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Imperialism, Buddhism and Islam in Siam: Exploring the Buddhist secular in the *Nangsue Sadaeng Kitchanukit*, 1867

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This article argues for understanding the reform of the Buddhist tradition in nineteenth-century Siam as a shift towards a secular conceptual grammar, and positions this shift within the dual imperial context of Siam. The binary conceptual structure that can be traced in the Nangsue Sadaeng Kitchanukit *(Elaboration on major and minor matters, 1867) also included an opposition between Buddhism and Islam, documenting not only the epistemic marks of the Christian missionary encounter, but also the inner-political imperial context of Siam's hegemony over the Islamic sultanate of Patani.*

Thailand is mostly excepted from explorations of secularism and occupies a special place in Buddhist studies because it has never been colonised; its nineteenth century reform of the Buddhist tradition, consequently, is often represented as instigated by the 'modernising monarchs' of the Chakri dynasty — King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851–68), King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910) and King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910–25).[1] Such claims inadvertently echo nationalist Thai historiography in highlighting the absence of colonialism and celebrating the Chakri monarchs as heroic actors of an indigenous modernisation.[2] However, a host of critical Thai

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1 Charles Hallisey, 'Roads taken and not taken in the study of Theravada Buddhism', in *Curators of the Buddha: The study of Buddhism under colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 48. For a critical discussion of this reading, see Ananda Abeysekara, 'Protestant Buddhism and "influence": The temporality of a concept', *Qui Parle* 28, 1 (2019): 1–75.

2 For an early critique of this view, see Benedict Anderson, 'Studies of the Thai state: The state of Thai

scholars has demonstrated how Siam (today Thailand) 'suffered from many of the ignominies and asymmetries that directly colonised states endured',[3] and how the royal government initiated reforms that were directly modelled on the governance policies of neighbouring colonial states.[4] As I argue elsewhere in more detail, Siam after the mid-nineteenth century therefore has to be understood as a modern imperial formation in a double sense: it was inserted into the geopolitical system of Western imperial modernity, while itself appropriating modern imperial forms of rule.[5]

What scholars have called 'Buddhist modernism' or 'reform Buddhism' in Siam (and the wider Theravada world),[6] I show, has to be integrally related to this dual imperial context and the resulting shift in conceptual grammars, allowing for traditional Buddhist concepts to be integrated into a modern secular grammar. According to Talal Asad, a secular conceptual grammar operates through a series of binaries such as secular/religious, public/private, or knowledge/belief,[7] and thereby sustains a secular form of order integral to both modern nation-states and imperial power relations on a global scale.[8] 'Religion' is one of the central modern concepts that organises this secular grammar and its adjacent state formation: its objectification as a subsystem of society allows for governing 'religious' subjects and practices; the demarcation of subjects as 'religious' entails the possibility to rule, divide and hierarchically categorise entire communities in terms of 'religious difference';[9] and its main normative tenets are shaped by Christianity, which still plays an often obscured role in the 'mechanisms and conceptual apparatus of imperial power'.[10] If we read 'Buddhist modernism' in Siam as a secular formation, however, a number of important political questions come to the fore that have rarely been tackled in this literature: how was European imperial expansion related to a discourse about 'religion' in Siam in the nineteenth century? How did the secular formation of 'Buddhism' facilitate modern imperial rule within Siam? And what are the characteristics of a formation that we could call, for lack of a better term, the 'Buddhist secular'?

studies', in *The study of Thailand: Analyses of knowledge, approaches, and prospects in anthropology, art history, economics, history, and political science*, ed. Eliezer B. Ayal (Athens: Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, Ohio University, 1978), pp. 193–234.

3 Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, law and colonial modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 2.

4 See especially Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, eds., *The ambiguous allure of the West: Traces of the colonial in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

5 Ruth Streicher, *Uneasy military encounters: The imperial politics of counterinsurgency in southern Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

6 For example, Stanley J. Tambiah, *World conqueror and world renouncer: A study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Peter Jackson, *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict: The political functions of urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989); Craig Reynolds, 'The Buddhist monkhood in nineteenth-century Thailand' (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1972).

7 Talal Asad, *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 16, 23.

8 Asad, *Formations of the secular,* p. 13.

9 Saba Mahmood, *Religious difference in a secular age: A minority report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); David Scott, 'Religion in colonial civil society', in *Refashioning futures: Criticism after postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 53–70.

10 Ruth Mas, 'The red thread of Christianity', *ReOrient* 1, 1 (2015): 57.

This article approaches these questions through rereading the *Elaboration on Major and Minor Matters* (*Nangsue Sadaeng Kitchanukit*, hereafter *Kitchanukit*), one of the first Siamese books, published in 1867 by Chaophaya Thipakorawong, a royal official close to King Mongkut.[11] The *Kitchanukit* counts as a major source of Siamese intellectual history generally, and of Buddhist reform in the course of the nineteenth-century Christian missionary encounter more specifically.[12] I proceed by first positioning the *Kitchanukit* within what David Scott calls a 'problem space'[13] of Western imperialism: I demonstrate that the unequal treaties with European powers signed by Siam also contained important provisions regarding 'religion' and supported missionary activities, and that King Mongkut soon adopted a secular idea of the *satsana* that stabilised his own Buddhist rule. Turning to a close analysis of certain sections in the *Kitchanukit* in the second part of the article, I show how it performs certain shifts from the grammar of the Buddhist tradition towards the grammar of the Buddhist secular.

This framing of modern Buddhism in the *Kitchanukit,* I furthermore demonstrate, simultaneously enabled the construction of Islam as Buddhism's Other, and thereby anticipated a binary that would become politically salient in Siam at the end of the nineteenth century. Siam then was in the midst of transforming from a mandala structure, where vassal states paid tribute to the powerful Buddhist monarch in the centre, into a modern nation-state, where sovereignty was based on the idea of a bounded territory.[14] 'Religion' emerged as an important tool in the new modalities of rule: the forceful appeasement of rebellions in the Lao and Shan states was followed by efforts to streamline their traditional Buddhist practices.[15] Regarding the rebellious Islamic sultanate of Patani in the south, however, the royal government necessitated a different form of regulation. Here, the notion of 'religious difference' between Buddhism and Islam, already outlined in the *Kitchanukit*, became tantamount to designing a dual legal structure that made modern Buddhism Siam's public and official form of 'religion' while privatising the Islamic tradition of Patani through the colonial system of Islamic family law.[16] The secular grammar of 'religion' in Siam

11 Chaophraya Thipakorawong, *Sadaeng Kitchanukit* (in Thai) (Bangkok: Sueksaphanit [1872]1971).

12 Craig Reynolds, 'Buddhist cosmography in Thai history, with special reference to nineteenth-century culture change', *Journal of Asian Studies* 35, 2 (1976): 203–20; Sven Trakulhun, 'Chaophraya Thiphakorawong: A book on various things (Thailand, 1867)', in *Religious dynamics under the impact of imperialism and colonialism: A sourcebook*, ed. Björn Bentlage, Marion Eggert, Hans Martin Krämer and Stefan Reichmuth (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 63–76; Thongchai Winichakul, 'Buddhist apologetics and a genealogy of comparative religion in Siam', *Numen* 62, 1 (2015): 76–99.

13 Scott uses this notion to describe 'an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs. That is to say, what defines this discursive context are not only the particular problems that get posed as problems as such (the problem of "race", say) but the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of answers that seem worth having.' David Scott, *Conscripts of modernity: The tragedy of colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 4.

