LEADING WITH A "NOBLE MISSION":

THE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP OF MAECHEE SANSANEE STHIRASUTA

A DISSERTATION
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to members of the Sathira Dhammasathan community.

Abstract

This case study describes the leadership of Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta, a dynamic Theravāda Buddhist nun and the founder and director of the Sathira Dhammasathan meditation center in Thailand. Her leadership characteristics, impact on her followers and contributions to Thai society were examined. Data was gathered through interviews with Maechee Sansanee, her colleagues and experts, direct and participant observations, and content analysis of documents and media between 2004 and 2009, including a total of six months of fieldwork.

Maechee Sansanee's leadership was described through four dimensions: moral leadership, servant leadership, aesthetic leadership, and social entrepreneurship. She exemplifies moral values that are taught by Buddhism and demonstrates moral behaviors as shown to others. She serves the Buddha and the community by following Buddhist teachings and making herself useful to others. She created numerous projects that improved people's lives using her social entrepreneurial spirit and aesthetic development. While *maechee*s generally have less social recognition and fewer resources than monks, they have more freedom from influence by the traditional *sangha* administration in pursuit of their activities, studies, and meditation.   Maechee Sansanee has emerged as an exceptional leader in Thailand and the *maechee* community by utilizing her leadership and entrepreneurial skills while realistically recognizing constraints and possibilities.

Abstract (Thai)

บทคัดย่อ

กรณีศึกษานี้อธิบายถึงภาวะผู้นำของแม่ชีศันสนีย์ เสถียรสุต ซึ่งเป็นแม่ชีผู้มี
ชื่อเสียงในพุทธศาสนานิกายเถรวาทและเป็นผู้ก่อตั้งสถานที่ปฏิบัติธรรมภาวนา เสถียร
ธรรมสถาน แห่งประเทศไทย ภาวะผู้นำของแม่ชี ผลกระทบที่มีต่อบรรดาสาวกทั้งหลาย
และผลที่มีต่อสังคมไทยได้ถูกนำมาศึกษาในที่นี้ ข้อมูลวิจัยได้รับจากการสัมภาษณ์แม่ชี
ศันสนีย์ ผู้ร่วมงานของแม่ชี และจากบรรดาผู้เชี่ยวชาญอื่นๆ ทั้งจากการสังเกตการณ์
ทางตรงและแบบมีส่วนร่วม จากบริบทวิเคราะห์จากเอกสารที่เกี่ยวข้อง และจากสื่อต่างๆ
ในช่วงเวลาระหว่างปี 2004 ถึง 2009 และรวมถึงจากการศึกษาภาคสนามเป็นเวลาทั้งสิ้น
หกเดือน

ภาวะผู้นำของแม่ชีศันสนีย์ ได้ถูกอธิบายใน 4 ด้าน คือ ภาวะผู้นำด้านจริยธรรม
ด้านผู้รับใช้สังคม ด้านสุนทรียศาสตร์ และด้านผู้ประกอบการทางสังคม แม่ชีได้แสดงให้
เห็นถึงคุณค่าทางจริยธรรมที่ท่านได้รับจากการสั่งสอนอบรมในพระพุทธศาสนา และ
แสดงออกถึงพฤติกรรมที่เปี่ยมไปด้วยจริยธรรมต่อผู้อื่น แม่ชีได้รับใช้พระพุทธเจ้า และ
ประชาชนในสังคมโดยการปฏิบัติตามคำสอนของพระศาสดา และโดยการทำตัวให้เป็น
ประโยชน์ต่อบุคคลทั่วไป แม่ชีได้ริเริ่มสรรค์สร้างโครงการต่างๆมากมายที่เป็นประโยชน์
ต่อชีวิตมนุษย์ โดยการใช้จิตวิญญาณของการเป็นผู้ประกอบการทางสังคม และ การพัฒนา
ในด้านสุนทรียศาสตร์ของท่าน โดยทั่วไปแล้ว ในขณะที่ *แม่ชี* มักจะได้รับการยอมรับและ
ได้รับทรัพย์สิ่งของต่างๆน้อยกว่าพระภิกษุสงฆ์ *แม่ชี*กลับมีอิสระจากการควบคุมดูแลของ
เถรสมาคมที่เคร่งครัด ในการดำเนินกิจกรรมต่างๆ ในการใฝ่หาความรู้ และการปฏิบัติ
วิปัสนา แม่ชีศันสนีย์ โดดเด่นขึ้นมาในฐานะของแม่ชีที่มีภาวะผู้นำที่พิเศษในประเทศไทย
และในสังคมของแม่ชีด้วยกันเอง จากการใช้ภาวะผู้นำของท่าน และการใช้ทักษะในการ
เป็นผู้ประกอบการทางสังคมในขณะที่ก็สามารถพิจารณาตามความเป็นจริงถึงอุปสรรค
และความเป็นไปได้ต่างๆในการดำเนินการ

Abstract (Japanese)

<div align="center">要　約</div>

　本研究は、テーラワーダ仏教の尼僧、メーチー・サンサニー・サティラスタのダイナミックなリーダーシップを描写したケーススタディである。メーチー・サンサニーはタイのサティラタンマ修道院瞑想センターの創始者で現在も代表を務める女性である。本研究では、彼女のリーダーシップの性質、追従者（フォロワー）への影響、そしてタイ社会への影響を調査した。データの収集は、リーダー本人、フォロワー、外部の専門家への聞き取り調査、直接および間接的観察、文献および映像資料からおこなった。２００４年から２００９年までのデータ収集期間のうち、合計６ヶ月間は、現地でおこなったフィールドワークであった。

　メーチー・サンサニーのリーダーシップは、道徳的リーダーシップ、サーヴァントリーダーシップ、美的リーダーシップ、社会的起業活動の４つの次元から描写される。彼女はブッダが教えた道徳的観念を体現し、他者に道徳的行動を実演してみせる。社会的起業家精神を生かし、美的側面を強調した多数のプロジェクトを考案実践することで、多くの人々の生活を改善している。タイのメーチーは一般的に、僧侶より低い社会的認識を受け、より少ない資源で活動せざるをえない状況である一方で、伝統的な寺院組織サンガ（僧伽）の管理下に入らないために独自の慈善活動、学問や瞑想の訓練を追及できるより多くの自由を得ているともいえる。本研究はメーチー・サンサニーが、さまざまな制約と可能性を現実的に認識しながら、リーダーおよび起業家としての能力を生かすことによってタイ社会とメーチー共同体の例外的なリーダーとして浮かび上がったと結論づけた。

