

Comments on Katherine Bowie's Study of Khruba Srivichai

Eiji Murashima
Waseda University, Tokyo

ABSTRACT—Katherine Bowie argues that the conflict between Khruba Srivichai and the authorities arose in the mid-1910s over the issue of military conscription. I contend that she has ignored a key source showing that the conflict arose earlier over decoration of temples for a coronation ceremony. I also argue that Khruba Srivichai did not fully break away from the Sangha until the mid-1930s. Proper scrutiny of original documents is important for understanding this important historical figure.

In the paper published here and earlier work, Katherine Bowie argues that the conflict between Khruba Srivichai and officialdom arose for the first time with the promulgation of the 1913 Ordination Act and the enforcement of the Military Conscription Act in 1914; that Srivichai had no license to act as ordainer (*upachaya*) yet he ordained men as monks so that they might escape military service; and that after serving two years detention and being released around 1917, Srivichai was ordered to decorate the temple on the Coronation Day of 2 December 1918, but he disobeyed the order. Bowie has also argued that the Sangha Act of 1902 was not enforced in northern Thailand until 1924.

I argue that Bowie has missed some important sources, especially a Sangha Announcement of 1920, and hence has the sequence and several details wrong.¹

A letter in the *Bangkok Times* of 7 June 1920 reported that Srivichai had been summoned to Bangkok in mid-May 1920 due to oppression by the Sangha officials and secular authority in Phayab. After reading this report, Prince Vajiranana, the Supreme Patriarch, formed an investigation committee consisting of three senior monks. In the committee's report, dated 12 July 1920, the head of Lamphun provincial Sangha listed eight issues on which the local Sangha and secular authorities confronted Srivichai prior to 1920, as follows.²

¹ For a fuller account of these issues, see my article "Historical Facts Concerning the Interrogation of Khruba Srivichai in Bangkok in 1920," published in Japanese with a brief abstract in English in *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* (Waseda University) 42 (Oct. 2021): 21-37; and my paper on "Historical Facts Concerning the Interrogation of Khruba Srivichai in Bangkok in 1920" presented on 12 October 2022 at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University; available for download at <https://researchmap.jp/read0030405/misc/40552614>. The seminar can be viewed on the Facebook page of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Naresuan University at <https://www.facebook.com/socialscinu/videos/-1-i-v-e-/1268260300596916>.

² *Thalaengkan khana song* (Sangha Bulletin, แฉลลการณคณลลลล) 8, 5 (August 1920): 174-6.

1. Presiding as a preceptor to ordain villagers without the appointment letter of a preceptor.
2. Not under the command of the head of Li district Sangha, Phrakhru Maha Rattanakorn.
3. Secular authority called a meeting of local monks in Li District to remind them to know the regulations of the Sangha and the government. Monks of every temple went to the meeting except for Phra Srivichai who did not go.
4. The government called for all temples to light up and beat gongs and drums in the coronation ceremony (ในการพระราชพิธีบรมราชาภิเษก, rachaaphisek). All temples followed, but Phra Sriwichai did not do it.
5. The head of Li district Sangha supposed that all temples were against the rule of the Sangha because they imitated Phra Srivichai; therefore he asked the acting head of Lamphun provincial Sangha, Phra Sinwilas, to summon Phra Srivichai and reprimand him. However Phra Srivichai continued to behave as before.

For these five charges, the head of the Lamphun provincial Sangha punished Phra Srivichai with two years of house arrest according to the order of the representative of the northern Sangha chief superintendent.

6. The secular authority requested Phra Srivichai to provide resident statistics of the temple, but he refused and told them to make their own investigation if needed. The heads of the district and the provincial Sangha ordered him to do so, but he did not obey.
7. The head of Li district Sangha arranged a meeting of all abbots of the temples in his own district. The abbots of many temples imitated Phra Srivichai and did not attend the meeting.
8. There are rumors that Phra Srivichai has special virtues. For example, a sword with a golden sheath fell from the air onto his altar. He holds this sword. Such rumors are believed to have come from him, whether he boasted or were rumored by others. The public, upon learning of these rumors, worships him.

On these three charges, the head of the Lamphun provincial Sangha expelled Srivichai from Lamphun province by order of the representative of the northern Sangha chief superintendent and ordered him to leave within fifteen days. When he defied the order and did not leave, he was detained in custody. Prince Boworadej then obtained permission from the representative of the northern Sangha chief superintendent to send him to Bangkok.

In sum, five of the issues were noted to have arisen before Srivichai's two-year house arrest in Lamphun between 1915 and 1917. The investigation committee stated that Srivichai had admitted his fault and his punishment was already complete after two years of house arrest. Three of the issues arose after Srivichai was released from house arrest around 1917, stripped of his abbotship, and returned to his temple in Ban Pang.

Bowie argues that Srivichai's conflict with officialdom began in 1915, implying that

there was no conflict earlier. However, her dating of Srivichai's refusal to decorate his temple is wrong.

