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Of Buddhism and Militarism in Northern Thailand: Solving the Puzzle of the Saint Khruubaa Srivichai

KATHERINE A. BOWIE

A growing body of scholarship on Buddhism is exploring the historical role of warfare and militarism. Buddhist polities have generally exempted monastic communities from military conscription and taxation. Although the monk Khruubaa Srivichai (1878–1938) is revered as a saint in northern Thailand today, during his lifetime he was detained under temple arrest on multiple occasions. He was sent to Bangkok in 1920 and 1935 to face charges that ranged from conducting unauthorized ordinations to treason. For the controversies he generated, the media of the day called him "that puzzling monk." Prevailing scholarship has explained the controversies as the result of conflicts internal to the Thai monastic order. In this essay, I argue that the puzzle posed by Srivichai is solved by recognizing the importance of changing policies regarding military conscription, changes which sought to restrict the traditional rights of the northern population to ordain and expanded state access to manpower.

Of all the world religions, Buddhism in the contemporary Western imaginary has become almost synonymous with nonviolence. Thus the BBC (2009) led off a broadcast with the straightforward remark that "non-violence is at the heart of Buddhist thinking and behaviour." Reinforcing this peace-loving characterization of Buddhism, the Buddha is recorded as having said, "In times of war give rise in yourself to the mind of compassion, helping living beings abandon the will to fight" (*Kutadanta Sutta, Digha Nikaya V*). Noted Buddhist pacifists with global reputations include the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Thich Nhat Hanh in the Tibetan, Theravada, and Mahayana traditions, respectively; each was either nominated for or received the Nobel Peace Prize. As Thich Nhat Hanh, who opposed the Vietnam War and who had an important influence on Martin Luther King Jr., explained, "In killing I would be betraying and abandoning the very teachings I would be seeking to preserve" (BBC 2009).

Despite its modern pacifist reputation, a growing body of scholarship on Buddhism is engaging the role of warfare and militarism in Buddhist history. This literature ranges from accounts of warrior-monks to analyses of ritual violence, war magic, and protective amulets.[1] Military conscription—be it for defensive or aggressive ends—triangulates

Katherine A. Bowie (kabowie@wisc.edu) is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

[1]On China, see de Groot (1891), Yu (2005), Shahar (2008); on Japan, see Victoria (1997), Adolphson (2007); on Tibet, see Dalton (2011); on Sri Lanka, see Bartholomeusz (2002), DeVotta and Stone (2008), Tambiah (1992), Seneviratne (1999); on Vietnam, see Moyar (2004); on Thailand, see Jerryson (2011), Keyes (1978), Bowie (1997); on Laos, see Baird (2012); on Burma, see

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state, religion, and populace. In a compromise that apparently dates back to the Buddha himself, Buddhist polities generally have exempted monastic communities from military conscription, and the monastic community has refrained from ordaining soldiers. This exemption has created historical moments when citizenry have sought ordination in order to escape military service. The resulting political tension is clearly articulated in the complaint of a Chinese court official circa 706: "If all of these citizens became monks, and if all the soldiers went into religion as a profession, how will military campaigns be assured success?" (Demieville [1957] 2010, 22). Despite its importance in processes of state formation, military conscription has largely been overlooked in the literature on Buddhist warfare. In this essay, I argue that recognizing the inherent opposition between conscription and ordination helps to solve the long-standing puzzle of the northern Buddhist monk named Khruubaa Srivichai.

Known today as a "Buddhist saint," Khruubaa Srivichai (1878–1938) remains the most famous monk in northern Thailand.[2] A development monk extraordinaire, he organized the restoration or construction of over 100 northern temples during the decades of the 1920s and 1930s (for a list, see Sommai 2002, 50–58). He is most famous for his role in building the scenic mountain road that winds up to the historic temple of Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep overlooking the modern city of Chiang Mai. His memory is nurtured in shrines at temples throughout the region, amulets, photographs and other memorabilia sold in local markets, oral histories, tourist advertisements, and hagiographical websites. The political ascent of former prime minister Taksin Shinawatra, himself a northerner, is attributed to merit he accrued from having offered gifts to Srivichai in a previous life. Thailand's recent prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, Taksin's younger sister, and other northern politicians, particularly those in the anti-Bangkok "red shirts" movement, referred to him in their speeches and included his shrines in their campaign events (e.g., 1somphong 2011; see figure 1).

Nonetheless, during his lifetime, Srivichai provoked so much controversy that he was headlined in the English-language newspaper the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* (hereafter BT) as "That Puzzling Priest" (e.g., BT6/28/1920, 3/12/1930, 7/21/1934, 9/9/1935, 5/4/1936, 5/14/1936, 5/15/1936, 5/25/1936). If today he is remembered as a *nak bun* or saint, in his day many viewed him as a *phii bun* or "holy man rebel"; he was even called a "traitor to his religion and his King" (BT6/7/1920).[3] He was detained under multiple protracted temple arrests in Lamphun, Chiang Mai, and Bangkok, forced to surrender his administrative positions as abbot and subdistrict head, and sent under police guard to Bangkok twice for investigation. The first investigation occurred in 1920. By the time of his second trip to Bangkok in 1935, conflicts in the north had become so intense that "the independent monks of the north had openly severed connections with their

Sarkisyanz (1965), Schober (2007); also see Ling (1979), Jerryson and Juergensmeyer (2010), Demieville ([1957] 2010), Ruth (2011), Tikhonov and Brekke (2013), Zimmerman (2006).

[2]On his life, see Sangaa (1956), Faa (1976–77), Singkha (2010), Sophaa (1991), Sommai (2002); in English, see Keyes (1982), Cohen (2001). Srivichai's name is variously transliterated as Siwichai and Srivijaya; Srivichai seems to be most common and so I have used this form.

[3]Court officials used *phi bun* as an oxymoron to suggest "one who falsely claims to have a positive moral heritage" (Keyes 1989, 129).

