

# **The Sangha and Political Acts**

## **Secularization in a Theravada Buddhist Society**

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### **Abstract**

The secularization thesis has been influential in social thought. Most Western and some Asian countries including Japan, seem to confirm this thesis. However, in most Southeast Asian countries religion remains important. In this paper, I focus on the monk demonstrations in Myanmar in 2007. First, I show the contradictions in the confrontation between religious ideals and the institutionalization of sangha (the monastic community of ordained monks and novices) in the modern political system. Then I discuss the institutionalization undertaken to unify the sangha and the relationship between sangha institutions and legal system and the secular world.

After this contextualization, I examine the monk demonstrations as part of a social movement. This involves exploring the kinds of networks used by the monks and the levels at which the military government intervened in the movement. Finally, I consider the response of Japanese Buddhist networks, including some humanitarian associations, and the effect of the monk demonstrations on wider networks of Buddhists.

### **Keywords**

Secularization, Theravada Buddhist society, social movement, engaged Buddhism, monk demonstration

## **1. Introduction**

Derived from Max Weber, the secularization thesis has been influential in social thought. It proposes that secularization is associated with modernity, which has three characteristic features: structural differentiation of secular spheres such as politics, economy, science and art and their separation from religious institutions and norms; marginalization of religion to the personal sphere; and the decline of religious beliefs and practices. Evidence from

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most Western countries and some Asian countries, such as Japan, seems to confirm this thesis. Despite an explosion of politicized religion in the 1990s, the same tendency can be discerned in most countries of Southeast Asia.

In Myanmar, 89 per cent of the population professes Theravada Buddhism. Back in 1962, the attempt of incumbent Prime Minister U Nu to make Buddhism the state religion was a cause of political instability, owing to the dissatisfaction it provoked among religious minorities. Gen. Ne Win seized power in a coup d'état and pursued a secularization policy. The constitutions of 1974 and 2008 both allow freedom of religion,<sup>1</sup> and the political system has become more secularized. However, in 2007 there were large-scale demonstrations by monks against the coercive military regime. Some accounts have given prominence to the role of the Internet and the importance of civil journalists (CJ) in disseminating information that was otherwise strictly censored (e.g. Chowdhury 2008). Others have analysed the religious background of the incident. For example, Schober has described how Buddhist practices and institutions often insert themselves into public life, encouraging the greater politicization of religion (Schober 2011: see also Jordt 2008, Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2008, Tosa 2008). She also convincingly points out how Buddhist thinking and the ideological framework of politics come together in concepts such as *dhammaraja* (P. ruler who keeps the Universal Laws)<sup>2</sup>.

I think it is more enlightening, however, to explore the contradictions present in the confrontation between religious ideals and the institutionalization of sangha (monastic community of ordained monks and novices) in the modern political system. Hence, I shall concentrate on this topic in this article. As the sangha is a powerfully influential aggregation, the authorities felt an urgent need to define a role for it vis-à-vis the modern political or secular system. Concerning European modernization, Asad (2003), following similar arguments regarding religion, has argued that Western concepts of “the secular” were constructed in the process of European modernization since the Enlightenment. This conceptualization made possible the separation of the secular public space and the religious private space, and for the relegation of religious ritual and discipline to the personal sphere.

<sup>1</sup> Article 34 of the present (2008) constitution and Article 21 of the previous 1974 constitution recognize freedom of religion. According to the 1983 census, minorities are Christian (5%), Muslim (3.8%), animist (1.2%), and Hindu (0.5%).

<sup>2</sup> Pali is an Indo-Aryan language, in which the canons of Theravada Buddhism were collected and later written down. In this article, local terms (Burmese, Pali and Japanese) are written in italics, (P.) denoting Pali, (J.) denoting Japanese.

Following Asad, I first consider the concept of the secular in a Burmese context. Then I discuss the kind of institutionalization introduced to unify the sangha, followed by an examination of the relationship between sangha institutions and legal system and the secular world.

After this contextualization, I examine the monk demonstrations. While the protesters insisted that their action as monks was legitimate, traditional and orthodox, the authorities, and some Buddhist opinion makers, held that participation in demonstrations was political and therefore not proper behaviour for Sangha members. Leaving aside the discussion of Buddhist values, I examine the events as part of a social movement (cf. Tarrow 1994). This involves exploring the kinds of networks used by the monks and the levels at which the military government intervened in the movement.

I conclude by looking at the Myanmar uprising in a broader perspective, i.e. by referring to the transnational dimension and the spill-over effects in the wake of the events. As a case in point, I consider the response of Japanese Buddhist networks, including some humanitarian associations, and the effect of the monk demonstrations on wider networks of Buddhists.

## **2. The model of the ideal king and the meaning of “secular” in Myanmar**

In Myanmar, the Sangha (capitalized when referring to the formally legislated entity) is one of the most important institutions. Accounting for about one per cent of the population, in 2009 total Sangha membership was 544,710, a number that exceeded the estimated 400,000 personnel in the armed forces (PWH 2010: 580). Although the behaviour of both laypeople and sangha members is guided by Dhamma, universal Buddhist law, compliance requirements are different: whereas laypeople are expected to observe only five precepts, the conduct of sangha members is regulated by 227 precepts. As ordinary members of society, laypeople are expected to engage in productive and reproductive activities and to participate in family life. Monks, however, leave their families, do not engage in production activities, and avoid sexual relationships. Materially supported by the laity, monks actually provide a means for laypeople to attain merit (*kutho*) by donating to monks. The laity and the sangha complement each other. Their social and legal statuses are also different. In Burmese, *lu* (human beings) refers only to laypersons: the category does not include monks, novices and nuns. According to the constitution, all citizens are expected to hold a national registration card (NRC). If a person permanently becomes a monk or nun, he or she is reclassified as such, and the NRC is returned to the government. In the political

context of a modern nation state, the Sangha comprises a large group of persons who have a special personal and legal status that sets them apart from ordinary citizens.

To understand the relationship between politics and religion in Theravada Buddhist society, Ishii (1975: 81) has proposed a triangular model of state structure that hinges on the Dhamma: the Sangha, through correct observance of the precepts, transmits the Dhamma; Dhamma, in turn, legitimizes the king. In principle, the same scheme applies to the traditional Burmese Buddhist ideal leader called *dharmaraja*. In other words, both the ruler and sangha should follow the Dhamma and keep a watchful eye on how others comply with its precepts. From the lay point of view, to the extent that the sangha as a whole follows the precepts and keeps itself pure, donations will be rewarded with greater merit.

