainable agricultural practices. Wisit's breadth of contemporary knowledge is wide and deep, with particular interest in quantum research; ecological trends; spiritual conceptualizations of business and community development; and the relationship between human biology and mind.

In further introducing Wisit Wangwinyoo, it is useful to look at where his activist foundation lays, specifically his early work with the *Ahimsa Group* (klum ahingsa) also known as the *klum santiwithi* (the Peaceful Method group) and later with the Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development (TICD). Wisit, Pracha, and Paisal (see chapter 3) were charter members of the Ahimsa Group sponsored and mentored by Sulak, and were hired by Sulak to work as editorial staff for the *Pacarayasara*, a journal of non-violence. They published international Marxist perspectives and translated and published authors of non-violent social movements such as Gandhi and Thich Nhat

Hanh (Ito, 2003). Thich Nhat Hanh was a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who was at the forefront of opposition to the Vietnam War and formulated the Engaged Buddhism movement, later linked to Sulak's International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). "The Ahimsa Group actualized their philosophy on non-violence by undertaking the human rights campaign to release political prisoners of the October 6, 1976 coup" (Ito, 2003: 245). Their activism spread throughout to the village-level, which had for the most part, become anarchistic, leading to multiple projects in rural and village self-sustaining development. Their work was influential in the creation of many NGOs working at the village level across the Southeast Asia region.

TICD's development heralds back to the historic inter-religious relations in Thailand and the eroding Buddhist practice of providing for human development. Historically, Thailand had been in conflict with Christians and missionaries for many centuries due in part to the exploitive nature of zealous missionaries and in part by Thai isolationist and protectionist policies. It was not until King Mongkhut reformed Thai Buddhism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and opened the land again to Christian missionaries that the chilly relationship became somewhat more cordial. The great Buddhist reformer, Buddhadasa, however, engaged in inter-religious dialogs with Christian leaders, inspiring "the Department of Religion under the Ministry of Education to create a commission for inter-religious relations, composed of Buddhists, Christians, Moslems, and Hindus. On the part of the Catholic Church, a few years after Vatican II, a commission was founded to deal with inter-religious dialogue" (Phongphit, 1984: 17). This was a significant event that inspired the activism of what would later become the

Thai Engaged Buddhists and the eventual founding and development of the TICD by Sulak Sivaraksa, Seri Phongphit, Phra Visalo Paisal, and Wisit Wangwinyoo among others. The TICD webpage describes the organization:

The primary mission of the TICD is to involve Buddhist monks and nuns in issues of ethics, community development, public well-being, environmental conservation, and other relevant socio-economic and political issues. It has brought about the establishment of various networks of progressive monks and nuns, collectively known as Sekiyadhamma (Dharma for self-cultivation).

TICD attempts to instill basic Buddhist principles into the concepts of community building and social change. TICD also promotes inter-religious dialogue among Buddhists, Muslims and Christians on different key issues such as peace and non-violence, environment reservation, gender, social justice, consumerism, endogenous people, and grassroots community development. In times of tension between religious communities, TICD as a major Buddhist organization has spoken out for Christians and Muslim friends. We have initiated a number of Buddhist- Muslim Dialogues, the first of its kind both within Siam, between Siam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The TICD is significant for a couple of reasons: one, it was one of the first social liberation organizations ignited by the inspiration of Buddhadasa and orchestrated by Sulak Sivaraksa that began to spawn a network of social activism/movements in response to a repressive, authoritarian state that had co-opted culture and Buddhism; and 2; the work was a template modeling Buddhist ideals of self-reliance and development for liberation. Wisit's early work with the TICD included the development of rural monks; reducing central control of the Sangha and state; developing alternative agricultural practices; reducing farm debts and reinvigorating traditional banking schemes (rice banks, buffalo banks, temple-run banks, etc.); and restoring indigenous forms of ecological knowledge and traditional practices of local Buddhism. While to

some this might seem a reactionary move to recreate a romanticized past, it was in actuality the laying of a foundation for an evolving spiritual society focused on self-sustainable growth and an alternative focus other than global consumerism.

During the early years of Wisit's activism, he worked setting up the Coordinating Group of Religion in Society (CGIS), worked with Amnesty International, and worked at Moo Baan Dek during its first year. Before moving to Chiang Rai, a couple of life-altering tragedies beset Wisit during the 1980s – he wife died of a brain tumor and left him alone to raise a three-year old son, and his business failed because of a lack of capital. Wisit went to work at Sulak's publishing company and at Wongsanit Ashram (Sulak's alternative Buddhist center/school) before another life-altering event took him to Chiang Rai to care for his ill sister.

In Chiang Rai, he was a co-founding board member of the Chiang Rai Pitisuksa Montessori alternative school. After work at the school, he developed the foundation, Kwan Muang Institute (KMI), to help people in the region develop healthy lifestyles and sustainable environments. With inspiration coming from David Bohm and Buddhadasa, he developed the Evolving Society Foundation in 2005 to teach dialog in order “to create open space to be more holistic, purposeful, meaningful” and community principles to government, public, and private institutions and organizations in order “to be more supportive of spiritual development.” Wisit said the benefits of dialog training are that “it creates a giving environment, fosters cooperation, and equality as opposed to hierarchy.” Wisit did not want to reproduce the production mode of schools, and wants people to primarily have “movement from the heart – not reason.”



To Wisit, the essence of spirituality is “self organization – a harmonizing of life and nature by learning through time to be free of obstacles so you can realize self and nature are one.” We experience limitation of self and knowledge because we adopt ways of thinking and “cling to thoughts and ideas” – not as dynamic tools – but as ideologies and templates that have an end goal that defines things with an attached certainty that is no more real than a mirage. The sort of knowledge Wisit talks about continually transforms and is paradoxically always embedded in the environment, “The more you understand nature, the more you understand yourself; and when you live the law of nature, you will live in harmony and not destroy.” From his dialog work, he has observed that one can be hardworking, yet lazy towards transformative learning, “when you are normal [natural], you transform all the time.” There is a spiral pattern to transformational learning, whereby you metaphorically loop outward as inhalation and then the return inward exhalation incorporates the inhaled energy to the pattern of your life – “you grow, fix, revitalize, and learn.” But when you are defending your ideology, you are “like a skipping record” with all energy going out to a struggle that has no exit, no return, no benefit.

#### 4.4.5.1 Wisit Wangwinyoo, Homeschooling Isara, the Chiang Rai Community

When Wisit’s son, Isara, was ready for pre- and primary school, he enrolled him in a Waldorf school in Bangkok. He only did this for about three years and became very disenchanted with the complete schooling process, from the everyday travel in traffic to the un-energetic curriculum in schools. Wisit had already discovered in his own life that most of his own studying had been on his own and that his real learning came outside of

school. “How children learn is actually how adults learn, through experience, discovery, play... but how we learn in schools is the most terrible way – by rote, by memorization, by intellectualizing things – all of the most shallowest and least effective ways to learn.” Once in Chiang Rai, it was not out of character for Wisit to get on the Internet and look at various methods of homeschooling and their curriculums. He came across John Holt’s radical ideas about unschooling and decided that Holt’s ideas matched his own experience.

Isara was unschooled, Wisit opening the world of potential to him through his unique homeschooling approach. “I don’t teach him the world, the world teaches him.” Wisit’s unschooling style comprised three features: “1. No curriculum; 2. No preaching; 3. No teaching. Let it happen – happening arts.” Wisit found it effective because once he provided Isara with “open spaces for self learning, he become fascinated by learning this way - there are a lot of surprises that happen.” One surprise was Isara’s English comprehension since he was a young child and learning to read in English on his own at age 9. He would listen to Wisit’s conversations in English and without a single lesson, became conversant in English.

I didn’t give him much educational direction, only for difficult parts. I listened to him more closely, gave him vital information, e.g. when he started playing video games, I introduced him to a friend who lost his vision. I showed him the possible consequence of reading on the computer and I let him make his own choices. Most of all, I tell him that the part of being strong is to master your habits. He learned self-respect to make his own choices and their consequences; he learned to organize himself and take care of himself.

A typical day for Isara was to laze around, go swimming, and playing with friends or listening to music in the evening. He would play as he liked and socialize. He was allowed to develop his own interests and at the age of 12 started to play the guitar. Isara was forbidden to consort with mafia types or “bad elements.” He socialized with many types of people – from street vendors to Wisit’s friends – and he learned the world by himself. When he was 16, Isara met a friend who had been away at a Russian musical conservatory, which interested Isara greatly. He decided he wanted to go and study music there. In the summer when he was 16, he taught himself Russian language and piano. In three months he was proficient enough to go to Russia on his own, take the entrance exam and recital, and passed with high scores. He is currently finishing his second year at the conservatory. This is a significant librated act by a Thai teenager because the majority of Thai youth stay close to their home and their family – sometimes never leaving or staying to create an extended family.

Wisit and Isara’s unschooling has impressed many within his community and two other families have also unschooled their children: Chandej and Kanya Pongjin, their daughter Ubonrasmi; and Montri and Thongyoon Tongpien, their son Tathata Tongpien and two daughters Natee and Yadfon. Chandej is Thailand’s National Master in Kung Fu and Tai Chi and many of the community’s meetings begin after playing morning Tai Chi and Tai Chi metaphors and philosophy are embedded in the daily dialog. Chandej and Kanya do not push interests on Ubonrasmi and she is a creative and precocious young girl who spends a lot of time writing stories she reads and acts out, playing with friends (including Natee and Yadfon), and is quite skilled in Tai Chi and

Chinese sword fighting. Montri and Thongyoon's son, Tathata has had a similar unschooling experience as Isara in that he found his own interest in Tibetan Medicine and journeyed off to India to learn this ancient art. It could be said that the whole community is unschooled as there are no children pushed to conform to social expectations of learning or to accept conditioning by organized institutions; and parents organize their community to be self-sustaining, following their own interests, and ever learning.

#### 4.4.5.2 Wisit Wangwinyoo's Educational Philosophy

Wisit and I engaged in quite a few conversations about many subjects related to education and I sat in on many of his community's morning meetings. His care for Thai people is evident, but he is concerned about their current state of thinking mind, which is not one that has the requisite focus, sense of curiosity, creativity, or ability to learn from everyday events such as work and play. He is convinced that the Thai state of thinking mind is due largely to the schooling process. Thai public schools in Wisit's view are stuck in only one type of learning – rote learning – and the learning is not original in that “you don't study science as a scientist.” Wisit's metaphor for learning in Thailand is

It's like eating sugar cane that has already been squished – the sweet flavor is gone. Thai education is leftover sugar cane – it's not a primary source of learning, it's a derivative. The presentation is by lecture only – a poor way to teach because you don't draw upon tacit knowledge... the product is obedience and mediocrity.

Wisit's experience has been that schools “destroy the natural learning ability” and enervate children as opposed to inspiring them and helping them to become “living

museums.” Thai schooling mostly prepares kids to be bureaucrats and civil servants and this has been the aspiration for most Thai parents for many generations and is becoming less and less effective at even this function. Wisit sees no reason for children not to be homeschooled and unschooled. Further, his experience as student, teacher, and parent has convinced him that schools should be placing their emphasis on providing rich supplies of a “variety of resources and tools with teachers acting as mentors and guides in order for students to learn on their own.” Currently, “students don’t really learn because teachers interfere with learning” and passive learning is interpreted as the norm. Education policy-makers have imposed a competitive system with the idea that standards are “part of the industrial production [process], producing people like machines” – necessary social engineering formulas to replicate their economic and development ambitions.

These sorts of learning issues are the grist of what Wisit would consider to be a wise investiture of time, energy and money to produce quality educational reform. Instead, he believes that the type of educational reform proposed by the MOE is inadequate, “they only see the crust of the apple – some of the structures and standards – but they never get to the juicy part of the apple.” Part of the problem becomes one of replication of what was wrong in the first place “the ones who never *really* learned themselves, how can they help others learn? It is impossible.” Due to the reproduction of students who learn how to get through an industrial system that requires little comprehension of knowledge relating to a cultural or local context, and relies on

memorizing bits of, mostly, useless information that has little practical application in Thai society, its institutions reflect this short-sightedness.

As long as the government is involved [in educational reform], reform will never work because MOE is a lot of mediocre people, 80% useless. If you cut 90% of MOE staff out and leave 10% who know something to do work, then you have a chance to get something done. Will it happen? If you are optimistic, but really, you have to have a revolution, and I view the alternative education movement in Thailand as part of that revolution - a social movement.

The MOE, however, parrots the global education policy-makers who have little interest in deeply understanding the effects of their imposition for the sake of progress, modernization, and economic development. Wisit's vision for Thailand is for a nation that doesn't find it imperative to follow blindly in the footsteps of the West and global entities. "We can learn from their wisdom and intelligence, but not follow their lifestyles, their ego, and their arrogance – we can learn from them." It is also imperative to identify "real values of happiness" because Thailand is already a resource-rich land, but "the quality of life is often shallow, the shallowness of consumerism." In addressing this shallowness, unschooling and homeschooling are essential so that the illusion of advertisement and propaganda "do not become more real than the real" and collective cultural knowledge will become significant. Thai people in Wisit's estimation, still value relationship over economic success and "if we [Thai people] realize our own value, Thais can be an alternative [model] country in the world – it can have real value and real community... to be an example to the world." This example would include realizing that "if you live more simple, life becomes more healthy."

Globalization is much more than consumerism and capitalism and Wisit has witnessed how it has also introduced innovative management principles as evidenced by “the development of learning organizations and knowledge-based management styles that are helping to change the old to a new paradigm.” This significance for Wisit is in the emphasis of “collective wisdom” and the development of communities of practice whereby change will occur suddenly for members interacting within the group highlighting participatory governance, and initiated through the vehicle of active learning. It is this potential through his work with dialoging that Wisit sees great hope in humanity, “if they learn by themselves, everything will happen.”

#### *4.4.6 Krusom and Sayarm Puengudom and Family*

Krusom and Sayarm of Chiang Rai, North Thailand, are homeschool parents of three children: Fasai (son, child #1), Saimake (son, child #2), and Baika (daughter, child #3). All three have been homeschooled to some degree, Fasai has completed his high school certification, and the two youngest currently attend an alternative school in Chiang Rai. Krusom would be quick to point out, however, that the type of parenting and guidance given to their children has not been reduced in significance or emphasis since the days when Fasai was an infant.

Yuthachai Chalermchai first told me of Krusom; how she was one of the first homeschool parents and that she had authored a few books on homeschooling for Thai parents and gave me her phone numbers. The first time I called her, she agreed to a personal interview and to answer a questionnaire as a preliminary to our interview. We exchanged several e-mails and she provided many useful details that proved, not only to

be an important source for information on her thoughts on homeschool and education, but also the common bonds that acted as cultural bridges that facilitated a friendship. Through numerous meetings, I got to know her family and the significance of their experiences as *familyschoolers* (my terminology), as Thais, as global citizens, and most importantly – as friends.

#### 4.4.6.1 Krusom's Tale

Krusom's life is largely shaped by her grandmother's influence. Her grandmother was an immigrant from China with a tradition of education, cultured environments, social consciousness, and Buddhism. Krusom was a precocious child that metaphorically represented a female bee fed grandmother's royal, ultra-natural influence. Together the importance of their story to the spiritual and alternative education movement is significant in that their lives are representative of many Thai historical patterns of movements that have led to reform and liberation.

During the first or second decade of the 20th century, Grandmother immigrated to Thailand when she was 17 or 18, leaving without family and arriving with a few fellow villagers. The next decade was marked by the exchange of bullets on the streets of Bangkok between the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and Chinese immigrants. The Chinese had been targets of systematic prejudice for over a century and during the pungent days of Thailand's dramatic revolution and state reform to a constitutional monarchy, they were enemies of the new ultra-nationalist state. Circles of Chinese Communists began systematic resistance to repression and prejudice with street confrontations and clandestine tactics to resist the bully tactics of the RTG.



Grandmother's brothers, friends, and relatives were in the inner circles of resistance and Grandmother was active doing her strategic part, while continuing to practice her Buddhism.

Grandmother's personal life was getting more complex and difficult - two husbands died and she was left alone with two daughters to provide for in a foreign land that was often not kind to her. Krusom explained that

The first grandfather was my mom and aunt's dad and he was murdered in Phrae province (Northern Thailand), and the second was a traditional Chinese medical man – but even being a doctor could not help him escape from tuberculosis, leaving my grandmom a widow again.

Grandmother moved to Bangkok and still held hope that she would one day return to China. Grandmother had a great ability to self-learn and this was a life skill that she used to best advantage. Her father was a teacher and she learned how to read and write Chinese from him and as a woman, was regarded within the Thai-Chinese community with high respect as a wise woman – a rare mixture of intellect and spiritual knowing. Krusom has an indelible image of her grandmother embossed in her memory – “whenever Grandmom sat resting in her rocking chair; she always held a book in her right hand and a string of beads in her left hand.”

While in Bangkok, a new responsibility took on a new unexpected importance. Grandmother was born on an auspicious day, month, and year, which indicated that she was, according to her Buddhist tradition, to fulfill a shamanic responsibility. She received further training and guidance from a master in the Thai-Chinese community and returned to China for a while before beginning her practice in the Thai Chinese community as Buddhist shaman. She ran a hospice and meditation center out of her

house and went wherever she was needed. Her main duty was to serve the dead and dying, sitting and meditating with the sick, preparing them for death, and then washing and clothing them for their funeral rites and cremation. Her life became one of pure service and there was no time or interest for another marriage or a revolutionary's life.

Of the six children in her family, Krusom was the only daughter. Before Krusom was born, Grandmother made her own daughter promise to give her her first daughter. And so it was done, Krusom stayed with her grandmother and spent little time in her birth family. Krusom was surrounded by Buddhist art, death rituals and rites, meditation, and many hours and days spent alone. Every day she started her journey to school by ambling through a large plantation, crossed the Chaopraya River by boat, and then walked through the city streets to the Chinese Christian school, "Kwang-Jao School." On some weekends, she would go with Grandmother on meditation retreats in the forest at Mahayana monasteries. It was a childhood of introspection and creative enhancement of living free and experiencing life fully.

Krusom attended Silpakorn University, the leading Thai university in the fine arts, architecture, and archaeology. Her university life was similar in that Krusom came and went from Grandmother's house and she often slept in the art studio, and on some occasions, her and her friends would paint night landscapes and sleep along the banks of the Chaopraya River. After she received her Fine Arts diploma, she then changed her field of study to Visual Communication & Graphic Design and finished her Bachelor of Arts in this field. And even though she was a talented artist, she had a real interest in human development and social sciences. She secretly audited classes at nearby

Thammasat University, studying psychology, philosophy, and human development courses in her spare time while still remaining in the art faculty. She became very interested in Child Psychology, reading and being initially inspired by Neill and his Summerhill School philosophy. She began to teach art for children at that point (at 19 years old) because her family's business was insolvent, and she had to find the means to support herself and pay for her education. "I had to find job and money to support my university life and teaching art was the only skill I could do very well."

After graduation, Krusom married Sayarm, a teacher of indigenous people (and classified as non-citizens) in the Northern hilltribe region, a setting with which their kids also became familiar during the homeschooling years. Together, the Peungudoms learned a lot about homeschooling and Krusom shared it with the Thai nation in the form of two books on home schooling (see appendix D). Krusom also authored other books on Buddhism and education and wrote under a pseudonym an advice column for teens (and also read by some adults) in a popular Thai magazine for youth. She had many "fans" who sought her counsel and who continue to write her to this day. She is currently working on a book on early childhood education for Rajani "Mae Aew" Dhongchai of Moo Baan Dek. During the past few years, she has been serving on the Board of Directors and acting as a "hands-on" school advisor at the Pitiusksa Montessori School as well as volunteering at the Family Learning Center, a Christian alternative school where her children now attend. She is also a business-owner – an art-training institute that sends gifted art students to schools to teach teachers how to use art in the classroom. One of the most important things Krusom does for her body-mind

connect is to do martial arts. She has mastered playing Tai Chi under the tutorage of the Thai Master, Chandej Pongjin and she has just advanced to brown belt in karate.