14 Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam mapped: A history of the geo-body of a nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).

15 Patrick Jory, 'Thai and Western Buddhist scholarship in the age of colonialism: King Chulalongkorn redefines the *jatakas*', *Journal of Asian Studies* 61, 3 (2002): 891–918.

16 Loos, *Subject Siam*.

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stabilised the binary of Buddhism/Islam that later sustained an imperial form of rule by the modern Siamese nation-state over the annexed sultanate.

Unequal treaties, Christian 'civilisation', and the *sasana*

The central legal document that points to Siam's insertion into the Western imperial system is the 1855 Bowring Treaty between Siam and Great Britain, which constitutes the first in a whole series of 'unequal treaties' that Siam concluded with mostly European powers during the second half of the nineteenth century.[17] The treaties were originally called treaties of 'friendship and commerce' and unlike their prototypes in China and Japan not 'forced' upon the Siamese; rather, King Mongkut and his officials were eager to support an economic opening that was already well under way.[18] In international legal terms, however, the treaties initiated the creation of Siam as an entity whose sovereignty was dependent on European powers:[19] extraterritoriality regulations exempted specified foreigners from Siamese jurisdiction and thereby paved the way for European interference into Siam's internal policies, particularly regarding the development of a modern government administration and legal system.[20] Such regulations were characteristic of the imperial discourse in nineteenth century legal scholarship, where European scholars connected the notion of sovereignty with European 'civilisation' and marked non-European states with lacking civilised progress.[21] King Mongkut himself during treaty negotiations with Sir John Bowring cautioned that the enforcement of the Bowring Treaty might be hindered by individuals unfamiliar with 'civilised' and 'enlightened' customs, given that Siam was still a nation 'half barbarous and half civilised'.[22]

The notion of 'civilisation' that undergirded treaty negotiations, however, was marked not only as Western, but also as Christian — a demarcation structurally anchored in the system of international law, which developed out of the Christian interpretation of natural law in the context of Western imperial hegemony.[23] The chief negotiator Sir John Bowring, author of Christian hymns[24] and active member

17 Until 1870 Siam concluded similar treaties with 14 additional countries, including the United States, France, Denmark, Prussia, Sweden and Norway, Belgium, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Spain. Note that critical Thai scholars applied the term 'unequal treaty' retrospectively in order to call attention to the similarities with earlier treaties concluded by imperial powers with China and Japan. Gerrit W. Gong, *The standard of 'civilization' in international society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), pp. 212–14.

18 See Loos, *Subject Siam*, p. 41, n.38; Barend Jan Terwiel, 'The Bowring Treaty: Imperialism and the indigenous perspective', *Journal of the Siam Society* 79, 2 (1991): 40–47; Shane Strate, *The lost territories: Thailand's history of national humiliation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), p. 28.

19 M.B. Hooker, 'The "Europeanization" of Siam's law 1855–1908', in *Laws of Southeast Asia. Volume II: European laws in South-East Asia*, ed. M.B. Hooker (Singapore: Butterworth, 1988), p. 532.

20 Hong Lysa, '"Stranger within the gates": Knowing semi-colonial Siam as extraterritorials', *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 2 (2004): 327–54.

21 Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, sovereignty and the making of international law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 100–07.

22 Cited in Nicholas Tarling, 'Harry Parkes' negotiations in Bangkok in 1856', *Journal of the Siam Society* 53, 2 (1965): 161.

23 Asad, *Formations of the secular*, p. 163; Martine van Ittersum, *Profit and principle: Hugo Grotius, natural rights theories and the rise of Dutch power in the East Indies, 1595–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Ana Kolarov, 'Grotius als Vater des christlichen Völkerrechts?', *Forum Historiae Iuris* 13 (2009): 1–40.

24 For example, John Bowring, *A memorial volume of sacred poetry* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1873).

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of the Christian movement of Unitarians, himself embodied the merger of Christianity with Western imperial expansion: 'Jesus Christ is free trade and free trade is Jesus Christ' is one of his well-known statements, which he defended against accusations that it was 'impious' by holding that it was 'intimately associated with religious truth and the exercise of religious principles'.[25] Documenting his mission to Siam in 1855, his journal is explicit about his disregard for the Buddhist tradition, particularly the Buddhist monkhood:

> To say the best, their [the monks'] religion is but harmless and useless, — a dream instead of a life, and a life unavailing as a dream. A few such might not exercise a very pernicious influence; but when a whole nation is impregnated with the notion that such an unmeaning existence is the most acceptable tribute that can be offered to the Supreme Spirit, it would seem impossible that any active or operative civilisation should stir up the elements of competition, or effect any permanent and general improvement.[26]

In line with certain strands of Victorian British discourse about Buddhism, Bowring portrays Buddhism generally, and Buddhist monks particularly, as marked by decay and 'self-absorbed Oriental asceticism',[27] and deduces that Siam's civilisation is 'impregnated' with such notions and thus rendered passive and dysfunctional — without any prospect of (economic) advancement.[28]

Bowring consequently supported Christian missionary endeavours both during his presence in Siam and in the actual treaty document. He ensured that two of his companions were given access to the missionaries stationed in Siam,[29] and successfully pleaded with King Mongkut to lift a travel ban imposed upon the American mission after one of their members had been accused of publicly insulting the king, noting in a letter to the missionaries: 'I trust that a better and happier era will smile on the country in which your tents are raised.'[30] In the final document of the Bowring Treaty, Article VI stipulates that 'All British subjects visiting or residing in Siam shall be allowed the free exercise of the Christian religion, and liberty to build churches in such localities as shall be consented by the Siamese authorities.'[31] One

25 Philip Bowring, *Free trade's first missionary: Sir John Bowring in Europe and Asia* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), p. 19.

26 John Bowring, *The kingdom and people of Siam: With a narrative of the mission to that country in 1855* (London: J.W. Parker, 1857), pp. 276–7.

27 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions; Or, how European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), p. 129.

28 Interestingly, the British envoy John Crawfurd, who had unsuccessfully tried to open Siam to British trade in 1821, had similar opinions about the Buddhist tradition and its monkhood. In his journal of the embassy to Siam, he described the negative 'influence which the Buddhist religion appears to have produced on the Government, manners, and character of the Siamese. […] there are no countries in Asia in which human life is held so cheap as in those in which the shedding of blood is considered sacrilege. This, as it appears to me, may in a great measure be ascribed to the institution of the Talapoins.' John Crawfurd, *Journal of an embassy from the governor-general of India to the courts of Siam and Cochin-China* (London, 1830), pp. 87–8.

29 Bowring, *The kingdom and people of Siam*, pp. 258–9.

30 Manich, *King Mongkut and Sir John Bowring*, p. 109.

31 Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Siam and Great Britain, signed at Bangkok, April 18, 1855; http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Bowring_Treaty (accessed 31 Oct. 2019).

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of the subsequent treaties that Siam concluded with France in 1856 was even more explicit regarding missionary activity: it contained detailed entitlements for French missionaries, allowing them to preach and teach, travel freely throughout the kingdom, and build churches, schools and hospitals with the consent of the Kingdom of Siam.[32] The unequal treaties, consequently, made Siam's sovereignty dependent upon meeting a Western standard of 'civilisation' not only in terms of government and administration, but also, and more importantly for our purposes, in terms of a Christian standard of 'religion'.