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Figure 1. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra offering a flower garland at Khruubaa Srivichai's shrine in Chiang Mai, after her successful 2011 election campaign. Photo courtesy of Thairath Online.

ecclesiastical superiors and declared Phra Sri Vijaya to be their leader" (National Archives 1935; Thompson [1941] 1967, 642). Over 300 monks and even more novices residing in some sixty northern temples left the order, some disrobing voluntarily in protest and some forced to disrobe by police (Faa 1976–77; Sangaa 1956, 260–82; Sommai 2002, 40; oral histories). The overt crisis was resolved when Srivichai signed an agreement "to abide by the laws of the church" and was allowed to return to the north in May 1935 to a welcoming reception of "more than eight thousand people" (Thompson [1941] 1967, 643). Indeed, Srivichai's decision to sign can be seen as the moment when Siamese court efforts to incorporate the northern Lanna regions were finally realized.

The puzzle in understanding why Srivichai became so controversial remains. Scholars have focused their analyses on two possible conflicts, both within the Buddhist monastic hierarchy (*sangha*). Some have portrayed his problems as resulting from personal difficulties with a senior local monk; however, beyond vague and undocumented suggestions of jealousy, the source of his difficulties is never specified (e.g., Sangaa 1956, 69–70; Thompson [1941] 1967, 642). The majority have portrayed his difficulties as structural, resulting from a clash between the northern and central Thai *sangha* over the enforcement of the 1902 Sangha Act, which sought to centralize administration control over the monastic order (e.g., Keyes 1982, 157; Sommai 2002, 28; Sophaa 1991, 71–79; Tambiah 1976, 241, 245). However, this second interpretation sidesteps three major complications. First, this act was not enforced in Monthon Phayab–as these northern provinces were then called–until 1924.[4] Second, this act contained no

[4]Keyes (1971, 556) says that the Sangha Act went into effect in the north in 1910. Citing Keyes, Cohen (2001, 229) and Tambiah (1976, 239) also use this date. See Ishii (1986, 79) for a list of

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provisions regarding ordination or any of the other charges he faced. Third, the central Thai *sangha* initially took a very moderate and even supportive position. Neither personal nor structural explanations address what monastic issues were at stake such that by 1920, Srivichai had catalyzed the support of "80 per cent of the people" (BT6/7/1920); references to "his personal charisma" (Ishii 1986, 77) or "his reputation for being endowed with supernatural powers" (Keyes 1971, 557) are descriptive, but not explanatory.

Contrary to the prevailing *sangha*-based interpretation, I shall argue that Srivichai's conflict originated with secular authorities as a result of the implementation of two new interrelated regulations. The two regulations were the Ordination Act of 1913 and the Military Conscription Act of 1905, which went into effect in Monthon Phayab in April 1914 (see Prakaat 1913; Wachirayaanwarorot 1971). The Ordination Act increased state supervision of not only who could conduct ordinations but also who could be ordained. The Military Conscription Act affected the exemptions of the monastic community. Although there is ambiguity surrounding the exact date, Srivichai appears to have first run afoul of officialdom in about 1915; this date corresponds closely with the period in which these two acts were being implemented.[5] Each act increased state control over the monastic community and therefore over access to manpower, thus marking a dramatic shift in the former balance between state, *sangha*, and laity in northern Thailand.

Drawing primarily upon newspaper accounts from this period and secondarily from oral histories and archival documents, I divide this essay into three parts. I begin with an overview of events leading up to Srivichai's first investigation in Bangkok, presenting evidence to suggest that secular officials were involved in each of the major charges that Srivichai faced. In the second section, I describe the impact of central Thai administrative reforms in this decade of growing nationalism, arguing that the imposition of the capitation tax and the military draft conflicted with the increasingly desperate needs of villagers to safeguard income and labor in a time of famine and disease. In the third section, I describe how central Thai secular reforms affected the traditional northern Thai relationship between state, *sangha*, and society. I conclude by suggesting that in his refusal to recognize secular authority to conscript monks and otherwise regulate the *sangha*, Srivichai was simultaneously defending the traditional independence of the northern *sangha* and de facto protecting the right of the population to ordain. Understanding the importance of military conscription and other related new secular regulations on the northern *sangha* and laity contributes towards resolving the puzzle of how Srivichai was at once vilified by state authorities as a traitor and glorified as a saint—and even as a messiah—by the populace.

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the fourteen out of seventeen *monthons* where the act was initially applied. See Prakaat haj chaj phraraachabanyat laksana pokkhrong khanasong R.S. 121 naj monthon mahaaraaj monthon phayab lae monthon pattaani (Announcement applying Sangha Act RS 121 in Monthons Maharaaj, Phayab and Pattani, 1924).

[5]Many Thai scholars suggest that Srivichai's problems began as early as 1908–10. See Bowie (n.d.) for a discussion of dating.

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I. The Charges: The Secular Puzzle Pieces

At the time of his first investigation by national ecclesiastical authorities in Bangkok in 1920, Srivichai faced eight charges. As this section will show, secular authorities played important roles. These charges were: (1) ordaining monks and novices without permission, (2) not obeying his senior district-level monk, (3) refusing to attend a district-level monastic meeting, (4) failing to light candles and beat gongs in honor of the royal coronation anniversary, (5) inciting other temples to resist the senior district monk, (6) refusing to assist officials with their household register, (7) inciting other temples to refuse to attend district monastic meetings, and (8) possessing a magical sword with a golden scabbard (the last charge indirectly insinuating leading a political rebellion) (BT7/28/1920; see Bowie 2014 for a fuller discussion of the last charge). He was declared guilty only of the first charge and innocent of the last five charges; the committee concluded that there was insufficient evidence to make a determination on the second and third charges given the ambiguity of whether secular or monastic authorities had issued the summons to Srivichai.

Scholarly attention has focused on the first charge, portraying Srivichai's decision to proceed with an unauthorized ordination as a result of his alleged ignorance of new central Thai *sangha* regulations. This interpretation does not accord well with the available evidence. According to the 1913 Ordination Act, approval for both monks conducting ordinations and the individuals being ordained had to be given by a representative of the Department of Religious Affairs (*Thammakaan*). Srivichai appeared to have been both knowledgeable of this regulation and seeking to comply. However, for reasons that are not explained, officials in two secular bodies within the central Thai administrative apparatus—the *kromakarn* representing the Religious Affairs Department and the *naaj amphur* (the administrative officer in charge of the district within the Ministry of Interior)—refused to authorize this particular ordination. An anonymous correspondent to the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* provides the following detailed account:

> About five years ago he [Srivichai] proposed to ordain a new priest, and he sent the Kamnan [subdistrict head] and head-man of the village to ask for a licence from the Kromakarn and Nai Amphur.[6] They were told that the licence would be issued later, and that meantime they could be preparing for the ceremony. The priest did make the preparations—a Buat Nak [ordination ceremony] costs some money—and when it was near Lent, he again sent the Kamnan and Phu-Yai-Ban [village headman] to get the promised licence. This time it was definitely refused. Taking the view that there was nothing wrong in ordaining an honest man, the priest carried out the rite without a licence. (BT6/7/1920)

Scholars have also presumed that Srivichai was not authorized to conduct ordinations; however, this interpretation is also not likely. At the time of this controversial ordination, Srivichai was the abbot of his village temple and head of the temples of his subdistrict (*hua muat*). Both as subdistrict head and as a monk who had been in the

[6]Sommai (2002, 32) records that Srivichai ordained two monks and eight novices at that time.