There is also a commonly used Buddhist dichotomy: *lokiya* (P. this-worldliness) and *lokkuttara* (P. other-worldliness). In Theravada Buddhist society, this dichotomy is important. Laypersons are mostly involved in *lokiya*, which can be regarded as the secular world, while monks or people who renounce the world are expected to engage in *patipati* (P. meditating), or *pariyatti* (P. learning the canons) or other practices considered appropriate to *lokkuttara*. In this sense, conceptions of secular that evolved out of a Christian milieu do not exactly match the Burmese synonym (*lokiya*), which is deeply rooted in the local Buddhist habitus: secular health is related to how well 'religion' is practised. An example of this can be seen in the purification performed by Burmese kings when they were threatened by the British in the nineteenth century. Having to deal with the power of modern Western countries, they also became concerned with modernity and rationalization. In response to the crisis, King Mindon (1853–78) performed sangha purification by issuing royal edicts to prevent the sangha from indulging in secular affairs, or from engaging in unorthodox practices involving supernatural powers (see Tosa 2000). In a sense, this purification, based on differentiating between the this-worldly and the other-worldly, was a test of the ruler's legitimacy.

This differentiation, however, has created a conflict between laws and judicial procedures that are different for laypersons and Sangha members. Although Myanmar has established a secular legal system, guided by the *vinaya* (P. precepts), the Sangha enjoys a special personal and legal status. In the attempt to formally institutionalize the sangha, problems have also arisen in the attempt to determine what orthodoxy is, or what the proper practices are for the pure monks. Before modernization there were numerous *nikaya* (P.) or *gaing* (ordination lineages or sects) that had their own practices based on their own interpretations of the canons. These different interpretations

sometimes caused conflict within the sangha. The establishment of a unified Sangha organization and judicial system had long been desired by the authorities and by most of the monks.

### 3. Establishing a unified Sangha organization and judicial system

#### 3.1 Sangha organization

In 1980, a blueprint for a unified formal Sangha was drawn up at the First Congregation of the Sangha of All Orders. The Congregation sanctioned nine *nikaya* and strictly forbade the establishment of separate new sects. It also decided to codify, for its self-government, a body of rules and other relevant legislation and to authorize major bodies to do the same.

Committee selection and organizational procedures were laid out in sets of Sangha regulations, rules, and manuals, which have been subsequently revised as needed; Table 1 lists the current regulations. Of these, the *Sangha Organization Basic Rules* (hereafter *Basic Rules*), the de facto constitution, are the most important (TUH 1996). *Procedures of Sangha Organization* sets out the procedures for organizing and selecting Sangha committees. Procedures for filing lawsuits, carrying out prosecutions, appointing judges, appealing to higher courts and generally dealing with Sangha regulations are set forth in *Sangha Lawsuit Resolution Procedures* (TUH 2005a).

The congregation also set up a hierarchy of monks with three governing levels: rural village and urban ward, state or division, and national. Three committees were established at the national level. The State Central Working Committee (SCWC) is made up of about 300 members and constituted on the basis of constituency population and in proportion to the membership of each of the nine *nikaya*. The 47 members of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SSMNC) are selected from the SCWC. In turn, the SSMNC nominates about 100 people to sit as members of the State Owada Sariya Committee, or Board of Advisors.

Below the national committees there are division and state Sangha committees, below them township and ward Sangha committees, and at the lowest level town and village Sangha committees. This hierarchical organization exactly matches the secular administrative hierarchy. In principle, all abbots (*kyaung dain hsayadaw*) of monasteries within a ward or a village become the members of the local ward or village working committees (WWC/VWC). At the next level, the township, WWCs and VWCs select the

TABLE 1: Sangha regulations (rules, procedures and manuals)

	Name	Subdivisions	Date of enactment or amendment
1	Sangha Organization Basic Rules (Basic Rules)	19 chapters, 108 articles	1980/5/27; amended 1985/5/29 and 1995/3/11
2	Sangha Organization Procedures (Organization Procedures)	29 chapters, 242 articles	Amended 1980/5/26
3	Sangha Lawsuit Resolution Procedures	9 chapters, 61 articles	1980
4	Sangha Nayaka Manual	5 parts, 28 chapters	First issued 1981/5/1
5	Sangha Orders	Nos 1–75 Nos 76–94	1980–1988 1989–2009
6	Manual for Prosecuting According to Sangha Order No. 75	3 chapters	2/25/1991
7	Sangha Lawsuit Manual	16 chapters, 42 sections	2/25/1991
8	Theravada Nun Organization Fundamental Rules (Fundamental Nun Rules)	14 chapters, 40 articles	Issued 1981; rev.1984/3/12–13; rev. 1996/3/24–25
9	Procedures of Theravada Nun Organization (Nun Organization Procedures)	9 chapters, 9 articles	Issued 1981; rev 1984/3/12–13; rev.1 996/3/24–25
10	Bhikkhuni Trial Report		(Final proofs, 2003/9/17)
11	Report of Trial No. 13 by State Special Winido Committee		

chairman of the Township Sangha Nayaka Committee (TSNC), and this chairman appoints members to the TSNC in accordance with the procedures and qualifications stipulated in the rules and manuals. Similarly, the members of the TSNC select a chairman for the next highest organization, who then organizes recruitment for the State or Division Sangha Nayaka Committee (SSNC/DSNC).

### 3.2 Judicial system

Because Sangha members are not ordinary citizens, they are usually dealt with outside the ordinary legal system. After independence, sangha legal affairs were dealt with under the 1949 *Sangha Trial Act* and the 1954 *Sangha Trial and Sangha Court Act*. After the First Congregation of the Sangha of All Orders in 1980, these acts were superseded by a new judicial system.<sup>3</sup> Before discussing the judicial system, it is worthwhile considering legal disputes concerning the sangha. The this-worldly/other-worldly distinction is also observed in the legal system; secular law applies only to laypersons, and is not directly applied to sangha members. For a start, in Theravada societies the conduct of monks is governed by rules, *vinaya* (P.), laid out in the canon, rather than by secular law. Legally, the Myanmar sangha has been required to abide by the above-mentioned sangha rules, regulations and manuals, which apply only to the sangha. These are legally different from secular laws. In this paper they are referred to as sangha rules (see Table 1). In addition, some specific laws concerning the Sangha have been issued by the government to serve as a bridge between the sangha rules and secular (or laypeople's) legal system. The body of rules and regulation is sometimes called sangha law, but confusion can easily rise because *Sangha Law* is generally used as an abbreviation for the *Law Concerning Sangha Organizations*.