#### 4.4.6.2 Familyschool Peungudom

When I asked Krusom what her reasons were for homeschooling, she told me that she had made careful note of how “happiness disappeared from the house.” She had observed how bored her son had become – unusual because he was a curious boy eager to learn by nature. In assessing Fasai’s school environment, she said, “I didn’t appreciate the way my son [Fasai] learned in [public] school. I didn’t appreciate the methods or subjects, or the textbooks.” The traditional teaching methods were rigid and subjects didn’t connect to one another or to her son’s life. The mainstream curriculum was designed to put pressure on kids to accumulate and presume knowing was a bundle of unrelated, mostly insignificant information. The large classrooms prevented any individual attention – “every child needs individual attention, especially my son, because I nurtured him and I know him more than the school.” Given all these conditions, Krusom felt as though she needed to “protect his curiosity and enthusiasm for learning – I want this good feeling about learning life-long. “

Krusom said that the learning approach of the school differed from the family’s view of learning. The school saw importance in irrelevant dictation, silly rules that were nonsensical, out-of-date textbooks, no emphasis on developing creative skills, and did not teach her son how to “investigate knowledge.” She saw no significance in allowing her son to just pass time, “passing grade to grade just to get a diploma.” This was a waste of precious life and “was not enough for my son – I need my children to maintain

their *learning heart*.” She declared, “if I didn’t change something, my son might fail or become a loser in society.”

Krusom didn’t know anything about homeschooling and was not influenced by anyone in choosing a *familyschooling* approach for the family Puengudom. She was aware that it was illegal at the time and was prepared to face arrest, but she was convinced she was doing the correct thing, an exercise of parental authority “to nurture and educate,” and a “natural and universal right.” Krusom and Sayarm took Fasai out of the fourth grade and Krusom refined her own curriculum, one she informally had used previous to this time, for this process. This “Learn by Heart” curriculum (see appendix E) was also the one she subsequently used with her other two children. Her curriculum is “simply simple” and Krusom says that her friends do not even consider it a curriculum. She was inadvertently and inversely inspired by the Thai public school curriculum – she wanted it “heart-based and not academic-based.” Krusom followed her knowledge of Buddhism, particularly the eight kinds of awareness corresponding to the eight great Bodhisattvas (visual, body sense, hearing, thinking, smell, wisdom, taste, and enlightenment of hindrances), which means that heart, body, and mind cannot be separated as they learn and move as a whole, not in parts.

We cannot learn from sitting in static posture for six hours a day and only use brain and not use emotion. If we cannot feel bored, cannot laugh, eat, or drink, then this is not a natural way of learning. A student can remember some information in this [public school, unnatural] way, but it won’t stay long in the memory.

Krusom thinks that it is expected of a mother to know what is good for her children and this was crucial for her curriculum design. She would assemble her

children (first Fasai) and have brainstorm sessions in which details of the curriculum were hammered out. She had the framework outlined requiring her kids to learn “maths, writing social skills, lifework, home responsibilities, tasks, manual skills,” and other things as mutually agreed upon. “I gave subject area boundaries and the kids filled the area inside the boundaries.” Krusom gave them the flexibility of choosing to work at day or night as they pleased. “Both my younger son and daughter prefer the evening. My daughter at 7PM – she is romantic and likes the light at that time of day.” Krusom’s role was to create subject assignments, types of tests, and reports – one a week every month. Krusom also wrote a daily report, like a journal. “I write my emotions/feelings for their form of assessment.” The children were active participants in their “daily assessment” accomplished by expressing what they learned or what they encountered during the day and how they dealt with that encounter. Fasai is outgoing and very conversant, much like father; Saimake is introverted and enjoys writing more; Baika is coy and studious like her mother. All the “assessment” is not really to measure academic achievement as much as the strength and depth of the family’s emotional, social, and psychological health. It also measures the value of homeschooling itself.

My relationship with my family is very close – it’s not a battleground like some families. I feel happy and lucky – it’s not a waste of time to homeschool because it is easy to reach my sons, to communicate. It is easier to create family bonds in homeschool. Homeschooling is not just the family learning – homeschooling is the whole family learning to link together to know [each other/oneself] deeply together, to be deep in relationship and this makes new skills we never had before. We can then make better relationships with others.

One particular skill Krusom learned from homeschooling was the “art of listening.” This skill, what she refers to as “contemplative listening,” would never have been learned by Krusom had she sent her kids to public schools. The “learn my own heart” form Krusom practiced was hearing her children without judgment and with openness, learning to *know* their concern and what “subjects” need to be addressed. It is also something that the children learned with her without having to be *taught*. While some parents believe they must be perfect around their children, Krusom was open to her kids about her limitations “Mom [Krusom] is not a good person at all moments – sometimes I am bored and stressed.” Krusom is a reserved person and generally doesn’t give in to complaints or outbursts “losing her energy” and her kids know how to ‘listen’ to her silence – like “when I feel imbalanced, I say to them that I want to close my work room door for a few minutes and you cannot knock.” Krusom feels grateful for having understanding kids “my children are very easy people, easy to understand others, and quite positive.” This characteristic reminds Krusom other benefits of homeschooling – emotional intelligence (EQ) and the opportunity to be learning all the time.

I think relationship is important to many areas – to relate with emotional intelligence. When I have the chance to learn relationships with my homeschool family, it makes me more skillful in my relationships with my friends and people at work. It helped me socially with my colleagues, at work, with students. Homeschool helps everyone in the family develop social skills with others outside the family.

“Quiet time” is a necessary feature of the family curriculum. A favorite activity in *quiet time* for Krusom’s kids up until they were about age 10 was “cloud looking and sky watching.” To many, this might seem an insignificant activity to be in a curriculum,

but to Krusom it is part of her *simply simple* curriculum – and to her, the simple is the most precious. “To look at clouds is not easy for adults, so I want them [her children] to keep a memory of childhood and clouds.” It was these sorts of activities that helped Krusom introduce a *natural spirituality* into her children’s life to heal and comfort them in times of need throughout their lifetime without having to rely on myths or dogma.

The essence of this nonsense with modern life and its complex society is that people find it difficult to reach the simple and the “cheap [inexpensive] medicine,” the spiritual succor, the ‘medicine pot.’ In Chinese families, you always have a pot to cook up herbs. Since spirituality can be too complex for children, I don’t emphasize ‘spiritual,’ but I use this term *medicine pot* to represent the invisible medicine pot my children can always have with them.

Spirituality is very important to Krusom and it is related to being whole and living and experiencing a holistic, undifferentiated existence. She emphasizes in her own life and in her curriculum “knowing oneself and what I feel and experience now.” This skillful means of living requires one “to practice consciousness, concentration, imagination, with the result of mindfulness.” This practice creates the *medicine pot of spirituality* – the unique experience of an invisible skill that serves to facilitate the paradoxical surrender and willful passage to wisdom and liberation. This medicine pot must be acquired at an early age and Krusom believes that humans only have a few years in which to learn the skills. “After the age of 12, we become a teen and the door closes to the potential to learn the spiritual [not the religious], to know your own medicine pot, and then the domain closes.” This is another reason for a parent to be concerned with a child in public schools



I don't want my children at this special time to disappear into the nonsense subjects at public schools. Kids in public schools are denied the ability to open up to spirituality. In exchange, they learn academics and they don't learn the real important *non-sense*.

When asked if others disrespected her children or her decision to homeschool, Krusom said that people never criticized her children because their demeanor was more mature and confident, but that she had been judged by others a number of occasions. She told me of a time when she was invited to an MOE-sponsored talk on homeschooling and alternative education in which almost all participants were public school teachers. There were some sharp comments, but one particular man became quite irate about the subject of home school and said, "How dare you make your children like lab rats." He was the type of educator who thinks homeschool cannot create certainty – just an experiment that will lead my children to failure in life." Krusom said she collected her composure and replied "Public schools are still classroom laboratories testing every student." He refuted this and wanted to engage in debate, but Krusom just smiled and said nothing more, making him angrier and he walked out. Krusom's experience with this sort of response has given her the insight that conservatives think her ideas are dangerous, doesn't create security for children, and "discredits the institution of school, and the high importance of schools [and their position] they hold in their mind." The more progressive parents are from "the new generation" of newer parents who admire Krusom and view her as "a pioneer and heroine."

The majority of parents, however, would never support homeschooling because they have no understanding of deschooling/unschooling/familyschooling and they do

not trust their abilities to be a *learning facilitator*. Krusom told me an old Chinese/Thai saying: “Children will not believe the parent, they believe the teacher.” Krusom finds *this* a dangerous concept and instead, believes “the child’s first teachers are the parents. If the mother cannot teach their children, no one can teach them.”

#### 4.4.6.3 Krusom’s View on Education

Teaching is full of fear - when teacher *teaches*, learner is destroyed... Teach, but don’t teach *truth* - tell stories or do dialog [teaching is mandating acceptance, telling is presenting for exploration and choice]... The key characteristic of a good teacher is compassion, not knowledge or intelligence... Education doesn’t teach people to live - learning is living... Students need to accept failure and losing, a sense of stupid-ness in order to be balanced.

In every one of our conversations, Krusom would be full of short capsules of wisdom culled from her experience and she would also have in-depth information about the Thai education system, Thai culture, Thai reforms, Thai alternative education, the input made by alternative educators to the reform process, and Buddhism’s relation to education and living among many, many things. Her life and her composed energy personify a person who might be referred to as a *Renaissance Woman* – or better yet, *Buddha Woman*, one who seems ubiquitous and capable of doing anything.

Krusom firmly insists she is not anti-school, but there are many aspects to the school process which makes it both an unappealing option and a degenerative and unhealthy environment for growing as a human being. Most school’s strategies are to “teach” information and give formulas and templates, but do not want to help students learn how to assess and analyze situations uniquely and truthfully. This is not far-sighted in a globalized world because students do not learn how to engage the world or

to be discerning regarding the allure and customs of the consumer world society. To Krusom, information is not important to know unless students connect this knowing to their lives and the wider lives of their family, community, nation, and world. However, public schools prepare students for a consumer orientation – consume knowledge, consume pleasure, consume everything and learn nothing of giving or living with a reflective conscience. By the time a student is a teenager, if they are already captured by consumerism or lack conscience, it is generally too late to create a healthy environment to arrest their degenerative development. Krusom believes it is essential to get to kids early to give them the necessary tools to question in order to make good and wise decisions related to their life. This cannot be mandated knowledge, or formulaic responses to situations – but by allowing and encouraging kids to question everything and discover things like a homeschooler, it can easily be done.

Teachers – and most parents – in Thailand don't understand children or can't transform understanding into purposeful action. The teachers in Thailand work very hard, but are not properly equipped with a "flexible mind." Most teachers are low-paid, have a family of their own, issues to deal with, and therefore lack energy to provide for the needs of up to 40-60 kids in a classroom. Parents have too high expectations of the schooling process and believe that they are absolved from or incompetent to be an essential element of the child's learning process. Instead, parents spoil their kids and at the same time, children do not play much as parents push them academically with regimes of tutoring or homework. The children suffer additionally because parents do not know how to teach social, emotional, or listening skills.

According to Krusom, homeschooling is not for everyone and it depends on one's temperament. She is, however, very pleased with her homeschool experience, the way her children have developed, and the way her family has grown and learned – the concept *familyschool*. The beneficial things she has enjoyed about homeschooling that Public schools do not provide are:

1. More family time;
2. more deep relationships inside and outside of the family – in the community at large;
3. kids have more fun, are happier, have more self-esteem, act with self-confidence, and are more self-aware;
4. all family members gain more skill in how to teach own self;
5. feel more free, less like the slave of the state, to look around at the world with fresh eyes.

In using comparative philosophies, Krusom views homeschooling, or at least a proper education to be like:

1. Montessori theory – Be normalized;
2. Chinese Qi theory – Qi flows more efficiently through the whole body if we can reach most *relaxed* state of both body and mind;
3. Balance of yin and yang in Chinese medicine – Be happy and at ease in your heart, then you can normalize, and move in body, mind, heart relaxed and balanced.

The disadvantages of this approach in Thai society is that the Ministry of Education (MOE) does not give recognition to this sort of balanced and normalized life; and until 2006, there was no financial assistance or resource support from the MOE, so you had to pay expenses out of your pocket. But these can be easily remedied, whereas learning the necessary foundation life-lessons has only a narrow window of time, place, and circumstance. Paradoxically, the approach through the narrow window is one of “leisure.”

#### 4.5 Home Schooling Students in Thailand

*We forget how much we learn from our surroundings without even thinking about it. Infants and toddlers learn concepts of light and dark, shape and color, motion and inertia – hundreds of concepts so obvious that we seldom think of them as having to be learned at all. As they grow older, kids don't suddenly drop this informal style of learning in favor of the more explicit approach; they (and most adults) simply become less aware of it. – Mary Griffith, advocate of unschooling, 1998.*

##### *4.5.1 Pichamon “May” Yeophantong*

May graduated with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in British and American Studies with First Class Honors and was honored with the King Bhumipol Award at the age of 17. She was awarded a Hedley Bull Scholarship to study at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. She has just recently graduated with a Master of Arts in the field of International Relations with the honor of *High Distinction* at the age of 18. She received a 90 on her Master's thesis, which is the highest mark ever given in the MA programme at ANU. She has just recently been awarded ANU's inaugural China Institute Scholarship, a full PhD scholarship in International Relations in her area of interest, China's foreign relations. The scholarship projects a three-year plan of study and May intends to graduate at the age of 21. She speaks seven languages: Thai, English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and German, and reads Sanskrit.

May has inherited her grandfather's and her mother's respect for reading and learning. She speaks like her mother about the importance of education, yet is also perceptive enough to see the pretentious and shallow social necessity of being “certified” knowledgeable:

You have to be smart in present day society – maybe not smart, but you do have to have a diploma in any field because it certifies you that you're at a

certain level of smartness and you're a participant in society... In reality, having a diploma is not the sole determinant of one's abilities. Knowledge, education and intelligence can't always be measured by the number of diplomas you have.

As a homeschooler, she realizes her life has been radically different than most kids her age, but she doesn't feel that she is outside of society "I'm still in society, so I can't really escape the fact that I have to perform to norms and values." But people who predictably asked about her social limitations as a homeschooler often disappointed May:

Are you OK? Anti-social? Have a problem getting along with others in your class? These are the least of my problems. In actuality, I have no real problems. I have many friends at the university and outside the university... Socialization is something that comes naturally in each and every person. Being anti-social is a mental problem. You don't have to go to school to learn to be social – it is innate.

Her social life was always part of her learning and it also served as a family bond that nurtured her sense of goodness and care. The amount of care her siblings demonstrated toward one another was poignant and loving. She never had to beg them to teach her something; her siblings gladly played the role of instructor or devising interactive situations for her. They would consult the Internet, books, other people – whatever/whoever to either help themselves or to help May. If May asked to learn a certain topic, they'd spend two weeks researching and preparing for her to create interest by simulating challenges and fun activities. May said that, when they were giving her some information, they would ask her "Are you OK? Am I going too fast? Do you understand?" Interactive and simulations also included the stereotypical learning environment, "My brother would create one-hour 'fun, false exams' and gave

me one week to prepare. Then he'd grade me and when I scored low, he'd say it was OK and then created a new situation." These moments of *familyschooling* undoubtedly inspired May and she claimed that the most important thing she learned in homeschooling was how to learn from living – that is, "the integration of the practical with the theoretical." May also found homeschool exceptional in helping her understand the concept of education

[Before my IGCSE examinations] I had never sat for a test or an exam, but I didn't think that they were *that* important, because when you learn something and it captures your interest, then you try to do your best to be good at it, then that's learning, that's education, and that's the one great thing that homeschool is good at. People have always misunderstood the real essence of education. Learning in school is not a way to socialize. It is not a way to gain social status; but instead, it is a way to improve your self by cultivating and gathering a variety of perspectives and new ideas that interest you.

The idea of emotion as an integral part of learning has not been promoted much in the West. However, May told me that she felt "surrounded with emotion" in the *familyschool* atmosphere. "There is no competition, no pressure to get grades, you have a friendly environment and there is no worry about bad relationships with teachers who will give me bad grades." Having positive influences that instill confidence and trust can only benefit the encouragement of a child's natural curiosity – and who would know better what sort of input is needed to fortify one's emotional content than a family member, or if one is extremely lucky, a caring teacher? In May's case, she gets both in a mother acutely aware of her daughter's disposition and those areas that represent a potential threat that could also be a potential strength. May's mother enrolled her in a number of classes outside the university that matched her interest and areas of potential

‘weakness.’ As an example, May does not fit the profile of a ballerina – her mother described her as a young girl big for Thai standards (but not by Western standards); yet she enrolled in ballet classes in order to sharpen her physical balance, grace, posture, and self-confidence. Surprising to others, she became a good ballerina and enjoyed it, particularly when classmates who disbelieved she could do ballet saw that she could.

May’s homeschooling was, by her own admission, “more freer than many (in Thailand) because mom didn’t care what the MOE wanted. We did it independently, on our own.” May also had the advantage of being raised with mostly English as a first language and therefore had access to many English language resources. Her homeschooling was not an over-emphasis of academic book-learning, but was more of a learning-as-living environment within a supportive, stress-free atmosphere. Every moment and situation was learning; the family network built the foundation to create a pattern of trust, confidence, and competence. Learning was “not driven by teachers, but we helped each other.”

In contrast, while attending Thammasat University, May observed that the Thai students were thoroughly conditioned to be “overly concerned and pressured to be first in class, be the class president, be the best of everything. Kids compete themselves to death to get into the best universities.” Overall, she was satisfied with her university, the teachers, curriculum, the information; but she already knew how to learn and was relaxed with the environment. However, she was “dissatisfied with fellow students, their petty rivalries, their competitive aggressiveness,” but she shrugged it off with a philosophical, “it’s a part of every society.” She has matured enough to realize she has



had to sacrifice a little bit of her freedom at university, but also learning new things and skills. But this is the expected attitude of a successful learner of life, too.

#### *4.5.2 Fasai Puengudom*

Krusom had told me much of her children and she first introduced her oldest son, Fasai to me at a large Bangkok shopping mall. We sat outside a popular coffee shop and spoke for 3-4 hours. Subsequent to that meeting, I saw Fasai a few more times in Chiang Rai. Fasai was in Bangkok having just finished a sound engineer course. His lifestyle at that time was centered on his main interest – bodybuilding, a phase that was an extension of his homeschooling. In talking and getting to know Fasai, I could see the influence of his mother and grandmother and their adventurous and confident spirit.

Fasai was homeschooled much of his youth, from fourth grade until high school. In hindsight, and in the context of his current phase, he said that he was “a small guy, but it became important for me to be noticed. [Now] I can’t stand to be less noticeable or less significant... I want to be my best to be more significant.” People might be quick to draw the conclusion that this attitude stems from Fasai lacking friends and the social aspect of public schooling, but Fasai refutes this and is quick to say he had friends, but what he didn’t get and what he has been seeking in his current phase was “to compare through friendly competition.” Fasai is trying to measure within his own set of perceptions what is his sense of excellence and what more he is capable of doing well – in essence, it is the calibration of the range and limits of his ego in relation to his life interests and the necessary skills in order to have his own sense of success – not someone else’s based on a standardized measure.

Since I quit homeschool... and getting into the real world, competing with people – I see how people are better at some things and I boost myself up to their level so that I am not less significant, and that I am [not viewed by others as] the result of homeschooling and don't know anything... In playing piano [when I hear someone playing good], I may play better technically, but perhaps I improvise better and I notice improvement in another area and that I have gotten better. I improve my own strengths, not imitate the strengths of the other.

Fasai confided that he had a hard time explaining to people about his homeschool experience, particularly with people who had adopted customary and typical ideas about the school experience and the learning experience of living *normally*. “I prefer unique people – not just anybody.” This preference grew out of his homeschool experience and being surrounded by interesting and unique parents and engaging in activities that most kids don't usually experience. This unique experience also had challenges and when Fasai went back to public school in tenth grade, he lasted only two months (“I skipped out a lot”), being in a large class with many girls was overstimulating. He enjoyed being around girls and they represented an entirely different sort of social learning.

At homeschool, obviously there were no girls and every girl outside of home seemed pretty. Now it is sometimes hard to deal with the opposite sex because I don't know much about them. But it's alright, as you grow up you meet more people and learn. I just learned a little later than those who learned these things in high school.

Being out of Thai public schools was “like being out of jail” for Fasai and he had much deeper communication and learning experiences at home. His level of self-understanding is evident when talking with him and seeing his progression through life. “I feel proud of my awareness of most things - it is one of my strong personality traits.”