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priesthood for more than ten years (he had ordained as a monk in 1899), even under the new regulations he would likely have had standing to conduct ordinations and had already been conducting ordination ceremonies. Instead, I believe it is more likely that these secular officials were denying approval to those who sought to be ordained. The 1913 Ordination Act lists punishments for monks who ordain "forbidden" men (*khon dong haam*); among those forbidden to be ordained are people who are illiterate, people fleeing government laws, people with pending court cases, and those shirking government service (*khon lobnii raatchakaan*). Villagers seeking to avoid payment of their taxes or military service therefore would be considered ineligible for ordination.

That the pressure to take action against Srivichai likely came from secular district officials is further intimated by the use of police since they, unlike monastic officials, had the authority over the police forces. Sangaa (1956, 70) suggests that the district officer was furious at Srivichai's insubordination. After the unauthorized ordination ceremony, Srivichai was arrested by police and brought to the Wat Lii Luang, the temple where the district-level prelate (*chaokhana khwaeng*) resided.[7] Fearing the growing numbers of his followers over the course of the next four days, the district prelate had Srivichai sent to the provincial prelate (*chaokhana cangwat*) of Lamphun, who investigated and released him (Sommai 2002, 32).[8]

Subsequent charges also suggest secular interests. Circa 1916 or 1917, the district prelate ordered Srivichai to bring all the monks and novices under his jurisdiction to meet with him *and* the district officer to ensure they were in accord with the new government regulations. Srivichai decided he would not attend the meeting; other monks decided in turn that they would not go (Sommai 2002, 33). So the police again were sent to escort Srivichai to the provincial prelate of Lamphun.[9] The provincial prelate appointed a committee; they decided to forbid Srivichai from serving as an ordainer and demoted him from his position as abbot and subdistrict head. If he agreed to these demotions, he would be detained for one year at Wat Phrathat Haripunchai in the city of Lamphun; otherwise he would be jailed there for two years. Srivichai accepted the punishment. After the year was over, Srivichai returned to his temple in Baan Pang (circa 1917 or 1918).

In 1919, the *kromakarn* and *naaj amphur* went to ascertain the number of priests and novices at Wat Baan Pang. Srivichai refused to cooperate, pointing out "that he was not the priest in charge and said they could count for themselves" (BT6/7/1920). When a number of priests and novices ran away into the forest, the two officials reported that "their investigation had proved fruitless" (BT6/7/1920). The provincial prelate then ordered Srivichai to bring all the monks and novices of that *wat* before him in Lamphun, but Srivichai replied that "not being head priest, he had no right to issue orders to the others. Also he did not care to go himself as Lampoun was far away" (BT6/7/1920).

[7]The *chaokhana khwaeng* was Phrakhruu Maharatnakhon (Maha In).

[8]The *chaokhana cangwat* was Phrakhruu Yanamongkol (Panya; also called Thampanyaa) at Wat Mahawan. According to a monk I interviewed at Wat Mahawan, Panya was a close friend of Khruubaa Sophaa, the pro-Lanna prelate of Wat Faajhin in Chiang Mai.

[9]Although the monastic title remained the same, Phrakhruu Yanamongkol (Fu) succeeded to the position upon Panya's death in 1915; Fu appears to have taken a tougher stance towards Srivichai (see Singhka 2010; monk at Wat Mahawan; old photo with dates found at Wat Mahawan).

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About this time, the *naaj amphur* and the district prelate sent an order out to all the subdistrict abbots in Lii district.[10] In honor of King Rama VI's coronation anniversary, they were to decorate the entrances to their temples with candles, lamps, and flags, as well as sound the temple drums for the occasion. Srivichai refused to comply, apparently because he felt his role as a monk was to follow the precepts and not engage in secular royal decorations (Sangaa 1956, 80; Sommai 2002, 34–35).

Events climaxed in early 1920. Although Srivichai had received a letter banning him from the province of Lamphun in January 1918 (Sommai 2002, 37), he had refused to leave. For reasons that are unclear, the lord (*chao*) of Lamphun invited Srivichai to receive alms in the city. Srivichai was accompanied on this journey by "many men and women of the village," with so many others joining en route that they arrived in Lamphun "a band of about 600 people." As the newspaper account continues, "The officials thought the priest had come to create a revolt and as the head priests said he had done wrong, he was arrested and shut up again in Wat Luang" (BT6/7/1920).

Momchao Boworadej, the head Siamese official (*uparaaj*) responsible for northern Thailand, was visiting Lamphun at the time. To defuse the growing tension, he had Srivichai brought to Chiang Mai, where he was kept under temple arrest at Wat Sridonchai. Over the course of the next two months, thousands of villagers came to make merit with him. On May 18, 1920, Boworadej ordered that police escort Srivichai to Bangkok. In Bangkok, Srivichai was detained until July 1920 at Wat Benjamabophit, the temple where the northern head of the Mahanikai Order (*Hon Nya*) resided.