Sangha law courts sit irregularly. When it is necessary to convene a court, monks from the local monastic organization or *winido* (P. *vinidara*, holder of *vinaya*) are nominated to judge or serve as jurors. The general principles follow the procedures for trials carried out at the lowest level. A list of candidate *winido* monks is drawn up by the local TSNC. The *Sangha Lawsuit Manual* (hereafter *Lawsuit Manual*) stipulates qualifications for service, and the suitability for inclusion is checked (TUH 2005b). When a dispute arises, the TSNC appoints court officers from the list. A plaintiff or defendant who is dissatisfied with the decision of the court can appeal to the next highest court, the division/state Sangha trial committee. After that, there is the possibility of an appeal to the highest court, the State Sangha Trial Committee. Thus the Sangha's legal affairs are regulated by a three-tier court system.

Trials normally involve ordinary disagreements, such as property disputes concerning the succession of monasteries and other possessions.<sup>4</sup> Four

<sup>3</sup> Concerning procedures for Sangha trials, see *Sangha Lawsuit Resolution Procedures* (TUH 2005b). Kojima (2009) provides a detailed explanation of the Sangha trial system. See also Kojima 2005, Ikuno 1982.

<sup>4</sup> They can deal with conflicts between the different sects (*nikaya*) and between the monks and laypersons, but the systems are a little different.

types of special courts may also be convened to treat extraordinary cases, which most often seem concerned with the conduct of Sangha members, and hence Sangha policy issues. This can be seen by examining the operation of two of these special courts, the Special Township Sangha Court Committee and the Special State Winido Committee.<sup>5</sup>

Under mechanisms established in 1987, special township Sangha court committees are convened to deal with complaints against monks who do not follow the rules of the monastery in which they reside and against monks who do not conduct themselves properly as Sangha members. A special township Sangha court committee is appointed by the TSNC from the list of the township *winido* monks (*Lawsuit Manual* Art. 47). This type of special court differs from ordinary Sangha courts in at least two respects: the court's decision is final – there is no appeal – and it deals with the smallest units of the Sangha, i.e., individual monks, and their conduct under monastic rule.

The Special State Winido Committee is another special court, in this case charged with deciding whether a specific doctrine is in accordance with the teachings of Buddha or not, i.e., whether a doctrine is orthodox or heretical.<sup>6</sup> The members of this court are selected from one of the higher committees such as the SCWC (*Lawsuit Manual*, Art. 57[E]). Again, there is no possibility of appealing the verdicts of this court.

It is important to understand that these courts do not handle cases involving only laypersons, they are exclusively concerned with religious matters, that is, the regulation of the Sangha. To bridge the two legal systems, a body of Sangha law (*Law Relating to the Sangha Organization*) was enacted under the State Law and Order Restriction Council (SLORC: SLORC Act No. 20/90, 31 October 1990). It sanctions only nine *nikaya* and “the different levels of Sangha organization formed in accordance with the basic regulation (*Basic Rules*)” and forbids the establishment of separate new sects. It also has a chapter stipulating penalties which will be discussed below.

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<sup>5</sup> The remaining two are Special Sangha Trial Committee (when a member of the SCSW or State Winido Hsayadaw is accused: Article 57–A, *Lawsuit Manual*), and its higher court, the Special State Sangha Trial Committee (Article-C, *Lawsuit Manual*).

<sup>6</sup> If a doctrine is judged unorthodox, the involved monks should defrock. However, if the monks formally indicated that they abandon the doctrine in front of *winido* monks, they would be welcomed back as legal monks.

## 4. State intervention in Sangha affairs

### 4.1 Promulgation of Sangha orders

*Basic Rules*, Article 101 (Ch. 18) stipulates that to solve problems in the administration or to implement Sangha reform the SSMNC can issue Sangha orders. Consequently, such orders should arise from lacunae or insufficiencies in the *Basic Rules* or the manuals. We can surmise that they also reveal the extent to which the Sangha exercises jurisdiction (see also Tin Maung Maung Than 1988, 1993).

Under the rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), when this unified organization was established, a total of 76 orders were issued (TUH 2009a). The purpose of almost half of these orders (31) was to facilitate the consolidation of the Sangha, mainly by facilitating the organization of the 1980 congregation. Sangha trials were the concern of another 14 orders, which stipulated, for example, how to treat monks who did not accept their sentences. Another 13 orders concerned doctrine and showed the degree of concern about heterodoxy in Myanmar Buddhist society. As already mentioned, the Special State Winido Committee decides doctrinal issues by trial. It is plausible to suppose that these orders were issued to counter and officially denounce doctrines that were judged to be unorthodox.

By contrast, under the rule of the SLORC–SPDC (State Peace and Development Council, 1988–2011),<sup>7</sup> only 18 orders had been issued up to 2009 (TUH 2009a). Eight of these were concerned with constraining the behaviour of monks or abbots. Although some orders of this type had been issued under the BSPP, the nature of the behaviour called into question was somewhat different. Under the BSPP, monks were censured for the following categories of behaviour: drinking alcohol or using other drugs; gambling; engaging in economic activities; selling, buying, or transporting smuggled goods; viewing theatrical performances or watching sports, playing music or participating in sports such as soccer or martial arts, or acting rudely; and improperly demanding donations. The procedures for bringing an accusation against delinquent monks and those for sentencing were separate (THU 2008a). It goes without saying that drug abuse, handling smuggled goods, and some of the other acts would be criminal offenses if committed by laypersons. The other prohibitions, however, regulate conduct that is unbecoming only to monks. As such, the prohibitions can be interpreted as unequivocally and

<sup>7</sup> The SLORC government later renamed itself the SPDC, but both were essentially the same military government.

universally defining for all in the Sangha the type of conduct that is inappropriate for (unworldly) monks.

During the SLORC–SPDC period, the same types of behaviour were prohibited, but in addition the authorities were intent on prohibiting ‘political activities’. In 1991, 2007, and 2009, decrees and orders were issued prohibiting monks from engaging in political activities. These prohibitions were prompted by boycotts and demonstrations organized by monks in 1990 and 2007.

#### 4.2 State intervention in Sangha punishment

Codified Sangha regulations are subordinate to State Law (*Lawsuit Manual* Art. 21, TUH 2005b, see also Kojima 2009: 98). The *Lawsuit Manual*, issued in 1980, declared that if a monk’s action is criminal under the (secular) penal code, or if the state is the plaintiff, the case should be judged in a secular court.