Krusom's curriculum and Sayarm's fatherly care were obvious factors, but the fact of his being away from institutional thinking and run of the mill production schooling cannot be underestimated. The homeschool *un-routine* was that Fasai didn't have to get up early, and for the first two years, there were no academic objectives – “just play, sleep, eat, lie on the ground [and watch clouds].” The first book Fasai read in fourth grade homeschool was about Native Americans and it was a topic that captured his interest. He then began to read every book he could find on Native Americans – myths and stories of the Lakota Sioux, the Long Walk of the Navajo, and the nation building of the Iroquois. Krusom said that Fasai's reading of these books were instrumental in developing a reflective approach to books because after reading it became a regular practice and communicative device to ask questions and discuss with everyone who would talk with him. This is also very different approach than the Thai schools as they emphasized manners in strict black and white terms, with no deep reflection, questioning, personal meaning-making or application. His reading became significant lessons because he began with personal reflection and followed it up with dialog among multiple sources in a living context.

In middle school years, Fasai studied hard in order to get his equivalency credentials, but he had to find resources to learn different subjects. His family, his uncle - every adult community friend who could help him learn was approached. This self-responsibility in his learning process most certainly enhanced Fasai's strength as a “good networker.” But in reflection, Fasai realized he was a good networker, but “not real good with relationships” and he decided that it would be better to attend an

alternative school in order to get a high school certificate and develop inter-relational skills. So he elected to attend a local Christian alternative school, The Family Learning Center (FLC) of Chiang Rai. It was a natural choice because it offered a relaxed, small school environment (50 students) that was family-oriented, similar to his homeschool experience. The FLC is a relaxed environment one in which students could “move around, eat, and call the teacher by their first name.” One would think that a school that is so relaxed would also lack filial respect, academic integrity, and camaraderie among students. As one who has spent time at the school I can attest that none of these negative attributes apply to any aspect of the FLC. One might also think of the possible inter-religious conflict given Christianity’s proclivity to *save souls* and *convert heathens* at every opportunity.

Many of my friends at the Christian School have good thoughts, love, compassion – they do what they believe. The Christian School is an amazing school – they practice their beliefs! I respect them a lot for their playfulness, their seriousness, their caring, and their friendship. They believe in free will and don’t try to push Christianity on anyone... I respect them a lot as very good humans. Most of them are here as volunteers and have formed several NGOs.

The FLC had a great impact on both Fasai and Krusom. Krusom now regularly volunteers her time and energy to the school and Fasai gives the FLC credit for positioning him to interact with the world “I am the way I am because I attended FLC... it gave me the opportunity to study my own beliefs.” Fasai, already having the ability to reflect and create meaning independent of dogma and cultural influences, examined the comparative significance of beliefs and what it is that emboldens his own independent identity and spirituality.

Christians believe in salvation – you’re not saved unless you are Christian. [But] It’s not right to tell someone they will go to hell just because you don’t believe in Jesus as a savior. I cannot tell this to my Christian friends, but they knew [what I think]... I guess I consider myself Buddhist. I don’t feel right doing the rituals [i.e., wai-ing Buddhist images] or repeating the three-page long prayers, saying words I don’t even know the meaning. I pray in my mind for people I care for. My definition of spiritual is to care about people... We are a Buddhist country, but many are not compassionate, even though it is the main idea of Buddhism... people saying bad things to each other and then go home to pray. People who pray in a traditional manner would say that I am not Buddhist because I criticize freely... But sometimes when you’re aware of things, you can’t accept them [anymore].

Fasai’s parents have instilled a deep sense of spirituality even though never labeling it as such. As confirmed by Krusom, it was intentional in order to allow Fasai to grow into a naturally spiritual person, a good, caring human not concerned with prescribed responses, dogma or labels. Fasai, although considering himself as “selfish,” told me of his interactions with beggars and his attitudes about the inequality of treating people according to the status given by social standards, as occurs too frequently in Thai society. He related how everyday he would cook up ten egg yolks leftover from his bodybuilding regime and distribute to different beggars he got to know. He told me about the time as a young boy when he was first moved by the beggar’s life and he gave the beggar all his money. It raised many questions and conversations with his parents and since this day, it has become his personal practice to respond to the morality of human need and not to respond to social status nor allow others to treat him as an inferior person. His unfettered attitude of caring and equality reminded me of the expression, *random acts of kindness*, because Fasai has no formulaic motives to measure equity or giving, except to have a sense of authenticity, a sense of pride and

respect, and a sense of morality. Fasai was thankful his father taught him moral justice because he thinks he might have become too “crafty” and insensitive to others’ life situation. “Morality is mostly concerned about being happy, content with yourself, and not making others unhappy.”

Even though he did get his high school diploma that is recognized in the USA, the MOE does not recognize it as valid and it has prevented him from enrolling in a Thai university (except for international programs). But this was never a concern for Fasai because he never had an ambition to go to university and, from his current perspective, “it doesn’t seem fun or interesting... I am trying to work to make enough money to do what I want so that I don’t have to rely on my parents.” Fasai thought working as a sound engineer would be something that might interest him and he went to a school in Bangkok to get certified. What it turned out to be however was an opportunity to know himself better and what learning skills he relies upon. Audio engineering wasn’t a suitable fit because Fasai has developed a learning style that relies on experiential skills, whereas a sound engineer must be precise and not dependent on estimation. Fasai also found it “too stressful being in a confined, stuffy, square room with so many lectures.” So, Fasai got his diploma, but knew this wasn’t a career step for him. His concurrent bodybuilding phase led to an interest in health, food, and cooking. He got a job at a restaurant in Chiang Rai on his own initiative even though his parents knew the owner. It also led to perhaps his next phase and his current activity – working on a Mediterranean cruise ship.

When I asked Fasai if he had to do it over again, would he choose homeschool, he replied emphatically “Yes! I loved the opportunity to be in this family. I respect how my family raised me and how they do things.” I am rather certain that Fasai does not say this because he has found an enclave that offers him security and a spoiled and isolated existence – it is quite the opposite from how he has responded to give himself life challenges to find his own way through life. He is aware of his deep love and connection to his family and how they have influenced him “I learned that homeschool and family is trusting... I gained my attitudes from my parents – their attitudes are my attitudes” but he also knows he must fulfill his own being and give it its own unique meaning. This requires the courage to be an individual standing on your own, not “carrying the weight of the ancients on horseback” as his mother would say, but to experience life as a continual learning event worthy enough to give your time and attention. Fasai elegantly reminds us that a part of being moral is also “being free.”

#### 4.6 Buddhism, Spirituality, and Education: The Voices of Four Thais

*Scientists are able to see the nature of non-self in the brain, in the body, in everything. But what they have found doesn't help them because they cannot apply that insight to their daily lives. So they continue to suffer. – Thich Nhat Hanh*

##### *4.6.1 Sulak Sivaraksa*

When I asked Sulak Sivaraksa what his definition of spirituality was, he answered, “I breathe, therefore I am.” I don’t believe he was referring to the old Latin *spiritualis*, of breathing, of wind, because after a short chortle, he quickly expanded his definition. Sulak perceives spirituality as a balanced experience of life that is mediated by sharpened mental faculties (“head”) and an insightful emotional range (“heart”). He

is quick to say that one does not need to be religious to be spiritual as religion can be as much a hindrance as a help. His mentor, Phra Buddhadasa, had told him that he needed to understand the best in religion because it teaches one to be humble.

Sulak explained to me how the Western world followed the path of the “head,” following the Cartesian dictum that has led to an overly concentration on thinking in a compartmentalized and materialistic realization of life. This leads to an alienation from the concept of goodness because it can’t be defined intellectually, with reason, or deducted logically. For Sulak, the spiritual is beyond the intellect, it synchronizes and harmonizes the intellect and the intuitive, and is a personal experience. For this to occur it is essential to “be mindful” in the Buddhist sense and this requires a particular education that is not part of the Western education advocated by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Sulak summarizes how the MOE sizes up to Buddhist education:

Unfortunately, the MOE doesn’t teach us how to know oneself or be mindful. It (MOE) teaches to know the sun and moon and everything else, but not ourselves. In Buddhism, the key understanding – the most important element for everyone to learn is how to develop critical self-awareness so that you will not be attached to yourself. You have to realize that people usually are controlled by (selfish) happiness, praise, wealth, fame and the avoidance of all discomfort.

Sulak had a theme in our discussion – the importance of friendship. According to Sulak, Buddha said that the most important external element to learn is how to be a good friend to one and all. I liken this to the importance of compassion in the Buddhist perspective. But Sulak enlarges the concept of compassion and deems friends to be those “who would be your other voice of conscious and tell you things you don’t want to hear,” particularly those things that keep one from being critically self-aware. He



laments that mainstream education lacks this emphasis on learning how to be the consciousness of others with the ability to reveal blind spots and be in the place to make community. “You have selfishness, hate, and delusion interfering with your development and... you need mindfulness to transform selfishness to selflessness. You become selfless in order to serve others in life-living-learning.”

The historical linkage between Buddhism and education has been a tradition carried on by Sulak throughout his career. Over the years he has established a number of NGOs emphasizing Buddhist traditions, a publishing company, founded The International Network of Engaged Buddhists, set up the Wongsanit Ashram - a Buddhist alternative informal school for Monks and communities – all related to education and being the consciousness of Thai society through the support of multiple forms of alternative education. He was the inspiration of Rajani and Pibhop Dhongchai, founders of *Moo Baan Dek*, Thailand’s first formal alternative school and has supported the legalization and expansion of home-schooling and alternative schools in Thailand. In 1995 he formalized the *Spirit in Education Movement* (SEM), an umbrella NGO that supported all his projects, which started small and grew into other larger groups educating and training in work places and places wherever learning will occur. Sulak views “education is a long-term process” and serves the purposes of creating better workplace atmospheres, promotes friendship, encourages the use of and transmission of indigenous knowledge, and the development of better livelihoods with far less exploitation.

SEM's alternative approaches are that it is rooted in two-way dialog and not teacher-to-student monolog, the use of nature as a teaching and learning tool, and most importantly to Sulak, they "learn from suffering, the first of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism." Sulak points out that "suffering now comes in various forms and that's why if you want to bring education to the modern world, you must understand the social structure which causes violence, greed, hate, and delusion." Sulak is adamant in saying that it is education's duty to concentrate on addressing "the root causes of structural violence," particularly in getting people to be conscious of the fact that "when you have comfort in life, it is often at the expense of others."

When our conversation turned to what some of the problems were with formal education in Thailand and how it affected the country, Sulak was both critical of formal education and the imperialism of Western thought. However, Sulak is not an isolationist and believes it is essential to develop Thailand in a sustainable manner. "We offer an alternative to the mainstream... to grow, we must go beyond US/European imperialistic footprints." This alternative is the addition of the spiritual dimension into education, and going back to the Four Noble Truths to confront suffering. However, Sulak doesn't see the formal education system having a value system. He is critical of teachers, but the blame is pointed at the elite,

Some of the teachers are nice and good, but on the whole, they are hopeless because all the deans and rectors and ministry in this country are Western products and have no concern for ecological issues and they claim they are Buddhists, but they have no understanding of Buddhism. For them, Buddhism is largely superstitious.

Remedying the problems in the Thai formal education system is problematic because as Sulak points out, “you kill Buddhism when you teach it in school... and if my ideas were incorporated into public schools, perhaps they’d water them down into something dreadful.” Yet his (he uses the word *our* in the transcript, speaking for the many friends working on the same issues) recent efforts have been to work within the system to change the laws to allow home-schooling and more freedom for alternative schools. “They should allow alternative education – if not, everything will be run by the government.” All schools, even private ones, must conform to the Thai official curriculum and although the MOE has incorporated Buddhism into the official curriculum, according to Sulak, it lacks a spiritual dimension. The problem of implementing the modern, formal Thai education curriculum is that it is a copy of the Western system, which is imbued with its own social and cultural influences, reflecting advanced countries that developed these educational systems from their own historical patterns. Sulak estimated that the Thai education system is at least thirty years behind any Western country. The purpose of Western education, particularly in the United States, is debatable, yet its foundation is in creating a schooled labor force and for the individual to gain higher social status. Thailand’s educational foundations are entirely wrapped in issues related to learning the Buddhist Dharma and serving the community. Sulak’s perspective on education reflects these cultural and social traditions and it is not surprising that he eloquently summarizes the purpose of education: “Education is really for liberation.”

#### 4.6.2 *Pracha Hutanuwat*

Pracha Hutanuwat is a very close associate of Sulak's and may even be considered one of his *right hand* partners. Pracha is a man who does not seek a spotlight, but has been very active in giving life to spiritual communities throughout the Southeast Asia region and internationally. Pracha was a monk for eleven years, having studied with the Venerable Phra Buddhadasa, and disrobing in 1986. He served as the director of the Wongsanit Ashram and the Spiritual Education Movement (SEM) for eleven years. The Ashram is described on Sulak's webpage as "an alternative, international community for simple living and engaging in social action and spiritual practice." It is one of the five nodes in the Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF) network Sulak, with the aid of Pracha and others have established to "point out the interconnection between humans, society, and nature." He has written and taught in many forums about sustainable living and eco-village living.

Pracha, as with Sulak, cannot separate spirituality from education, culture, or everyday living. In opening up our conversation, he reminded me that within the Asian context, contemplative people serve the cultural traditions of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Hinduism with education the key to "cultivating the heart" in order to separate the wholesome from the unwholesome, the reliance on purity within each individual. But unless one is taught how to distinguish one from the other, you won't cultivate wholesomeness, and this is the role of education. The problem with contemporary schools is that, although Buddhism and meditation may be subjects, teachers don't really know how to get students to realize their wholesomeness.

Buddhism is often presented “as an intellectual learning, how to answer a set of Buddhist teachings, but it doesn’t cultivate the heart.” Cultivating the heart, or intuitive knowing, feeling, and sensing of self and ones environment, is facilitated by proper contemplation with guidance from a teacher knowledgeable in this practice – traditionally the role of monks. Before King Mongkhut reformed the Sangha during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most men became monks for 4-5 years and meditation was an everyday part of life for villagers. Pracha laments and says, “Interest in contemplative approaches have steadily dropped off since Mongkhut’s reform and most monks are now very secular – unfortunately.”

Pracha put into perspective for me the relationship between Buddhism and education and its purpose through comparison of Jungian conceptualization and a Maslovian perspective. Jungians talk of individualization and Maslovians speak of actualization, but Buddhists look to “develop a more awakening quality, to be more compassionate, to be more wise, to be more generous.” Pracha asserts that these qualities cannot be cultivated in an ethos of capitalism or socialism and one must go beyond all this, what he labels as “the modern project.” It is essential to use the Buddhist approach of building alternatives – cultural first, and then economic and political will follow after that. This approach

attends to the need of building communities of resistance, building schools of resistance, building an ashram of resistance in order to produce individual resistance, family of resistance, and businesses of resistance that create cultural power, moral power, intellectual power, and most of all the power of wisdom to put into daily practice.

Pracha reaffirmed the need of every community to have rebels in order to be healthy and make it vital and moral. “To be moral, you have to be rebellious at the right time.” So, it is not rebelliousness for the sake of rebellion; it is to keep the community from creating needless dichotomies, monocultures, and conformity to group thinking that hurts diversity and cultivation of a good society. The current monoculture, standardization, and problems in the south of Thailand have “grown out of the nation-state building project of Rama V” (King Chulalongkorn) whereby there was “no tolerance for differences in the nation project.” Pracha emphasized the artificial nature of nation-creation and that it shouldn’t be taken seriously by anyone. The problem of nation-states in Southeast Asia is particularly difficult, explained Pracha, because there were hundreds of different states developed over hundreds of years that lived in relative peace. So, nationhood is relatively new to Thailand and it has come at great expense – the expense is an “internal colonization process” whereby a state is created with “everyone not feeling good enough, aided by going through the education system, and the media.” But he sees this internal colonization process as having been transformed to a colonization process by the corporate elite “who happen to control all the tentacles of the state machinery” and who happen to be linked to the global elite in industry and education.

Pracha refers to this educational colonization as “Americanization” because of the historical significance of the first Thai national educational plan, which copied the curriculum and purpose of the American system. Pracha’s “modernization project” has education as one of its principle mechanisms with the function of undermining the

cultural, spiritual, and psychological fabric in the communities that Thailand's new nation had claimed hegemony over. The "modernization project" began when the elite went to the West and entered their schools. They were "brainwashed" to believe that Thailand and Southeast Asian people were not civilized or progressive, even though the rural people were content before modernization with their lives within small kingdoms where there was no money, ownership, laborers, or consumer markets. The elite returned from overseas "to inflict their inferiority to the masses" and began the hegemonic rule of "Bangkok imperialism – Bangkok colonizing the distant villages while the elites were being colonized by Western ideas."

During our conversation, Pracha and I discussed how alienation is part of being human – we all have existential alienation because we want to escape from nothingness. Pracha pointed out that, deep down we know this is a sense of lack, but the "modern project" exploits this sense of lack. This deep insecurity becomes a search for a sense of self, fame, wealth, power, sex – all fortifying a sense of self, something to grab on to – the antithesis to spirituality to a Buddhist because they foster the development of competition, aggression, and selfishness. Traditional societies developed cultural "governors" to moderate the destructive tendencies of these. Pracha noted that most people are not aware or do not want to see the negative aspect of modernization and follow the "modern project" blindly. Pracha further explained to me the harm Thai education has inflicted even to the present day: the psychological suggestion of a sense of inferiority "that has created a great sense of alienation and uprooted people from their cultural values, deprived them of self-respect, and made them too weak to resist the

enticements of modernization and becoming the victims of consumerism.” When we spoke of the United Nation’s initiative, *Education for All* (EFA), he said, “I don’t believe in that initiative.” He iterated this two times and sighed deeply after the second time. He said in a sad manner, “this is how you brainwash people to be victims of consumerism.” He finds the *Education for All* initiative regrettable because its main emphasis is to be another “modern project” to establish conformity and international class stratification. Pracha is a firm believer in education, but it is the schooling project that projects the debilitating servitude to a global push to be a good consumer and all that that entails – competition, aggression, self-orientation, and loss of community orientation - that he firmly objects to.

Anyone who has spent any time in Thailand will have seen weary children being shuttled seven days a week from school to tutor and then home to study for several hours in order to get good grades and do well on the college entrance exam. The lure is the hope of going to the best college and getting a high-status job. This academic march starts at a very early age and is driven by parents with the stated concern of wanting the best for their child. To Pracha, the over-emphasis on uber-academics and getting good grades by Thai students and parents is the trap of consumerism. This aspect of not feeling good enough and in response, making such dramatic efforts to prove to oneself or others, “this is the modern ignorance that is destroying our lives, destroying our children. Young children are being uprooted by this thinking.” Pracha thinks that what is taught in schools does not require spending 12 years in school and



could be reduced by half. He favors education without the schooling – ideally, learning in a community.

For Pracha, book learning is important, but such a very small aspect of learning. Schools and the educational elites have given it an importance beyond its utility. In contemplative education, “when you reflect from experience, you learn a lot – intellectually, personally, spiritually, and emotionally. Some of the most important things Pracha has learned from being an educator over the past three decades are that

Learning to make decisions is education; relationship is education, because you learn the quality of life by relating with/to the quality of other people. You can’t learn this by thinking. Instructional training can be helpful, but only by taking responsibility of intellectual development.

Drawing upon his time as a schoolteacher in a formal school, he told me two stories that influenced his thinking a lot. Both related to young children working, helping to feed their family, the pride they felt, and how it related to learning. Pracha has learned:

The first thing is that students must make decisions in their life. You are not to sit in rooms for twelve years without making important decisions in your life. My students learn to make their own decisions that are appropriate for each stage of life development. At high school level, I hope they learn how to make their living.

In contrast to most Western educators and some human rights activists, Pracha believes in children working, though not in exploitation. He believes that as soon as children are able and strong enough to work, they should do so. His beliefs are in accord with several alternative educators in Asia that, most notably, the Shikshantar Institute, that believe international education elites have demeaned the dignity of the working class.

In closing our conversation, I asked Pracha if there was any chance for change given the seeming global hopelessness and the progression of the “modern project.” He said,

We are all human beings and all humans have awakening aspects, so we should all see hope. If you see more of the Buddha nature in yourself, then your faith in the good qualities of the universal will be more stable. But you have to see it in yourself first.