The Supreme Patriarch (*sangharaja*) in Bangkok appointed a committee to investigate the eight charges levied against Srivichai.[11] The rulings of the Bangkok ecclesiastical committee were remarkable both for their moderation and their implication that monks did not necessarily have to obey secular state officials. In his written decision, the patriarch found that while Srivichai should not have conducted ordinations without permission, the punishment should have been ordered by Bangkok and not the acting head priest of the province; furthermore, their punishment was too severe for the offense committed. Regarding Srivichai's failure to attend meetings, the patriarch remarked that "if the *civil officials* called the priests to a meeting . . . it could not be counted that he was in the wrong" (BT7/28/1920; emphasis added). Regarding Srivichai's failure to decorate his temple (in effect risking a charge of lèse-majesté and hence treason), the patriarch provides a particularly fascinating summary, writing:

> In this case the illumination, etc., must be done by those who wish to do it themselves, and the officials who tell the Wats [temples], surely do so only to let them know the time. If the observance was made compulsory, that would be a mistake for it would mean no honour to the King. When Phra Srivichai did not comply with this suggestion, he could not be called to account. (BT7/28/1920)

Regarding the charge that other monks in other temples were following Srivichai's lead, the patriarch said that the fault should not lie with Srivichai but with the heads of those temples. Srivichai was found innocent of the charges of failing to assist "*civil*

[10]The date was likely December 2, 1918, or 1919.
[11]The *sangharaja* was Prince Vajiranana (1860–1921). See Reynolds (1979).

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officials in charge of registers of population," of inspiring other abbots to disobey orders to attend a meeting called by the head priest of Amphur Lii, and of promoting the rumor that "a sword with a gold scabbard fell from the sky on to the altar" at his temple (BT7/28/1920; emphasis added). Furthermore, the patriarch faulted the northern provincial prelate for failing to punish Srivichai as his individual offenses were committed but instead having "all the offences lumped together." The Supreme Patriarch, noting the obvious tension between Srivichai and the local ecclesiastical authorities, determined that "he ought to be sent home officially" and contributed funds to defray the costs of his return trip (BT7/28/1920). Thus the Bangkok *sangha* seemed to recognize the legitimacy of Srivichai's argumentation regarding his refusal to cooperate with secular officials who sought to convene meetings, gather registration data, or celebrate state rituals.

II. The Manpower Framework: Taxation and Conscription

Although the influence of the central Thai court in the administration of northern Thailand grew steadily following the treaty of 1873, most of the early changes primarily affected the powers of the northern ruling families and had little direct impact on village life. As this section will show, two major policy changes wrought significant changes on the everyday lives of villages: the capitation tax and military conscription.[12]

Whereas villagers in the past had owed tribute and corvée labor to the ruling northern lords, the capitation act stipulated that adult males between the ages of eighteen and sixty were to pay four baht annually. Instituted after 1900, the capitation tax provided dramatic increases in revenue for the central Thai court.[13] This revenue enabled the central Thai administration to place members of the northern ruling families on monthly retainers, thereby deftly depriving them of their former powers (BT5/10/1900, 1/28/1902; Sarassawadee 2005, 228). Village headmen were "to keep a correct list of all males in his district" (BT1/28/1902). Monks, novices, village headmen, government officials, and "all of royal descent" were among those who were exempt (BT1/28/1902). Villagers who were unable to pay the annual head tax were expected to contribute labor for state projects for up to one month.[14]

The imposition of the head tax provoked profound resentment among villagers, contributing to the Shan uprising in 1902 (BT10/14/1902).[15] Men who failed to pay their taxes or perform state labor were subject to arrest. Newspaper accounts in Bangkok report police making "hundreds of arrests" in a single day (BT8/2/1911; also 8/5/1911, 8/3/1912, 8/7/1912).[16] Its impact in northern Thailand was likely even more

[12]Other important acts were the land tax and an act regulating the slaughter of bullocks, buffaloes, and pigs, which went into effect in Phayap in 1902 (BT6/19/1902).

[13]Income increased from 15,378,114 ticals in 1892 to 60,859,508 ticals in 1908 (BT11/29/1910).

[14]If villagers provided their own food, they worked up to fifteen days; if the government provided food, they were to work for not more than thirty days (BT1/28/1902). This act was revised in 1917 (see Sarassawadee 2005, 229).

[15]The poll tax also contributed to widespread strikes among the Chinese in Bangkok in June 1910 (see BT6/1–17/1910). Keyes (1977, 294–95) writes that the poll tax began in the northeast in 1899, but the BT suggests it was only enforced in 1911 (BT2/21/1911).

[16]A remarkable number of Bangkokians were exempt. See BT8/7/1912, 8/22/1913.

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dramatic because Monthon Phayab "had more people conscripted for public works than any other monthon in Siam" (Sarassawadee 2005, 230). Elderly villagers I interviewed in the 1980s regularly mentioned being arrested and ordered to perform public labor, many of them working on road construction and the train tunnel near Lampang. Although the head tax was supposed to replace the former corvée labor and tribute paid to the northern lords, in many cases it was simply an addition. Labor in lieu of the head tax, traditional corvée labor, and "voluntary" labor for the benefit of the community were easily conflated. Thus a district officer in Phrae (Muang Pong) was reported as "pursuing the rather ancient custom of requiring of the people labour, timber, thatch, rattan, rice, etc., without remuneration" (BT8/24/1918).[17] Noting that such labor was a "great source of discontent" in the north, an editorial remarks, "the actual work is the unpaid labour of people who have already done more than the amount of Government work required by Siamese law" (BT5/10/1902). One account of a "cleaning bee" in Chiangrai in 1917 describes "an average of 400 to 500 workmen" who were "working daily on streets, ditches, culverts, etc." (BT9/25/1917). The extraction of labor would likely have intensified over the decade as officials sought to press the "development" of their jurisdictions with the construction of various new government buildings and roads.

A requirement that men be able to show proof of payment further facilitated abuses of power by police and other local officials.[18] A lawyer in a Bangkok court case commented that "the trading community of Bangkok were unable to go about their business, no matter how important, without being liable to arrest" (BT2/29/1913; see also 2/28/1913, 8/5?/1913, 9/1/1913). On December 14, 1912, police arrested his client, an Indian merchant; despite providing proof he had paid his poll tax, he was put in a cage that had been erected at Wat Sampeng "for the purpose of detaining people suspected of not paying the poll tax" (BT2/28/1913). Similarly, a foreigner en route to Nan Province had three of his carriers detained "because they did not have their poll tax receipts with them" (BT3/5/1918). Caravan traders often had to pay the poll tax "twice on the same trip (because they failed to return out of the country before the new Siamese year)" (BT12/7/1911; also 2/8/1912).