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Glossary

Term	Definition
baht	Thai unit of currency
bhikkhu	Male Buddhist monk
bhikkhuni	Female Buddhist monk
bun khun	Attitude and value of reciprocal obligation, especially to those who have offered one assistance such as parents, teachers, monks and doctors
dhamma or dharma	The teachings of the Buddha. Buddhist view of the nature of things,
isara	Freedom
kamma	Intentional or volitional actions which bring about moral consequences for the performer.
maechee	Term used for white-robed Buddhist nuns in Thailand
metta	Loving kindness
nibbana	Permanent extinction of suffering. Release from the cycle of rebirth.
panna	Wisdom, understanding, knowledge
saalaa	Hall, pavilion, preaching hall
sangha	The monastic order
tham bun	To perform meritorious deeds

(Haas, 1964; Falk, 2007)

Chapter One:Problem Statement

"A small ego leads to big accomplishments." (Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta, personal communication, March 4, 2008)

Introduction

In the first decade of the 2000s, several extraordinary women rose to political leadership. In 2010, Julia Gillard became the first female Prime Minister of Australia. In Finland, Mari Kiviniemi, as Prime Minister, joined another outstanding Finnish woman, Tarja Halonen, who had been the nation's President since 2000. In Costa Rica, Laura Chinchilla Miranda became the first female President of Costa Rica. Chandrika Kumaratunga was the fifth president of Sri Lanka from 1994 to 2005.

Despite the political achievements of these women, women's general involvement in leadership is much lower than that of men. The statistics regarding women in important political and business positions exemplify typical patterns of women's less active roles in leadership. For example, in the United States in 2008, women held 42.8 percent of leadership positions such as legislators, senior officials, and managers, which represents less than half of those positions. In Asia, Thai women held only 23.8 percent of such positions and Japanese women only 9.2 percent (International Labour Organization, n.d.).   In the *Fortune* 1000 companies, the largest thousand companies in the United States as ranked by their revenues, only 29 had female CEOs in 2010 (Catalyst, 2010).

The disproportionately small numbers of women in influential positions is addressed in the 2008 Global Gender Gap Index (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2008). This index shows the magnitude and scope of various kinds of gender inequalities in the world. While it acknowledges that gender inequalities manifest themselves differently in different societies, the report "benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education- and health-based criteria, and provides country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups" (p.3). In general terms, the United States ranked 27th out of 130 countries, while Thailand and Japan ranked 52nd and 98th, respectively, on the Gender Gap Index.

Indexes on economic participation and opportunity along with political empowerment are particularly salient in the discussion of women's representation in leadership positions. For example, in economic participation and opportunity, the United States ranked 12, Thailand 25 and Japan 102 out of 130 countries. This suggests that women have less access to important positions in businesses and trades than men in these countries; particularly in Japan, women have significant difficulties being taken seriously in these areas compared to women in the United States and Thailand.

In the political empowerment index that monitors the number of women in parliaments and ministerial positions along with female heads of state, the United States ranked 56th, Thailand rated 104th and Japan 107th. This suggests that women in all these countries are not adequately represented in the political arena but those in Thailand and Japan have particularly significant difficulties ascending to political leadership positions.

In Thailand, the location of the current study, the gender difference also manifests in the area of Buddhism, its national religion. In this rapidly developing nation in Southeast Asia where 64.6 million people reside, 95% of them identify themselves as Buddhists of the Theravada tradition ("Royal Thai Embassy, Washington," n.d.). Within the Thai Buddhist *sangha*, the official religious institution, monks hold the highest status. Since only males are allowed to enter monasteries to become monks, women who want to practice Buddhism either practice as ordinary householders or become *maechee*s, shaved women in white robes. Thus, in Thai Buddhism, women are never able to ascend to the highest positions of authority.

Purpose of the Study

The current study examines the leadership of a Thai *maechee* who emerged as a leader despite the general environment in Thailand which holds leadership challenges for women in political and religious realms. Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta is the founder and director of the Sathira Dhammasathan Center, a meditation retreat center located in Bangkok, the capitol city of Thailand. Since the founding of her meditation center in 1987, she has undertaken numerous outstanding community service projects to assist families, children, and youth. She is well known in the country through her appearances on TV and radio shows in which she teaches *dharma*, the Buddhist teaching, to a wide audience. She has also been an active participant in the peace dialogues of interfaith communities outside of Thailand.

What kind of leader is she? What has made her a leader? What are the societal, historical, and personal backgrounds behind her success story? The purpose of this case study is to explain the emergence of Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta as a leader in promoting alternative paths for education and development in Thai society.

Research Questions

The current study explained Maechee Sansanee's leadership based on three broad research questions. These questions embraced different levels of inquiry around a leader: the individual, the community, and the larger society. The first research question was: What are Maechee Sansanee's characteristics as a leader? Answers to this question included her personal traits, skills, and individual viewpoints about leadership. This question was answered by analyzing data from multiple sources of information, including individual interviews with Maechee Sansanee, her followers and outside experts, participant and direct observations, and document and record review.

The second research question was: What is her impact on her followers? This question was formulated based on an assumption that a person is a leader when others recognize her as one (Ciulla, 2004). This question was answered by information obtained through interviews with the followers. The last research question was: What is her larger impact on Thai society? Answers to this question included but were not limited to her engagement with Thai society, leadership challenges that she has faced, and her response to them. A synthesis of interviews, observations, and document and record reviews generated answers to this research question.

Contribution of Study

The current study contributes to knowledge bases in three areas: (1) women in leadership, (2) women in Thai Buddhism, and (3) leadership theory.

First, this chapter started with a general problem statement that fewer women than men are in leadership positions in the world. From the gender equality and human resource perspectives, women should be encouraged to take leadership roles and be provided opportunities and resources to become effective leaders. The current study provides an example of an outstanding woman who rose to leadership despite an environment which often does not encourage women to become leaders despite their potentials.

Second, the current study focuses on a unique case of the leadership of a Thai *maechee*. *Maechees* do not receive as much attention as monks and therefore, not much has been written about them in English. Several authors (Falk, 2002; Litalien, 2001; Tsomo, 2004) have written about Maechee Sansanee as part of comparative case studies of Thai Buddhist women in different scopes; however, little scholarly work has been produced that describes Maechee Sansanee in depth. Parichart (2004) wrote a case study about Maechee Sansanee in Thai but it has not been published in English. Therefore, the present study contributes to the relatively sparse knowledge base on *maechees,* especially in English.