When the unified judicial system was set up, members of the Sangha initially seemed to be aware that they occasionally lacked practice in legal procedures. The *Lawsuit Manual* mentions that “monks can request the help of (secular) authorities” if the members of a *winido* committee are unable carry out all the work involved in convening a trial, examining a case, and investigating and gathering evidence (*Lawsuit Manual*: Ch. 4, Art. 24, para. C2; Ch. 6, Arts. 38 and 39; etc.). Other provisions related to this are contained in *Act No. 3* of the 1980 *Pyithu Hluttaw* [People’s Assembly], under the heading “Resolution of disputes and cases concerning religious precepts (*Wini dhammakan adikayon hmuhkin mya hpyeshin hsonhpyatye hsainya upade*)”.<sup>8</sup> This Act also mentions responsibilities that fall within the jurisdiction of secular authorities. For example, if a plaintiff or accused fails to follow a summons to appear before the State or Division Sangha Nayaka Committee, the relevant secular authority may bring the person in question to trial.

An examination of Sangha orders issued after 1980 suggests that the Sangha encountered a number of problems in implementing its justice system. It seems that a considerable number of monks had criticized the *winido* (judge) monks and their judges and that some did not accept court verdicts. For example, *Order No. 47* issued on 3 January 1983 declared that anyone who wrongfully criticizes or denounces *winido* monks is liable to prosecution, and *Order No. 58* issued on 31 October and *No. 69* issued on 21 No-

<sup>8</sup> The complete contents of the Act can be found in TUH 2005a.

vember 1983, confirmed the responsibilities of *winido* monks. Another issue was the lack of explicit punishments under Sangha law or regulations.

The 1983 People's Assembly attempted to remedy this by passing *Act No. 9*, which supplemented the stipulated punishments. This legislation was subtitled *Protection of judgement for disputes and cases concerning religious precepts (Wini dhammakan adika yonhmuhkinmya hpyeshin hsonhpyatyehsainya ko kakwesaungshaukthi upade)*. Article 2 in Chapter 1 of this Act defines distinctive features of sanctions available to the Sangha. The most severe verdict is impurity (P. *asuddha*), defined as committing *pārājika* (P.) which spoils the man as a monk (Art. 2 (B)). A monk found guilty of impurity should be expelled from the Sangha. If a monk admits an act of impurity, however, and acknowledges this in front of the members of the Township Sangha Nayaka Committee, the latter can decide whether he can remain as a novice who abides by the appropriate precepts or must be disrobed (Art. 2 (C)). This implies that even if a trial finds that a monk is incapable, i.e. that he is not fit to be a monk, unless he admits this to himself, the other monks cannot purge his sins. In other words, even if a *winido* committee delivers a negative judgment, the Sangha organization has no way of expelling a serious miscreant from the Sangha without the sinner's consent. According to canon law (*vinaya*) and sangha regulations, a guilty person, in effect, has to disrobe himself. The only sanction available to the Sangha bureaucracy is suspension of the issuance of a new Sangha registration card and invalidation of the current one.

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that *Act No. 9* was passed by the secular authorities owing to dissatisfaction with the toothlessness of the Sangha courts. It stipulates that any monk who is found guilty of impurity in a Sangha trial should not remain a monk (Art. 3(B) and 4). If the guilty party refuses to disrobe, he is liable to a prison sentence of up to three years (Art. 8). Moreover, any layperson who pretends to be a monk or novice is also liable to three years imprisonment (Art. 9). Nor is anyone allowed to preach doctrines which the Special State Winido Committee has declared to be unorthodox (Art. 6). To do so is punishable by up to five years imprisonment (Art. 10). No-one can refuse to follow orders or instructions issued by a township council when these conform to the decisions of a Sangha court (Art. 7); offenders are liable to six months imprisonment (Art. 11). In sum, *Act 9* enabled enforcement of sanctions against monks found guilty of offences by a Sangha court. Thus, it is an encroachment of secular authority into Sangha affairs. Secular jurisdiction knows punitive sanctions, whereas under canon law (*vinaya*), the most severe sanction at the disposal of the monks is exclusion.

### 4.3 State Intervention in the SLORC–SPDC period

State intervention in the Sangha organization increased during the SLORC–SPDC period. Many monks, novices and nuns participated in the pro-democracy movement of 1988. For example, even though the establishment of such organizations was strictly prohibited by the authorities, young monks founded the All Burma Young Monks Union (ABYMU) and other organizations (Matthews 1993: 419–21). Numerous monks were arrested. Their arrest ignited smouldering resentment and led to a large-scale boycott called *pattanikujjana* (P. *pattam nikkujjana kamma*). This *pattanikujjana* refers to inverting the bowl used to collect donations (see Jordt 2008). By doing this, the monk refuses to accept donations from persons deemed unworthy of merit. In Myanmar, *pattanikujjana* is understood to be formally permitted in the canon. Initially, in October 1990, many monks around Mandalay began to refuse donations from military families (Matthews 1993: 419–21). In response to the boycott, SLORC issued *Proclamation 6* on 20 October 1990. Under the authority of Chairman Senior General Soe Maung, it prohibited monks from engaging in ‘political’ activities and from organizing outside of the nine officially recognized *nikayas*. It also declared associations such as the Sangha Thameggha Association, Young Monk Association and Abbot Sangha Thameggha Association to be illegal (TUH 1996: Appendix). The following day, the SLORC government issued *Proclamation 7*, which concluded with “this proclamation shall be as powerful as the law”.

Then, on 31 October, the 18-article *Law Concerning Sangha Organizations*, often referred to by its short form, *Sangha Law*, came into effect. This law reiterated the illegality of establishing new organizations besides the nine *nikayas* (see Ch. 3), offenders being liable to three years imprisonment (Ch. 4 Art. 12, TUH 1996: Appendix). The Sangha Nayaka issued *Sangha Order No. 81: Procedures for the rural level of the Sangha to keep the peace in the Sangha organization* (5 November 1990) and *Sangha Order No. 82: What abbots of monasteries and nayaka [advisory committee] monks of big monasteries should do to keep the peace* (5 December 1990). *Order No. 83* (13 July 1991) stipulated that monks and novices should not participate in party politics. Thus, supplementing the Sangha regulations listed in Table 1, both Sangha orders and government proclamations were issued to ban monks from political participation.

As well as sticks, the government offered some carrots to the monks. *Proclamation 42* (1991) created 20 new categories of religious titles. The Ministry of Religious Affairs published lists of hundreds of recipients and held a large-scale ceremony to award the titles in March 1992 (TUH 1992).