Secularising the sasana

In fact, the very term 'religion' was translated in the Siamese version of the Bowring Treaty with *satsana*, derived from the Pali *sasana,* a key Buddhist concept that in its traditional usage notably contrasts with both notions of 'religion' and 'Buddhism'.[33] In Pali Buddhist literature, *sasana* — sometimes in the compound version *buddhasasana* — most frequently means instruction, message or order, and describes 'the life of the Buddha's teachings after he is gone; it is the condition of possibility for making merit and liberation'.[34] Over the course of time, *sasana* has been more readily defined through certain modes of practice such as chaste living. Crucially, the *sasana* is closely linked to a specific idea of rule in the ideal of Buddhist kingship: as demonstrated in Siam's most important premodern legal code,[35] Buddhist kings were tasked with protecting and promoting the *sasana* to prevent its continuous decline and eventual disappearance.[36]

32 The original clause in the contract reads: '*Les missionnaires Français auront la faculté de prêcher et d'enseigner, de construire des églises, des séminaires ou écoles, des hôpitaux et autres édifices pieux, sur un point quelconque du Royaume de Siam, en se conformant aux lois du pays.* […] *Ils voyageront en toute liberté dans toute l'étendue du Royaume, pourvu qu'ils soient porteurs de lettres authentiques du Consul de France, ou, en son absence, de leur évêque, revêtues du visa du Gouverneur-Général, résidant à Bangkok, dans la juridiction duquel se trouveront les provinces où ils voudront se rendre*' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *British and Foreign State Papers*, XLVII [London: HMSO, 1856–57], p. 995). This clause has an important historical precedent in a treaty concluded between French and Siamese authorities in the 16th century to regulate missionary activity in addition to commercial relations. This treaty 'gave formal permission and full liberty to the missionaries to instruct the Siamese in science, law, and other studies [as long as they were] not opposed to the interests of the Siamese Government and the laws of the kingdom.' The treaty also already included extraterritoriality regulations that entitled the French missionaries and their converts to distinct tribunals 'different from the ordinary courts of the land'. P.W. Thornely, *The history of a transition* (Bangkok: Siam Observer Press, 1923), pp. 22, 29.

33 John Ross Carter, 'A history of early Buddhism', *Religious Studies* 13, 3 (1977): 263–87.

34 Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The impermanence of religion in colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), p. 1.

35 Yoneo Ishii, 'A note on the semantic expansion of *sasana* in the royal epithet *akkhasasanupathamphok*', in *Buddhist legacies in mainland Southeast Asia: Mentalities, interpretations and practices*, ed. Francois Lagirarde and Paritta Chalermpow Koanatakool (Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient; Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2006), pp. 67–70.

36 There is a substantial literature that deals with the *sasana*, ideas about its gradual disappearance, and its centrality to Buddhist kingship. See Jan Nattier, *Once upon a future time: Studies in a Buddhist prophecy of decline* (Fremont, CA: Jain, 1991); Anne M. Blackburn, *Buddhist learning and textual practice in eighteenth-century Lankan monastic culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 80–84; Jason A. Carbine, 'Shwegyin sāsana: Continuity, rupture, and traditionalism in a Buddhist tradition', in *Historicizing 'tradition' in the study of religion*, ed. Stephen Engler and Gregory P. Grieve (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 145–74; Turner, *Saving Buddhism*.

It is only in some of the first nineteenth-century Thai language dictionaries, often published by missionaries, that we can find entries that render *sasana*/*satsana* the hypothetical equivalent of an abstracted and universalised notion of 'religion'.[37] Already in 1810, for instance, the Indologist John Leyden published a *Comparative vocabulary of the Barma, Maláyu and Thái languages* at the Indian Mission Press in Serampore glossing 'religion' in Thai as *satsana*.[38] Likewise, the *Grammar of the T'hai language* compiled in 1828 by James Low, a lieutenant stationed in Penang with the British East India Company, translates *sasana* as 'religion'.[39] In the Siamese missionary journal *Bangkok Recorder*, published by Protestant missionary Dan Beach Bradley, an 1844 article on 'Toleration in Turkey' talks about Islam by using the terms *satsana mahamat,* thus already indicating the use of *satsana* as abstracted from the Buddhist tradition.[40] Perhaps the most interesting entry is in an 1854 dictionary compiled by Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix, a French Catholic Bishop in Siam close to King Mongkut: he glosses the 'religion of Buddha' with *buddhasatsana,* provides translations for the expression *nok satsana* ('out of the church'; literally: outside the *satsana*) and *khon nok satsana* ('infidels'; literally: people outside the *satsana*), and adds the adjective 'true' to his translation of *satsana* ('religion — the true religion').[41] The Bishop here, of course, equates Christianity with the only 'true religion': in 1844, he had published a book juxtaposing Christian with Buddhist beliefs that determined the supremacy of the Christian God over Buddha.[42]

The Thai version of the Bowring Treaty reflects this secular transformation of the *satsana* also by its adjacent Thai verb *thue*, 'to hold', which is extended here to mean 'holding a belief' — Christians are described as those persons that 'hold/believe in the Christian religion' (*thue satsana khrittoen*). By contrast, in Siam's premodern legal code, the Three Seals Law, the *sasana* is usually accompanied by Pali verbs that indicate how the *sasana* is studied (*pariyatti* or *boriyat*) or practised (*patipatti*). For instance, the first decree on the Buddhist monkhood (revised under King Rama I [r. 1782–1809] in 1805) rules that the king, as the upholder of the *sasana,* should promote the Buddhist *sasana* both in 'its scriptural learning [*boriyat*] and its practice [*patipatti*], so that it shall steadily prosper, revered by gods and humans alike'.[43] In the Bowring Treaty and nineteenth-century missionary dictionaries, *sasana*/*satsana* is no longer a mode of practice integral to the system of teaching and learning and

37 On translation as a powerful process of producing hypothetical equivalents, see Lydia Liu, *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 16.

38 John Leyden, *A comparative vocabulary of the Barma, Maláyu and Thái languages* (Serampore: Mission Press, 1810), p. 126.

39 James Low, *A grammar of the T'hai or Siamese language* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1828), p. 75.

40 *Bangkok Recorder*, 1, 4 Oct. 1844, p. 14.

41 Jean Baptiste Pallegoix, *Dictionarium linguae Thaï sive Sa̱mensis interpretatione Latina, Gallica et Anglica illustratum* (Paris, 1854), p. 724.

42 Winichakul, 'Buddhist apologetics', p. 82.

43 The original wording, according to Ishii, reads that the king '*pen akkhasasanupathamphok phraphuttasasana charoen sisawatdi thang para boriyat lae patipatti sasana hai thawon rungruang pai pen thi lueam sai mamatsakan bucha kae thephayuda manut thang puang*.' Ishii, 'A note on the semantic expansion of *sasana*', p. 67.