Finally, many conventional leadership theories and approaches have provided important conceptual frameworks for this study. The literature guided this study from

the formulation of the research questions, through data collection procedures, to data analysis. Of particular importance in the current study was the application of this Western-originated leadership literature to a non-Western context. The current study provides useful applications of both established and emerging leadership approaches to dynamic cross-cultural analysis of leadership.

Overview of the Remainder of the Study

This study's results are shared as follows. Chapter two reviews leadership theories and approaches in the current literature. Chapter three presents the context of this study in terms of society, politics, economics, religion and gender relations. Chapter four presents the research design and methodology used in this study. Chapter five discusses findings based on the research questions. Chapter six presents discussions and conclusions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier,
wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?"
(Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27)

In the first half of this chapter, theoretical frameworks of leadership and related fields are reviewed. Specifically, the review starts with a section that presents leadership theories that focus on leaders themselves: traits, skills, and styles. This section is followed by a review that introduces approaches focusing on relationships between the leader and the followers; these include the situational approach, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, and servant leadership.

The second half of the literature review presents studies that examine leadership from a variety of perspectives noted by academics. This section provides an overview of leadership theories that developed in response to a variety of societal needs. First, the current situation in literature related to women and leadership is reviewed. Second, leadership theories from cross-cultural perspectives are presented. Third, the current literature in leadership and ethics is reviewed. Fourth, Buddhist leadership is introduced as it provides pertinent background information for this study. Finally, an emerging theory of social entrepreneurship is presented.

Leadership Theory

Leader-Focused Approaches

Trait Approach

Historically, people have believed that leaders possess some special characteristics that differentiate them from ordinary people. A 19th century historian and philosopher, Thomas Carlyle (1907), commented, "[T]he history of the world was the biography of great men" (p.18), and this contributed the rise of the trait approach in leadership studies. Early leadership researchers examined leaders who had gained great respect and then determined the psychological traits that characterized them. For example, Stogdill (1974) identified 10 characteristics that were positively associated with leadership. They included: achievement, persistence, insight, initiative, self-confidence, responsibility, cooperativeness, tolerance, influence, and sociability. Northouse (2007) reviewed studies that examined the personal traits of leaders and summarized their results in five major traits: intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability.

Recent studies also suggest a close association between leadership traits and personality. Judge, et al. (2002) wrote that extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness are positively related to effective leadership. Emotional intelligence is another relatively new construct that researchers now relate to effective leadership. According to this theory, effective leaders have abilities to perceive,

express, and manage emotions within themselves and when interacting with others (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000)

The trait approach is criticized for suggesting that only a person with the prescribed characteristics can be a leader. Therefore, it may present a barrier for a person without those characteristics to become a leader. Despite such criticism, the trait approach continues to be dominant in many organizational activities such as hiring, evaluation, and training settings because of its prescriptive abilities.

Skills Approach

While the trait approach assumes that a leader is born to be a leader, the skills approach assumes that leadership abilities can be developed through training and experience. Robert Katz, an early proponent of the skills approach, suggested that effective administrators/leaders need three different kinds of skills, i.e., technical, human, and conceptual, depending on their position in an organization (Katz, 1955). According to this theory, technical skills are essential for leaders in lower and middle management positions, and conceptual skills are essential for those in top and middle positions. Human skills are important for all levels but more so with top and middle management.

More recently, Mumford, et al. (2000) suggested three components that are essential to effective leadership outcomes. These components include problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, and knowledge. They, along with other factors such as

the leader's individual attributes, career experiences and environmental influences, allow leaders to solve problems and perform effectively.

Style Approach

The style approach is a framework for assessing a leader's behavior from two dimensions: task and relationship. This approach has found favor in the leadership research field as a way to broaden the scope of leadership studies. While the traits and skills approaches focus on a leader's characteristics and capabilities, this approach was recognized as an alternative paradigm in investigating leadership since it addressed how leaders act. It assumes that effective leaders balance task and relationship dimensions in their behavior.

Several seminal studies have validated the style approach as useful to understanding the leadership process. However, each study defined the task and relationship dimensions of leader behavior in somewhat different ways. The Ohio State University categorized leader behavior into the dimensions of initiation of structures and consideration to describe the task and relationship dimensions (Stogdill, 1974). The University of Michigan research team described leader behavior within the dimensions of production and employee orientations (Bowers & Seashre, 1966). Blake and McCanse (1991), in their development of the Leadership Grid, used the dimensions of production and concern for people to describe the task and relationship dimensions.

Leader-Follower Focused Approaches

In the early 1980s, some leadership scholars turned their attention to followers' perspectives in leadership studies. Transformational leadership theory, introduced by James Burns in the 1970s, symbolized the turning point in the literature. Today, the majority of leadership studies involve examinations of leader-follower relationships (House & Aditya, 1997). A definition of leadership suggested by Northouse (1985), "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p.3) illustrates the attention paid to both the leader and followers in the process of analyzing a leader's influence.

Situational Approach

Situational leadership assumes that an effective leader uses different leadership styles to meet the demands of different situations, including relationships with the followers. The Situational Leadership II (SLII) model developed by Blanchard (1985) and Blanchard et al. (1985) explains situational leadership in two dimensions: leadership style and development level of subordinates.

First, the leadership styles are described in terms of degrees of directive or task-oriented behaviors and supportive or relationship-oriented behaviors. Second, development levels of subordinates are described by the degrees of competence and commitment of the follower required in a particular job. Since the situational leadership model assumes that a follower's commitment and competences change along the time

continuum, the effective leaders determine the follower's developmental level and adapt their leadership styles.

For example, if followers have low competence and low commitment, leaders would use a directive style in which they would give their followers step-by-step specific instructions. If followers have low competence but high level of commitment to the leaders, a coaching style would be most appropriate, with the leaders guiding the followers by giving technical and emotional support. If followers are highly competent but not very committed to the leader, leaders would find a supporting style useful, in which they emphasize rapport and trust building. Lastly, if followers are highly competent and committed, the leaders would employ a delegating style that requires little effort to support and direct their followers.