She placed the date when Srivichai was told to decorate his temple as the coronation anniversary (*chartmongkhon*) on 2 December 1918 or 1919, and has now revised that to 2 December 1918. However, point 4 of the Sangha Announcement shows that the two-year house arrest beginning in 1915 was in part punishment for this defiance. Besides, Srivichai was stripped of his post as abbot while under house arrest and hence had no management responsibility in 1918. The occasion when Srivichai refused to decorate the temple must have been earlier. King Rama VI held two coronation ceremonies, on 11 November 1910 and 2 December 1911, and a coronation anniversary ceremony on 11 November for the remainder of the reign,³ except in 1917 and 1918. It seems that in 1917 the ceremony could not be performed due to the great flood. The 1918 ceremony was held jointly with the King's birthday ceremony from the end of December 1918 to the beginning of 1919.⁴ Point 4 in the Announcement states that the occasion of Srivichai's defiance was a *rachaaphisek*, namely one of these ceremonies. The year of Srivichai's defiance would have been 1910 or 1911.

I argue that the conflict between Srivichai and officialdom thus began around this time in 1910 or 1911. I do not suggest that Srivichai was arrested at this time (as Bowie mistakenly implies), only that the conflict began.

I argue that Srivichai was arrested in 1915 under the Preceptor (Ordination) Act of 1913, that was promulgated on 9 August 1913.⁵ Prior to the enactment of the Preceptor (Ordination) Act of 1913, there was no legal basis for the house arrest of Srivichai. The Preceptor Act of 1913 contains the following provisions:

Clause 12. If a preceptor intentionally ordains a person who lacks the qualifications for ordination to the novice or bhikkhu, or does so outside of the authorized area, the following punishments shall be imposed: (a) temporary suspension from ordination; (b) revocation of the appointment letter of the preceptor; (c) punishment not contrary to the state laws; (d) temporary house arrest; and (e) temporary expulsion from the land where the offense occurred. One or more punishments are imposed depending on the severity of the offense.

Clause 13. The duration of the temporary punishment shall be until repentance, but shall not exceed two years.

Clause 15. If a monk who has not been appointed by the Sangha serves as a preceptor in an ordination, he shall be punished by one of the punishments listed in Clause 12(c), (d), (e).

Clause 18. The provisions of this Act shall be deemed to apply *mutatis mutandis* to the Sangha Administration Act of Ro. So. 121 [1902].

³ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, Vol.28, p.1767; Vol.29, p.1892; Vol.30, p.1946; Vol.31, p.1828; Vol.32, p.1885; Vol.33, p.2166; Vol.36, p.2394; Vol.37, p.2793; Vol.38, p.2462; Vol.39, p.2336; Vol.40, p.2615; Vol.41, p.2645; Vol.42, p.2541.

⁴ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, Vol.35, p.2827, 19 January 1919.

⁵ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, Vol. 30, pp. 196-200, 24 August 1913.

In the report of the investigation committee quoted above, the head of Lamphun provincial Sangha listed “Presiding as a preceptor to ordain villagers without the appointment letter of a preceptor” as the first of the five charges against Srivichai prior to his arrest in 1915. He was punished under Clause 15 and Clause 12(d) of the Preceptor Act by being placed under house arrest for two years, the maximum penalty set forth in Clause 13.

Bowie speculates that Srivichai’s conflict with the authorities began when he ordained men to escape military service following the enforcement of the Military Conscription Act in northern Thailand in April 1914, but she provides no evidence of such ordinations before his arrest in 1915. She cites the case of Khruba Pii, but that case occurred in 1924/5.⁶ The eight charges listed in the Sangha Announcement make no reference to ordinations for evading conscription.

Bowie argues that the Sangha Act of 1902 was not enforced in the northern provinces until 6 September 1924. While that is indeed the date of enforcement in the *Royal Thai Government Gazette*,⁷ there is evidence that the Act was partially enforced in northern Siam in the 1910s.

The Sangha Act which became law on 16 June 1902 laid down the procedures for appointing temple abbots, district Sangha heads, provincial Sangha heads, and Monthon Sangha heads, and specified their respective powers and duties. It is clear that the head of Li district Sangha, the head of Lamphun provincial Sangha and the representative of the northern Sangha were in place and functioning in the 1910s. Their positions must have been based on the 1902 Sangha Act.

Also, Clause 18 of the Preceptor Act of 1913 provides that: “The provisions of this Act shall be deemed to apply *mutatis mutandis* to the Sangha Act of 1902.” This clearly implies that the Sangha Act was in force, at least partially, when the Preceptor Act came into effect in northern Thailand on 9 August 1913.

On 15 June 1916, King Rama VI dismissed the head of the Lampang provincial Sangha on the grounds that he was going out and playing around town like a layman. At the same time, the king deprived him of the title of Phrakhru.⁸ The king was empowered to dismiss the provincial Sangha heads under Clause 30 of the Sangha Act of 1902. This again shows that the Sangha Act of 1902 was at least partially implemented in Monthon Phayab in the 1910s.

Bowie argues that Srivichai was summoned to Bangkok in 1935 to be investigated because he ordained hundreds of monks and novices without permission in violation of the Sangha Act. I suggest that his offence was a violation of the 1913 Preceptor Law. The Sangha Act of 1902 has no provision on preceptors.