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the model of kingship in the Buddhist Theravada tradition; it has rather, and in accordance with modern Christian ideas that directly informed the secular notion of 'religion', become an abstract term for a system of belief in 'a set of propositions to which believers [give] assent'.[44]

A proclamation that King Mongkut declared only three years after signing the Bowring Treaty demonstrates that he merged this secular framing of the *satsana* as belief with its traditional understanding.[45] In the first paragraphs of the 1858 *Proclamation on believing in religion* [*satsana*] *and on people with wrong beliefs*, Mongkut announces:

> Following the custom of the righteous ruler of the land, he shall not prohibit any citizen from believing in religion, which is their personal sanctuary. In the present time, and in the future, this ruler permits people to believe in religions as they wish. Since the belief in religion includes various things that are in agreement, such as not murdering animals, not stealing, not being exceedingly sexual and fornicating with the wife of another, not lying, not drinking alcohol, abstaining from anger, having good-will and compassion, being honest and grateful, sharing things to distribute happiness, and doing many other good things that are virtuous and beneficial to each other. People of every race, every language, and every religion all understand readily that these things are good, admirable and just.[46]

44 Asad, *Genealogies of religion*, p. 41. See also Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 67.

45 I am indebted to Anthony Irwin for pointing out this declaration to me. See Anthony Lovenheim Irwin, '"Imagining" boundaries: Simå space, lineage trails, and trans-regional Theravada orthodoxy' (MA thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011). Another translation of the declaration can also be found in: M.R. Seni Pramoj, 'King Mongkut as a legislator', *Journal of the Siam Society* 38, 1 (1950): 44–6. Missionary publications mostly cite a later declaration issued by Chulalongkorn in 1878 as the first 'Edict of Toleration' that 'guaranteed full liberty of conscience', e.g. Willard Cooper, *Historical sketch of the missions in Siam* (Philadelphia: The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church, 1915), p. 30. This edict was proclaimed after Presbyterian missionaries of the northern Siamese mission in Laos had appealed to King Chulalongkorn to remit a traditional fee for marriages of Christian converts. According to a translation by the missionary Daniel McGilvary, Chulalongkorn's edict differs from Mongkut's earlier one in that it emphasises the liberal notion of religion as an individual choice: 'That religious and civil duties do not come in conflict. That whoever wishes to embrace any religion after seeing that it is true and proper to be embraced, is allowed to do so without any restriction. That the responsibility for a right or a wrong choice rests on the individual making the choice. That there is nothing in the laws and customs of Siam, nor in its foreign treaties, to throw any restriction on the religious worship and service of any one.' Daniel McGilvary, *A half century among the Siamese and the Lao* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1912), p. 216.

46 In romanised Thai, the original is titled '*prakat kan thue satsana lae phu thi thue phit*' and reads: '*wa thamniam phu khrongphaendin thi pen yutitham midai ham ratsadon thangpuang /nai kan thue satsana pen thiphueng khong tua /nai wela thisut lae kan bueangna /song anuyat yom hai khon thue satsana tam atthayasai / duai wakan thue satsana lang sing ko tong kan / muean yang mai kha sat mai laksap /mai luangkoen nai kan methun sangwat tham chu phanya khong phu-uen / lae mai ceraca khamthet /lae mai sep sura lae ot khwamkrot /mi mettakaruna kae kan / lae suesat katanyukatawethi /lae hai pan singkhong chalia khwamsuk kae kan / lae thamkhwam di uen /sueng pen khunprayot kae kan ko mi ik lai yang /khon thuk chat thuk phasa thuk satsana ko hen phromkan wa /pen khwamdikhwamchop pen yutitham*.' See Proclamation No. 151, in 'Collected proclamations of King Rama IV, vol. 4'; https://vajirayana.org/ประชุมประกาศรัชกาลที่-๔-ภาค-๔/๑๕๑-ประกาศการถือสาสนาแลผู้ที่ถือผิด (last accessed 30 Jan. 2021).

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In this proclamation, on the one hand, *satsana* is coupled by the notion of 'belief' (*kan thue*), and represented as an individual matter of 'personal sanctuary' — once again, rather than defining a mode of practice of the Buddhist tradition, *satsana* is here equated with a secular idea of 'religion' as individual belief. In accordance with this secular shift, Mongkut deploys 'religious belief' to describe different, and potentially conflicting, subject positions,[47] thus hinting at the modern assumption that 'religion' is one of the most important characteristics defining individual identities of different 'races' and 'languages'.[48] The King also makes a move typical of normative ideas of secular morality to mediate potential conflict between these subject positions: while not deploying the term 'morality', he implies that all believers share a universal ethical and moral ground.[49]

On the other hand, however, the King presents the basic Buddhist precepts as the universal common ground for people of 'every race, every language, and every religion', and refers to himself as the 'righteous ruler of the land', thereby citing the ideal of righteous practice in accordance with the *dhamma* that has traditionally legitimised the rule of the Buddhist monarch.[50] In a later paragraph of the proclamation he even concretely describes this ideal: 'His Majesty is firmly resolved to preserve the purity of the Buddhist *satsana*, so that it may continue to be a help and guidance to His people.'[51] The Buddhist precepts, traditionally virtues necessary for the embodiment of right Buddhist actions, in this proclamation become general moral guidelines necessary for the maintenance of Siam's order; the King recognises a multiplicity of religious beliefs in his realm, but continues to support the Buddhist *satsana* by universalising and secularising Buddhist precepts as public morals. In this reading, the secularisation of certain Buddhist ideas simultaneously enables the permeation of emerging secular concepts with the Buddhist tradition.

The *Kitchanukit* and the missionary encounter

One of the most important effects of the Bowring Treaty and subsequent unequal treaties was structural support for missionary work. Catholic missions had been slowly re-establishing their presence in Siam during the first half of the nineteenth century,[52] while the first two Protestant missionaries, Karl Gützlaff and Jacob

47 Scott, 'Religion in colonial civil society', p. 68.

48 Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions*, p. 1.

49 On the centrality of the public–private divide and the concept of 'public order' to a secular problem-space, see also Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning secularism: Islam, sovereignty, and the rule of law in modern Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

50 Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society: Thai Buddhism in history* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986), pp. 45–6.

51 In romanised Thai: '*phrabatsomdet phracaophaendin mi phra rat haruethai prasong ca thamnubamrung phraphutta satsana hai borisut/ mihai muamong pen monthin /lae hai rungrueang caroen pen prayot kae phraifa khaphaendin pen an mak*.' Proclamation No. 151, in 'Collected Proclamations'.

52 Catholic missionaries had settled at Ayutthaya in the 16th century: first, two Roman Catholics, followed by Jesuits and Franciscans. In the 17th century, the Société des Missions-Étrangères de Paris started sending the first French missionaries. After a coup against King Narai in Siam in 1688, Catholics were persecuted and missionaries imprisoned, but they were not expelled, so the French missionaries who returned in the 19th century could build on an important base. The most prominent French Catholic missionary in 19th century Siam was Bishop Pallegoix, who arrived in Bangkok in 1830. See: Thornely, *The history of a transition*, p. 31; Thanet Aphornsuvan, 'The West and Siam's

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Tomlin, arrived in Bangkok in 1828, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions instituted the first permanent Protestant mission in 1833.[53] The missions remained remarkably unsuccessful in their attempts to convert any Siamese to Christianity, but the evangelical encounter under conditions of imperialism was central to transforming traditional epistemic and political structures in Siam.[54] Already in the 1830s, the *Phraklang* (a royal official performing the role of a minister of foreign affairs) had explicitly expressed that Siam appreciated the presence of missionaries if they taught Western skills and were 'experienced botanists, chemists and genealogists and mineralogists',[55] and an increasing number of missionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century became active in a wide variety of areas, also growing closer to the ruling royal elite.[56] Thus it was missionaries who worked as teachers for the royal family and brought the first printing press using Thai type to Siam,[57] which was used to print the Three Seals Law, thereby transforming a sacred and secret text into a public 'source of applicable and practical law'.[58] Christian missions also preached Western medical practice and introduced ideas of public hygiene that were soon adopted by King Mongkut.[59] Crucially, the Protestant missionary Dan Beach Bradley began to use print technology to publish the first newspaper in Thai, the *Bangkok Recorder*, which contributed to cultivating a new epistemic space for publicly critiquing Buddhist tradition,[60] especially after extraterritoriality regulations in the unequal treaties protected foreigners from Siamese jurisdiction.[61]

It was in the context of such debates that the royal official who had negotiated a number of unequal treaties as a minister of foreign affairs, Chaophaya Thipakorawong

quest for modernity: Siamese responses to nineteenth century American missionaries', *South East Asia Research* 17, 3 (2009): 401–31; Michael Winship, 'Early Thai printing: The beginning to 1851', *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, 1 (1986): 45–61.