Military Conscription Act

The second act that had a major impact on the everyday life of villagers was the Military Conscription Act of 1905, which provided for a universal draft of eligible men (see BT6/29/1905, 9/7/1905, 10/13/1905 for discussion). Although instituted under King Rama V, military conscription became a major component of King Rama VI's push to develop nationalism and military preparedness during his reign. Little is known of the process of military recruitment in nineteenth-century northern Thailand, but a form of conscription for the police can be dated to about 1899 (Sarassawadee 2005, 230). In the wake of peasant uprisings in northern and northeastern Thailand in 1902, Bangkok

[17]Villagers also protested land tax abuse "in the form of inflating the actual number of rai in their paddy fields to twice the number" (BT8/24/1918).

[18]Tax collection was so unmerciful that on the same day that a major fire occurred in the market on Thapae Road, "an officer of the Municipality presented bills for taxes against the burnt buildings" (BT5/25/1917).

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established an army division headquarters in Chiang Mai in 1903 (Sarassawadee 2005, 209). Following the Franco-Siamese Convention of 1904, police and military posts were established along the northern Thai border with Laos (BT11/30/1905, 12/7/1905; see also Goldman 1972). Initially, military conscripts were imported from other regions; of the 1,600 members of the standing army, 1,000 men came from Nakhon Sawan and Phitsanulok and only 400 were northerners (Sarassawadee 2005, 230). The 1905 act was implemented gradually, beginning with provinces in the central region.[19] This new act facilitated the expansion of both police and military recruits, since both were then drafted through the same lottery after 1908. In 1911, the national army was restructured; Phayab soldiers became the Eighth Division under the Second Army Corps headquartered in Phitsanulok (BT1/17/1911). Northern soldiers from Chiang Mai, Chiangrai, and Nan were included in the show of military might of 30,000 troops on parade in coronation ceremonies for Rama VI in 1911 (BT10/23/1911).[20] Northern Thailand also saw the growth of the Wild Tiger Corps, a paramilitary organization based primarily among government officials.[21] This period records a growing number of inspections by senior military officers.[22] By 1912, a visitor to Chiang Mai "was amazed to see the changes in the Military Cantonments" (4/23?/1912).

The 1905 Military Conscription Act went into effect in Monthon Phayab on April 1, 1914 (BT9/22/1913).[23] The *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* provides a detailed summary of the process:

> The number of able-bodied men from 18 to 39 in each Amphur district will be ascertained. The men first selected will be those of 18, and if the required number be not forthcoming then those of 19 will be taken, and so on. Those who make the selection will be the Khaluang Kalahome [Ministry of Defense official], the amphur of the district and an Army officer, assisted by the necessary doctors and clerks. When the number of men liable for service have been assembled and examined, and those who are exempt or unfit have been weeded out, then from among the remainder the number required will be selected by lot. If there are 200 men and 20 are required, there will be 20 red lots and 180 black. For entering the Army, the minimum height is to be 148 centimetres, and the minimum chest measurement 75 centimetres; but the regulations provide that if enough men in the district do not come up to that standard others may be selected. (BT3/24/1910)

[19]The Act was applied first in Korat, Ayuthia, Nakonsawan, Phitsanulok, Ratburi, Nakon Chaisi and Prachim (BT7/27/1907, 7/26/1907). It went into effect in Bangkok in April 1910 (BT3/24/1910).
[20]This show of military might was larger than the number assembled for the ceremonies marking Rama V's return from Europe in 1907, since "there [were] a greater number of men in the Reserve [then]" (BT10/23/1911).
[21]The Wild Tigers were founded on May 6, 1911, by King Rama VI to involve "official classes" who were not subject to conscription (BT12/4/1911). For this reign, see Greene (1999); Vella (1978).
[22]For example, Major General Momchao Alongkot, Commander of the Army of the North (BT9/24/1914, 9/3/1915); Prince of Phitsanulok, the Heir Presumptive (BT11/26/1915).
[23]The law also went into effect in 1914 in Monthons Udon, Ubon, and Roi Et (BT9/22/1913). On April 1, 1916, the law went into effect in Nakon Srithammaraj, Pattani, Surashtra (Chomphon), Puket, and Petchabun (BT8/28/1915).

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The draft procedure was rather abrupt for those drafted: "Those drawn in the ballot will forthwith be taken over by officials of the respective services in which they are destined to work, and the others will be allowed to go back to their homes, free from any liability to be called upon for service for twelve months." Furthermore, as a safeguard against desertion, "Those who enter the regular Army will be tatooed [*sic*] in accordance with the old custom" (BT3/24/1910).

The implementation of the military draft gave added importance to census registration. Although there had been earlier efforts, an official census was completed in Phayap in 1909 (11/23/1910; see also Sarassawadee 2005, 224–28).[24] Lists of eligible males in each *tambon* were then made. As one report summarizes, "These lists were sent to the district registrars. They informed the Police, who in turn issued summonses to these men" (BT4/29/1910). Some sense of how invasive Siamese efforts to gather complete household registers were survives in the following account by an outraged foreigner in Bangkok:

> I had a surprise visit (now so much in vogue) of the Police or at least two men in police uniform accompanied by some Siamese men in ordinary clothing the other day, perhaps a party of five or six in all. On being asked what they wanted they uttered the cabalistic or "open sesame" word "Somonokruer" [household registration]. I had already had a visit of two men in police uniform some few days before, first asking my name and then asking for some one named white, green or something uncommon of that sort who was wanted for military service. . . . After their departure it occurred to me that this continual entry of the police escorting unknown and un-uniformed parties of men into my premises without warning or production of any Court search warrant was getting beyond a joke. (BT6/12?/1912, 6/13?/1912)

Conscription also led to an increased role of police in enforcement. A report from Bangkok remarked, "The inquisitorial services of the Police are at present actively engaged in rounding up all persons liable to military service under the new law" (BT3/30/1910). So draconian were police measures that the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* noted, "Should the conscript not put in an appearance when called father and mother are both arrested and kept in durance until the boy turns up" (BT4/27/1910). A newspaper correspondent remarked that "police methods is this country invariably follow the line of least resistance" and noted that "the police stations and other rendezvous are crowded with innocent and inoffensive men and youths" (BT4/30/1910). This writer continued in an impassioned eloquence:

> Respectable citizens herded together like cattle in a pen, branded like cattle on selection, treated apparently as criminals first and conscripts afterwards. Are these methods calculated to instil a proper spirit of patriotism in the minds of the youth of the nation? Are they calculated to strengthen the bond of loyalty of the people towards the Throne? Is an army conscripted on what the

[24]Siam's first census occurred in 1904, but did not include Monthon Phayab (BT12/11–12/1905).