Thus, the situational leadership approach is able to prescribe four different leadership styles for effective leaders to use in different situations (Table 2.1). Because of its practical benefits, the concept of situational leadership has become widely used in many organizations, especially in corporate settings.

Table 2.1: Situational Leadership

Follower's Situation		Leadership Style	Leadership Approach
Competence	Commitment		
Low	Low	Directing	High Directive / Low Supportive
Low	High	Coaching	High Directive / High Supportive
High	Low	Supporting	High Supportive / Low Directive
High	High	Delegating	Low Supportive / Low Directive

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) emphasizes the followers' perspectives in describing a leader's social influence. Burns explained that a leader's aim is to inspire followers to accomplish a goal that is higher than expected. In doing so, transformational leaders understand followers' needs and motives, present themselves as role models, and put forward a vision for an organization or cause.

Bass (1985) elaborated on transformational leadership by placing it on a continuum with transactional and laissez-faire leadership. While transformational leaders inspire followers to accomplish more than they would normally expect through encouraging and motivating them without conditions, transactional leaders lead people based on the exchanges between themselves and followers.

According to Bass, transformational leaders exhibit four factors: idealized influence charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transactional leadership involves two factors: contingent rewards that may be represented by promotions and monetary incentives, and management-by-exception that often takes the form of negative reinforcement.   In Bass' model, laissez-faire leadership represents the absence of leadership. In general, transformational leadership is perceived as more effective than transactional leadership (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996).

Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leadership is often discussed interchangeably with transformational leadership because of the similar emphasis on followers (Northouse, 2007). An original definition of charismatic leadership was concerned only with the leader. Max Weber (1947) defined charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (p.358).

While charismatic leadership addresses the leader's personality characteristics, it also emphasizes the importance of the leader-follower relationships. Bryman (1992) explains that followers are essential for charismatic leadership because they perceive the leader's charismatic characteristics.

House (1976) suggested a specific set of characteristics for charismatic leaders in terms of personality, behaviors, and effects on followers. He argues that, charismatic leaders are dominant and confident, have the desire to influence and hold strong values. They also present themselves as role models, demonstrate competence, articulate visions, communicate high expectations for followers and show confidence in their abilities, and arouse motives. As a result, followers trust the leader's ideology, have similar beliefs to those of the leaders, accept them without question, feel affection toward them, obey them, identify themselves with leaders, become emotionally involved with the leader's goals, raise their own goals, and increase confidence and self-efficacy.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership emphasizes an altruistic quality in the leader-follower relationships. Robert Greenleaf (1977) proposed that a leader is a servant of the follower before she becomes a leader. He wrote:

> The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. (p.27)

Through various interactions with the followers, servant leaders promote their followers' personal growth. They take care of the followers, listen to their concerns and needs, and strive for their empowerment. Such leaders would self-check their own effectiveness as servant leader by asking, "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while* being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27) Thus, the leader's altruistic interaction with the follower helps nurture a sense of community among followers and prepares them to address justice in a larger society.

Leadership in Multiple Dimensions

Women in Leadership

Gender stereotypes have acted as barriers for women who desire to rise to leadership positions. Gender stereotypes, socially constructed preconceptions about men and women, define men's quality as masculine and women's quality as feminine. The masculine quality involves dominant and assertive behaviors while the feminine

quality involves supportive and nurturing behaviors. In the leadership context, these gender stereotypes have made it a default that men are seen as ideal leaders because they can perform in the masculine way required for an effective leader. Women are, instead, considered suitable for support persons in the community because of their nurturing qualities.

Women can actually be effective leaders when they play feminine roles. According to the role congruity theory (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002) , women can rise as leaders when they use their unique feminine strengths. Performing a masculine role does not help women become recognized as effective leaders. Even if the masculine quality is required for a leader role in general, when female leaders behave like male leaders, they may be questioned on their leadership capabilities because the masculine quality does not match their gender role (Ritter & Yoder, 2004) .

Leadership and Culture

Leadership as Universal Phenomenon

Cultural dimensions of leadership are important elements in leadership studies. Exploring the unique and context-specific meanings of leadership is essential to understanding the leadership process in different cultural contexts. Leadership scholars treat cultures in varied ways depending on their focus on universality or particularity. While universal characteristics of leaders applicable to all cultures are sought on one hand, leadership characteristics that are applicable to specific cultures are also

appreciated. For example, Yoder and Kahn (2003), in their study about gender

congruency theory, suggested that a woman's role as a leader differs depending on

contextual variations.

Universal leadership traits receive a great deal of attention in the corporate

world, in particular. For example, in 2008, McKinsey & Company published the

McKinsey Leadership Project report, the result of a four-year-long study on leadership

skills among women in the business world (Barsh, Cranston, & Craske, 2008a).   Based

on interviews with 85 successful leaders around the world, the report defined universal

characteristics that women could strive to achieve in order to rise as leaders in their

organizations.

The report concluded with five dimensions of "centered leadership" as

characteristics of successful women leaders. This model includes: "a shared purpose

with deep meaning for the people involved, explicit awareness and management of

energy, positive framing, strong informal and formal networks, and the collaborative

creation of opportunities" (Barsh, Cranston, & Craske, 2008b). This report has been

appreciated by many working women as a source of renewed energy, motivation, and

new meaning in their career lives, despite some cautions related to over-simplification.

Concerns related to this approach may be that these five dimensions were presented as

an over-simplified panacea package or a quick fix for effective leadership, and may

keep women from further examining each dimension on a deeper level.

Leadership as Cultural Phenomenon

Cultural orientations influence the operation of leadership in different cultural contexts. Dimmock and Walker (2005) remind the leadership studies circle of a more cautious use of conventional leadership theories when applying them to non-Western contexts for two important reasons: differences in language and cultural orientations.

The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project suggests that the patterns of leadership desired in each society vary across cultures. This seminal study is an interdisciplinary research project that aims to "explore the cultural values and practices in a wide variety of countries, and to identify their impact on organizational practices and leadership attributes" (House, et al., 2002, p. 3). It was conducted based on an assumption that leadership practice varies in different contexts and each practice is recognized as desirable in the particular culture.

The GLOBE study provides concrete leadership models that were observed in different cultural clusters. For example, the study provides information about leadership that is desired in Thai culture, the context of the current study. According to their results, Thai people generally accept self-protective, charismatic or value-based, and humane-oriented leadership styles. The study also suggests that participative leadership is not perceived as a popular method in Thai society.