#### *4.6.3 Phra Visalo Paisal*

The Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo is the abbot of Wat Pak Sukato “Forest of Happiness Temple” in Chaiyaphum Province, Thailand. He attended Thammasat University during the 1970s and was involved in student activism with a focus on human rights and protection of political prisoners. He entered the monkhood in 1983, although his original intent was to be a monk for only three months, when he found he could be a more calm and energetically focused activist with the aid of meditation. He is a pupil of the Venerable Buddhadasa and Sulak Sivaraksa. He is the co-founder of Sekiyadhamma, a network of socially engaged monks in Thailand and has worked closely with Sulak and Pracha in the area of environmentalism and meditation. He is also a well-respected academic writer and has published many articles and books in English and Thai on the environment and Buddhism in daily life. He is an advocate for a strong civil society and the integration of political, public action with spiritual conceptions.

Krusome Peung-Udom, a pioneer home-school mother, introduced me to Phra Visalo via Internet. When I made the appointment to meet Phra Paisal, he suggested the

“*Yoong Tong*” tree in the courtyard at Thammasat University. Although I knew the tradition of Thammasat as a university that represented the progressive political point of view and the locale of the infamous bloody massacre of 1976, I did not realize the significance of this tree site until much later after we met. The tree site has been traditionally a bit like the Boston Commons – a place heaped in the tradition of radical student and popular revolutionary speech. The university itself has its origination in radical politics - Pridi Banomyong, one of the organizers of the revolutionary People's Party and the *Free Thai* movement, drafted the essential founding act in 1933. As a result, Thammasat University, then known as the University of Moral and Political Science, became Thailand's second university on June 27, 1934. The university's original vision was to create a public tertiary institution to foster democracy through the study of law and political science and it has established its reputation as one of Southeast Asia's leading universities in the fields of law and political science (Wikipedia, 2007).

We began our conversation talking about the moral issues facing Thailand as a result of globalization. Phra Paisal lamented how the moral attitude in Thailand has faced a dramatic decline, particularly since 1983. Phra Paisal defined the moral issues as “corruption, dishonesty, social injustice, and issues related to aggression and violence at home and with children.” Corruption is particularly pernicious since it is now so pervasive and widespread at every level of power, even at the rural level now. Phra Paisal quickly made the connection between consumerism and the challenges to a spiritual society. He viewed consumerism as a kind of religion in Thailand without an

alternative or, metaphorically, without an antidote. According to Phra Paisal, Buddhism “doesn’t play its role properly in providing spiritual satisfaction.” People are attracted, not only to the sensual pleasure of consumerism, but also because it provides a purpose and means of self-fulfillment. Unless Buddhism re-reforms itself, it will not be able to be a spiritual force. In addition, Thailand needs to develop a strong civil society concerned with moral issues to counteract the materialism influenced by consumerism.

Phra Paisal explained the lack of a “public good” in Thailand and how this has persisted over time. Traditionally, Thais haven’t concerned themselves with the community too much as this is the realm of *pii* (spirits). Phra Paisal explained that there are two sources of morality - Buddhism and *pii*. Buddhism is personal morality and *pii* is related to public or communal morality. Westerners have a difficult time in understanding the concept of *pii* and classify it as “superstitious” without realizing its value or its function. Since King Mongkhut’s Buddhist reforms, many traditions considered by Westerners as “superstitious” have also been taught to be so by Thais. Most “educated” Thai people will view many cultural aspects of Buddhism to be superstitious and there are fewer people who believe in *pii* as the guardian of community morality or a family/community bonding function on a spiritual-emotional level, yet there has been nothing to replace its function. “Not law, because people can get around the law with money, but society will not try to replace *pii* morality.” The only way to develop a public good and replace the *pii* morality is to develop a strong civil society or people with a strong social sense, which is gradually being developed among grassroots groups, NGOs, and some middle-class people.

How we raise children, education, including the way morality is taught by teachers and monks is on a personal level with a more interpersonal approach to morality. We don't teach about public morality and I think this is the problem.

Phra Paisal believes that the strengthening of civil society will reduce authoritarianism and make the state more transparent in Thailand. Even though there has been a lot of effort put into decentralization, it has not taken out the authoritarian or bureaucratic system even though this was one of the stated goals of decentralization. Phra Paisal says convincingly that authoritarianism and bureaucracy are very strong and are one and the same. This dual-headed system “will never go away and has now spread to the village level via the *aw baw taw*” (decentralized government office at village level). This is “a reproduction of the authoritarian-bureaucratic system and does not promote the use of brain, data, or knowledge – it only exercises authority and power... through confrontational acts” and by discouraging dialog and input.

He sees the creation of area regional education offices a breakthrough, but the decision-making process still does not involve the local populace in any of the decisions. On top of the authoritarian- bureaucratic system, “education is a failure – the quality of teachers has declined even though there is no real shortage of teachers (except for village level teachers).” This decline has occurred even though academic qualifications are higher because they are surpassed by the decline in morals and professionalism. In the past, people loved to be teachers or monks, but now, intelligent people cannot become teachers or monks. Education is facing a major dilemma in Thailand because teachers are “generally those who have failed to excel in other areas

in demand for development” (maths, science, law, medicine) and “many, if not most teachers have no particular commitment or love of education and they are culled from the lower academic students.” Phra Paisal lays the blame on the state educational structure that has overindulged with centralized stratification and bureaucratic methods, all the while feeding “the ideal of materialism” that grows into authoritarian configurations. “Thai education system is to serve economic planning with less emphasis on moral, not to mention spiritual, just to serve the economic purpose.” He also sees the pattern of educators who go overseas to complete their PhDs and then “come back and getting discouraged by the system and losing their passion. They end up answering to the hierarchy and compete for permission to be significant.”

In a tribute to his master, Phra Buddhadasa, in May 2006, he wrote, “Growth in material consumption does have a positive side. It allows religion an opportunity to present alternatives once people emerge from the myth that materialism leads to happiness” (Visalo, P. in Tangwisutijit, N, 2006). I asked him about this and what sort of hope he has for Thailand. His response was, “I don’t have hope with the state and the market, but I do with society and with social capital.”

#### *4.6.4 Nuttarote Wangwinyoo*

I first met Nuttarote “Nutt” in 2003 when I went to Thailand for a pre-dissertation research study. He was finishing up a sustainable agricultural training at Moo Baan Dek near Kanchanaburi province. Moo Baan Dek was the first Thai alternative village school and often conducted alternative non-formal training for adults. Nutt was completing the facilitation of training in sustainable agriculture and before he

left, we sat down and spoke of indigenous knowledge. We talked on several occasions when I was in Thailand during 2006 and I also met his uncle, Wisit Wangwinyoo in addition to other of his community members. Nutt is a pupil of his uncle, Wisit, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Prawase Wasi and it was these close ties that led to the founding of the Kwan Muang community in Chiang Rai, a foundation that was established in collaboration with Sulak's Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). The community emphasizes dialog and team learning, with workshops and training in spiritual and deep ecology, sustainable living, self-awareness and personal transformation, among many experiential learning courses. Nutt was a monk in the rural area of Northern Thailand before he decided to apply his insights into the secular world, first by graduating from the Nairopa Institute in Boulder, Colorado and then by returning to create NGOs that would shelter his notions of a spiritual community.

Nutt attends a monthly meeting, *The New Consciousness Group*, a group formed by Dr. Prawase Wasi in 2004. Dr Wasi has been instrumental in introducing public health awareness into Thai society and most recently has been trying to introduce "sin taxes" on tobacco and alcohol. Nutt explained to me that Dr. Wasi formed the New Consciousness Group because he thought that Thai society needed to "stress the importance of spiritual evolution." The group he formed is composed of twelve intellectuals (mostly policy-makers and social leaders) who meet monthly for six hours to discuss what is occurring throughout the world, particularly those things that are related to spirituality or progressive science. The group seeks what and how to implement concepts and practices that would assist in spiritualizing society, to evolve

society in a more distinguished manner. Although Nutt views the group as a bit elitist in the sense that ideas aren't always put into application, the evolution and shifting of worldviews and paradigms, from economy to science and to include all disciplines of human knowledge, are necessary because "our bodies are complete, but our minds are stuck." Nutt has observed that the group tends to spend too much time arguing about the term *spiritual health* and "talking about spirituality without practice is endless babble." To make the point even more clear, Nutt says that "learning organizations talk about community of practice (COP), but they (the New Consciousness Group) have a community of concepts (COC)."

The NGO Nutt co-founded has had a series of incarnations and is currently known as *Foundation Kwan Muang* (Soul Society) and has also been known as *Sang Comb Wee Wat* (Society for an Evolving New Consciousness). Nutt summarizes the foundation's intent, "we bring people together to explore their assumptions of the world, the purpose of life, and how we can contribute to a better world." He is quick to point out that the foundation is a community composed of "a varied social matrix" that seeks dialog with different organizations and institutions to realize new life lessons; and is not an elite organization with "an agenda to implement *on* you." The Foundation has ten sophisticated guiding principles as an organizational entity: 1) no claim to professional expertise (non-elitism); 2) attend to other's agenda, not ours (no single solution, agenda emerges from dialog); 3) develop community of practice (help establish COP in organizations to affect structural change as well as individual change); 4) attend to perceiving organization's goal/agenda; 5) work with structures and inner



organizations (bring parts to the whole); 6) bonding and networking; 7) education is to be community-oriented, not productive-oriented (“Life Agenda” and thinking with body as well as mind, use of Tai Chi); 8) move from personal level to the family level; 9) train new facilitators; 10) Emphasize healing – start from within. One of the procedural “mantras” Nutt uses is “Let come, not let go.” In his work with Americans during training sessions, Nutt has noticed that this mantra peeves them, as it is contrary to American procedural expectations of planning every moment and learning event with little room for spontaneous learning and shifting of perspectives.

When I asked Nutt how he was educated and whether the Foundation’s principles are in contradiction to Thai education, he said he was a very good student and a trained engineer, but he never felt confident or fulfilled, so he questioned why this was so. He came to the realization that Thai education is “very much an industry to manufacture the capacity to perform, not to live and not to connect. It emphasizes the lack of people with the assumption that if you only compete will you develop something greater.” Nutt explained that schooling had been an emphasis on expressing appearances of knowing (“conform and perform”) as opposed to the ability to reflect on the “wisdom of the unspoken” that can act in greater capacity for fuller living. To Nutt, the tragedy is that modern Thai education does not value or encourage people to discover their “connection with the world, with nature, or with other people – we are isolated.”

Nutt has ascribed a substantial influence of Buddhism and its theory of learning on the Foundation’s principles. He maintains that Buddhist learning principles requires

one to reflect on ones own “projection of reality,” which is impressionable and “projects what we want to see, not what actually is.” Buddhism approaches this problem by “enrichening the capacity to observe – to observe the observer.” So, it becomes essential to develop a sharpened mind that is capable of perceiving the relationship between the clutching of the assumptions of reality and the fixating power of fear. This challenge inevitably creates discomfort and a resistance and Nutt has observed that if people are frightened too much, “they curl up into old knowledge,” old assumptions and fears. Nutt therefore begins trainings by getting participants to examine “how people see themselves and how they relate to family and friends.” The conditions necessary for learning become, as Buddhist often refer to it, like a refuge “ that takes place in bonding, in the environment of safe space, trust, and community” So, just as Sulak reminded me of the important theme of friendship, the refuge of learning becomes “both individual and collective” because it is seated in relationship and “only with relationship can you tell if someone is learning.” Learning, then, is cultivated from friendship and takes time to nurture.

When I asked Nutt about his ideas concerning spirituality, he said it is when people can see beyond the conditioned, to “see the invisible.” It is significant to note how he didn’t focus on the self as the receptacle of spirituality – as one receiving from or giving to a deity, but as one responsible to and as equal participant engaging in a dynamic world. For one who can view the earth and the mundane as equally sacred will most likely perceive the intuitive “sense of purpose of the wholeness” and will conduct sacred service “without attempt to do too much.” As opposed to the certainty and

comfort of knowing ones spiritual destiny, Nutt believes it is important to be in awe of the mysterious, “the quest itself and not the answers,” and be willing to accept endless connecting meanings, known but not taught. For those who wear their spirituality like a degree, Nutt offers these final thoughts “Many people approach spirituality as something to gain or attain – they miss the wholeness by which to act from that which one seeks. We are already that which we seek.”

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary & Analysis

#### 5.1 Summary

This chapter revisits the research questions and reviews the methods used in the study. The largest sections of this chapter summarize the findings and discuss their implications based on fieldwork, historical patterns, and on relevant literature from previous research. It is intended that this chapter will lay the foundation to support recommendations and observations in the final chapter.

##### *5.1.1 Research Questions & Research Methods Employed*

This research examined home-schooling and local alternative schools in Thailand that share the historical spiritual and cultural orientation of Buddhism and that are associated through an engaged and networked social movement. This social movement is contextualized by the historical examination of state reforms in Thailand that have directly affected education, Thai culture, Buddhism, and the creation of the Thai nation-state. A further context that is examined are the global forces that have influenced both the historical state reforms and the educational social movements in which both have fended off what they each considered negative influences to the cultural integrity of Thai society. In order to conduct this research and examine these issues and assumptions, I asked four primary research questions:

1. What social, cultural, political, and spiritual values inform alternative education activists in Thailand?

2. What are the differences in spiritual and/or educational values between alternative educators/homeschoolers and policy-makers/formal educators in Thailand?
3. What has been the impact of alternative schools and homeschooling on decentralization and reform in Thailand?
4. What (if anything) is distinctly “Thai” about Thai reform and Thai social movements?

These questions required several research methods, including two anthropological case studies of alternative schools; qualitative interpretation of 80 official interviews of homeschool parents and students, alternative educators, advocates, Ministry of Education officials, United Nations officials, and teachers/administrators from Thai public schools; the historical examination of Buddhism as education and socio-cultural force; and the social, cultural, and political history of Thailand. All of these were carried out over a four-year period with an additional one-year of analysis and writing and editing. These methods not only addressed the fundamental research questions, but also revealed a large reserve of data concerning alternative education, social movements, Buddhism, reform, and Thai public education.

## 5.2 Results – Summary & Discussion

### *5.2.1 Summary of Results*

In short, results from this research have provided historical sketches and personal narratives related to Buddhism, education, Thai society, and the pressures from the global, most notably, the “West”/USA. The research provides the following:

- A broad summary of historical patterns of Thai reforms in Buddhism, culture, and education and the relationship to global pressures;
- A broad summary of the socio-cultural and educational influences of Buddhism;
- The weaving of narratives and historical text describing how globalization and modernization in the form of capitalism and Western influence have affected the socio-cultural and Buddhist structures in Thailand;
- Illustrative narratives from participants associated with alternative education that detail their values, the interaction of their involvement with educational reform, and how their relationship with education has served as a social movement.

Among the many specific issues that came out of the research were comparative expressions of values made by alternative educators/homeschoolers and policy-makers/formal educators and the spiritual value differences of Buddhism and Christianity, the predominate players in this research. In the tables below are the values and beliefs set side by side.

*Question 1 & 2: Differences in Spiritual Values between Alternative & Formal Educators; and social, educational, and political values informing Alternative & Formal Educators.*

Alternative Educators/ Homeschoolers	Public School Policy-Makers/MOE
<div>Reform, Global Effects, Modernism &amp; Consumerism</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the Thai government, specifically the Ministry of Education (MOE) were to be involved in reform, it will essentially fail its mission.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed, except by the very top Ministers and policy-makers.</li> </ul>	

Reform, Global Effects, Modernism & Consumerism (continued from page 257)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple living and respect for nature are important, but have been erased by modernism and the race to modernize and compete on the international level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modernization is essential for national growth and the Royal Thai Government promotes sustainable education.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consumerism has become the new religion of Thailand and it has been encouraged and fostered in public schools with competition as the “sacred rite.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everyone has the opportunity to attend public school and get a quality education. Competition helps the country and breeds excellence.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The way of Buddha has been abandoned in favor of materialism, modernism, and consumerism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buddhism is still an essential school subject and aspect of Thai culture.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consumerism and modernism are step-children of colonialism and is causing great harm to children, and Thai culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thailand has never been colonized and a nation must walk hand-in-hand with the world.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Education Act of 1999 was a beautiful written document, but has never really been implemented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Western education has been forced on Thai people and has diminished Thai culture, Thai intellectual traditions, and indigenous/local wisdom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thai culture has adapted well to the integration of Western knowledge and the MOE has designed a curriculum that emphasizes a Thai cultural context.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The international Education for All (EFA) project of the United Nations is seen as a piece of colonial machinery that breeds fear and a sense of inferiority to Thai people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EFA promotes the right of every child to have a quality education.</li> </ul>

Alternative Educators/ Homeschoolers

Public School Policy-Makers/MOE

Education & Schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Education Service Areas (ESA) are a dysfunctional extension of the MOE and represent the authoritative and bureaucratic approach to serving the schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ESA are the cornerstone of Thailand’s decentralization, but there are still problems due to the inexperience of officers and teachers. However, rural teachers want ESA abolished.</li> </ul>

Education & Schools (continued from page 258)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MOE believes it is the sole authority on education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MOE believes it is the best authority on education.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phra Buddhadasa and/or Sulak Sivaraksa have directly or indirectly influenced a large majority of alternative educators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• King Chulalongkorn is seen as the father of modern education in Thailand. Activists are part of the disruptive mob scene.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work and experience are essential aspects of education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study and homework are essential for academic achievement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values are missing in education, and must be an aspect of learning, but they cannot be taught as subjects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values are missing in education, but they are attempted through curricular design.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools are not necessarily the best place to get an education – in fact, most alternative educators believe the public schools are the worst place to get an education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools are the best place to get an education.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public education is designed in such a way to apply pressure on the students to memorize bundles of unrelated subjects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New methodologies are being introduced to equip teachers with effective teaching skills.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exams, standards, and academic pressure do not help in the learning process. In fact, Thai homeschoolers and alternative school students have proven that they impede the learning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exams and standards help assess educational progress and needs. It aids in establishing those who are making effort and those who will earn future educational, employment, and social opportunities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers try hard, but have too many subjects to cover, too many students, too few resources (at least the rural schools), and are paid far too little to be effective educators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New modern techniques are being promoted and passed on to teachers through experimental schools and model teachers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a good person is very important, but schools concentrate only on academics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry of Culture has many campaigns to bring back Thai and Buddhist values through the media.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Thai curriculum does not teach life skills or morality and prepares only the few elite to be prepared for the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thai education has made great strides and has produced a qualified workforce to attract the foreign investment that produces jobs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information gained in schools does not connect to life and instead encourages formulaic responses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education allows students to acquire new job potential and better work environments.</li> </ul>



Education & Schools (continued from page 259)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public school prepares students for consumerism, including consuming the learning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools prepare students for their future in a changing world among peers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thai public schools promote one-way communication and do not support exploration or experimentation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are acquiring new techniques, slowly, but surely.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thai students in public schools do not play enough and education is not seen as fun or interesting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers and schools are works in progress. Pre-school is a new emphasis for the MOE.</li> </ul>

Homeschool	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social issues are not an issue with homeschoolers and they are more social and well-adjusted than their counterparts in public schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The best place for students is in the classroom with colleagues in order to learn to work as a group and as an individual.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most homeschool families believe the whole family learns when the child is homeschooled, brings the family closer, and gives meaning to life-long learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of families are not qualified to teach and life-long learning is an emphasis of the RTG and MOE.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homeschoolers and alternative educators believe every child needs individual attention and an individual curriculum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual curriculum and attention is impossible, not necessary, and is inefficient.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homeschoolers families pay a substantial amount of money for their child's education and they believe they are not given any benefits from their tax money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negotiations with benefits are on-going, but the MOE believes the best place for children is in schools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homeschooling is not for everyone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed.</li> </ul>

Issues Expressed by Junior MOE officials & Public School Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher strikes involve fear of ESA "mafia," loss of face to younger officials, and loss of MOE status &amp; benefits.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ESA siphons off a % of money intended for local schools and make it financially more difficult for small rural school. Principals want ESA abolished.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are paid low salaries, yet often buy their own materials and help students.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There have been many Head Ministers of Education and it has disrupted work in the MOE as none of the Ministers build on past work.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Ministers had no coherent vision and plans were changed all the time.</li> </ul>