53 While the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions withdrew in 1850, three American Protestant organisations became active in Siam: the American Baptist Missionary Union, the American Presbyterian Mission, and the American Missionary Association, which was supported by the Congregationalists. See Walter F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III. 1825–1851* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1957), pp. 35–6.

54 See Talal Asad, 'Comments on conversion', in *Conversion to modernities: The globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter van der Veer (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 263–73.

55 Cited in Vella, *Siam under Rama III*, p. 36.

56 To illustrate, in 1851, the missionaries were personally invited to attend the inauguration of King Mongkut.

57 Winship, 'Early Thai printing'.

58 Loos, *Subject Siam*, p. 40.

59 Davisakd Puaksom, 'Of germs, public hygiene, and the healthy body: The making of the medicalizing state in Thailand', *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, 2 (2007): 311–44.

60 Bradley also documents these intentions in his diary, where he writes, for instance, how he published an article in the *Bangkok Recorder* to 'expose the falsehood of Buddhism and the great excellency of the Christian religion as contrasted with it'. Cited in Moffat, *Mongkut, the King of Siam*, p. 157.

61 Thanapol Limapichart, 'The emergence of the Siamese public sphere: Colonial modernity, print culture and the practice of criticism (1860s–1910s)', *South East Asia Research* 17, 3 (2009): 374. After the signing of the Harris Treaty with the United States, American missionaries even served as assessors or judges on the boards of the extrajudicial courts. The US government often used missionaries such as the Presbyterian Stephen Mattoon to act as their formal diplomats in Siam. Eva M. Pascal and Paul W. Chambers, 'Oblique intervention: The role of US missionaries in Siam's incorporation of Lanna 1867–1878', *Journal of World Christianity* 2, 1 (2008): 36–8.

(1813–70), began preparations for the *Kitchanukit*, which was eventually published in 1867 in a first edition of 200 copies and printed on a press that Thipakorawong had to assemble himself — the missionaries had refused the use of their presses on the grounds that the *Kitchanukit* contained negative remarks on Christianity.[62] Thipakorawong, originally Kham Bunnag, was a member of the powerful Bunnag family and had occupied a number of posts in the official royal administration before being appointed by King Mongkut, a close friend of many years, as the minister of the royal treasury and foreign affairs (*Phrakhlang*) in 1865. After falling sick and retiring from public office in 1867, Thipakorawong worked as an author of major works on Siamese history and tradition and was later commissioned by King Chulalongkorn to write the chronicles of the first four reigns of the Chakri dynasty.[63] The *Kitchanukit*, perhaps his most famous work, became the first book in Thai that was written and printed by a Siamese, and was widely read and celebrated in a number of Western countries, including England and Germany, in a version translated and published by Henry Alabaster under the title *The modern Buddhist* in 1870.[64]

Some scholars, however, have speculated that King Mongkut authored parts of the *Kitchanukit* himself, because it resonates with opinions voiced by the King in the *Bangkok Recorder*, and expresses the goals of a movement that the King himself had initiated: the *Thammayut-nikai*. Mongkut, who had spent the first half of his life as a monk (1824–51), had studied Pali Buddhist scriptures. Dismissing the lax practices of Siamese monks, he founded a new Buddhist sect (*nikai*) after he became the abbot of Wat Bonoriwet in Bangkok. He named the sect *Thammayut* —'those adhering to the Dhamma', contrasting it with the *Mahanikai*, to whom the majority of monks belonged, as 'the order of long-standing habit'. Furthermore, he framed the *Thammayut* as a mindful and spiritual movement in opposition to the *Mahanikai,* supposedly characterised by material attachment, and explained in a letter to Sinhalese monks that 'only the *Thammayutnikaya* examines the Pali texts directly, ignoring the encrustations of habit and commentary interjected by Buddhist clerics according to their own lights'.[65] Probably revealing the importance of the missionary encounter, Mongkut's reform movement, which would become of great importance regionally and the model for Siam's national 'religion', in its title and direction echoes both the Orientalist fascination for scriptural origins and Protestant claims to the truth of the religious word.[66]

Besides expressing a similar discourse of the truth of Pali sources, the *Kitchanukit* also discloses its connection to the missionary encounter through its very format, which resembles a Christian catechism: it explicitly addresses young children, and starts each section with an indirect question, such as: 'If you ask how many days

62 Somjai Phirotthirarach, 'The historical writings of Chao Phraya Thipakorawong' (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1983), p. 63.

63 For a detailed account of Thipakorawong's life, see ibid., pp. 30–80.

64 Henry Alabaster, *The modern Buddhist: Being the views of a Siamese minister of state on his own and other religions* (London: Trübner, 1870). Sections of the *Kitchanukit* are also included in: Henry Alabaster, *The wheel of the law: Buddhism, illustrated from Siamese sources by the modern Buddhist, a life of Buddha, and an account of the Phrabat* (London: Trübner, 1871).

65 Cited in Reynolds, 'Buddhist monkhood', p. 95.

66 Webb Keane, *Christian moderns: Freedom and fetish in the mission encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 'Introduction', pp. 1–36.

there are, I will reply that …'. However, while catechisms typically cover mainly questions of Christian faith,[67] the *Kitchanukit* discusses a huge variety of subjects: it starts with the reckoning of time, explains different seasons and the weather, touches upon the causes for different diseases, elaborates on the formation of mountains and the constitution of the universe, and, in the second and largest part of the book, treats and compares different 'religions'. Besides various versions of the Bible, catechisms were the most important print product that different missionary societies distributed to gain converts in Siam; catechisms were also used in mission schools to teach *Thaiklang* — a language then spoken only by the nobility in the Siamese capital, which later became the national standard for Thai.[68] As the Presbyterian missionary Daniel McGilvary (stationed in Siam from 1858 until his death in 1911) reported: 'Some of our first Christians were attracted to our religion by their desire to learn Siamese; and the Siamese bible and catechism were our textbooks.'[69]

It is this idea of catechism-as-textbook, used for educating children, that Chaophaya Thipakorawong seems to follow in his preface to the *Kitchanukit*. He starts off by explaining that he has written this book for 'children who are interested in exploring various things', and goes on to criticise their low capacity for concentration that stems from the faulty education they receive — either in temples, or from their relatives, or from different books, including Buddhist chanting books. 'I think that the books these children read do not have any use for these children', Chaophaya explains, because they do not teach any useful knowledge besides having the children learn basic language skills.[70] Read in the Siamese context of the nineteenth century, this preface constitutes a direct attack on the Buddhist tradition. In Siam, until the beginning of the twentieth century, monks were responsible for the education of young men: young boys received a basic education at Buddhist temples, mainly in speaking and writing Thai, from the age of around seven; if they decided to be ordained as novices a few years later, they were also instructed in other subjects, including astronomy, mathematics and Pali.[71] Although Thipakorawong does not further define what exactly he means by 'use' (*prayot*), his very idea that Buddhist practices such as chanting are unprofitable indicates a secular understanding of education to which the construction of mission schools in Siam had probably contributed.[72] The