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> Siamese conscript must naturally regard as penal lines likely to be an efficient military instrument if needed for use? Is a police force recruited by compulsion likely to be other than discredited service, probably germinating in itself corruption and crime? (BT4/30/1910)

For the population at large, military conscription meant a shortage of local labor.[25] A report noted "the scarcity of boatmen owing to conscription for the army" (BT9/18/1907). Another noted that "several soldiers have recently left the service without permission, to reap their rice" (BT12/13/1907). The *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* stated that in Bangkok "the people being summoned by the police . . . are as a rule in employment" (BT3/30/1910). In the countryside, the act had "given rise to much discontent, the farmers complaining that the youth of the country is impressed into the unproductive military service while productive agriculture depends for its labour mainly upon the women and old men" (BT3/30/1910). As parents sought to have their sons exempted, newspaper reports noted that upcountry was riddled with swindlers "representing themselves to be Government officials and announcing their willingness to issue certificates of exemption from service," obtaining "fair sums of money from their dupes" (BT8/1/1910, 8/12/1913, 8/16/1913).

Resistance to military conscription was likely to have been particularly intense in northern Thailand. Given that as many as three-fourths of the northern population had originally been war captives, fear of the dislocations caused by warfare ran deep (Bowie 1996). Northerners' fear was in evidence even before the act went into effect. In 1907, W. A. R. Woods reported that families were crossing into British territory, "alarmed at the continual increase in Siamese taxes, and at the prospect of enforced service in the gendarmerie or of corvee labour, which is so extensively used by the Siamese authorities" (BT9/18/1907). In 1910, a rumor of looming military conscription caused "panic" in Chiang Mai (BT9/3/1910). Once conscription was implemented, desertion was a significant problem among the early recruits; as Sarassawadee (2005, 230) notes, "among 300 conscripted men, 160 ran away." Even as late as the 1970s, villagers I knew spent considerable sums with both spirit mediums and well-placed bureaucrats to ensure their sons would not be drafted.[26] The decade of the 1910s in northern Thailand was beset by famine and epidemic outbreaks of disease, each hardship reinforcing the others (see Bowie 2014 for further details). Under such dire circumstances, northern village families would have been particularly concerned to keep their sons at home.

III. Exemptions: The Intersection of Buddhism and the Military

Northerners had long sent their sons to temples to receive an education; those who subsequently disrobed became part of the village elite, former novices being addressed as "*Noi*" and former monks addressed as "*Naan*." In keeping with longstanding tradition, the

[25] Boatmen and others benefited from army contracts for rice, horses, and other supplies (e.g., BT9/3/1915, 3/28/1918).

[26] Draft Day continues to be a major occasion in the village calendrical cycle, marked by parties for both those selected and those spared.

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1905 Military Conscription Act exempted monks and novices who "knew the dharma (*ruu thaam*)" (clause #13). In August 1913, the act was amended such that only monks and novices who both knew the dharma and whose ordination was verified by relevant secular authorities (e.g., the *nakornbaan* or *thesaphibaan*) were exempted.[27] In 1917, the Military Conscription Act underwent significant revision; under clause #8 all novices and monks without ecclesiastical office (*somanasak*) or who had not passed ecclesiastical examinations (*parian*) were to be registered in the military reserves. Abbots were to inform the district officer (*naaj amphur*) if monks or novices moved or left the order. Monks and novices who were under the age of twenty-three and who ordained after 1917 were entered in the regular draft upon disrobing; those age thirty and above were listed in the reserves (clause #33). These amendments marked growing secular control over the Buddhist *sangha* and the population at large.

Villagers repeatedly informed me that many villagers in the past ordained as novices and monks in order to "escape" being drafted into the military (*nii buat hyy phon thahaan*; AM#556, CT#59, SS#521).[28] According to an abbot in Chomthong, when conscription time came around, there were as many as twenty to forty novices ordaining; they disrobed once they passed the draft age (#CT59). A former monk in Sansai said he originally was ordained at his parents' insistence because they wanted him to escape the draft (*raj baj khaw wat, hyy phon tahaan*); however, by the time he was seventeen (circa 1917), the laws had been changed and he had to register for the draft anyway (SS#521; also SKP#231). He said that thereafter the senior abbot of Sansai refused to ordain any monks unless they had first passed through the draft; in his case, his number was not called and so he was allowed to ordain as a monk. Another man recalled that when he was still a young child (circa 1900), word came that the draft recruiters were on their way; his parents had his older brother, who was then in the fields harvesting rice, ordained that very night with the abbot at their village temple (AM#556).[29] Another villager recalled that during draft time, villagers would ordain for three days or flee to another district until it was safe to return (S#190). The British consul-general, W. A. R. Woods, provided further confirmation of this overall pattern of northerners ordaining to avoid the draft:

> The Government has been compelled, moreover, to institute certain tests and apply some restrictions to candidates for ordination, on order to prevent the temples from becoming refuges for tax dodgers and evaders of military service. Before this was done, it now and then happened that, when a village Headman was called upon to compile a list of the young fellows in his village who were liable for conscription, he was fain to report that there were none

[27]Lay temple leaders were also exempt (see 1913 amendment; also McGilvary 1912, 100, 114).

[28]One villager also explained that "those with shaved heads [clergy] do not pay taxes" (*kon hua bo dong sia phasii*) (HD#54). Furthermore, villagers who served monks also appeared to have had tax exemptions. A villager recalled that Khruubaa Sophaa of Wat Faajhin had eight litter carriers; they were also exempt from the four baht head tax (AM#536).

[29]The famous abbot in Sankhamphaeng district, Khruubaa Laa, said that the monkhood provided no refuge from the draft since monks were educated and made good officers. When Laa was eighteen (in about 1915), he also fled to the forest to avoid conscription. He said that the military draft of monks began during World War I. In his case, his village headman made arrangements so that he was not drafted (SKP#231).