At the same time, the government officials and their families made donations to prominent figures in the SSMNC, the top echelon of the Sangha Organization. The award of titles and the donations was not limited to senior members of the Sangha Organization. Some monks who had been imprisoned for anti-government activities also received titles and donations after their release (Kojima 2009: 108).

This type of conciliation, whereby the government tried to co-opt prominent figures and incorporate them into the Sangha organization by awarding titles and donations, was also observed before the First Congregation in 1980. After suffering a severe defeat in the 1990 general election, the government seemed to feel a need to bolster its popularity or legitimacy. Consequently, it turned to the mass media to demonstrate its contribution to Buddhism. As Steinberg (2001) has suggested, the government began to use Buddhism to prop up its legitimacy.

How people interpreted these acts, however, was beyond government control. I often heard people doubt whether these apparently meritorious deeds carried out by people who had slaughtered unarmed demonstrators and confiscated money from the people could generate real merit. In Myanmar, the Sangha mainly recruits from a traditional class of intellectuals, who are very aware of a time-honoured habit that values the maintenance of good relations with laypersons. In almost every Buddhist village there is at least one monastery with resident monks. These community-based monks have an informed and, usually, compassionate understanding of the social problems of their *daga* (P. *dāyakā*, supporter or patron). Even though they generally remain aloof from worldly matters, in their sermons monks may sometimes include tacit criticism of the way social issues are being dealt with or may indirectly comment on political topics. It is also possible for a monk to make an indirect criticism while ostensibly telling a historical Buddhist tale. With the free press muzzled and public statements strictly controlled, for more than 50 years direct criticism and discussion of politics in general were avoided. Moreover, the government prohibits all unsanctioned assemblies of more than five persons. Religious congregations within monastery compounds, however, remained lawful.

This might account for the growing appetite for Buddhist preaching since the latter half of the 1990s. Independent *taya ho bwe* (preaching ceremonies) have become widespread. Sermons delivered by popular monks have been recorded and distributed on optical discs. Tens of thousands of CDs, VCDs and DVDs or published transcriptions have been sold or distributed to bring merit to patrons. In this sense, it seems that preaching ceremonies have come to provide a sort of public sphere for lay Buddhists, one in which they can receive both moral encouragement and listen to criticism

of the authorities. It is plausible to suggest that the government policy of favouring Buddhism has strengthened the influence of the Sangha at the community level.

## 5. The 2007 monk demonstrations and its social background

### 5.1 The 2007 monk demonstrations and government response

As suggested earlier, despite the strengthening of government control over the Sangha bureaucracy, in the wake of a government announcement in August 2007 that the price of gasoline and other fuels would be raised by 500%, widespread demonstrations by monks ensued in September 2007. In addition to directly increasing household cooking and transportation costs, the price hike also made food more expensive. Before long, there were sporadic protests by citizens, but these did not initially attract mass participation. Then, in early September, monks who had joined a demonstration in Pahkokku City, Magwe Division, were arrested and roughly handled by soldiers. Seeking an apology, monks and novices marched while reciting *paritta* (P. verses for protection). No apology was made. After this, many monks, novices and nuns took part in protest demonstrations, which spread very quickly to Mandalay, Yangon, Sittwe, Mogokku and other places. Besides demanding an apology from the authorities for their violent behaviour toward monks, these demonstrators also asked for measures to ease the general hardships of life. This attracted the sympathy of the general public. People came out with offerings of water and food for the marching monks. In some areas, it was observed that many Muslims and Christians and other non-Buddhist citizens were also making offerings. It was widely believed by the public that the monks initially had dissuaded laypersons from participation, saying these kinds of monk demonstrations were a traditional form of religious protest, and that monks, having no family, were less vulnerable than laypersons, whose self-sacrifice might put their families in jeopardy. Then a large-scale boycott (*pattanikujjana*) began on 17 September.

As the scale of the demonstrations grew, the government and the administration of the Sangha Organization first tried to defuse the situation by issuing warnings. Carried on the front pages of official newspapers (e.g., *Myanmar Alin*, hereafter MAL, 24 September 2007), *Order No. 93* issued by the SSMNC urged the monks to follow the *Basic Rules* of the sangha. At the same time, past orders forbidding monks from engaging in politics – *Nos. 81, 83, 85* and (issued in 1984, before the 1988 demonstrations) *65* – were recirculated. Since reciting *paritta* while marching and inverting the

donation bowl are legitimate acts for sangha members, perhaps the authorities delayed their response. On 24 September, some monks came to the front of Aung San Suu Kyi's house, where she was held under house arrest. She made a brief appearance to accept the blessings of the monks. The number of people taking part in these demonstrations kept growing and, apart from novices and nuns, laypeople also began to march with the monks. On 27 September, the military resorted to force, including the use of firearms. It was reported that hundreds of monks were injured and many were arrested.

One month later, the deputy minister of religious affairs and the minister of home affairs submitted a summary report of this affair to the chairman and the most important monks of the SSMNC (MAL, 25 October 2007). This indicates that the higher echelons of the Sangha and the SSMNC had not been involved in the investigation into the incidents. According to the official report, ex-convicts were involved in the democratic movement. They had been ordained as monks and founded the All Burma Young Monks' Union (ABYMU). These bogus monks entered the sangha with political intentions and misled prominent pure and innocent monks with less worldly experience. From this it is clear that the authorities unilaterally decided that the behaviour of monks should be construed as political. This is corroborated by the lack of any account of the affair in the 2007 report of the SSMNC Fifth Convention. The only mention is a terse statement of consequences: the report issued on 24 October stated that the chairman and the secretary of the Yangon Division Sangha Nayaka Committee (DSNC) were to be dismissed because they took "action beyond their responsibilities".<sup>9</sup> There is no further information about the "action" (TUH 2008b).<sup>10</sup> It is highly unusual that top figures in the divisional committees are dismissed without specifying the reasons. DSNCs comprise the second upper level of the Sangha. Moreover, the Yangon Division is a major area for monastic education. Since the dismissals happened so soon after the affair and many

<sup>9</sup> The content of the report is unusual. Usually reports give the grounds for dismissal and an account of the procedures followed. A description of the "actions" that provoked the sanctions is conspicuous by its absence. The entry states that a local investigation committee, comprising three members from SSCWC and Deputy Director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, was convened to consider the case (Section 6, 24 October) and presented a report recommending dismissal (Section 68, 24 November). The related committee of SSMNC answered that the matter would be considered at the 47th Congress of the SSMNC (Section 69) (TUH 2008b:89–90).