While Dimmock and Walker cautioned against unchecked application of Western leadership theories to other cultures, several additional concerns deserve attention in a cross-cultural leadership study such as the current one. First, the English

term leadership may not have exactly the same meaning as the word used in other languages. For example, while Thai has an equivalent term for leader, *phawa phunam,* this term may not have the same meaning as in English-speaking countries.

Further, some terms related to leadership originated from the particular culture of interest and do not always have equivalent terms in English. For example, several scholars have described leadership in Thai society in terms of Thai unique term, *baramee* (Conner, 1997; Suntaree, 1999) The term *baramee* implies not only that he or she is a leader but also willing to give, accept and forgive others, which are essential qualities of people who gain respect in Thai society. Thus, Dimmock and Walker's reminder helps the researcher keep open-minded to cultural variations of leadership processes.

Differences in cultural orientation manifest in many aspects of organizational lives, including decision-making. In North America, participative leadership is perceived as a desired leadership style (House, et al., 2004) . Effective leaders are expected to involve other people in the decision-making process to a moderate degree. Lewin and Leppitt (1939) claimed 70 years ago that the democratic style is more effective in the decision-making process than the autocratic and laissez-faire styles. Based on this perspective, the participative approach has provided a framework for people in democratic North America to evaluate leaders.

The concept of power distance developed by Hofstede (2005) explains another assumption about leaders in different cultures. Power distance is defined as "the extent

to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions within a country

expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p.28). In a country where high

power distance among people is the norm, such as Thailand, a leader may rely more on

the high status accrued by high power distance than other qualities as the source of

power to exert over followers. For example, Hallinger (2004) noted:

> The cultural expectation that staff will 'follow orders' to adopt officially
> pronounced changes has led Thai principals to underemphasize their role in
> creating a shared vision of the change process and motivating staff to change.
> (p.69)

As this example suggests, persons with high status may be automatically

recognized as leaders, and therefore, other personal traits, skills and relationships with

followers may not contribute to their rise as leaders as much as they would in Western

contexts.

Another unique construct of leadership in some cultures is physical appearance.

For example, women's beauty is highly esteemed in Thai society (Van Esterik, 2000).

Among important qualities for Thai female leaders including good personality,

politeness, and femininity, physical appearance is an especially important criteria to

gain recognition as a leader (Ockey, 2004).

Finally, a society's handling of the issue of inequality influences people's

perceptions about leadership. For example, non-Thai individuals often comment that

Thai social and individual relationships are not equal. Amara (1998), while

acknowledging such an observation, suggests that an alternative model for the study of

Thai society should encompass the realities of a variety of social structures and human

relationships that may exist in the society. She states that such a model should:

> … incorporate the patron-client model, but going beyond the dimension of
> status-power to include the more benign dimensions of status differences based
> on familism, seniority, and the gratitude relationship (*bun khun*) system in the
> analysis of overall unequal relationships in the hierarchical society (p.17).

She further suggested that "[S]uch an analysis, including also that of changing

values and their ideological support, can perhaps yield a more perceptive and dynamic

presentation of Thai society than a purely structural approach" (p.17). Thus, a great

need lies in the development of leadership theory that has the capacity to embrace a

variety of cultural assumptions about human relations, such as those in Thai culture.

Leadership Ethics and Buddhist Leadership

The importance of ethical dimensions in leadership has gained increasing

attention only recently (Northouse, 2007). Ciulla (2004) notes that the short history of

ethics within leadership studies is probably due to a lack of leadership work in the

humanities as opposed to that done in psychology, business, and political science.

Ethics can be defined as "the kinds of values and morals an individual or society

finds desirable or appropriate" (Northouse, 2007, p. 342). Whether leaders are ethical

or not depends on the virtuousness of individuals and their motives. Ciulla discusses

ethical leadership in terms of leaders' relationships with followers.   She notes,

"Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between

people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the

good" (p.xv). Thus, ethical leadership requires a leader's self reflection on moral values and the virtue of their behaviors, both internally and interpersonally.

Buddhist leadership is an example of a leadership framework that demonstrates such qualities. While defining spiritual leadership in general as "the enactment of leadership with deep inner meaning for both themselves and others" (p.788), Kriger and Seng (2005) especially notes that the study of leadership in a Buddhist context potentially informs deeper inner meanings regarding leaders and their followers. In explaining three constructs of leaders, "having," "doing," and "being," they note that the first two constructs are easily observable and thus receive much more emphasis than the "being" construct in today's leadership research. In other words, most of the discussions relate to the leader's skills, competences, resources or personality traits, and activities but little is discussed about the leaders as human beings.

Kriger and Seng state:

The leader, in the Buddhist paradigm, thinks, feels, senses and observes the changing aspects of the world and the inner contents of the mind along with feelings and sensations; however, there is no "self" that is directing of the world. For Buddhists, the ego, and its attendant desires, are posited to be the fundamental causes of unhappiness. In this view attempts to satisfy the desires of the ego only lead eventually to emotional suffering. In place of these the Buddha advocated selflessness, or 'no self' (*anatta*). This is not the denial of the 'self', but rather the absence of essential distinction between ourselves and everyone else. In this view everyone and everything in the world is intimately interconnected in a set of endless causal networks. (p.783).

Kriger and Seng relate the dearth of the "being" construct in today's leadership theories with Westerner's lack of familiarity with Buddhist concepts. Selflessness, one

such example, may challenge the application of Western-originated leadership theory in a Buddhist culture. While for Westerners, the concept of "self" is central in the discussion of identity and personality, selflessness in leadership means the absence of or less emphasis on the distinction between a leader and followers.

Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is treated as a relatively new topic in the academy, but it has been observed among practitioners in various fields. For example, Mechai Viravaidya is a visible social entrepreneur in Thailand. As the founder and director of the Population and Development Association, a non-government organization, he promoted condom use as part of the strategy to improve the overall quality of life for people in rural areas. As a result of the massive innovative condom campaign by this "Condom King," Thailand's total fertility rate and the number of HIV/AIDS infected persons both dropped significantly (Makino, et al., 2005).