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> at all, but that the local temple had had to put up several temporary buildings to accommodate the abnormal number of young priests and novices. (Woods 1935, 151)

Growing Controversy

The growing militarization provoked controversies both over the proper attitude of Buddhists towards war and towards growing secular control over the clergy. Even before the outbreak of World War I, King Rama VI was promoting a militarized nationalist agenda. He argued that historically the Siamese were warriors, each of whom understood that "his much prized individual independence rested upon the foundation of the independence of the community of which he formed a part." Even rice "was not grown for export, but to fill the granaries to provide the soldiers with supplies" (BT12/4/1911). In one of his speeches, he cited the case of King Bimbisara, who consulted with the Buddha upon finding that his soldiers were deserting the ranks of his army in order to join the monkhood. As Rama VI explained, the Buddha "at once commanded that all such deserters should forthwith return to the army, and also further laid down a special rule that thenceforth no soldiers on the active list of any royal army should be accepted as candidates for ordination"; the king concluded that "Lord Buddha, who was himself a Prince of the warrior caste, fully understood and appreciated the necessity of national defence" (BT8/15/1914).

The king's efforts to use Buddhism to justify military conscription provoked some controversy, even in central Thailand. A well-known abbot in Bangkok, Phra Thepmoli, authored a pamphlet stating that "the military profession was an evil and that those engaged in it or associated with the manufacture of military weapons, etc., were guilty of sin (*pen bab*)" (BT1/5/1916).[30] As a result, he was "deprived of his rank by His Majesty's command" and placed under de facto temple arrest at Wat Bovornives, the royal temple where the Supreme Patriarch resided, "in order that no other monk should make such mischief again, and interfere with politics, which are not his profession" (BT1/5/1916).

To counter the potential growth of an anti-military attitude, Phya Dharmasakdi, undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Ecclesiastical Affairs, hastened to argue that "if one looks at the Buddha's life and teaching, one will find no place where he condemns the military life" (BT1/5/1916). The Supreme Patriarch also supported the pro-militarist view of the king, albeit in a slightly more muted form in which he differentiated support for the military from "militarism." In a sermon he gave on the occasion of the king's birthday, he said that the Buddha was "a preacher of preparedness" and continued:

> It is also an erroneous idea to suppose that the Buddha condemned all wars and people whose business it was to wage war. Many instances could be quoted to prove that the Buddha recognised the necessity of defensive war, and such may also be inferred from parts of the following allocution itself. What the Buddha did condemn was that spirit miscalled 'Militarism,' but which is really

[30]Phra Thepmoli (also called Phra Upaalii) was born in Ubon and became abbot of Wat Boromnivaat on Klong Mahanak (BT1/5/1916). For more, see Thepmoli (1915); BT1/21/1916.

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> intolerant and unreasoning hatred vengeance and savagery which causes men to kill from blood lust, and a religion that tolerates such a brutish spirit is not worthy of the name of religion! (BT4/28/1916; see also Reynolds 1979, xlix)

Northern *Sangha*-State Relations

Evidence suggests a dramatic difference in the historical balance of power between the *sangha* and the state in northern Thailand in comparison with central Thailand. Faced with a serious revolt led by monks, Rama I (r.1782–1809) sought to establish control over the central Thai *sangha* by requiring that monks be attached to specific monasteries and carry identifying certificates when traveling. No monk arriving at a monastery from another district was to be permitted to stay until his documents had been examined. Furthermore, all abbots had to forward a register of monks under their supervision for mobilization and control of manpower (Ishii 1986, 65; Reynolds 1972, 42–43; Tambiah 1976, 185; Wenk 1968). John Crawfurd, who visited Bangkok in 1822, remarked on this tight regulation of the *sangha*, noting that "religion was completely identified with the government" (Crawfurd [1828] 1967, 368). Crawfurd explained:

> The Sovereign himself is the real head of the religion of the country. The Talapoins [monks] depend upon him for subsistence and promotion. They have neither rank nor endowments independent of his will. They are not hereditary; they have no civil employments; and no tie which unites their interests with those of the people. (372)

By contrast, the *sangha* and the state had a more balanced relationship in the northern Lannathai kingdoms. The northern Thai kingdoms, long tributary to Burma, seemed to share a model of *sangha*-state relations in which monks represented lay interests as much, if not more, than court interests. As Melford Spiro (1970, 380–81) writes, Burmese monks "frequently interceded on behalf of prisoners condemned to execution, protected the weak from extortion by powerful officials, assisted others in obtaining tax relief in periods of economic distress, and urged the removal or transfer of despotic district officials."

That this more balanced relationship existed in the northern Thai kingdoms is intimated by Dr. David Richardson's intriguing description of the investiture of the northern supreme patriarch by the ruling lord (*chao* or *chow*) in 1834:

> The Chow before investing him with the high office asks him if he will obey his lawful orders, which being answered in the affirmative, he makes over to him all authority over all ranks of the priesthood. The high priest then asks the Tsoboa [ruling lord] if he will listen to his intercession in favor of criminals condemned to death when it shall appear to him the punishment is too severe for the offence, to which he assents. (Farrington 2004, 75; see also Colquhoun 1885, 151–52)[31]

[31]Such interventions occurred in Burma (e.g., Sangermano 1893, 122, in Spiro 1970, 380; see also Grabowsky and Turton 2003, 401, 506–7).

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When the rulers of Chiang Mai and Lamphun wanted to raise an army to attack two Burmese states in 1839, "the priests waited in a body" to voice their dissent, albeit to no avail (Farrington 2004, 227). Even in the difficult days that followed the execution of the first two native converts in 1869, the missionary Daniel McGilvary (1912, 82–83, 120) remarked that an abbot dared to visit him regularly and that "the monasteries were always open" to him. Thus northern Thai monks appear to have been more likely than central Thai monks to agree with the Burmese monk in Sagaing who allegedly responded to a messenger from King Mindon, "Tell him that a man who lives between the hills does not need instruction from a man who lives between the thighs [of women]" (Than Tun 1955, 179, in Spiro 1970, 381).