<sup>10</sup> By contrast, when Cyclone Nargis struck in May 2008, it is recorded in the 2008 annual report that the third conference of State Winido Hsayadaw was not held because those involved in the trial had to return to their home towns owing to disaster brought by the cyclone (TUH 2009b:8). There is an obvious difference between the narratives of the two incidents.

Sangha members in Yangon participated in the demonstrations, we surmise that the authorities decided that the Sangha had not taken appropriate action against senior figures who were involved and forced the dismissals. At the same time, the SSMNC seems to have neither the responsibility nor the right to interrogate monks who might be involved in the pro-democratic movement.

## 5.2 Consideration of the official report

It is not clear how well the report published in MAL reflected the actual situation. From interview responses of monks seeking refuge outside the country or news reports from overseas Burmese media, it does seem that some activists from the 88 generation (ex-students who participated in the pro-democratic movement in 1988) were ordained as monks and helped to organize the ABYMU and the other groups within the sangha. Even so, the official reports appear to exaggerate the role of outside agitators.

The first question is whether leaders or participants in the demonstration should be regarded as ‘bogus-monks’. Most of my fieldwork informants give priority to proper conduct when judging whether a monk is worthy or not. Once a man is ordained in accordance with the formal procedure, and as far as he observes the precepts, he is generally regarded as a monk, not as a bogus monk.

The second question is about the procedure for arresting monks. The government seems to have established a particular procedure for arresting monks in the course of the pro-democratic movement since 1988: the first step is to bring monks and novices to police stations, prisons or halls; the second is to defrock them or to make them forcibly wear white, which means they will no longer be treated as monks but as laypersons; the third step is to investigate and imprison them.<sup>11</sup> Many international organizations have reported that the authorities hold suspects without charge, sufficient evidence, or trial. In the context of Burmese Buddhism, the defrocking of monks is also important. Many monks were summarily defrocked without following canonical procedure. Sometimes the authorities sent senior monks who were allied with the government to force the suspected monks to defrock in accordance with canonical procedure. Concerning this point, Rev. Penang Hsayadaw, the then-secretary of Sasana Moli,<sup>12</sup> or International

<sup>11</sup> Many monks said that they were detained without trial.

<sup>12</sup> This organization, the International Burmese Monks Organization, was formed by 49 monks living overseas (in North America, Asia and Europe) for missionary work on 28 October, 2007.

Burmese Monks Organization, expressed the opinion that monks should not be defrocked, unless it is shown beyond doubt that they did not observe the precepts and in such cases, even if they violated the rules, they should be judged by the sangha.

In other words, there are two legal systems for Burmese Buddhists. For Sangha regulations should apply to monks authentically following *vinaya*. Secular law applies to laypeople. If monks are suspected of having committed a sin or other impropriety, the case should be investigated by the sangha following the stipulated procedures. If the verdict is impurity, the sentence should be exclusion from the sangha. If a monk is suspected to have committed a layperson's crime, the case should be referred to the secular authorities after investigation by the sangha. These are all formal procedures that have been approved by government. When it comes to 'political activity', however, the authorities have unilaterally taken it upon themselves to judge whether a monk is guilty or not. If the authorities assert that a monk has been involved in 'political activity', he can be deprived of his right to trial within the sangha and, indeed, to any other legal defence.

We might also wonder how many of the protesting monks were ex-convicts, presumably previously imprisoned for political activities. In photographic and video evidence most of the main participants in the demonstrations appear to be quite young monks and novices. The next section discusses this more fully.

### 5.3 Analysis of the participants: Monastery types and student monks

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) listed 52 monasteries to which the arrested monks belonged. I have classified these into monasteries from which more than ten monks were arrested and monasteries from which just a few monks were arrested. The former were predominantly *pariyatti* (P. learning of Buddhist canons), and the latter community-based, monasteries.

Almost every Buddhist village has at least one monastery with a couple of resident monks. These are community-based monasteries. Within the community, the relationship between monks and laypeople is close and both sides know each other very well. Most villagers and town residents have their sons ordained in a community-based monastery as a rite of passage. In the AAPP list for Yangon, monasteries without any mention of the number of the monks arrested are most likely community-based. They are located in

suburbs such as Okkalappa North and South, New Dagon, Thaketa, and Thingangyun.<sup>13</sup>

To found a *pariyatti* monastery devoted to sangha education and monk training, the regulations state that an abbot has to attract more than 50 monks and novices. In other words, it is plausible to assume that monasteries where more than ten monks were arrested were *pariyatti* institutions. In the AAPP list, the following are *pariyatti* monasteries: Ngway Kyar Yan (100 monks arrested), Yangon; Pauk Myaing (40 arrested), Mandalay; Thein Daw Gyi (108 arrested), Bhamo; and Khaymarthiri (42 arrests) and Yazana (90 arrested), Myintkyina. Other famous monasteries in Yangon also appear in the list, including Aung Mingala in Alon Ward, Mingala Yama in Botahtaung Ward, and Mogaung in Yankin Ward. Prominent figures in the sangha bureaucracy come from these monasteries, and many of their resident monks have received titles and honours.

While there may be different types of monastery, it is important to remember that the community-based monasteries and the famous *pariyatti* monasteries may have deep ties. Many abbots of rural monasteries learned the Buddhist scriptures at *pariyatti* monasteries.<sup>14</sup> Promising young novices and those really keen on continuing their Buddhist education are sent by abbots to famous *pariyatti* monasteries in neighbouring provinces. Student monks start by learning the scriptures during their teens and take exams to assess their canonical learning. Consequently, the monks at *pariyatti* monasteries are rather young. If they want to continue their studies, they move to centres of education, such as Mandalay, Yangon and Pakhokku. Famous *pariyatti* monasteries consequently attract student monks from all over the country. Sometimes students change monasteries in the quest for a better education, for a particular teaching and for examination qualifications. Through this ‘pilgrimage’ of education, monks establish their own networks. When educated monks become abbots (*kyaung dain hsayadaw*), they use these networks to send their disciples to well-known monasteries.

One of the famous centres for monastic learning is Pakhokku, which was also the location of the initial demonstration. A number of *pariyatti* monasteries here, such as Aledaik Gyi, have deep historical roots. Other notable centres for sangha education, for example Mandalay, Myintkyina and Bahan Township in Yangon, were also sites of monk demonstrations in 2007.