Today, social entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly pertinent to addressing social issues as the boundaries between the private and nonprofit sectors become less clear (Drucker, 1989) . In the private sector, globalization and the advancement of information technologies have changed work arrangements to become more fluid and individual-based. At the same time, the accountability of the corporate sector regarding social issues, including human rights and the environment, is rapidly increasing and being recognized. In the nonprofit sector, professionals with high levels of skills and knowledge are being sought more than ever, in addition to their already established

missions for social change. Thus, in today's society of fast-paced movements and unequal wealth distribution, social entrepreneurs are social change agents and opportunity-exploiters with a social mission and useful expertise.

Researchers have defined social entrepreneurship in different ways. The first definition emphasizes the societal nature of an activity that is taking place in a business setting. According to this view, social entrepreneurship includes business practices that have taken social responsibilities into consideration (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Sagawa & Segal, 2000). The second definition assumes that the activity takes place in a not-for-profit setting and emphasizes its capacity for value creation (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006).

The third definition describes an innovation created by an entrepreneur who is seen as an agent for social change. This assumption differs from the first two definitions by the lack of interest in the economic consequences of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship in this view is defined as "change agents who adopt social missions, recognizing and pursuing new opportunities" (Dees, et al., 2002).

Another definition is a means to initiate social change that solves both short-term and long-term problems (Ashoka Innovators for the Public, n.d.)(Ashoka Innovators for the Public, n.d.)(Ashoka Innovators for the Public, n.d.)(Ashoka Innovators for the Public, n.d.). Yet another definition refers to combining resources in

novel ways and exploiting opportunities, thereby catalyzing social transformation and meeting social needs, and eventually creating social value.

Alvord, et al. (2004) provides a framework for the analysis of social entrepreneurship. In their comparative study of seven cases of social entrepreneurship, they established an analytical framework that included the examination of social entrepreneurship innovation, leadership, organizational process, scaling up strategy and impact of social transformation. They identified common patterns in the innovations of the seven social entrepreneurship cases: building local capacity, solving problems using "packages" of solutions, and building local movements for political purposes. They suggested that much research is needed on the ways that the common patterns of innovations work in different contexts.

Chapter Three: Context

"Some look on Buddhism as Culture. Anyone with a high regard for culture finds many aspects of Buddhist practice which are common to all cultures and also many that are characteristically Buddhist and far better and higher than anything in other cultures."
(Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1956, p. 21)

Political and Economic Context

Modern Nation and Economic Growth

During the past five decades, Thailand has undergone dramatic political, economic, and socio-cultural changes. Politically, constitutional monarchy and democracy were introduced, though military influence remained strong, particularly in the period up to 1992. Economically, the country has experienced rapid industrialization and the expansion of capitalism, transforming an agriculture-based economy into an industrial one. Rapid industrialization in Thailand since the 1960s forced an agrarian society to become a modern capitalist society (Ingram, 1971; Pasuk & Baker, 2002).

The economic boom and bust from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s demonstrated the dynamic and close relationships between the Thai economy and the global economy. They also illuminated the increasing power of the private sector supported by liberal national policies (Pasuk & Baker, 2004). In the 1980s and early 1990s, Thailand experienced an unprecedented economic boom. As the Thai economy

grew at extremely high rates, per capita incomes and international investment increased dramatically.

The social effects of industrialization were significant and complex (Jacobs, 1971; Muscat, 1994; Pasuk & Baker, 2002; Suntaree, 1989). Inequalities in income, wealth, market power, and access to social services are prominent between urban and rural areas. Environmental deterioration is acute because of the resource-intensive nature of Thailand's economic development (Hirsch, 1998). The destruction of forests has created economic hardships for people who had depended on the forest for a major part of their livelihood. The urban population doubled after the economic boom which caused serious traffic congestion in the capital city, Bangkok. Many intellectuals claimed that materialistic lifestyles have weakened the significance of the Buddhist-based traditional values and practices.

When Thailand faced an economic crisis in 1997, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej stated in his speech on December 4:

> A careful step backwards must be taken; a return to less sophisticated methods must be made with less advance instruments. However, it is a step backwards in order to make further progress. If no such action is taken, the crisis will be difficult to surmount. (H.M. King Bhumibol, 1997a)

While the nation's economy grew enormously, Thailand had lost its tradition of a self-sufficiency economy.

His Majesty King Bhumibol (1987; 1997a) suggested that economic

development efforts should focus on self-sufficiency rather than the expansion of

export-oriented production.

> In fact, I have often said to such audience as this one that to be a tiger is not
> important. The important thing for us is to have a self-supporting economy. A
> self-supporting economy means to have enough to survive. About this, I have
> often said that a self-sufficient economy does not mean that each family must
> produce its own food, weave and sew its own clothes. This is going too far, but I
> mean that each village or each district must have relative self-sufficiency. (H.M.
> King Bhumibol, 1997a)

The concept of a self-sufficient economy was introduced previously by some

Thai and non-Thai economists such as Payutto and Ernest F. Schumacher. Schumacher

(1973) argued that human beings should value inner fulfillment through their working

life rather than material wealth and Buddhist economics is an example of that attitude.

Payutto claimed that Buddhist economics is "one of a number of interdependent

disciplines working in concert toward the common goal of social, individual and

environmental well-being" (Payutto, 1994, p. 17). "Buddhist economists would not

only consider the ethical values of economic activity, but also strive to understand

reality and direct economic activity be in harmony with 'the way things are'" (p.20).

Buddhism Context

Theravāda Buddhism plays a central role in Thai society, where 95 percent of

the population is Buddhist. The Buddhism is essential for Thai society both

symbolically and politically. Symbolically, Thailand's Constitution states that the King

must be a Buddhist (Suwanna, 1999). Politically, Buddhism play a significant role in

Thailand's political decisions (Chaiwat, 1994; Swearer, 1991) and the Thai

government is the key determinant of the configuration of Thai Buddhism. On an

individual level, an increasing number of Thai adult citizens are interested in meditation

and *dhamma* studies since the 1990s (Kirsch, 1996; Sanitsuda, 2001).

In Theravāda Buddhism, the ultimate religious salvation is *nibbana*, a state in

which a person transcends *kamma*. To achieve *nibbana*, a person pursues several

important paths, including moral action (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom

(*panna*). Becoming a member of the *sangha* as a monk is considered a most

appropriate way to advance to a higher level of the path. In monkhood, one goal is to

commit to the discipline that promotes detachment from worldly desires. Monks

receive the highest respect in Thai society as a result of their rigorous adherence to the

Buddhist path.