The northern *sangha* appears to have been widely outraged by the interference caused by the overly zealous enforcement of military conscription by central Thai officials. This outrage was manifested in a famous vignette describing the fiery reaction of Chiang Mai's supreme patriarch, Khruubaa Sophaa (abbot of Wat Faajhin). The requirement in the Military Conscription Act that novices and monks had to "know the dharma" provided grounds for officials to summarily drag novices and monks to the district offices to undergo the draft lottery; central Thai officials considered northerners who were literate in the northern script but not in central Thai script as ignorant of the dharma. When Sophaa learned that novices and monks were being forced into the draft, according to Pranii Sirithorn na Pathalung's colorful account, his blood boiled. Mounting his litter, he was carried straight to the residence of the Siamese commissioner.[32] As soon as he reached the staircase, he bellowed angrily in northern Thai, "Is Chao Khun Surasih here? Are wars and tigers now besetting us on all directions? Is that why you are now taking novices and monks off to be soldiers?" Sophaa was known for having a booming voice that ensured his sermons could easily be heard outside the temple even before the days of microphones. The commissioner was shocked to see the patriarch so angry. He invited Sophaa into his residence. It took some time to calm the patriarch's anger. In the end, however, the commissioner decided that monks and novices would be exempted from the draft, thus sparing them the humiliation of having their robes removed and their chests measured (Pranii [1964] 1995, 1:187). This detente appears to have ended with Sophaa's death in 1915 (at age eighty-three) and Surasih's departure about the same time.

Sophaa's name came up often among villagers I interviewed in the 1980s. He was known for being strict in his practice of Buddhism, not being afraid to stand up to secular authorities, and refusing to preach in central Thai. According to one abbot, when Sophaa was pressured to adopt the central Thai school of Buddhism (Thammayut), he refused, allegedly saying, "Why become their slaves?" (*ben khaa khaw thammaj*; SKP#231; see also Pranii [1964] 1995; Ratanaporn 2010). He was also widely remembered for his stance on military conscription. As one villager, himself a former monk, in San Sai explained:

> If one wanted to avoid the draft, one became a novice and fled to be with the abbot of Wat FaajHin. He wouldn't let his novices be drafted (*bo daj, bo hyy*). He would accuse the draft officials of having no respect for the religion.

[32]The commissioner was Chao Phrayar Surasihwisitsak (Choei Kanlayanamit), who was appointed *thesaphiban* from 1902 to 1915 (Sarassawadee 2005, 209–13).

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> Monks had more freedom and more power then. They were more respected. (SS#521)

Although Srivichai became a focal point of official outrage, his refusal to obey orders issued by secular officials appears to have been in line with northern views regarding the separation of church and state. That Srivichai shared Sophaa's views regarding the new regulations on the military draft can be inferred from his support for his disciple, Khruu-baa Khawpii. Srivichai ordained Khawpii as a novice in 1905 and as a monk in 1911 (Cohen 2001, 230). Khawpii was disrobed on three occasions. He was first disrobed for failing to register for the military draft. In 1924, he was charged by the Lamphun Court for failure to possess the identification card issued to men who had registered for the draft. Although Khawpii was already past the age of conscription, the charge was "intended to showcase the newly promoted sangha law which stated that a monk can be brought to trial in a secular court if he was found to have violated the state law" (Cohen 2001, 230; see also Kwanchewan 1988, 128). When Khawpii refused to accept the card, he was forcibly defrocked and imprisoned for six months. Srivichai subsequently reordained him then and on one additional occasion. However, as a condition of Srivichai's return from Bangkok in 1935, Khawpii was compelled to disrobe a third time; he wore white robes from then on (for more see Cohen 2001; Kwanchewan 1988). Srivichai's support for Khawpii intimates Srivichai's own likely views regarding the illegitimacy of state interference in monastic matters; the widespread support that Srivichai received from fellow monks and laity suggests these views were widely held.

Conclusion: Fitting The Jigsaw Together

Debates over "just and unjust wars" have confounded moralists over the centuries (Walzer [1977] 2000). A profound tension exists between the religious injunction common in world religions that forbids killing and the moral legitimation of warfare. The clash between the desires of the central Thai government and the concerns of the northern populace was no doubt heightened by the paradox of combining an ideology of nonviolence and generosity with the reality of expanding military conscription and exploitation. Ultimately neither side emerged fully victorious. When Srivichai signed the document agreeing to abide by central Thai government regulations in 1935, overt northern resistance became more muted; nonetheless, northerners have maintained a distinct northern identity to the present day.

Prevailing scholarly explanations of the origins of Srivichai's difficulty have centered on conflicts internal to the monastic order; however, these explanations are not consistent with the existing evidence and leave many dimensions of the puzzle posed by Srivichai unsolved. Why was a monk considered a saint by some also considered a traitor by others? If the underlying issue was the ordination controversy, why were his monastic superiors not pleased that so many villagers wanted to ordain? What made a young monk then living in a remote, impoverished community so dangerous to other monks? Because the overt monastic infractions seemed so petty, many scholars have tried to minimize this controversy, suggesting that it was the result of a minor misunderstanding by an ignorant village monk (e.g., Sukich 2002). Arguments based on Srivichai's alleged

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ignorance do not accord well with other aspects of his biography. Why did Srivichai willfully continue to ordain hundreds of monks and novices over the course of the 1920s and 1930s (most notably Khruubaa Khao Pii)? If Srivichai were not literate in the northern Thai script, how could he have become a head abbot of his subdistrict and later abbot of one of the most prestigious temples in Chiang Mai City, Wat Phra Singh? How could a simple monk spearhead such an unparalleled explosion of temple construction, raising huge sums of money and coordinating large numbers of laborers? If minor, why was the controversy not resolved without multiple temple arrests? And why did thousands throughout the north rally in his support?

In this essay, I have argued that the underlying issue was control of manpower—the state seeking to conscript labor, the *sangha* seeking to protect its exemptions from state labor obligations, and the populace desperate to keep labor at home. State control over manpower lay at the heart of both the Ordination Act and the Military Conscription Act. Framing the controversy as contested access to labor explains both why secular officials were enraged by Srivichai's apparent insubordination and why thousands of northerners were ardent in their support for him. As villagers were already upset by the capitation tax, the imposition of military conscription further conflicted with their increasingly desperate needs to safeguard income and labor in a time of famine and disease. Whether Srivichai opposed warfare or merely opposed state interference in the *sangha*, he refused to prioritize the secular needs of the state over those of the sacred realm of the monastic order. In his repudiation of secular authority over the *sangha*, Srivichai was simultaneously defending the traditional independence of the northern *sangha* and de facto protecting the right of the population to ordain as a refuge from worldly suffering at a time of severe economic hardship. Framed not as an internal monastic conflict but as a triangulated conflict between state, *sangha*, and populace over military conscription, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

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