67 See the entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica, where 'catechism' is defined as 'a manual of religious instruction usually arranged in the form of questions and answers used to instruct the young, to win converts, and to testify to the faith.' https://www.britannica.com/topic/catechism (accessed 19 Nov. 2019).
68 William A. Smalley, 'Early Protestant missionaries and the development of Thailand's hierarchy of multilingualism', in *Southeast Asian linguistics studies in honor of Vichin Panupong*, ed. A.S. Abramson (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1997).
69 McGilvary, *A half century among the Siamese*, p. 224.
70 Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, pp. 1–2.
71 Ishii, *Sangha, state, and society*, pp. 24–6.
72 The first small mission schools in Bangkok were already founded in the late 1840s, and by the end of the 19th century, mission schools could be found all over the country. See Smalley, 'Early Protestant missionaries'. A secular system of state education was initiated only in 1875, when Chulalongkorn issued a proclamation 'extending the Royal Patronage to secular, Thai schools in the Royal Monasteries …, offering the monks free printed Government textbooks …, salaries to lay teachers and increased alms to monk teachers.' David K. Wyatt, 'Samuel McFarland and early educational modernization in Thailand, 1877–1895', in *Felicitation volumes of Southeast-Asian Studies presented to His Highness Prince Dhaninivat Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn*, ed. Siam Society (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1965), pp. 1–2.

preface thus sets the tone for Thipakorawong's framing of Buddhism as a form of knowledge isolated from traditional Buddhist practice.

Buddhism's universality and Islam's miracles

In another key sentence in the preface, Thipakorawong promises to present answers to different questions by following, as he puts it, 'the pathway of the world [*lok*], and that of religion [*satsana*]'. In setting up this binary, the *Kitchanukit* seems to directly reproduce the opposition between religious and worldly matters that centrally characterises the epistemic order of the secular. This split slowly, if accidentally, gave rise to an epistemological concept of the 'real' that became the primary realm of historiography and science, and was constructed as opposed to the realm of 'religious belief'.[73] Read in the context of the Theravada Buddhist tradition, however, Thipakorawong's differentiation between 'world' and 'religion' as two different pathways rather resonates with the opposition between the Pali notions of *lokiya* and *lokuttara*. In many works in Buddhist and Southeast Asian studies, these two terms have been interpreted as expressing a dichotomy between 'secular' or 'this-worldly' versus 'sacred' or 'other-worldly', and have been applied to differentiate the world-renouncing path of the monk from the this-worldly path of the laypeople.[74] Yet, quite problematically, this translation and interpretation of *lokiya* and *lokuttara* itself discloses a secular framework. In a more careful analysis of the terminology, by contrast, *loka*, the noun on which the adjective *lokiya* is based, 'means "this world" but also includes other realms of existence in the whirl of *samsara*',[75] the endless cycle of Buddhist rebirth, such as different heavens and hells. *Lokiya* might thus rather be translated as a 'customary mode' of traditional practice that contrasts with a mode of existence that has already gone beyond (*uttara*) this cycle— *lokuttara*.[76] With both terms part of the same cosmology, *lokiya* describes a conditioned attachment to this world that has been left behind by those present in *lokuttara*.[77]

The secularising move that the *Kitchanukit* performs against the background of this traditional grammar is subtle but key: it replaces *lokiya* and *lokuttara* with *lok* and *satsana*, and thereby suggests that the two pathways are no longer part of the Buddhist tradition. Instead, the tradition is transformed into an objectified (Buddhist) 'religion' that operates within a secular 'world'. In addition, Thipakorawong introduces *lok* and *satsana* as two different ways of knowing the truth and promises that he will 'answer questions' and 'solve problems' in both regards — radically contrasting with the two

73 Asad, *Formations of the secular,* pp. 42–3.

74 See, for instance: Steven Collins, *Self and society: Essays on Pali literature and social theory 1988–2010* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2013), pp. 190–91; Tambiah, *World conqueror and world renouncer*; Monica Lindberg Falk, *Making fields of merit: Buddhist female ascetics and gendered orders in Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007).

75 John Ross Carter, 'Traditional definitions of the term "dhamma"', *Philosophy East and West* 26, 3 (1976): 336, n.7.

76 John Ross Carter suggests distinguishing the 'customary mode' (*lokiya*) from a 'transcendental mode' (*lokuttara*) — the latter term, however, carries strong Christian connotations. John Ross Carter, 'The notion of "refuge" (sarana) in the Theravada Buddhist tradition', in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism: A memorial volume in honor of Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap*, ed. A.K. Narain (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp., 1979).

77 John Clifford Holt, *Buddha in the crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 22–3.

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different modes of practice and existence defined by *lokiya/lokuttara*. Further underlining his understanding of *lok* and *satsana* as two different forms of truth, Thipakorawong's preface directly refers to the positivist notion of verifiable knowledge and attaches normative weight to it. 'I have pulled out those issues with evidence [*phayan*] and cut out those that have no evidence and that we cannot see for real', he writes, asking his readers to help with corrections in case they find mistakes.[78]

In a well-known passage about rainfall, the *Kitchanukit* prominently deploys this positivistic notion of 'evidence' to question the veracity of the Siamese three-worlds cosmography — a cosmography that is based on Pali Buddhist sources, dates back to the beginning of the Siamese empire in the fourteenth century, and in a revised version until well into the nineteenth century constituted one of the central textbooks in Siam's Buddhist tradition.[79] Thipakorawong first recounts the different explanations for rainfall offered in the three-worlds cosmography before challenging their correctness. For instance, rain in the cosmography is supposedly caused when 'the wind carries the water away from the Anodad pool in the Himapan forest'. However, 'the Himapan forest is believed to be in the northern region, … but the rain comes from all [cardinal] directions'.[80]

The *Kitchanukit* moves on to compare these 'unproven stories' with a number of beliefs in different 'religions'. Starting with Chinese beliefs in different gods, it ends on challenging monotheistic beliefs in God the Creator. If there really was one merciful God who created the world, why does he not make rain fall equally everywhere? The *Kitchanukit* offers a more rational alternative here, which is to 'follow the wise ideas of philosophers who have some proof of their theories'; they have shown that rain is caused by distillation, and evidence for this theory is provided by ponds drying up in the heat of the sun.[81] Albeit not stated explicitly in this passage, the *Kitchanukit* implies, of course, that such ideas are compatible with the version of Buddhism that it supports.

This narrative echoes Orientalist ideas of Buddhism as a universal philosophy.[82] For instance, the German Adolf Bastian, who on his travels to Siam had been received by Thipakorawong himself,[83] and would later become the founder of ethnography in Germany, characterised Buddhism as a 'religious-philosophical system', which allowed for 'explaining the causal connections of the real' while maintaining a 'consistent world view without any discrepancy between belief and knowledge that has led in other contexts to a double-entry-bookkeeping'.[84] Likewise, in the *Kitchanukit*, Buddhism does not remain a mere 'religion', but transcends this status to make important contributions to debates in the worldly sciences: in Thipakorawong's own secular framing of the two pathways of *satsana* and *lok*, Buddhism speaks to both.