The "law of *kamma*" is a foundation of this theory of merit-producing action.

The Thai people believe that a human condition, whether enjoyment or suffering, results

from *kamma* (action) from a previous life. This sense of accountability between the

present act and future well-being motivates the Thai people to pay attention to moral

development.

It is important for most Thai people to seek to improve their *kammic* status

through meritorious activities. The word *tham bun* (to make merit) is generally used to

refer to a wide range of good deeds and acts of generosity. Ample opportunities are

available for people to earn merit through various kinds of donations, which are often administered by temples. The most commonly practiced form of merit-making is offering food to the monks on their alms rounds. Helping build or renovate a temple is also highly regarded. Sending a son to the temple to spend a period of time as a novice is encouraged in many families; it is meant to be a way to enhance the boy's moral character. Until modern formal education was introduced in Thailand, this practice provided boys with an opportunity to gain education. In adulthood, entering the monkhood is still encouraged. Government officials are granted the opportunity to be ordained as a monk some time during their career without losing their positions.

The value systems of Thai people have changed during the past few decades, especially among the urban population (Suntaree, 1998). Rapid socioeconomic changes have reduced the significance of official forms of Buddhism (Jackson, 1997). Psychologist Suntaree Komin states that the urban population increasingly seeks personal competence, independence and achievement. In this context, Buddhism has changed its meanings and purposes for people who have new aspirations and challenges.

In the last few decades, a variety of new religious traditions have emerged (Jackson, 1997). The Santi Asoke and Dhammakaya movements are two notable examples of recent Buddhist reform movements which address the modern needs in Thai society. First, the Santi Asoke sect grew out of concerns about increasing consumerism and its negative impact on Thai society in the 1970s (Essen, 2005). Started by Pothirak, a former television producer, their practice is similar to that of the forest monks. They choose lives in which they do not rely on a materialistic lifestyle.

They practice mediation and follow strict moral codes so that they would gain high spiritual power. Their ideal lifestyles are very simple: a self-sufficient life detached from worldly affairs, including family relationships.

Second, the Dhammakaya movement has gained popularity with urban Thais by combining traditional superstitious practices and modern consumer-oriented strategies. Dhammakaya established a meditation center on 6 acres where followers practice mediation and attend short courses. The modern appearance of the Phra Dhammakaya Temple and its highly intellectual monks have attracted urban middle class Thais who are used to modern concepts such as efficiency, orderliness, elegance, and some level of comfort (Sanitsuda, 2001). In addition to these meditation centers established through reform groups, several charismatic monks have gained popularity while the market in religious amulets has also expanded.

In the rapidly changing Thai society, engaged Buddhism developed by monks such as Bhuddaddāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993) advocated Buddhism with a commitment to social actions. He is the most eminent Thai philosopher monk in the twentieth century and a prominent leader of engaged Buddhism (Jackson, 2001). He has had a significant influence on the intellectual Thai middle class since the 1950s. He founded Suan Mokh meditation center in the south, which became a popular place for people who desired to learn meditation.   He provided a reinterpreted and rationalized version of Buddhist doctrine and rejected conventional mythical explanations. He cultivated the potential of transforming Thai Buddhism into a popular ideology that supports democratization, social justice, and socio-economic development.

Bhuddaddāsa Bhikkhu has also inspired Buddhist nuns by arguing that laypersons, especially females, should be able to practice Buddhist teachings and transmit them to the world for its improvement (Jackson, 2001) .   Because nuns do not have many female role models in the monastic community, Bhuddaddāsa provided important inspiration for many *maechee*s.

Educational Context

Historically, education in Thailand has had a close connection with Buddhism in its content and delivery. In early years, education was available to boys at the temples. With the start of a constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thailand set education as a priority policy agenda. After that, Thailand initiated education as a measure for development and population control. According to the National Education Act issued in 1999, Section 4, Thailand's education aims for "the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people" (Ministry of Education, 2004).

To achieve this goal, Section 15 of the Act provides a statement that recognizes the value of all forms of education: formal, non-formal, and informal education. It states in Section 23 that in each approach, learners acquire knowledge, defined as follows:

(1) Knowledge about oneself and relationship between oneself and society;
(2) Scientific and technological knowledge and skills;

(3) Knowledge about religion, art, culture, sports, Thai wisdom, and the application of wisdom;

(4) Knowledge about skills in mathematics and languages, with emphasis on proper use of the Thai language; and

(5) Knowledge and skills in pursuing one's career and capability of leading a happy life.

The Act also notes in Section 63 the necessity of learning about sustainability of the environment and natural resources. The Thai government encourages the use of technology, such as "radio broadcasting, television, telecommunication radio, and other media of communication" to deliver educational content and enhance religious, artistic, and cultural affairs.

As Thailand strives for economic development, there has been a growing concern among Thai people that their country also needs to invest in human development (Somwung & Siridej, 2005) . This view states that preparing a labor force that can meet the needs of the modern global economy is not enough. In the face of worldwide materialistic cultures, preparing citizens who value sustainable development, social justice, and compassion is imperative.

Both Thai and Western scholars note Buddhism's potential to promote education that prepares the youth to become global-minded citizens (Fry, 2006). Buddhist educators and policy makers believe that, in order to develop citizens of high ethical values, children need to be taught Buddhist values (Chumpol, 1984; Somwung & Siridej, 2005). In a study of citizenship education policy by Cogan and Derricott (2000) , educators mentioned that Thai education should emphasize spiritual

development and Buddhist values such as non-violent conflict resolution and low-consumption lifestyles. Thus, Buddhism has gained renewed value as an important framework in today's Thailand.

Women in Thailand

Women in Thai Society

Several authors have remarked on the relative advantage of Thai women in educational attainment and job opportunities across sectors (Chatsumarn, 1991; Bhassorn, 2000). For example, women's roles are prominent in trading and other economic activities. This tendency is pervasive across socioeconomic classes although it is particularly noticeable among Thai women who already have higher socioeconomic status.

Despite the typical image of women being financially capable and independent, the actual images of the ideal Thai woman are more complex. Thai women are expected to be dutiful daughters, caring wives, and self-sacrificing mothers (Falk, 2000). In the context of the current study, women's role as mother is especially noteworthy.