Western (Christian) Spirituality	Buddhism
Historical Spiritual Foundations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roots in 11<sup>th</sup> century papal reform and associated creation of modern law and the modern nation-state.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roots in early Shramanic/Jainism ascetic practices and Vedic thought.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church takes over secular law and redefines sin to allow redemption and judgment on earth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buddha's first teachers were Jain ascetics and later influenced by Vedic thought.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utopian millennial ideas drive science and technology in order to assure a successful endworld.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptually, begins with the undeniable fact of suffering, endless dissatisfaction with life and wanting reality to be other than it is.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millennial thought drove exploration and "enlightened" thought, but also fostered and condoned colonialism, oppression, and dominance of thought worldwide.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pertains to developing qualities, skills, and habits that allow one to live in contentment that is not at the expense of anyone else and is not dependent on the pursuit of any external goals or objectives.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christianity fractured into uncountable beliefs and practices. Spirituality lacks contemporary definition, cultural purpose, cross-cultural effect, and proximity to education, but focuses on "other-worldliness."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined by the Four Noble Truths: suffering arises with the belief in, then attachment to non-substantial existence, and then this suffering can be transformed when one finally becomes skilled on the Noble Eightfold Path.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christian orthodoxy is anchored in biblical reference and belief in the salvation through Jesus. Contemporary spiritual definitions borrow liberally from "Oriental" concepts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The skills on the Noble Eightfold Path are in three primary areas – wisdom, ethics, and mental acuity, and they embody coherence of perspective, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually associated with religion, faith, belief in conditions beyond oneself, need to change others (saving them in some manner), meaning-making by individuals, something that intercedes in the name of social justice, an inspirational and creative force.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The heart of Buddhist spirituality would be the Four Sublime States, also referred to as divine abodes (of Brahma) and boundless states. The four abodes/states as taught by the Buddha are: Loving kindness; Compassion; Sympathetic joy; and Equanimity.</li> </ul>

*Question 3: Impacts of Alternative Educators on Thai Decentralization and Reform*

Impact of Education Reform by Alternative Educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Helped activate democratic process through participation in the design of the Education Act, leading to education reform.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocated and articulated education policies that benefit alternative educational approaches.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrated alternative, holistic education models.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspired the Ministry of Education to implement value education in formal schools using alternative school models.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Produced multiple resources in alternative approaches to schooling.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Addressed weaknesses of formal schooling in Thailand.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduced new dynamic techniques associated with learning.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrated how to apply Buddhist and spiritual concepts in an educational setting.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Re-introduced traditional community practices and indigenous forms of knowledge.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoted reintroduction of indigenous knowledge and learning from experience.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Defined some threats from globalization as well as Thai-compatible benefits.</li></ul>

*Question 4: How Thai Social Movement are Distinctly Thai.*

Thai Social Movement Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All the qualities of European cultural movements and adult education movements.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspired by and adherents of Engaged Buddhism.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Movements contests cultural meaning through compassionate action.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Non-violent positive action.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social movement that advocates spirituality and personal inner transformation.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social justice is produced through acts of compassion, not law or force.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activists do not choose sides – all people are part of compassionate movement.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offers opposition – not resistance.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Real change begins and ends in spirituality.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reform starts with the individual and community naturally follows individual transformation.</li></ul>

*5.2.2 Interpretation & Reflection of Results*

*5.2.2.1 Thailand's History of Reform & The Modern Project*

This research has proposed and made the argument that Thailand has interacted with the global in a patterned manner. The state has utilized *reform utilities* - Buddhism,

culture, and education – almost formulaically to neutralize potentially dominating influences coming from global sources but paradoxically to dominate its own people. Thailand has learned that the strategy of interacting on a commercial level could stave off colonial occupation. Nellie Stromquist (2002) observed that states overwhelmingly support and emphasize the global market and allow the national economic concerns to dominate a nation's development model in order to fit into the hegemonic concerns and policies of the global market. This pattern was not broken with Thailand's response to global pressures in the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century. Reforms in late nineteenth century and late twentieth century Thailand had many common features and responses including: a transnational trade climate driving the reform of the neo-liberal market with capitalism as the engine; economic interests and a strong desire to be internationally competitive also driving institutional and educational reforms; commercial interests becoming a threat to communities and cultures; and a nation utilizing reform utilities to solidify a notion of a nation-state while an elite segment of society determining notions of culture and propriety.

Along with the introduction of modern commercial interests came “excessive consumption, individualism, and competition – the three dominant traits of our times” (Stromquist, 2002) – an apt and fair description of the path to modernism and contemporary policy development that have occurred in Thailand. This global rush of economics as most nations' prominent policy emphasis also required a concerted effort to, as M. Fernanda Astiz, et al. (2002) claimed, “an active, even aggressive, process of social transformation.” But social transformation engineered by the state seldom goes

unchallenged. Such is the case with Thailand whereby authority has consistently met opposition over the centuries in response to hegemonic tendencies, and as Ji Ungpakorn asserted in 2003, that to know Thai history is to know that class struggle has always been the predominating social liability of citizenship and has frequently been the source of social unrest.

Thai reforms over this one hundred year period engendered a healthy, expressive opposition to the exploitation and abandonment of Buddhist principles that promoted, foremost, personal and social liberation through education, not economy. The first major oppositional character that upheld Buddhist principles and advocated a different sort of reform was Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. The second major oppositional character was Buddhadasa's student, Sulak Sivaraksa. Both of these influential characters are the most critical nodes in a Thai network of Engaged Buddhist and socio-cultural activists who advocated for alternative educational approaches. These activists believe the way of Buddha, hence Thai cultural patterns and social capital, has been forsaken in favor of the adoption of materialist modernism leading to a colonial mentality in subservience to the global neo-liberal market and seduced by consumerism.

Nearly every Thai activist in this research concurs with the view that consumerism as having overtaken Buddhism as the state religion and as the chief import from what Pracha Hutunuwatr referred to as the "modern project" from the West. This modernism has historical intellectual, cultural, and social foundations of which are Western-based, and are contrary to Thai Buddhist conceptions of the path to liberation. Walden Bello, among many other Asian activists, finds this path laid by the Western

intellectual tradition with its mechanical views of linear progress alien to historical Asian or indigenous traditions of cultural, spiritual, and intellectual development. This subjugation by Western patterns of thought has not just altered notions of culture, but has had a profound detrimental effect on the relationships between deep knowledge of how to interact with the natural world and, perhaps most germane, how an individual empowers their self and relates on a human level to other humans in order to engender societies that emphasize conviviality and friendship as Buddha, John Holt, and Ivan Illich advocated.

#### 5.2.2.2 Thailand's Educational Decentralization & Reform Break Down

Globalization generally materializes as the symbolic manifestation of the bridge between a nation's economic ambitions and the international commercial interests of global entities in the form of education decentralization. It usually targets the education system of a "developing" nation first in the form of decentralization, but just as Diana Rhoten (1999) laments, it suffers from a lack of understanding in how the policy is implemented and the impacts it has on various levels of society. Dani Rodrik and Diana Rhoten cautioned policy-makers about this routine prescription of education decentralization because they have used so little empirical evidence of its efficacy or insight into its political, social, or cultural implications; nonetheless, policies have been, and continue to be, driven by economic interests in order to develop a skilled labor force and sustained by research conducted at the behest of, and in support of, economic benefits of decentralization and the move to Western standards of education. Generally, research and policy decisions do not consider the cultural context in which policies are

to be situated, a critical error of allowing policy to be finance driven and “its primary effect on their education systems is to increase inequality of access and quality” (Carnoy, 1999: 60).

In a show of support for global *groupthink*, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and policy-makers, just as many nations across the globe did, determined a need to reform education based on international research on where the nation should be ranked academically based on comparative standardized tests that measure academic skills that benefited the global market, driven by concern for economic standing and achieving development based on production, not equity. James Kaufman and Joan Nelson (2004) have noted the lockstep replication of reforms worldwide in the late 1980s and early 1990s, explaining that reform and decentralization were believed by nations to foster global commerce, democracy, human capital development for modernization projects, and the integration into the global market through the social patterning of competitiveness as a norm. In affirmation of the policy and research influence and preference of major transnational development financiers, Kaufman and Nelson wrote that “investments in education became one of the highest priorities of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and other international financial institutions” (2004:252). In contrast, the response by Thai alternative educators to these economic-driven philosophies instead favored the more Buddhist approach of ethical development first with a holistic approach to education that doesn’t require the individual to be captured solely in the cerebral process. Their vision of reform was a liberating process

that advocated the fostering of a learning society devoted to exploring and experimenting.

Due to a fortuitous confluence of events in Thailand, moderate bureaucrats and some alternative educators and progressive activists joined forces in attempt to create a reform acceptable to the people and the market. Jonathan Young and Benjamin Levin found in their 1999 research that reforms generally mirror government political ideologies and usually perpetuate inequalities and policy processes that generally exclude educators and people who have already been largely factored out of the national development equation. But, the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), now Office of the Education Council (OEC), the national education planning office under the Office of the Prime Minister, researched and wrote up proposals to have an Education Act placed in the Human Rights section of the then new Constitution (1997) and involve local people in the design of the Act. The proposal was met favorably and several key alternative educators (and participants in this dissertation research) became involved in writing provisions for homeschooling, alternative education, and educational values. To this extent, there was a feeling of accomplishment and a sense of success in establishing the framework for the potential of a beautiful reform.

Merilee Grindle (2004) found fascination in seeing agencies coming together to execute and implement a successful education reform, but this type of success is only from a managerial perspective and does not look at the difficulties found at the bottom end of the political power grid. If the view is held that the implementation of reform will lead to a positive social change, one needs to consider some of the new research



coming out that question this assumption. The 2007 studies by Mark Robinson and Diana Conyers indicate that: “there is little evidence to suggest that decentralization significantly improved the quantity, quality or accessibility of public services” and that “poor and socially marginalized people have not in general benefited from improved access to services.” So, it is not unusual to find that the Thai educational reform designed in the Education Act of 1999 prescribed decentralization, and as acknowledged by OEC officials in this dissertation, hasn’t been a complete success for a few reasons, most notably because the stated means to accomplish that decentralization – the social capital found in local wisdom, traditions, and customs - had already been wrested away from the local in the first set of reforms one hundred years ago in order to create a unified, dependent state-devised vision. Equally, just as in the African studies, decentralization has not substantially empowered or given sufficient education to the rural areas in Thailand and to those who are in most need of political effect.

There are examples of the more basic reform fundamentals that have broken down and slowed the process of Thai reform. In a specific case, a high-level Ministry official participant described the Education Service Areas (ESA) as a key component of the decentralization efforts, representing the devolutionary units of the reform. The teachers and some of the mid-ranked Ministry officers, however, view the ESA as unessential and corrupt. It is not only the rural teachers who view them as unessential, it is also the alternative educator participants view them as perhaps good in theory, but in practice represents the corruption that comes along with the bureaucratic and

authoritative aspects of the Thai state. The teachers view them as unessential because they control the school budget by allocating funds minus their unauthorized “cut” and their assessment of the schools and principals themselves.

In devising reform strategies, Thailand has utilized the four modes of decentralization as described in 1984 by Dennis Rondinelli, Shabbir Cheema, and John Nellis: deconcentration, delegation, devolution, and privatization, but not necessarily most effectively. Deconcentration, perhaps the weakest of reform modes, manifested in the attempt to transfer teachers to be under the *aw baw thaw*, the local administration of the Ministry of Interior. Delegation manifested in the manner in which the Ministry of Education entitled the principals and community committees to be functional school managers. Devolution was the most empowering mode - although it might not have been an intentional authorization - gave supervisory, evaluatory, and fiduciary responsibilities to the ESA and the *aw baw thaw*. How they were acted out revealed social and cultural traits that demonstrated limitations and potential strengths.

The mid-level Ministry officials and teachers revealed how the deconcentration aspect of reform was flawed, conspired against the teachers and principals, and did not prove to be of much benefit for them. The Ministry of Education (MOE) had planned the deconcentration whereby teachers would be transferred from the Ministry of Education to the *aw baw thaw*, a branch of the Ministry of Interior. The teachers balked at this plan and marched by the thousands into Bangkok where they demonstrated fiercely at the House of Parliament. Many people, including the press, believed the issue to be merely the teacher’s selfish concern with their government benefits. But it was a

complex set of issues that the Mid-level Ministry and rural school principal participants explained in more detail, and mostly with justifiable concerns regarding the mafia-like composition of the *aw baw thaw* and their thuggish bullying. The alternative educators affirmed how the *aw baw thaw* represented a corrupt and authoritarian link in the devolution of power to the local.

The devolution of power to the *aw baw thaw* and Education Service Areas (ESA) worked to the detriment of giving local people the opportunity and power to lift the reform from the bottom up. Michael Fullan in his many years of experience with educational reform has concluded that successful reform can neither be a complete top-down approach nor a bottom-up approach, but takes a simultaneous movement at both the top and bottom. But in the Thai reform, the bottom sector of reform was given mere delegatory authority, the least powerful mode of reform, and additionally remained under the weight of various centralized powers. The example of the rural school principal who is assessed for his fund-raising ability by the ESA, while at the same time the ESA controls the meager central funding for his school and withholds a certain percentage for the personal welfare of the ESA staff is a prime example of stepping on the local with a closer, more kinetic force of authority. The empowerment of communities and teachers amounts to doing more for themselves with less knowledge, financial wherewithal, time, and resources. The officers at MOE see the need for the empowerment of the schools and committees as originally intended in the vision of decentralization, which had the ambition to foster democratic principles. There is little resemblance in this decentralization at the rural school level that reflects the inclusion

and education of communities to approximate a democratic political effect that throws off suppression as advocated by the likes of Noel McGinn, Thomas Welsh, Mark Bray, or Mary McNeil.

Jere Behrman et al's observation of the paradox of decentralization and adjusting to the demands of the market do not necessarily bring about beneficial outcomes. The idea that the "decentralization of education management simply shifts the same old problems to levels that are less capable of resolving them" (2002: 3) is quite applicable to the Thai context. Everyone I spoke with from the MOE to the alternative educators mentioned ineffective actions and lack of knowledge at all levels of the reform implementation process, except at the initial design process. It was surprising that the mid-level Ministry of Education (MOE) officials agreed with nearly every alternative educator and expressed a complete lack of confidence in the competence of the Thai government, particularly related to the successful implementation of the reform of public education. The MOE officials saw their work places transformed, but it didn't become more productive or empowering – just more confused and diffused. In fact, they became disheartened at how the reform had been implemented – the wrong policy using the wrong standards had supplanted the beautifully envisioned policy crafted seven years earlier. They all agreed that the real reform had the wrong target and efforts should have been directed at the Ministry and/or levels of authority. A key dysfunctional aspect was the fact that a revolving door of Head Ministers came and went and each one had their own agenda that completely disregarded the continuity of previous work. The Head Ministers were politicians that

created whirlwinds of activity, and even if their political activity filled the sails of reform from different directions, the MOE officers felt they had no one who knew how to navigate, had no rudder on their ship, and were being tossed around with no progress in reaching the destination of reform. In a similar outlook, the alternative educators believe that reform has been applied incorrectly – the wrong prescription to cure what ails education and society. One group of alternative educators and a former MOE officer, probably expressing the sentiments of all alternative educators, prescribed the cure of educational revolution, not educational reform.

#### 5.2.2.3 Thailand's Educational Decentralization & Alternative Education

Cheng Kai-Ming (2000) commented how common it was for nations to adopt only the dominant global trend to serve the global agenda promoted by international banks, the United Nations, or Western nations trying to gain a foothold in development countries' labor and consumer markets. Countries have adopted Western education systems, enticed by the hope of the verity in the vision of a new world transmuted by technology and scientism. In the case of Thailand, many in the alternative education field believed that the reform placed in the 1997 constitution would allow new opportunities previously denied by the MOE. But the effect of reform and decentralization on alternative education did not give the anticipated freedom they had hoped for, particularly in relation to who got empowered and the latitude given to operate and manage a local alternative school.

One of the most notable challenges of alternative schools due to reform was the emergence of the privatization of schools, which resulted in a rush of franchise

alternative schools springing up all over Thailand. This had the effect of undercutting local alternative schools by allowing the MOE to maintain their curricular grip on local alternative schools while still requiring the same test-based emphasis as the public schools. This was further complicated by the parental empowerment embedded in the Education Act. The parents became encouraged to not only become involved in their children's education, but were also encouraged to be involved in local education committees. Theoretically this was a good idea, but parents have failed to see the worldview of holistic education and instead, have placed many forms of parental pressure, i.e., parent school associations, parents demanding to be on school boards and committees, etc., on alternative schools to focus more on preparing their children for succeeding in the national exams. This pressure continues to take alternative schools away from their holistic educational philosophies and convert their emphasis to become akin to elite Thai public schools with an English curriculum.

Some schools are seemingly immune to this pressure, mostly due to their success in creating a steady funding base. Three schools involved in this research, Sathya Sai School, Santi-Asoke Schools, and Mae Aew's Village School have donors wide and far and, and except for the Village School which is intended for orphans and poor village or indigenous children, appeal to parents who want their children to be raised as good people with knowledge of traditional Thai culture and Buddhism. The waiting list is very long for both Sathya Sai and Santi-Asoke schools and there are no tuition fees. Schools such as Panyotai Waldorf School and Pitiusuksa Montessori School must charge tuition fees that limit those who could attend to those who have the

wherewithal to do so. Pitisuksa has been facing the most pressure from parents, as it is located in the far north of Thailand with few potential clients. The school has been under siege the past few years and is obliged to concede to the power of parents' demands to design a curriculum that make their kids more academically competitive with urban kids.

Alternative educators experience the MOE as an unyielding institution that believes itself to be the sole educational authority who determines all educational movements. In addition, the alternative educators perceived the actions of the MOE as the same sort of arrogance that came from colonials, a condescension that dismissed anything but the “superior” Western approaches and ideas. But ironically, the alternative educators seemed to comprehend many essential Western educational ideas at the heart of the Education Act such as contemporary educational methods, and the holistic philosophy of education; while many staff at the MOE and public school teachers did not understand with any substantial level of competence the educational concepts advocated in the Education Act. It was as if the Education Act was written for the benefit of the alternative educators, but they were excluded from the creation of a healthy educational system and from freely exploring how to improve their skills – ones that could benefit the Thai nation quite immeasurably. The alternative educators saw it instead as a beautiful and promising document that was handed over to those who understood it least and were least capable of developing the innovative skills to quicken teacher and educational development on a broad scale to fulfill its promise.

Michael Fullan has not seen the benefit of following “best practices” or the latest fads in reform, but has seen great effect with a holistic, local effort that uses knowledge to continually transform local groups into an innovative community of learning. Peter Senge has also described *learning organizations* as essential in the societal change process because they learn their personal limits and potentials and see learning as a lifelong process. They both emphasize communities that know how to empower themselves through a personal self-reflective process that is less interested in changing others than in discovering how individuals are kept from living a learning life.

In contrast to a learning organization, Thailand has attempted to build a massive reform machine in which educators and institutions were expected to follow a blueprint, while forsaking the creative and dynamic elements necessary to allow the wide-open spiritual space necessary to build a learning community. Two examples of this can be found in how the MOE tried to reproduce the success of both the Sathya Sai School and the Santi-Asoke schools and failed due to teachers’ and administrators’ unfamiliarity and incomprehension of the essential underlying holistic philosophy of an alternative and spiritual (not dogmatic) approach to learning. Another example might be how the normal schools and teachers colleges have little to no exposure to alternative methods or ideas, nor do they have much experience in alternative environments. The inspiration and encouragement to explore and experiment is lacking as a professional educator, particularly when teaching engenders low esteem as a profession due to its very low salary and the view that learning is a boring and tedious process related to endless memorization and preparing for exams.