78 Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, p. 2.
79 Reynolds, 'Buddhist cosmography in Thai history'.
80 Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, p. 21.
81 Ibid., p. 22.
82 Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions*, p. 130; Sven Bretfeld and Helmut Zander, 'Henry Steel Olcott: The Buddhist catechism (India, 1881/1908)', in Bentlage et al., *Religious dynamics under the impact of imperialism and colonialism*, p. 475.
83 Adolf Bastian, *Reisen in Siam im Jahre 1867* (Jena: Hermann Constenoble, 1867), p. 73.
84 Adolf Bastian, *Der Buddhismus als religions-philosophisches System (Vortrag)* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1893), p. 6.

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In another passage, for example, the *Kitchanukit* highlights how the Buddha — as 'the scholar of the universe', and 'the enlightened in the world' — 'already knew the truth and saw the truth' about the world going in circles, whereas the villagers back then still believed 'that the world was flat with the mountain of the God Meru'.[85] Thipakorawong later adds: 'Anyone who thinks that the earth is flat believes in some kind of creator. Anyone convinced of a round-shaped globe is in line with those statements that the Lord Buddha made regularly.'[86]

Clearly, here, Thipakorawong's construction of the Buddhist secular entails two movements. First, and similar to the epistemic process of secularisation that David Scott has observed for nineteenth-century Sri Lanka, the Buddhist tradition has become a 'religion', a reified entity 'now available for consideration "from the outside" as it were, now open to rational investigation. And in consequence one could now speak not only of "religion" but of "religions," that plurality or series of similarly objectified systems of doctrine each with its own distinctive claim to propositional truth.'[87] Second, however, Buddhism in the *Kitchanukit* transcends its status as a mere 'religion' and becomes a modern philosophy offering rational explanations in the natural sciences. This second move of claiming unique and universal religious truth in the secular world — of claiming the ability to disenchant itself — is usually attributed to Christianity.[88] The *Kitchanukit*, however, appropriates this move to secure Buddhism the place at the apex of the comparative frame of 'world religions' that missionaries had hitherto reserved for Christianity.[89]

The miracles of Islam

Buddhism's universality is further underscored in the *Kitchanukit* by representing Other traditions such as Islam as mere 'religions'. In fact, to gather information about Islam, Thipakorawong had possibly interviewed an *imam* (head of a mosque) from the south of the kingdom about the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, and compiled his notes in a manuscript titled *Prawat Ruang Phra Nabimahamad* (History of the Prophet Muhammad) before writing the *Kitchanukit*.[90] In his account on the history of 'religions', Thipakorawong first describes different Muslim beliefs, before performing as a rational Buddhist critic:

> I think that this story is questionable, and I have asked the *khaek*[91] [Muslims] about how Noah could have been building such a big boat for one hundred years. Wouldn't the boat

85 Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, p. 99.
86 Ibid., p. 104.
87 Scott, 'Religion in colonial civil society', p. 68.
88 Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions*; Gil Anidjar, 'Secularism', *Critical Inquiry* 33, 1 (2006): 52–77.
89 Winichakul, 'Buddhist apologetics'.
90 Somjai, 'The historical writings of Chao Phraya Thipakorawong', pp. 98–101. Somjai attributes this manuscript to Thipakorawong, but the attribution is uncertain. I have not been able to locate the manuscript in the Thai National Archives.
91 Thipakorawong uses the word *khaek* to refer more generally to Muslims, and equates the *satsana khaek* to 'Islam'. Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, p. 86. For the etymology of *khaek*, see A.V.N. Diller, 'Islam and southern Thai ethnic reference', in *Politics of the Malay-speaking south: Vol. 1, historical and cultural studies*, ed. Andrew D.W. Forbes (Gaya: Centre for South East Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 153–67. I discuss the genealogy of the term in Streicher, *Uneasy military encounters*, chap. 3.

> have decayed? How much money did he have? How big was the boat really such that it was able to accommodate all these animals? And if the animals lived there for so many years, where did they get their food from? And if there were only pairs of animals and they ate each other, what happened to them in the end? How did Noah fight off the other people who would have wanted to board the boat once they saw the terrible flood?[92]

Similarly, in a discussion of the cause of fever and epidemics, the *Kitchanukit* outlines more Muslim mysteries:

> The *khaek* say that there are trees in heaven that bear the name of a person on each of their leaves. When the leaf falls the person named on it dies. Those people who live well, however, do not have to fear anything because their leaf does not fall.[93]

Significantly, in the framing of the *Kitchanukit*, the very legitimacy of Islam is grounded on such irrational beliefs. One long section of the book discusses the pre-history of Islam, generally, and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, specifically. According to Thipakorawong, Muhammad, who was born in the city of Mecca, introduced himself as God's messenger (*rasun lunlah*) and 'showed miracles to people. He reached out and seized the moon from the sky, put half of the moon in his sleeve, and then reattached it. People understood that this was how the full and the half-moon were created. So many people believed in this religion.'[94] In a biography of Prophet Muhammad that Prince Damrong Rajanubhab replicated in 1922 from older sources, possibly Thipakorawong's older biography, this story of the moon miracle is extended: the cutting of the moon occurs when the Prophet tries to gain more followers for his 'religion' and the ruler of Mecca gets suspicious and wants to test Muhammad's capabilities by asking him to cut the moon into halves. The ruler finally believes Muhammad when he additionally succeeds in turning a vegetable into a human being.[95]

What shines through in these passages of the *Kitchanukit* are two lines of thinking typical of Western Orientalist constructions of Islam: the representation of Muslim 'religion' as non-universal and irrational to the point of appearing 'ridiculous',[96] and the overt concentration on the Prophet as the founder and propagator of such wrong beliefs.[97] Echoing such ideas, Islam in the *Kitchanukit* is a 'religion' of mysteries and miracles, the beliefs of which were spread by the Prophet. Thus Thipakorawong frequently uses the notion *satsana mahamad* — Mahometanism — as a synonym for *satsana khaek*. Once again, this representation of Islam relies on a secular idea of 'religion' as a belief system based on propositions that can, or cannot, be verified. The point here is not only that such a framing enables Thipakorawong's ridiculing of Islam's mysterious beliefs vis-à-vis his claims to Buddhism as a universal philosophy; perhaps even more crucially, it reduces the tradition of Islam, with its

92 Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, p. 96.
93 Ibid., p. 51.
94 Ibid., p. 131.
95 Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, *Phrachum Phongsawadan Pak Ti 28 Rüang Phongsawadan Yuan Lae Brawath Phranabhi Mahammad* [Chronicle Collection Part 28 on the Chronicle of the Yuan and the history of the Prophet Muhammad] (Bangkok: n.p., 1922).
96 Masuzawa, *The invention of world religions*, p. 199.
97 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 63–8.

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own political and legal system, to a collection of wrong beliefs that can be traced back to a deceptive prophet. By extension, Muslims in the *Kitchanukit*'s rendering are not adherents of a specific tradition, but victims seduced into a system of wrong and irrational beliefs.