The primary cause for Srivichai’s summons to Bangkok in 1935 was his attempt to break away from the existing Sangha. Until that time, Srivichai’s group worked within the Sangha. In 1933, Phrathamkosachan (Plot Kittisophano, 1889-1962), the head of

⁶ Theetat Jaejai, “Khruba Apichai-Khoapi’s Roles in the Propagation of Buddhism” [in Thai], *Warasan Panithan* 13, 2 (July-December 2017): 321-322.

⁷ *Royal Thai Government Gazette* Vol. 41 p. 74, 7 September 1924.

⁸ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, Vol. 33, pp. 767-768, 25 June 1916.

Monthon Phayab Sangha and one of the highest ranking figures in the Thai Sangha, made a report to the Ministry of Education detailing that Phra Srivichai of Wat Phra Singh had repaired, restored or rebuilt a total of twenty-seven temple buildings worth 165,697 rupees (approximately 133,000 baht) in five provinces of Monthon Phayab.⁹ Phrathamkosachan met Srivichai when visiting Chiang Mai in person to attend the cremation ceremony of Chao Dara Rasami, a princess consort of King Rama V, on 22 April 1934.¹⁰ At this time Srivichai was found to be working within the existing Sangha organization.

It was not until around April 1935 that his group of temples broke away from the Sangha and began to carry out ordinations. By late 1935, 90 of the 937 temples in Chiang Mai province had left the Sangha – almost a tenth of the total.¹¹ Possibly they were encouraged into this bold move by the great support that people gave to Srivichai for the construction of the Doi Suthep mountain road over November 1934 to April 1935.

On 1 November 1935, Srivichai was summoned from Chiang Mai to Bangkok. The main purpose was to suppress those temples and monks which had broken away from the Sangha while Srivichai was not in northern Thailand. This action took place under the direction of Phrathamkosachan and Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan (Charoen Yanawaro, 1872-1951), head of the Supreme Sangha Council. The basis for this suppression was the fundamental principle of the Thai state that since Thai Buddhism was the state religion under the patronage of the king, there must be a single Sangha.

At a cabinet meeting on 13 January 1930, King Rama VII made the following remarks regarding the cabinet decision of the forced disrobement of U. Sila, a Burmese monk at Wat Kulap, a Burmese temple in Bangkok, who refused to belong to the Thai Sangha.

It is our principle that people are free to choose their faith and perform their religious rites according to their own preferences. However, since Buddhism is a *State Religion* [spoken in English] with the power of government patronage and control, no Buddhist should do anything to diminish the *State Religion*. Any Buddhist monk who follows the *latthi hinayan* [Hinayana practice] and whose conduct differs from this principle is an undesirable person.¹²

King Rama VII used the vocabulary of “*latthi Hinayan*” in Thai and “State Religion” in English. The cabinet confirmed that the principle of freedom of religion did not apply to monks under Hinayana Buddhism, the state religion; there was a single Sangha and they could not be independent from it. This principle was maintained after a constitution was promulgated in 1932.

Bowie writes respectfully that Ajarn Singkha Waanasai was “a highly respected

⁹ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, Vol. 50, pp. 1267-1270, 6 August 1933.

¹⁰ *Srikrung Daily News*, 17 May 1934, National Archives of Thailand (NAT) So. Ro .0201.10/61 pp. 20-21.

¹¹ NAT So.Ro.0201.10/61 p. 44; *Thalaengkan Khana Song*, Vol. 23, *Phakphiset Chabap* 2 (20 October 1935): 34-37.

¹² NAT Ko.To.1/23, pp. 319-320.

northern scholar” and that “Ajarn Singkha’s biography¹³ was particularly influential for later scholarship because he had been a novice with Srivichai and had given the eulogy at Srivichai’s cremation.” Yet even this biography gives the date of Srivichai’s death incorrectly as 22 March 1939. The daily newspapers published in Bangkok at the time unanimously reported Srivichai’s date of death as 21 February 1939.¹⁴

The narrative in the latest and largest Srivichai study edited by Dr. Pensupa Sukkata in 2018¹⁵ is also questionable in many places where no sources are specified. It seems there is still much to be discovered about Srivichai. In a recent article, I used new information found in several Thai-language daily newspapers published in the 1930s.¹⁶ For future study of Khruba Srivichai, it is necessary to seek out as many primary documents as possible and make efforts to understand these primary documents accurately.

¹³ Singkha Waanasai, ed., *San Prawat Khruba Srivichai nakbun haeng Lanna Thai* (Biography of Khruba Srivichai, saint of Lanna Thai) (Chiang Mai: Sun Nangsu Chiang Mai, 1979).

¹⁴ See Murashima, “Historical Facts,” 36-37.

¹⁵ Pensupa Sukkata, ed., *Khruba Chao Srivichai* (Bangkok: Samakhom Chao Lamphun, 2018).

¹⁶ Eiji Murashima “Background, Process and End of Khruba Srivichai’s Second House Arrest in Bangkok (November 1935-May 1936): Thoroughness of the Central Sangha Elite’s Repressive Disposition of the Srivichai Faction,” in Japanese with English abstract, *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 45 (2022).