#### 5.2.2.4 Alternative Education & Its Discontent with Public Schooling

Alternative educators have expressed discontent with public schooling on two different experiential levels – psychologically and intellectually. Psychologically, Thai public education, being a Western product and imported knowledge system with its own intellectual tradition and values, has had the same disorienting effect as a colonial educational system. Helena Norberg-Hodge in observing the effects of Western education on developing nations notes how a nation loses “cultural self-esteem” and traditional, local wisdom gradually loses importance and disappears. Pracha Hutanuwatr has also explained how schools - aided by media - instills a sense of “not being good enough” and that to be good enough, one must throw off the old because it represents the superstitious and the uncivilized without the aid of indigenous frameworks. This entire “brainwashing” process, as Pracha calls it, relies on isolating people from their familiar social and cultural groundings and inundating them with the notion that modern progress and technological mastery are at the pinnacle of human accomplishment and that nations and communities who are not part of this progress are undeveloped and in dire need of assistance. This process veers further into dysfunctional realms when Western educators, development specialists, and Christian missionaries filled with ideals manufactured in an intellectual and historical context that assumes moral correctness and justifies controlled development disguised as missions of mercy, come rushing in with the pervasive perspective that people not part of the modern project are ignorant, in abject poverty, and in need of their superior knowledge. The final manipulation is for the state to begin defining notions of culture and identity – mere

veneers of Thai memories overlaid onto Western modern sensibilities in school, arts, and media. Sulak and other participants would agree that this process, instead of being a beneficial grafting process of Western knowledge with Eastern knowledge turns into conquering and subjugation of intellect and psychological processes both by Western idealism and the Thai state, which has capitulated to a variety of Western pressures.

The intellectual tradition of Thailand has also been greatly altered due to Western pressures, the modernization project, reform in order to conform to Western standards and curriculums, and/or a combination of all of these. Timothy Reagan has exposed the common practice of researchers and scholars in various fields of exercising bias that favors Western ethnocentric notions of culture, knowledge, and learning. Thai Buddhist/education reforms were set in motion when Western Christian missionaries declared Thai people uncivilized and incapable of merging rational thought with morality, insinuating that Thailand's intellectual capacity failed to meet scientific rigor and ethical authority. Thailand's reforms initially became predicated on feeling psychologically unequal to Westerners intellectually and spiritually. Subsequent changes followed these same themes and as Sulak has noted, traditional forms of knowledge that blended life, nature, and spirituality were completely abandoned by the Thai state.

The psychological effect of abandoning traditional forms of knowledge and feeling inferior to the modern and "civilized" West (America) has created a paradox in Thai society whereby there is an understandable, but absurd vacillation between the notion of inferiority and superiority to Westerners. Understanding this psychological

vacillation or how it arose as an aspect of contemporary Thai society is slightly easier than determining how to offset the overall effect of the unexamined promulgation of Western thought in education, dominated by the concepts of competition, aggression, and individualism at the expense of traditional knowledge that relies on learning intersubjectivity, impermanence, and compassion. Thai reforms have in effect neutralized Thai culture by erasing the real and historic remains of the Thai indigenous and intellectual traditions and suturing the intellectual traditions they have adopted from the West/USA onto a Thai apparatus - much like stitching skin onto the bones of Thai cultural skeleton. Kai-Ming Cheng mentioned in 2000 that only when a society knows the benefits and limitations of cultural borrowing could they face the challenges of globalization. Thailand has only begun to realize the limitations of adopting Western intellectual traditions in education as a standard and it appears as though they have not grasped the real benefits of what they have relinquished culturally or intellectually from their own Buddhist and Thai learning traditions. Perhaps Cheng would say that Thailand has not yet begun to understand globalization enough to master the global forces that cause it to react impulsively with reform motives without multicultural insight and the wisdom of intuition.

Related to the neutralizing effect of adopting Western intellectual traditions were the oft-heard criticisms by alternative educators that Thai public schools fail to teach holistically – they emphasize only a small set of thinking skills that do not develop full, creative mental capacities, while completely ignoring the connection thinking has with the body, with emotions, and with social interactions and work. The

disconnected being and the uncreative mind, according to Jiddu Krishnamurti and David Bohm, is one that relies on knowledge provided by an authority whereby knowledge is not questioned or discovered. The Thai alternative educators frequently mentioned displeasure in the fact that Thai public schools did not see the relevance of the questioning as a source of knowledge itself. The importance of knowledge in public schools is that it is to be regarded as hard data to be memorized in order to demonstrate intelligence in the form of exam scores. To most public school students, school, while viewed as the beginning of education, also represents the end goal of “learning” – the rigorous process of countless hours memorizing for tests. Learning is not viewed as something pertaining to anything outside of the classroom, or to a continual process engaged in throughout life.

The Thai alternative educators believe that, not only does intelligence originate in practice, it involves learning through living and living ones knowledge acquired through experience and work – just as Buddha taught. Experience is something that many within the Ministry of Education proclaim to respect, yet the schooling process provides such little time for children to experience; in particular, to learn through living and instead encourages limited forms of literacy and tedious study. Timothy Reagan implies that scholars, educators, and policy-makers have unexamined deep biases in confusing the schooling process with education and the emphasis of literacy over other forms of learning. Correlatively, nearly every alternative education participant claimed that education was essential, but Thai public schools did not provide education to kids nor did it prepare students for the real world, life outside of school. According to

Michael Fullan, most contemporary schools prepare students to become victimized by global institutions that lead students through the marketing of consumer knowledge, but unfortunately, schools do not assist students in learning how to perceive in an interconnected manner that would contribute to the development of a richer, more complex society capable of transformation.

Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1998), maintain that schools and the predominant forms of knowledge produced for schools equates reality with abstraction and Ivan Illich similarly declared that “both literate and illiterate people now live in the reign of the alphabetic mind” (Illich, I. in Esteva, G. & Prakash, 1998: 73), by which he meant that knowledge that was once found applied in everyday application working in relation to the earth is now found in a book with a fabricated and meaningless context that may or may not be applicable in ones life. Based merely on exam scores, it will be the state that determines contextual value and whether a student’s knowledge is life-applicable.

An aspect of living ones learning according to the alternative educators is to be a “good person,” or as Santi-Asoke emphasizes - individual development of material skills and the spiritual skills of Buddha’s Eightfold Path to live a complete, integrated, holistic life. Sulak mentioned how Thai public schools did not teach how to learn about knowing one’s own experience; Pracha said that Thai schools fail to help students discern from wholesome and unwholesome; and as Nuttarote mentioned, schooling made no effort to teach students how to observe personal projections. They, along with all other participants, believe that competition, consumerism, and the national economic

development plan are the main concerns of the public school curriculum. The influential educator, Jiddu Krishnamurti, taught that schools are environments that exploit and condition students with self-concern for security, identity, and certainty instead of skill at transforming these psychological movements of fragmentation and separation into a radical change of heart that leads to wisdom and compassion. The example of Santi-Asoke and Sathya Sai schools make a strong case in affirming the idea that schools can be places where the heart is transformed and the mind follows this path of wisdom.

#### 5.2.2.5 Homeschool as Alternative Education

Buddhadasa, acknowledged as an important inspirational figure for the majority of alternative educators, grasped the fragmentation that came with learning based only on material reasoning processes. His revolutionary approaches to education, though widely acclaimed among Buddhist scholars, has failed to make their way into the Thai education system, partly due to the historic advent of a nationalist curriculum that continue to emphasize conformity to cultural and academic standards designed by the state with the foremost intent of fortifying the creation of a nation-state; and now to conform to international standards of the global education industry, or “manufactured belief industry” as one alternative educator coined it. Intellectuals and rural people alike in Thailand met Buddhadasa’s ideas favorably because his message resonated with the Buddhist cultural wisdom that emphasized learning as an individual through experience, work, and nature and being able to adapt on one’s own terms to the modern world. His most important contribution to education, though not adopted by the formal education system, is the realization that understanding deep intuitive states of knowledge relies on

the transmission and reception of language on two levels of meaning, the everyday and the spiritual. This was significant because if a student were versed in distinguishing these levels, profound knowledge would not be dependent on literacy, but would necessitate an able teacher and attentiveness to one's life experience.

Every homeschool parent in this study had stories to tell about teachers that did not mentor their children towards life mastery and discouraged their child's thirst for learning. An additional concern shared by all the parents has been the development of their child's individuality and healthy conceptions of self. Krusom and Pannada saw how schools tried to break their children's level of confidence and natural curiosity and interest in learning. While no homeschool parents in this research directly encouraged an interest in reading, all of their children developed a natural love of reading subjects that interested them and led to a developmental stage of utilizing literate sources for additional information to supplement their life experience. Shilpa Jain and Manish Jain of the Shikshantar Andolan Institute have wryly made the point that all global development efforts emphasize the destructive nature of illiteracy and lack of schooling, yet ironically or not, it is the literates and the schooled who have been the truly destructive ones and the very ones who so actively pursue the remedy of education for nearly all development conditions worldwide.

I was reminded multiple times by every homeschool family that students already know how to learn and learning begins from the "heart," the emotions inhabiting intuitive and compassionate levels that are the keys to exploration, discovery, and understanding the complexity of the interplay of subjective and the objective states.

It is schools that attempt to implant a limited mental framework as the primary tool for learning and creating a meaning for a dynamic, intersubjective world. Knowledge derived from this limited logical and analytical faculty creates a fragmented delusional perspective, one that Yoshirharu Nakagawa (2000) points out is translated in Sanskrit as *avidya*, ignorance, and has to be transcended in order to acquire wisdom. The Thai homeschool participants mentioned how public schools over-saturate students with unrelated subjects with which no student can connect. The homeschool parent, Krusom, told me that knowing information is not useful unless you can connect it to your life, your family, your community, your nation, and your world. Another homeschool parent said that they have yet to meet a Thai student who could tell them how what they have learned is useful to their life.

The Shikshantar Andolan Institute, an influential Indian community that has many friends within the Thai alternative education movement, has arisen in part as a response to the global assumption that schooling will magically create a better life for children, but has in reality become an aspect of the problems children face. The Institute, just as the Thai homeschoolers, have found that the foundation beliefs promulgated by modern education do not necessarily create a sustainable and enlightened world, or a life-long loving of learning, or communities that come together to share individuality and knowledge. In fact, schools had become antithetical to community building and family stability to these parents. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi avers that it is essential to develop interdependent communities and families that provide an array of experiences in order for children to realize a growth in conscious



complexity. He further believes that it is this conscious complexity that allows a transformation of nations, systems, schools, communities, families, and individuals.

It shouldn't have been a surprise, but every homeschooler told me of the closer family bonds they experienced. What was even more surprising were the depth and the skills that spawned from what I refer to as *familyschooling*. All parents mentioned how much they learned about themselves and the opportunities to re-visit past experiences, habits, or other experiences of limitation, and re-live and relieve various psychological or emotional stressors resulting in a revitalization of their life and their families'. According to the participants, levels of communication - particularly listening skills - were elevated; levels of loving, intimacy, and disclosure improved; ability to communicate to others outside the family improved; personal insight, consciousness, and awareness heightened; ability to be forgiving and understanding of others improved; realizing the important things in life were clarified; comprehending the path of dharma was demonstrated in daily activities; and the significance of learning was captured on a daily basis. Although every parent said that it was more expensive than sending their child to public school and entailed financial hardship, they all said it was worth it and wouldn't change a thing about their experience.

An oft-heard argument against homeschooling is that it limits the social experience of children. This is a blatant untruth in the case of all the homeschoolers in this study. They were all very well adjusted, well-liked, and socially competent young adults who displayed maturity and ample amounts of self-security and confidence. They were intelligent and could interact with people of all social levels and ages. Their level

of competence in their chosen area of vocation was extremely high. One could ascribe the significance of the holistic approach of homeschooling for these commendable traits, and perhaps it is as Yoshirharu Nakagawa suggested: the “Eastern” emphasis of communion models over communication models “does not reproduce pre-established social distinctions, but it is open to novel experiences coming from deeper dimensions” (2000: 50).

#### 5.2.2.6 Social Movements: Engaged Buddhism as Education Movement

Much as Jacques Derrida or John Caputo would imagine a strong social movement, Thailand’s alternative education social movement has arisen at the local community level to oppose state hegemony while strongly promoting lifelong learning, particularly in community of practices. The Thai social movements have punctuated historical assaults on culture and have represented opposition to reform measures over the last 150 years. These social movements have been shaped by and in turn have reshaped culture just as Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (1995) would determine; while Rick Fantasia and Eric Hirsch would note how the Thai social movements have contested the meaning of Thai culture and how it will be represented in the future. They would comment further by saying that if research focuses on the interaction between the power elites and movement participants, the values, beliefs, practices, and the relationship between culture and social movements would be made clear. Gary Fine would go further and claim that Thai social movements reveal Thai cultural content and its expression at the local level. Janet McIntyre-Mills (2000) would observe that the Thai social movements have been collective action by informal groups committed to

broad changes to social institutions through cultural re-education in order to define the norms that transform institutions and induce a reshaping of meaning and solidarity among people.

Social Movements in Thailand have displayed similar characteristics as social movements in the West, particularly in the European adult education tradition, but there are aspects that distinguish it as unique. It is distinguished as an Engaged Buddhist movement with origins in Buddha's radical movement that expected dual forms of liberation - personal reform that leads to social reform. Buddha's movement demanded personal responsibility and interactive goodwill that generally manifested in providing community needs such as health, education, and guidance to all.

Although the Buddhist tradition of radical transformation and liberation has had 2500 years of movements, there have been significant contemporary movements that are redefining how social movements become effectively active. Among activists who are most influential are Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Anagarika Dharmapala, and Mahatmas Gandhi (even though he was a Hindu, his influence on Buddhists is unmistakable). Among the many liberation movement leaders they have inspired, three are germane to this research, being networked together as co-founders of the Engaged Buddhist movement: Thich Nhat Hanh, A.T. Ariyaratne, and Sulak Sivaraksa. Many other Asian Buddhists have had great impacts as Engaged Buddhists, such as Maha Ghosanand, the Cambodian monk who led peace walks through the "Killing Fields;" the Thai "forest monks" who were active in saving forests from the destruction by loggers and land barons; and Vinobe Bhave, Gandhi's successor and Ariyaratne's mentor.

Engaged Buddhism is a worldwide movement with members very active in living Buddhist dharma and the insights that arise from meditation in order to halt or mitigate human suffering and to manifest justice and enlightenment in the environmental, political, social, and economic aspects of life. There is no formal conscription, and the participants of this research would probably classify themselves as such and would probably say they find the Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism agreeable to their lifestyle and spiritual aspirations. Thich Nhat Hahn organized the first chapter in the 1970s with Sulak Sivaraksa organizing the first International Network of Engaged Buddhists in the 1980s. Thich and Sulak have work together for decades and were both active in anti-war movements during the Vietnam War. Sulak has developed many Buddhist movements, spiritual organizations, alternative spiritually oriented schools, and sustainable eco-village development programs. Their lives have been devoted to the promotion of learning and living consciously and holistically, principled by the Four Abodes: Loving kindness (metta); Compassion (karuna); Sympathetic joy (mudita); and Equanimity (ubekka).

It has been assumed by many that Buddhism was a docile religion that has encouraged a passive attitude amongst its followers. In Thailand, that which has become known as Buddhism is a state reform utility and in this regard, has become a religion that has attempted to pacify and shape its citizens in socially passive molds to use for the purpose of benefiting the state. Engaged Buddhism is not a tool of any belief system and therefore is not a religion or a tool of any state; it is a social movement, contesting cultural meaning by re-educating at the local level to benefit every being. Yoshirharu

Nakagawa (2000) has explained that, excluding Engaged Buddhism, the general difference of action between East and West is that the East (Buddhism, in this case) has always been concerned with inner transformation through contemplation with little concern in transforming the social world. The West has always been associated with efforts to transform society through critical dialogs and activism and attempts to create illusive social justice by willful and forceful efforts. Engaged Buddhism has sought to make compassion a manifested way of being to bring about social justice.

While Western activists and scholars have approached the lack of social justice with force, law, and policy, it is all but effective, because many unintended people become victims in the vain attempts to create fairness and equity based on agendas and numbers, instead of individuals, needs, and potential. The Western social movements seem to look at society dispassionately, and passionately abstract, as a conceptual thing that sees justice as an enactment of punishment to someone, or at least an externally manipulated social arrangement that is based on advantage and disadvantage. As an alternative view, Satish Kumar (2005) has averred that social injustice, inequalities, and exploitation are not due to a lack of justice, it is due to a lack of compassion that they remain predominate social ills. The forceful imposition of justice by states or by organizations or individuals also justifies their own aggressive injustices in engineering society.

The attempt to realize social justice through compassion is the most unique feature of Engaged Buddhism and distinguishes it from Western social movements in strategy and intent. The Engaged Buddhists do not often take sides against any one

person – not an act of indifference nor an act of passivity - but remains committed to the imperative of compassion shown to all beings, responding to the suffering of all, and addressing the need of the moment – not on a global or universal scope - but within its own context. As an example, A. T. Ariyaratne's success with Sarvodaya in the midst of the factional Sri Lanka civil war was due to a unique movement designed specifically for the Sri Lankan village cultural context and development defined as spiritual goals, not materialistic goals. Ariyaratne's realization was similar to Gandhi's dictum "The spiritual law expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life" (Bond, 1996: 123).

This is another area that social movements of Engaged Buddhists differ from Western movements. Engaged Buddhists advocate movements that are tactically oppositional, while Western forms of social movements rely on resistance tactics. The difference between resistance and opposition in this context is that Western movements, reliance on resistance only engenders further resistance and force; whereas the Engaged Buddhists are oppositional, but this does not limit the tactics to be yielding or assertive, like when the alternative educators met at the Ministry of Educators and resulted in friendship, yet did not diminish the opposition. The alternative educators acted in opposition to the norms and beliefs of society without thought of conforming to something they knew was wrong for them. They did not act in anger or with resentment, they acted clear-headed and firmly as if there were no other option and no conflict. The difference with Western social movements is that participants allow aggressive emotions limit their tactics and attract strong negative responses. Western movements

also seem to engender a dual-life in that one does not live ones movement, the movement is usually a spectacle, or an event that one attends, or an action directed at someone else to express ones outrage, ones aspiration, not ones life.

The social movement characteristic of Engaged Buddhism that all of the alternative education participants share, is the belief shared by Gandhi, that education should be “for life, through life, and throughout life... [and] it is educating not only the head, but also the heart and limbs” (Ariyaratne, 1999: 20). All of them see the destructive nature of schooling, particularly the imported Western “factory-schooling” that has had the same effect as a colonial institution to all the participants. This is in stark contrast to most Western social movements in that few Western participants have experienced schooling as a colonial institution; few see how education can occur outside of schooling; few see the danger of educational institutionalization; few oppose schooling – in fact the majority probably favor the proposition of more schooling for children, particularly children in “developing countries;” few see school as a means for social control and the narrowing of intercultural perspective; few see the global hegemony behind the advocacy of the global *Education for All* initiatives; few have seen the essential relationship of work, experience, and learning; few see how communities of practice are essential for social movements; and few see education as an aspect of social movements.

An example of how an Engaged Buddhist social movement utilized education is the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, a movement created by A.T. Ariyaratne in opposition to a failed school system that produced a country wrought with violence. In

response, holistic community development, referred to as “village re-awakening” and based on the principles of Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, was integrated through various forms of education to address the material and spiritual needs of the entire village. According to the Sarvodaya movement, the mark of a progressive society is one whereby all forms of education are integrated into people’s lives in order to act as a stalwart fortification against the social and personal instability caused by colonialism. Ariyaratne was obviously inspired by his mentor, Gandhi, whose famous *Hind Swaraj*, advocated more than the mere expulsion of the British, he claimed the foundations of British colonial institutions were insidious and needed to be rooted out and expunged from the Indian psyche and replaced with regenerative Indian traditions. Similarly, Thai alternative educators – Engaged Buddhists – have made efforts to expunge the insidiousness of Thai internal colonialism, evade the seduction found in global markets, and without imposition, reshape the Thai heart, mind, and soul.



## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion & Future Directions

*Human concepts, no matter how cleverly conceived they are, almost always work against the whole.* – Christopher Alexander

#### 6.1 Looking Back & Looking Forward

This research has asserted and presented evidence that Thailand has historically responded to globalization in a patterned manner in which reform is used as the means to deflect colonial and select global influences through the creation of a nation-state. The Thai nation-state has created a sort of national colonialism by means of fabricating reform utilities – culture, Buddhism, and education. Buddhism has traditionally been the parent of both culture and education, therefore all three of these reform utilities are inter-related, essential components of Siamese history that have been redefined by the Thai state to serve its purpose of creating a homogenous and coherent nation. The impetus for the expression of this need for reform is the Western expression of superiority and the state's concession that Thai people needed to prove their value in relation to Western ideas, and although not intentional, also established the notion that Thai people, their culture, their spiritual practices, and their education were not as good as the Westerner's.