<sup>13</sup> One of these, Meggin Monastery, which became famous for taking care of AIDS patients, was later shut down and all its monks arrested.

<sup>14</sup> Of these, Masoeyin Taik Monastery at Mandalay is the biggest and most famous, housing more than 5,000 monks and novices within its precincts.

I am not suggesting that monasteries as teaching institutions played a central role in the uprising. But it appears that a certain number of these monasteries were implicated simply because they hosted numerous young monks in their 20s and 30s. It is likely that the concentrated passion of youth caused the demonstration to spread quickly in the central areas.

*Pariyatti* monasteries have been vehicles for Buddhist tradition in Myanmar, which is based on canonical education. At the same time, under the military regime *pariyatti* education seems to have become more important since 1980, probably because *pariyatti* education is required for the management of the Sangha, which is run in accordance with Buddhist scriptures. To obtain titles or to move up the hierarchy of the sangha bureaucracy, knowledge of the scriptures and examination qualifications are necessary. This may be what motivates so many young monks to try and get into famous *pariyatti* monasteries or the State Buddhist University. At the same time, through recruitment and network relationships, *pariyatti* monasteries maintain strong ties with the local monasteries. Through these networks, information from urban monasteries can easily reach rural areas.

While it is conceivable, as reported by the deputy minister, that the 2007 demonstrations were instigated by political activists who had infiltrated the sangha, this is not sufficient to explain why the movement spread so rapidly throughout the country. We can assume that news travelled along networks of monks and laypersons who were involved in spreading the movement.

The initial protests were prompted by fuel price hikes and, while seeking apologies for rough handling, the monks also demanded relief for laypersons. Meanwhile, it was widely reported that many laypersons massed and tried to protect monks when the police visited the monasteries to conduct interrogations. Informants have told me of dissatisfaction among the young monks. For example, some feel that senior members of the sangha bureaucracy have been corrupted by the military government through appeasement policies or by their desire for religious titles, status in the sangha bureaucracy and other worldly temptations. The evidence I collected suggests that a comparatively large number of young monks at famous *pariyatti* monasteries participated in the demonstrations. Since young monks and the novices from *pariyatti* monasteries are expected to become future leaders of the sangha, their participation in demonstrations might destabilize the bureaucratic foundations of the Burmese sangha.

At the same time, it should be noted that the government handled these demonstrations in accordance with procedures that were already in place. As mentioned in Section 3, central policies toward the Sangha have been in place since 1988, one basic premise being that state law takes precedence

over sangha regulations. Since then, supplemental Sangha orders have made it clear that the government does not allow the sangha to engage in political activities. In dealing with the demonstrations, the government applied established policies.

#### 5.4 Analysis as a social movement

In this section, I would like to consider the demonstrations as a social movement or collective action. Discussion of social movements often focuses on how people are mobilized. An important aspect of this is framing and forming collective identity, processes that consolidate consensus and impel participants to act. Framing both defines and generalizes grievances and constitutes the ‘us’ and ‘them’ in a movement’s conflict structure (Tarrow 1994: 20–21). In this sense, the two claims of the demonstrations, to relieve the destitution of laypersons and to demand an apology for the violent behaviour towards monks, provided sufficient framing to mobilize both the sangha and laypersons. The demand for an apology was a legitimate way of defending Buddhism and mobilized many monks through the *pariyatti* (school) monastery networks. The effects of the ill-considered price hike motivated many civilians who had long desired greater democracy. The protests also gained the sympathy of Muslims and Christians, which extended the movement beyond the boundary of Buddhism and further into the public domain.

Face-to-face groups, social networks and nodes of intersection are important elements that generate and sustain social movements. In the 2007 demonstration, connections between the monasteries and local communities and intersections with wider networks functioned effectively.

There is more to collective action than merely acting collectively. Different social movements are characterized by the kinds of collective action taken, which may include collecting signatures for petitions, assembly, strike action, marching, property occupation, traffic obstruction, setting fires, etc. Many conventions of contention are learned and form a repertoire that is locally available to public culture. Here, repertoire is conceptualized as being both structural and cultural, involving not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with others, but what others expect them to do, and what they know not to do (Tarrow 1994: 20–30). Recognized as Burmese tradition, refusing donations (*pattanikujjana*) and chanting *paritta* are orthodox deeds for sangha members. Meanwhile, peaceful procession has been already accepted as a form of civil action. In Myanmar, combining legitimate civilian conduct with orthodox Buddhist practices became part of the repertoire of collective action for the sangha. Ironically, the Burmese

sangha, a non-civilian community with no right to vote, was instrumental in creating an effective social movement representing many civilians. Although the movement was not strictly secular in either the Burmese or Weberian sense, we can say that a new item was added to the local repertoire of collective action, one which proved effective in civil demonstrations.

## 6. Transnational Buddhist networking

The events in Myanmar were not an isolated business of the local monks. They were events that triggered a wave of transnational, intra-Buddhist solidarity in various shapes and formats. While signs of external solidarity during civil wars or violent clashes is displayed, for instance, by sending supporting fighters to the battleground (Bosnia being a former and Syria a current case in point in the Muslim world), the monks' uprising in Myanmar witnessed more subtle forms of fellow-monk/fellow-Buddhist engagement. As another illustration of this let us take the example of Japan, where interest in the situation in Myanmar increased rapidly after Japanese photojournalist Kenji Nagai was shot in a demonstration and later died of his wounds. Then Prime Minister Fukuda called the cameraman's death extremely unfortunate; the government presented a note of protest to the Myanmar government and demanded an investigation.

Meanwhile, Japanese branches of NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the AAPP sent statements to General Than Shwe of Myanmar and to the Myanmar Ambassador to Japan regarding the monk demonstrations and the treatment of the monks. Japanese Buddhist associations made similar protests. For example, the Japan Buddhist Federation (JBF, Zen Nihon Bukkyo Kai), one of the biggest associations of Buddhism in Japan,<sup>15</sup> issued a statement to the governments of Japan and Myanmar, to the United Nations and to the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB). Part of the statement read:

As fellow Buddhist followers, we would like to express our indignation and deep regret at these acts. The demonstrations in which the monks participated were based on *fukubachi* (J. alms boycotts). Every day, the monks peacefully and in a disciplined manner, beg for alms. In this way, they have borne witness to the suffering of the daily lives of the people

<sup>15</sup> According to its website, the Federation consists of major Buddhist denominations, all prefectural Buddhist Associations and other Buddhist groups, including 59 main denominations. More than 90 percent of all members of Buddhist organizations in Japan belong to 104 denominations and organizations.

and have sincerely prayed for tranquility in their daily lives (Zen Nihon Bukkyo Kai 2007: 12).