The violence of Islam and the tolerance of Buddhism

As a logical consequence of Islam's purported parochialism, and again resonant of Orientalist notions, the *Kitchanukit* explains the global spread of the *satsana khaek* by highlighting violent aggression. The Prophet, it elaborates, 'assigned two of his generals to be the leaders of the armies to conquer big and small cities in the Arab world and the land of Hindustan, including Java and Malayu'. They conquered 'cities and houses' and 'suppressed people and forced them to believe in their religion', killing everyone 'who did not believe' — except for children, who were sent to 'religious teachers'. It concludes that 'the religion is widespread until today'.[98] Similar remarks can be found throughout the text: 'There is a common saying that the *satsana mahamad* is respected widely because one hand holds a sword and the other one a notebook. People do not respect this religion because of the teaching'; expressing a localised version of this idea in a different section, Thipakorawong also refers to the *khaek* as holding on to a *kris*, the wavy dagger found throughout the Malay archipelago.[99]

In a particularly telling paragraph, the *Kitchanukit* contrasts the teachings of Muhammad with those of the Buddha:

> Mahomet also taught … that all other religions were the enemies of his religion, and that heaven could be attained by injuring the temples, idols, and anything held sacred by another religion. Should one believe in such teachings? Buddha did not teach that he alone should be venerated, nor did he, the just one, ever teach that it was right to condemn other religions.

And when refuting the accusation, voiced by a missionary, that Buddhism is not a truly universal 'world religion', Thipakorawong writes that the Buddha never claimed his 'religion' to be of the 'whole world' but rather indicated 'the path of truth'[100] — implying, of course, that the Buddha's truth is universal, and that, by nature of the universal truthfulness of his ideas, Buddha did not need a world-encompassing mission of proselytisation to spread his 'religion', nor did he require to condemn or discriminate against religious Others.

These elaborations intimate the political implications of the *Kitchanukit*'s comparison of 'world religions'. The power of Islam, a parochial 'religion' whose Prophet teaches the belief in mysteries, is based on violent conquest, while the power of Buddhism derives from providing the ability to access the ultimate universal truth, laying the grounds for a naturalised Buddhist peaceful tolerance. In 1861, King Mongkut had sent a letter to Pope Pius IX that spelled out similar ideas:

98 Thipakorawong, *Kitchanukit*, pp. 131–2.
99 Ibid., pp. 90, 92.
100 Ibid., pp. 109–11. See also translation in: Trakulhun, 'Chaophraya Thiphakorawong'.

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> Although numerous other faiths were professed all at variance with Buddhism, which was for the Capital the centre of unity and the object of veneration for all its kings, all such other faiths had always been tolerated and sustained, making it possible for those who professed them to continue in their own religious practices … Particularly speaking, no hostility to Christianity has ever been manifested here in this Kingdom as in the cases of the Emperor of China, the King of Annam and other heads of states. This tradition is considered to be well-founded by Siam and it breathes a spirit of happy tolerance among the people of the Kingdom.[101]

And in a still famous text, *The nature of government in Siam since antiquity* (1927), Prince Damrong Rajanubhab would later celebrate 'tolerance' as one of the quintessential characteristics of the 'Thai race'.[102]

Damrong's construction represents the next step following the secularisation of the Buddhist tradition into an objectified Buddhism: Buddhism here becomes a (positively) politicised identity and even naturalised characteristic of a racialised group of people, and can be contrasted to the (negatively) politicised identity of the *khaek*. Crucially, the idea of tolerance derives from a discourse of political liberalism and was ascribed to Buddhism as early as the seventeenth century, when travellers like Robert Knox attributed the toleration of different religious groups as an exemplary trait of Buddhism.[103] However, while liberal theorists like John Locke tasked the Christian secular state with the guarantee of religious toleration, the naturalisation of tolerance as a trait of Buddhism was to aid in legitimising its supremacy in the emerging legal architecture of the Siamese nation-state.

Conclusion

The *Kitchanukit*'s construction of Islam in terms of 'religious difference' became particularly politically salient when royal rulers began to ponder the incorporation of the Islamic sultanate into the emerging national territory of Siam at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas the integration of other tributaries such as the Lao states went hand-in-hand with an official demarcation of their population as Thai and Buddhist, the Patani population was seen as holding a 'different religion' and speaking a 'different language'; consequently, the royal government sent an envoy in 1896 to investigate their customs and support the Ministry of the Interior with designing an appropriate policy for governing the South. The envoy, concluding that the *khaek malayu* were living in 'semibarbaric states', advised the ministry to implement family law regulations modelled on the British colonial government of Muslims in Malaya.[104] These regulations were formally promulgated in 1901, and when, in 1902, Patani's sultan rebelled against the Siamese intrusion, Siam engineered a blockade of the Pattani River and imprisoned the *raja* before integrating the formerly independent principalities into its new administrative system.

101 Cited in Moffat, *Mongkut, the King of Siam*, p. 161.
102 Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, 'The nature of government in Siam since antiquity', in *History and politics: Reading book for a course on Thai civilization* (in Thai) (Bangkok: n.p. 1975[1927]), p. 6.
103 Abeysekara, 'Protestant Buddhism', p. 11.
104 Loos, *Subject Siam*, p. 81.

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A privatised idea of 'religion' is central to the system of family law:[105] while colonial governments often claimed that family law protected local 'religions', this legal system effectively reduced religious traditions such as the Islamic tradition to the private sphere and left matters of real politics in public administration to colonial powers. In Patani, as a consequence, local authorities, who had been stripped of their political functions and wide-ranging juridical powers in the traditional Islamic system, were left with legislating matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Through this legislation, which is still in force today, Islam in Patani was officially reduced to a mere 'religion', and political resistance to Siam's enforced annexation comfortably framed as 'religious violence'.

In parallel to finalising the encroachment on Patani, King Chulalongkorn in 1902 promulgated the first *Sangha Act*, through which Buddhist monks were forced to register with a specific monastery, had to undertake state examinations and were, as one of the most important royal reformers put it, no longer only 'subject to the ancient law contained in the Vinaya [Buddhist Book of Precepts]', but also had to 'subject themselves to the authority which derives from the specific and general law of the State'.[106] This increasing state regulation of the Buddhist monkhood went hand-in-hand with strengthening the hegemonic position of a normative form of Buddhism, also vis-à-vis Islam, most notably through the institution of kingship. When Thailand's first constitution was issued in 1932, for instance, the King — unlike the parliamentarians — did not have to swear an oath to it but had to promise to rule according to the principles of the *dhamma*, and the constitution redefined the King's position as the supreme supporter of the *satsana* by stipulating that the king was both a Buddhist and the patron of all religions in Siam, including Islam.[107] The king's status as the patron of Thai Muslims was further spelled out in the Royal Patronage of Islam Act of 1945, which instituted a model of governing the Muslim community that directly reproduced the state-led administration of the Buddhist monkhood.[108] The hierarchy implied in this construction of Buddhist patronage directly replicates the *Kitchanukit*'s construction of the Buddhist secular versus the parochial 'religion' of Islam: it transformed elements from the Buddhist tradition into a universal state law that incorporated all other religious communities as smaller, particular entities.

105 Asad, *Formations of the secular*, p. 228.
106 Cited in Justin Thomas McDaniel, *The lovelorn ghost and the magical monk: Practicing Buddhism in modern Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 101.
107 Eugénie Mérieau, 'Buddhist constitutionalism in Thailand: When rājadhammā supersedes the constitution', *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 13, 2 (2018): 283–305.
108 Yoneo Ishii, 'Thai Muslims and the royal patronage of religion', *Law & Society Review* 28, 3 (1994): 453–60.