One of the most unique characteristics of Thai people is their ability to reflectively integrate external beliefs and practices and make them distinctively their own. Both the creation of the nation-state and the influence from globalization have introduced Western sensibilities and the adoption of international ideas and innovations, but have also unleashed influences that are dissonant with traditional notions of Thai

culture, Buddhism, and education in the name of modernization and development. Opposition to these influences over the past 150 years have been steady and led mostly by Buddhist monks and rural people, but over the last 50 years gained the sympathy of an educated group of Buddhists and middle class urbanites. Buddhadasa Bhikku championed a progressive Buddhism that amalgamated traditional spirituality with traditional knowledge and re-fashioned them to fit into the modern world. The Thai nation-state, however, followed the international (Western) mode of progress that brought wealth, but also elicited destructive excesses and long-term dependencies caused from addiction to economic practices that represent unsustainable living – metaphorically like culture on heroin. Buddhadasa’s students have become the spiritual leaders that formulate contemporary opposition and healers of the unsustainable global trends. Sulak Sivaraksa has been the pointperson of this amalgam of spirituality, culture, and education that has manifested as the alternative school movement in Thailand and in concert with other international Buddhists, the development of Engaged Buddhism.

The Thai alternative education movement has been a response to what is perceived as a failed school system that gives little opportunity for the majority of students to get a real education because of curricular emphasis on a non-holistic approach to a complicated curriculum that demands more memorization than it does a real exploration in learning. According to research participants, it is a school system that does not prepare students for the real world. And, according to literature, seems to be another national school system that has relied on educational reform to deal with the

real world of globalization without benefit of empirical evidence of how reform interplays at local cultural or regional levels. This systematic approach is instigated at the behest of transnational institutions, which directly or indirectly define the parameters of action based on data and information that reflects their perspective and benefits their enterprises and agendas.

This research has also explored the traditional roles of Buddhism and how it is founded on education, but not merely for edification and employment, but meant to be integrated into one's life and represent the transformation necessary to shed the defilements that substantiate ignorance and delusion. In the case of Thailand, the global emphasis on modernization according to Western traditions caused a great upheaval to Thai society. The Thai Buddhist Sangha was reformed and altered how education was to occur leading to eventual educational reform, aligning it with the American model. Buddhadasa Bhikku, however, with his revolutionary reform of thinking paved the way for the Engaged Buddhist and alternative education movements. These movements have moved beyond established forms of Buddhism and education by amalgamating traditional, authentic Eastern and contemporary, progressive Western concepts and adapting them to fit into local cultural contexts. This has allowed for a spiritual – as opposed to state religiosity – emphasis on compassion manifesting as social justice and alignment with education as a spiritual expression of living learning in order to know wisdom. It is the living learning that distinguishes both movements and in which the most potential is seen.

### *6.1.1 Important Contributions to Literature*

Various literature used for this research indicated there are areas that need to be further illustrated and that have been explored in this research include:

- How globalization is perceived and translated in cultural contexts;
- The comparison of education decentralization within and across local settings;
- The use of an international comparative approach to understand globalization, particularly how culture can be mobilized to create reform;
- The relationship between international financial institutions, international research agendas, global groupthink, and the similarity of reform measures across “developing” countries;
- Reform and its relationship to modernization and the effect it has on local cultures;
- Learning traditions from the time of Buddha through the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- The influence of John Holt, Ivan Illich, and the holistic education movement on the Thai alternative education movement.

There are several areas in which there has been little previous research and have been broached in this research, including:

- Homeschooling in a “developing” nation context, giving voice to homeschool parents and children, and introducing the idea of familyschooling;
- Education as a social movement;

- Engaged Buddhism as a social movement;
- The concept of reform utilities in which a country uses cultural features of a society (in this case, its own society) to colonize it;
- The History of Thai reform and the related patterns between reforms in 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century;
- Establishing the difference between Eastern and Western spirituality in attempt to begin coming to a definition of spirituality.

#### *6.1.2 Recommendations for Future Research*

The field of education would benefit by further research using an international comparative approach. The international comparative education field would benefit from further examination of culture and globalization and viewing education and schooling from a variety of viewpoints, particularly from the vantage point of local, indigenous, and rural perspectives - not to reinforce the “loaded” desires and expectations related to Western schooling, but to explore oppositions and weaknesses inherent in borrowing from Western concepts. This also entails further research in the anthropocentrism found in educational research and needs to be looked at much more closely if there is ever to be a true effort to bring education to all people. In this regard, there is additional research needed in how transnational corporations, financial institutions, and special interest groups subtly or overtly direct research project agendas and how these research projects end up influencing – negatively and positively – policies and affecting local levels. To this end, examining how policies are enacted to induce substantial and beneficial change that are not measured in economic terms, but

in perceived levels of communal and personal happiness, well-being, life-learning, and democratic process.

There needs to be much more research on spirituality, particularly from various cultural contexts with non-Western means of interpretations. Differences and similarities are important, but also how certain forms of spirituality that lie outside of dominant religions have been pressured to conform to standardized beliefs, much the same as what has occurred with schooling. The relationship between spirituality and religion needs to be examined more closely as does the traditional role of spirituality and education. There is the notion implicit in this research that Western (Christian) religion has not been rooted in spiritual concepts, but concepts related to law and state control of people. The idea that religion represents a type of “state utility” to preserve identity and certainty, while spirituality represents the unseen power to be liberated from the “active misapprehension of the nature of things” as the Dalai Lama says, is an area that would benefit from further research. In relation to education, it would be very beneficial to examine whether religion limits the ability to experience life-long learning or whether it is spirituality that encourages wider avenues of learning and living.

There is a small, but growing body of research on indigenous learning, but there needs more attention to indigenous knowledge in country contexts that do not share Western intellectual traditions and how the variety of philosophies of learning spawned a host of methodologies to pass down knowledge in pre-literate and pre-alphabetic days. Related to this idea of pre-literate learning, further research on learning in general, is necessary as is the potential for homeschooling/familyschooling as a moral, civil, and

community building activity in “developing” or war-torn country contexts. Research on how to develop education systems not based completely on Western intellectual traditions, perhaps discovering/introducing hybrid, cultural approaches would be beneficial to the majority of communities outside of urban areas. This also would benefit by a closer look at culture and trying to determine how aspects of culture sustains themselves over long periods of time. Is culture merely concepts, mannerisms, and actions learned and re-learned every generation, or are there elements of culture that operate on many levels and breed in a sub-conscious, “cultural mind?” Even of more importance is what constitutes cultural change and how does it occur? Are the ideas of culture and change conceptualizations taken for granted in that they are deemed routine controllable processes?

Perhaps as an entry point to research on culture is further examination of reform measures and their relationship with globalization by asking if concerted efforts to change individuals through institutional or systematic measures is effective or wise. Questioning whether the change to create a civilized and humane community and society begins with planning change for others or seeking ones own liberation is primary. In considering this, research must also look at the potential of education as a social movement and how the social movement of Engaged Buddhism offers an alternative view in encouraging self-development, community-building, and civil human relations that manifest as compassion and justice.

### *6.1.3 Policy Recommendations*

#### *6.1.3.1 International Policies*

Perhaps it is naïve to believe that international financiers, transnational corporations, international educators, and special interest groups to give up their agendas for changing others and saving the world in order to suit their visions and sate their desires; but it may not be so naïve to expect an arising awareness and subsequent dialog related to how to build a civil world that arises out of an educated, though not necessarily schooled – community of voices. It is not naïve to believe that the international and transnational institutions need to begin to encourage and finance research that explores more than the predominate agendas that favor dominant views that support economic interests over cultural or local interests. Universities and scholars should be open to considering alternative perspectives that do not necessarily support Western cultural or intellectual traditions and question the assumption that Western remedies are superior to ones that arise in a local context with local sensibilities. Organizations or movements that have found success in the West should not assume the problems or the remedies are the same in other contexts, and if they are the same problems, the remedies will almost certainly not be the same.

Motives for working with other societies should not be to challenge cultures to change or to adapt to international economic interests, nor should the motive be to uphold the righteousness of an international or global social or cultural agenda without a need expressed by the local. Educationally, international educators need to make cooperative efforts more of a confluence of ideas whereby partners exchange wisdom



and practices and voiced concerns amassed from symposiums composed of urban and rural, and alternative and formal educators. International educational institutions should not be in a rush to work only with those who support or cater to Western educational ideas unless there is a capacity to assemble a community of voices and address educational needs across a wide social spectrum. The capacity to implement policies addressing this wide spectrum of educational needs is in need of support, financially and educationally. The Western institutions also need to show capacity for working in diverse cultural contexts and in situations representing an imbalance of power. This process is to be looked at as a shared learning process and not necessarily as a business deal negotiated to completion for the sake of funding and prestige.

#### 6.1.3.2 Local Policies – Ministry of Education

The Thai educational reform has been hurt, most of all by the empowerment of distributed arms of the Ministry of Education (MOE) – the *aw baw thaw* and the Education Service Areas (ESA). They have not in essence given schools much authority or power at all, except to create a portion of their curriculum, but without additional assistance or resources. Reform power momentum moved downward, but there was no reform power moving upward or outward or towards formulating richer complexity. A recommendation that the MOE should consider is to invest more power at the school level by allowing the ESA power only to advise and assist, but not to have financial power over the schools. Schools should have full financial power over their schools and should be advised and assisted by MOE staff in how to raise additional funds, develop materials/curriculum, and involve the community. As there is a great number of staff in

the central office, there should be plenty of opportunity to deploy staff to assist in this object. The *aw baw thaw* should have no power relationship over schools, but should have incentives to assist in the welfare of schools.

The staff at the MOE mentioned many times how disorganized the reformed central office had become after reform and that they had seen a new Head Minister of Education every year and each one had had their own agenda that did not include building on the work they had been doing previously. These Ministers were also not educators themselves, so usually emphasized policies related to economics or a personal political agenda. An obvious recommendation is to give a fixed term to the Ministry of Education and recruit candidates from educators who have had a long and broad history in education and have a progressive view of learning and institutional organization. The MOE also needs to consider re-reforming the central office and find the means to develop what Peter Senge refers to as a “learning institution.” Duties, responsibilities and lines of command need to be implemented whereby staff are given problems to solve and the freedom to explore their potential and limitations through the process of work, discovering their colleagues capabilities and how to collaborate with them, and discovering how work relates to reform in general – an iterative learning-working process. To this end, the MOE may consider using staff in new and innovative ways in order to assist local and rural schools, perhaps as adjutants to school principals and teachers and as a support for school committees. The biggest reform might be one related to how one deals with positions of authority – being in a position of authority

entails empowering others and ensuring others have the resources and skills to live a learning life, but does not entail debasing them in servitude.

The MOE might consider prioritizing research by their staff to examine education, learning, and schools – not from a Western context with Western meanings, but from Thai and Buddhist contexts, historically and how it has manifested over the last few reforms. This research would have as an objective establishing a Thai education system that is designed to fit the holistic educational needs of all Thais with teachers equipped with the ability to teach students multiple ways without ever having to repeat the same manner of teaching, depending on the needs of the individual. This research will also include site visits and observations at alternative schools to examine philosophies, techniques, and curriculum. Research would be used to coordinate efforts for developing a working relationship with the MOE and normal schools and teacher's colleges – which currently doesn't seem to exist. This relationship would include student-teacher training at model and alternative schools along with exposure to alternative school philosophies and learning strategies. Sending student-teachers to schools throughout Thailand would do wonders for their confidence and to learn multi-cultural perspectives and to be prepared for the unanticipated. In addition, possible courses in school administration run by MOE staff and an internship for student-teachers to work with the MOE at select schools in need could be created. An additional aspect of this research project would be to bring Engaged Buddhists in to the normal schools to teach special courses in community development and creating learning communities. This could also be in the form of on-going workshops and site visits to

select schools. Lastly, the issue of pay and making teaching a position worthy of career consideration must be revisited.

#### 6.1.3.2 Local Policies – Alternative Educators

Thai alternative educators have done well in creating rich potential for evolving new learning environments. Alternative schools in Thailand have mirrored their belief about how learning occurs – through experience, trial and error, and exploration. They have all been models that could be applicable, not only in Thailand, but throughout the “developing” world and they should be prepared to share their experiences globally. While there are not many recommendations that could increase the ability of the schools to function more efficiently or effectively, it might be useful for some alternative schools to develop a parent education program to explain the philosophy of the school, how it benefits their children, how learning occurs, what is important to know about learning and being a parent, and how to work with the school in ways that benefit all who are part of the school community. This might slow down the rate at which parents push their children – and the schools – to perform according to the measure of the test. Parents need to remember that the most important things in life are not necessarily learned in schools, but that things learned for the sake of schooling can be some of the most damaging experiences and prevent children from experiencing learning as living.

Lastly and in closing, the most obvious recommendation to the MOE would be to suggest how much more successful their reform would be if they were to demonstrate more support of alternative education and willingness to collaborate. Equally, alternative educators might consider how to collaborate with the MOE and remember

not to feel too correct and incapable of seeing others, Thai or non-Thai, in friendship with the wisdom that gives rise to compassion. Robert A. F. Thurman said that the cultivation of compassion is possible because it is based on the reality that it is more powerful than evil and our deeper nature is unveiled through goodness as expressed in wisdom. Because of the goodness in our nature, some of the greatest learning occurs in unanticipated moments - the sacred and the profane appear together on a daily basis in assorted situations with diverse people. Seeing all situations as learning events and all people as teachers is living learning. Finding these moments is emergent wisdom. Sharing those moments is being a civil human being – concerned for the common good and observing the fundamental nature of reality.

## APPENDIX A

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Protocols (Thai Political/Social Movement Expert)**

**Questions about your home school experiences.**

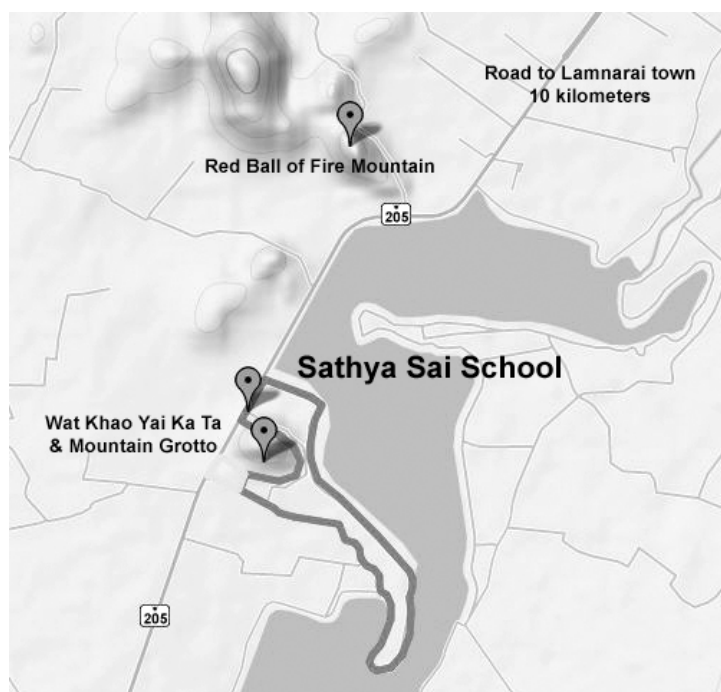
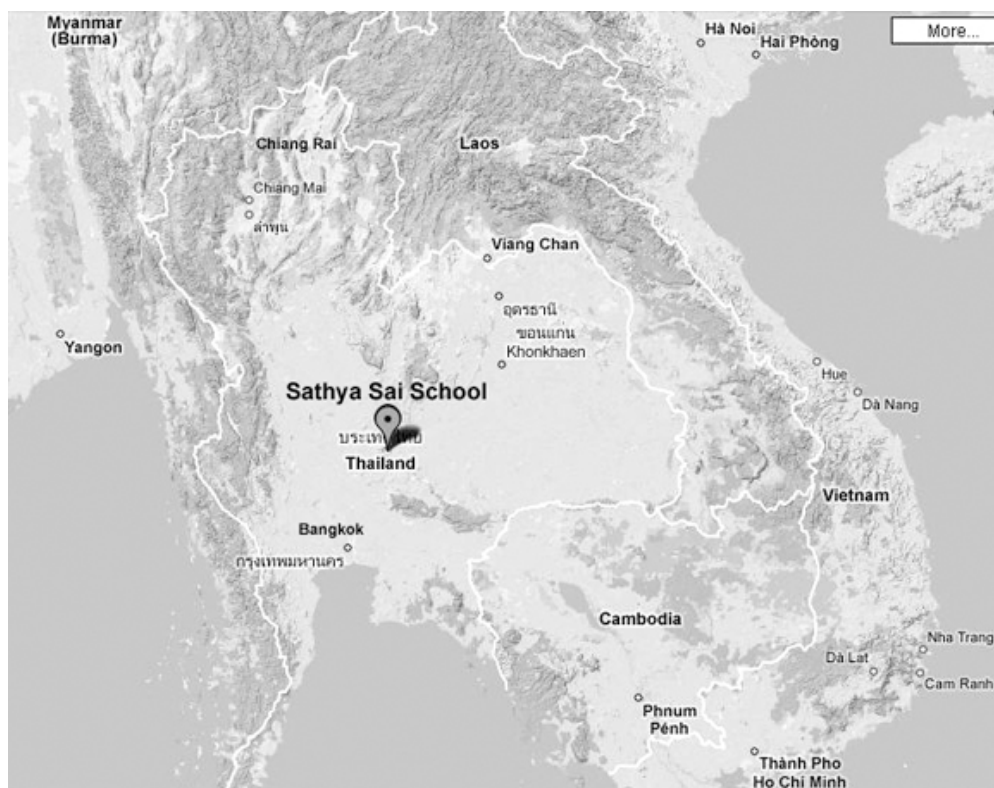
1. Tell me your story – how and why did you get involved in home schooling in Thailand?
  - Before home schooling, were you disenchanted with public schools in Thailand?
  - If so, explain the situation that disappointed you.
  - What were some of the factors that made you decide to home school?
  - Where did you hear about home schooling in Thailand?
  - What did you know about home schooling before you started in Thailand?
  - Who were some of your influences in deciding to home school your children?
  - What were some of the problems you had initially? Are there any on-going problems?
2. What sort of support, or lack of, did you receive from the Ministry of Education/government?
  - Has this changed over the years?
3. Who did you rely on to set up your curriculum?
  - What are kids supposed to know?
  - What did your curriculum emphasize?
  - How was it different than going to a Thai public school?
4. What are the benefits for a Thai child to be home schooled?
  - Are there any drawbacks/disadvantages?
5. Would you consider yourself a spiritual (not necessarily religious) person?
  - What is your idea of spirituality?
  - Did your spiritual beliefs have anything to do with your home school decisions?
  - Do your children go to the temple to gain Buddhist and life-knowledge from the monks?
  - Do you believe Thai children are missing a spiritual education?
6. What do other parents you've talked to think about home school and home school students?

- Those who don't home school their kids – what are their reasons for not doing it?
  - How are your children treated by public school students and parents?
7. Do you think Thai culture is being ignored by public schools?
- What does it mean to be Thai?
  - How do kids know they are Thai?
  - What is your idea of Thai culture?
  - Has globalization harmed Thai culture?
  - Has it helped Thai culture?
8. Do you have any relationship with Moo Baan Dek (MBD)?
- If so, how did you hear about it?
  - Did you have to register your children through MBD?
  - Are there other schools that support home schooling like MBD?
  - Is there an informal network of alternative schools?
  - Formal network?
9. Are political issues important to you?
- Have they been a factor in your home school decisions?
  - How knowledgeable are you about the education reform process?
10. Have you made recommendations to the Ministry of Education MOE regarding education?
- If so, how did you present them?
  - If not, what recommendations would you make to the MOE?