Moreover individual schools under JBF also made their own statements, for example, Jodo Shinshu Denomination, considered to be the most widely practiced branch of Buddhism in Japan. The Honganji School (Jodo Shinshu Honganji-ha), one of the main schools of the Jodo Shinshu Demonination, also issued a statement in the name of its president, Rev. Fujikawa: on 28 September 2007, quoting the *Dhammapada*, he requested the Myanmar government to stop the killing and to adhere to Buddha's teaching (Honganji homepage). This school seems to be very aware of global human affairs. It has made other statements concerning the maintenance of world peace, addressing the Tibetan situation, in response to the September 11 attacks, nuclear testing by North Korea, etc. Similarly, Otaniha School (Jodo Shinshu Otani-ha, or Nishihonganji), the other main school of Jodo Shinshu, released a statement in the name of "all the persons interested in this matter". According to *Burma Info*, on 15 October 2007, four members of this school read out the statement in front of the Myanmar Embassy in Tokyo (website of Burma Info).

Other NGO networks led by Buddhist monks have also shown interest in the monks' demonstrations. For example, a statement was jointly signed by 16 associations comprising several centres of the Nichiren Denomination (the second biggest denomination in Japan), the Ayus Network of Buddhists Volunteers International Cooperation, INEB-J and others. Ayus and INEB-J are NGOs founded to promote the network of Buddhism and to give support to people who need help. These two NGOs are concerned with 'engaged Buddhism', i.e., applying the teachings of Buddha to try and ease problems such as political, environmental and economic suffering (see Queen and King 1996; Queen, Prebish and Keown 2003). Engaged Buddhism can be traced back to Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk who sacrificed himself as a symbol of opposition to the Vietnam War. This active trend has links with movements to reform entrenched traditional Japanese Buddhism, which has been characterized as *soshiki bukkyo* (funeral Buddhism). In Myanmar, there seems to have been little discussion of 'engaged Buddhism': the sole example I have found was a mention of it by Aung San Suu Kyi in an interview with Alan Clements (Aung San Suu Kyi 1997). By contrast, many Buddhist groups in Japan regard the monks' protest in Myanmar as an exemplary practice of engaged Buddhism. They have also tried to learn from the exiled monks. For instance, in 2006, they invited Shin Kemasara, one of the prominent protest monks, to hold a meeting. The Ayus website carried an essay by Shin Kemasara titled *Engejido Budizumu, Bukkyo to Koku-saikoryoku* [Engaged Buddhism: Buddhism and international cooperation].

Three Burmese monks were also invited by Ayus, Biruma Shimin Foramu [People's Forum on Burma], Engeijido Budizumu Kenkyukai [Society for the Study of Engaged Buddhism], and others were invited to participate in a conference at the Tsukiji Honganji Reihaido on 12 December 2007.

Shimazono (2013) has reconsidered the practices of Japanese monks from the point of view of Dhamma or social ethics, and points out that a new movement started to gain ground in traditional denominations during the latter half of the 1990s, following the devastating Great Hanshin Earthquake in western Japan (240–72). Realizing how little Buddhism mattered in people's daily lives and how little they, as monks, had been concerned about the people's suffering, some Japanese monks became active in welfare, concerned with aiding the poor or relieving their distress, providing supportive prevention of suicide, support to victims of disaster, etc. Ayus and the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) also extended their activities overseas. Shimazono suggests that some of the socially active monks, while aiding the victims of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake, became involved in anti-nuclear activities (259–72). It seems clear that there is overlap between these socially active members of the denominations and those who sympathized with the 2007 demonstration. It is also interesting that some groups both provided support from a distance and tried to learn from exiled Burmese monks.

## 7. Conclusion

The concept of *dhammaraja* can as easily justify interference in the sangha by the authorities as intervention in politics by the sangha. The widespread rationalization brought by modernity – starting with the king's attempt to rebuild order by purifying the sangha in the nineteenth century – has also affected the *sasana* (Buddhism) in Myanmar. The effort to differentiate the spheres of sangha and laypersons might be regarded as a form of Burmese secularization. Since 1980, the sangha has been institutionally unified, and its regulations embedded in the secular legal system. Examination of the orders issued by the SSNMC reflects the authorities' concern to prevent the Sangha from engaging in political activities. One strategy used by the military government was to simultaneously exclude the sangha from this-worldliness, including politics, and to enclose the Sangha within the boundary of other-worldliness. While attempts of the military government to prevent citizen participation in politics are hardly legitimate, the project to exclude the sangha can be legitimized as purification. Even so, the more the authorities employ Buddhist religio-political ideology, the more they strengthen the

moral authority of the sangha. This contradictory outcome may be one of the reasons why the demonstrations were so widespread.

If we view the 2007 demonstration as a social movement, it is clear that its goals attracted both members of the sangha and laypeople, and that its forms of action united civilian conduct with orthodox Buddhists practices, resulting in effective collective action. Ironically, a widespread social movement that attracted Christians and Muslims as well as lay Buddhists was galvanized by the sangha, which has been legally defined as a non-civilian community with no voice, not even the right to vote, in political affairs. This movement, not strictly secular in either the Myanmarese or Weberian sense, represented a new form of civil demonstration.

In Japan, Buddhists issued statements censuring the military government's violent suppression of the peaceful demonstrations and showing support for the monks. Schober has suggestively pointed out that "seeking enlightenment by engaging society, rather than withdrawing from it, transcends traditional boundaries between Theravada and Mahayana models for practicing the path to enlightenment" (Schober 2011: 132). Indeed, in Japan, a number of Mahayana denominations have sought to learn from Theravada movements. Moreover, Japanese Buddhists tend to show less interest in differentiating between this-worldliness and other-worldliness, and are not as bothered by the apparent contradiction in monks' participation in politics. Focusing mainly on the monks' protests as social engagement, they have shown no interest in issues such as the legal situation, past intervention by the authorities, and the possibility of monks' self-governance. They have viewed the events through a lens shaped by their own urge to reform Buddhism in Japan, to waken it from the slumber of funeral Buddhism and render it capable of responding to actual problems. Seeking further enlightenment, some branches invited exiled monks who participated in the demonstrations to discuss the issues and incidents. Here we find a shared awareness of responsibility arising from living in the present-day world that, in Buddhist terms, must deal with a central issue: to what extent can and should monks – predominantly concerned with the private sphere – help improve the situation in the public domain?

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