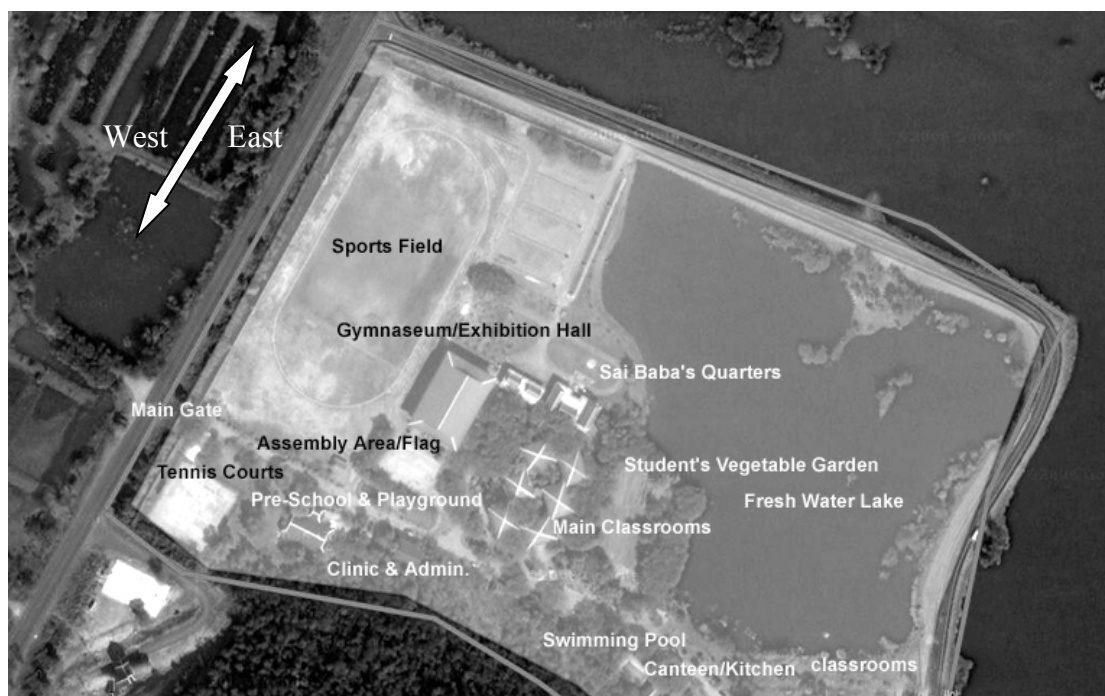


## APPENDIX B

### MAP OF SATHYA SAI SCHOOL LAMNARAI, THAILAND



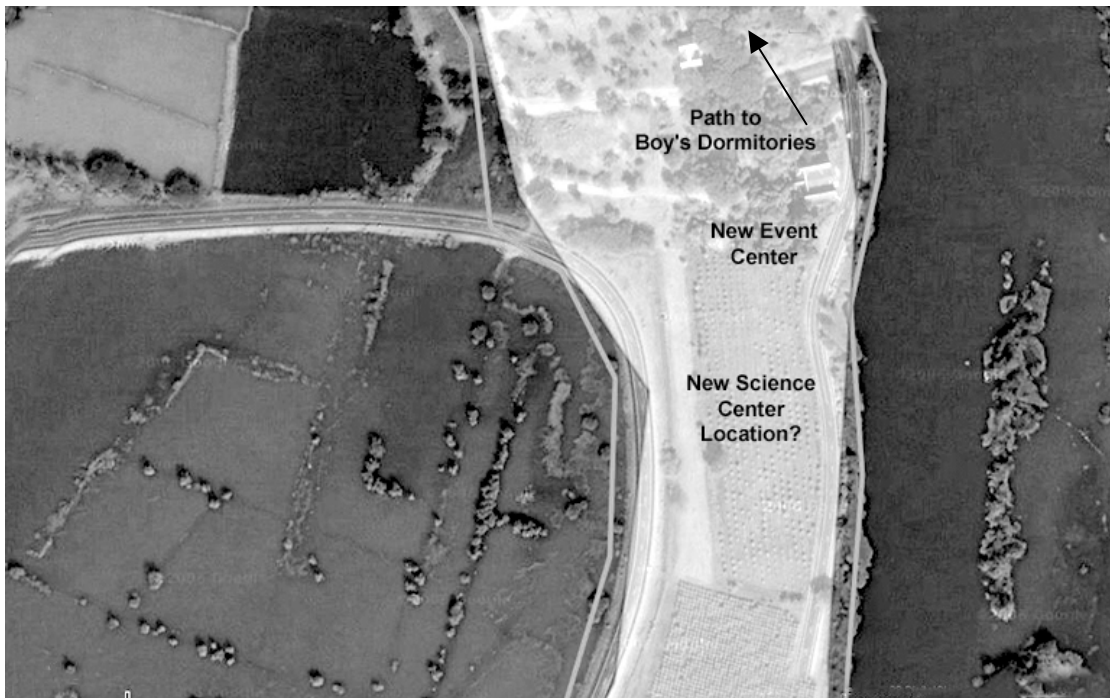
Sathya Sai School (Google maps)



Main entrance, main classrooms, canteen, lake, grotto, girl's dormitories, and meditation center (Google Maps).



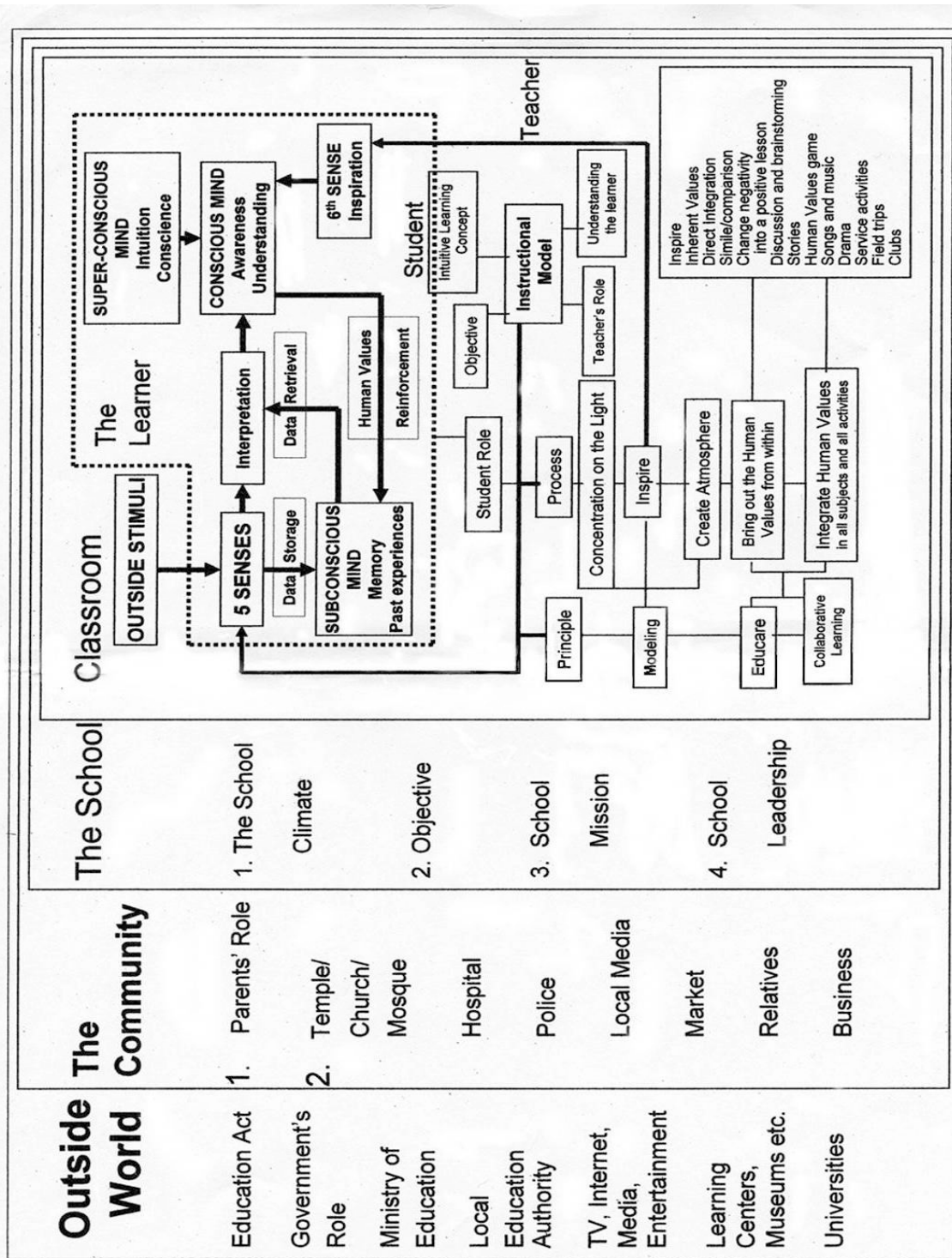
Central girl's and teacher's dormitories, meditation center, laundry, senior boy's house (Google Maps).



Southwest side of Sathya Sai School (Google Maps).

## APPENDIX C

DR. ARTONG JUMSAI'S  
DIRECT TEACHING METHOD: LEARNING HUMAN VALUES



## APPENDIX D

### KRUSOM UDOMPEUNG'S HOMESCHOOL BOOK FOR PARENTS TABLE OF CONTENTS



## **Homeschooling**

By Mae Som

### *Contents*

1. Education for the balancing of life
  2. Homeschool parents have to know their own children deeply
  3. Is there anything hidden in kid's questions?
  4. "Impressions" are the foundation of beauty in a child's mind
  5. Homeschooling and socializing
  6. Kids need sustainable education
  7. Father's role in mother's view
  8. Knowledge must be dynamic
  9. "Curiosity" is more important than "information"
  10. Kids also have intuition
  11. Cold wind, fog sprinkling, and wisdom
  12. Learning, wide world, and friendship
  13. "Arts" – the connecting channel between "head" and "heart"
  14. "Family school": the classroom of life
  15. Are they really incompetent?
  16. "Doing nothing" is alright
  17. The mixed curriculum
  18. Kid's language is universal language
  19. What's cool: process or product?
  20. Drum rhythm vs. life rhythm
  21. Peaceful state of learning
  22. Appendix: "The ordinary wisdom - the base of life – is started at home"
- (This article was written for S.E.M.'s research of Thai alternative education, 2003.)

## APPENDIX E

### “LEARNING THROUGH THE HEART” KRUSOM UDOMPEUNG’S HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM

While the children are expected to participate in at least one major topic each day, kids can choose a topic of their interest each day. For example, they may learn about how to exercise by helping their father plant a tree that day. However, they should cover all the major topics in a month. The curriculum is to encourage creativity, self-care, recreation, and being a “good kid.”

The curriculum contains ten major topics:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. My ten fingers (sub-topics: crafts, cooking, making models, and carpentry)   | 2. Brain food (sub-topics: reading, maths, science, English, and writing reports)   |
| 3. Healthy body (exercise, like going jogging with their father or doing yoga with me)  | 4. Quiet Time (laying on one's back watching clouds, listening to the wind, and meditation)   |
| 5. For the public ( sub-topics: household chores) care for the family's many pets - more than 10 chickens, three turkeys and three goats, they have participated in two main topics - For the public and Sharing and compassion.) | 6. Wide world (the children travel with them to other provinces). They travel a lot - to the mountains, to the seaside, and every winter, go to visit hilltribes and the children get to learn about their way of life and culture. |
| 7. Socialising (the youngsters are expected to greet callers on the phone and visitors to their home, contact old friends and make new friends)   | 8. Feeling (they are encouraged to express their emotions, listen to others, and think well about themselves and others)  |
| 9. Sharing and compassion (can also mean giving their possessions to the needy)   | 10. Aesthetics (painting, listening to music or playing an instrument, poetry reading or listening, or enjoying artworks)   |

## Kru Som's “Learning Through the Heart” Home-School Curriculum

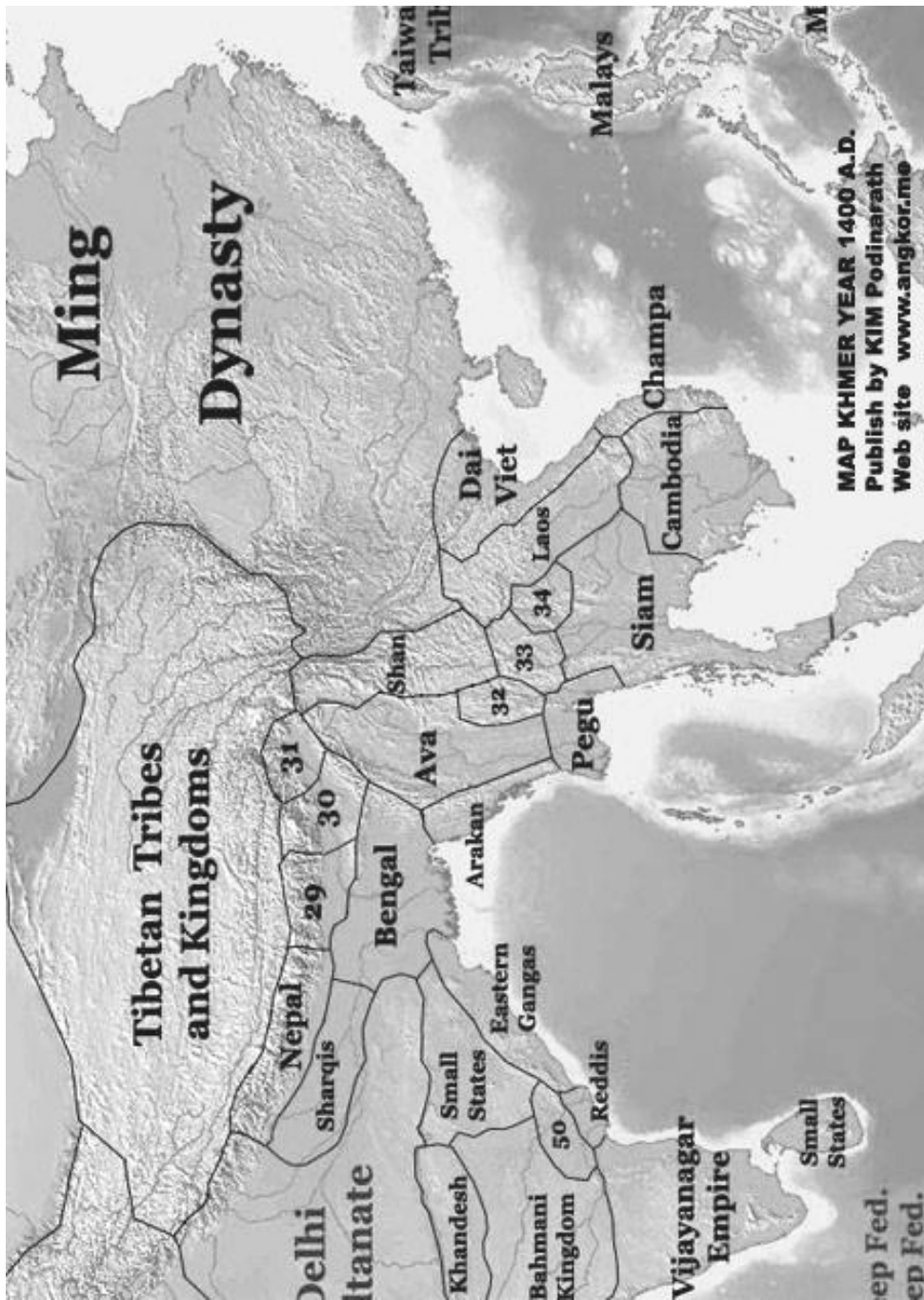
## APPENDIX F

MAPS OF ASIA – 550 B.C., 1300 A.D., & 1400 A.D.



Asia 550 B.C. (<http://www.angkor.me/>)





Asia 1400 A.D. (<http://www.angkor.me/>)

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*Vita of MICHAEL ERNEST JONES*

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

<i>Education &amp; Development</i>	<i>Communications &amp; Media</i>	<i>Management</i>
Teaching/Training	Publisher/Editor Roles	Manager Roles
Curriculum Design	Media Production	Project Design
Scholarship Management	Education Material Production	Consultancy
Monitor & Evaluation	Promotional Design	Program Mgmt.
School Organization	Library Organization/Mgmt.	Advising/Mentoring
Research	Web-site Development	Mediation/Negotiation

Lived/Worked: Tunisia, Morocco, Thailand, Lao PDR, N. & S. Vietnam, Cambodia.

**POSITIONS**

***Cultural Immersion Projects, School of Education, Indiana University***

Associate Instructor - Project Coordinator, 2000–2004.

- Recruited and was responsible for up to 125 undergraduate student teachers in three program phases (Classroom, in-country student-teaching, and overseas student-teaching).
- Conducted classroom sessions on country-specific cultural, political, historical, and educational values in ten nations.
- Conceived and adapted a tool for student's self-evaluation and conducted personal interviews three times annually in effort to mentor them in their personal and professional growth.
- Incorporated pedagogical and cultural ideas through the design of a year long simulation activity.
- Supervised and mentored student teachers in classroom situations at local public schools.
- Produced a multi-media film for international award ceremony.

***Aquaculture & Aquatic Resources Management (AARM), Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand***

Senior Program Specialist: Manager, Information & Promotion Unit, 1995-2000.

- Developed strategies and led team tasks to address Southeast Asian institution building needs of eleven partner colleges' Information Management capacities and Human Resource requirements.
- Hired and supervised a staff of six in regional training and media production activities.
- Conducted/facilitated training: webpage development; audio-visual production; educational materials design; library and information management; and instructional technology integration.

- Managing Editor responsible for delivery of publications: anthology book series, international newsletter; website with educational materials; technical publications; and modules and manuals.
- Authored press releases; promotional materials; program logos/motto; brochures; best practices and policies; program reports; organizational statements; journal articles; and proposals.
- Inform donors and international community of the program's work and expand network of partners.

***United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Thailand***

*Associate Program Officer – Education & Social Services, 1991-1993.*

- Monitored, assessed, and evaluated all educational, vocational, and social service programs in nine refugee camps in Thailand sheltering the Lowland Lao, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Khmer.
- Liaised with major international refugee donors in training/social service program design.
- Assessed the non-Indochinese (Burmese, Sinhalese, Tamil, Afghan) refugee's needs, formed a refugee education committee, established a refugee school with multi-lingual curriculum and teacher training program to serve 3000+ refugees in Bangkok.
- Formed networks of assistance with institutions/agencies and created a variety of educational and vocational programs benefiting women, men, boys, and girls of at least ten different nationalities.
- Initiated primary education and skill training programs, tertiary opportunities, and coordinated scholarship programs that sent refugees to local and international schools.
- Supervised four social counselors at the non-Indochinese center and supported social and medical welfare programs, including special services for HIV/AIDS cases and abused children;
- Planned, proposed, and negotiated security measures at center, which was often a hotbed of violence, disputes, psychological eruptions, and frequent police raids.
- Co-wrote and produced teacher training video and manual in three languages.
- Prepared monthly reports with statistics, \$200,000 annual budgets, and program proposals.

**OTHER RELATED POSITIONS**

- **Center for Evaluation & Education Policy**, Indiana University, Project Evaluator – Alternative Education Program (Simon Youth Foundation-National Education Resource Centers) – 1 year.

- **Indiana University (IU)** (Instructional Systems Technology Department), Associate Instructor: R521, R541 (Instructional Design courses), 1 year.
- **Institute of International Education & IU**, Education Consultant – SE Asia Region. 1993-1999.
- **Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand**, Instructional Material Developer, 2.5 yrs.
- **Head Start Pre-School Program**, Materials & Curriculum Developer, Eugene, Oregon, 3 years.
- **Ohio-Reads Literacy Program** (via Indiana University), Monitor & Evaluator, 2002, 1 year.
- **Peace Corps-Tunisia**, Audio-Visual Agriculture Extension Specialist, 2.5 years.
- **Schools and agencies**, ESL TEACHER (K-12 and adult) – Thailand, Tunisia, Morocco – 3 years.
- **American Arbitration Association**, Tribunal Manager/Developer (with State Attorney General) – Massachusetts State Lemon Law Arbitration Program, 4 years.

## **EDUCATION**

### Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 2000-2008

- **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), 12/2008**, Major: Policy Studies – International Comparative Education; Minor: Intercultural Communication
- **Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Scholarship, 2006-2007**
- **Master of Science, 2002**, Instructional Systems Technology (IST)
- **Certificate in Distance Education, 2001**

### University of Massachusetts at Boston, Boston, Massachusetts, 1985-7

- **Graduate Certificate, 1987**, Dispute Resolution: Mediation and Negotiation

### Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon, 1983

- **Bachelor of Arts, 1983**, Majors: 1. Communications (Intercultural, Mass Media); 2. Fine Arts (Film and sculpture); Minor: Human Studies.