Mothers are strong and influential family members in many parts of Thailand. Keyes (1987) notes that pre-Buddhist beliefs in the vital soul explain the customary female roles. Thai people traditionally believed in an inherent connection between women, earth, and rice, which all share nurturing characteristics. They also represent essential vital elements which a human being requires for survival, from mother's

womb and milk to rice. Thai mothers are influential also because they are the symbols

of moral and emotional values. She represents virtue, selflessness, sacrifice, goodness,

forgiveness, and the wholeness of a family (Falk, 2000; Mulder, 2000). Thus, because

of the high value attached to mothers, women's relative authority and power within a

household are significant (Bhassorn, 2000; Falk, 2000).

Women's positive physical appearance and impression are highly regarded in

Thai society. Van Esterik (1996a) wrote, "The attributes of gentleness, silence, and

virtue are intertwined with the attributes of grace, composure, and beauty to produce a

model of Thai femininity that crosses regions and classes" (p.103). Several authors

commented that physical appearance and beauty were essential aspects of culture

formation and nation building in Thailand's history (van Esterik, 2000; Peleggi, 2007).

Women's appearance was strategically used by the Thai government when they were

admired as "Flowers of the Nation" in the 1930s. They were encouraged to dress in

Western attire so that the nation looked modern.

Women in Buddhism

While Thai women have relatively high social mobility in terms of educational

attainment and job opportunities, their opportunities in religion are limited. Rutledge

(1992) stated:

> Thai males may become monks or *bhikkhu* and lead a life of religious
> contemplation, and although Theravāda Buddhism provides a way for women to
> pursue a life of religious contemplation, or *bhikhuni*, Thailand has never fully
> implemented this religious option for women. (p.54)

A common explanation for this gender discrepancy is that Thai Buddhism defines men as detached and therefore suitable for monastic roles, but sees women as worldly and therefore suitable for family maintenance. Keyes (1987) noted that women are defined as beings that are "inherently lower in religious status than men, and women are barred by sex from aspiring to the roles to which the greatest virtue attaches, namely the roles associated with the Buddhist *sangha*" (p.161). The lower status of women is associated with their role of taking care of family and the household, which are considered worldly and less meritorious activities in Buddhism (Kirsch, 1996; Rutledge, 1992). Falk (2000) pointed out that society believes women have lower *karma* than men, and as a consequence, this reinforces internalization of the inferiority and guilt feelings within women themselves.

Since women are assumed to engage in worldly activities, they legitimately become actively involved in trades and businesses. Kirsch (1996) suggests that women participate in economic activities because the society allows them to do so to compensate for their lack of merit. In addition, Thai women are active in trades because taking care of financial matters is a part of the family responsibilities imposed on women. Since women are not able to accumulate merit by receiving ordination, female members of a family, including mothers and daughters, make an effort to support their families through earning incomes.

While women are denied a religious life, women's roles in the family are highly honored, assured and praised (Rutledge, 1992). In contrast to men's path to maturity through ordination as a novice monk, women gain maturity through marriage and

childbirth (Falk, 2000). The value of the maternal nature of women was already emphasized in the old Buddhist texts (Andaya, 2002) . In the earlier era of Theravāda Buddhism, women strove to accomplish the appealing maternal roles because it was an image that was familiar and relevant to their lives, regardless of social status (Keyes, 1984). In addition, a mother is able to a gain a great sense of respect by "giving" a son for ordination, the most merit-producing act for women.

Although women's roles in the traditional Buddhist *sangha* have constraints, their roles in the daily practice are significant. Since women are considered less meritorious than men, women have been the main lay supporters of Thai Buddhism (Suwanna, 1999). Women represent the predominant majority of persons who donate daily food offerings to the monks, attend religious services, and make contributions to temples.

Bhikkhuni Movement

In the history of Thai Buddhism, a *bhikkhuni,* (female ordained monk) has never existed. Chatsumarn (1991) explains that when the Sukhothai Kingdom in the fourteenth century adopted Theravāda Buddhism from Sri Lanka, *bhikkhunis* were not able to travel to the kingdom because of the long distance. Since then, opportunities to invite a *bhikkhuni* lineage into Thai Buddhism have never been sought.

Women's lack of opportunities to become monks and the resulting distinction of roles in Buddhism between men and women have kept women from becoming involved in various responsibilities in society (Suwanna, 1999; Chatsumarn, 2006). Practically

speaking, this distinction created unequal access to social and institutional resources for women. Men can choose to live a religious life as a monk, receive education, and various kinds of protection and support from the government whereas women cannot.

The differentiated roles of men and women in Thai Buddhism have shaped a representative look at the status of Thai women. Falk (2000) points out, "The elevated role of the mother, perceived as the highest priority of women's roles, had indirectly undermined women's other needs and aspirations" (p.54). Suwanna (1999) claims that Thailand's refusal to establish a *bhikkhuni* order "has been perceived as serving as legitimation for treating women unequally and for regarding them as being inferior to men in the general society" (p.282). Critics argue that for ethical and practical reasons, Thai Buddhism should broaden the spiritual paths for women to fulfill the demands and standards of a contemporary society.

*Maechee*s

In Thai society today, *maechee*s are lay women who shave their hair, wear a white robe, and observe eight to ten of the Buddhist precepts. The exact origin of *maechee*s is unknown. They were first reported by Western missionaries living in Thailand during the Ayudhya period as groups of white-robed women with shaven heads leading a religious life. Despite a common myth that *maechee*s are destitute women, Chatsumam noted that *maechee*s represent a wide variety of background characteristics: age, social status, educational level, aspirations, and motives for receiving nuns' ordination. She found in her study that the most frequently cited reason

for becoming a *maechee* was to "live a pure life (*chiwit borisut*) in order to attain nibbana, the ultimate Buddhist goal" (p.43), not heal a broken heart.

For Thai women, the only way to devote their lives to Buddhism is to become *maechee*s since they are not able to be ordained in an official way. *Maechees* typically observe eight to ten precepts, while Buddhist lay people are expected to follow five precepts. The basic five precepts are to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants. In addition to these lay precepts, *maechee*s refrain from wearing ornaments, singing and dancing, using high beds and seats, and eating solid food after midday. *Maechees* who follow ten precepts also refrain from handling silver, gold, or money.

The number of *maechee*s living in Thailand is not clear. Falk (2000) comments that neither the Department of Religious Affairs nor the Thai Nuns' Institute knew the actual number of *maechee*s, including those living in temples, nunneries, and other private locations. In 1996, there were more than fifteen thousand registered *maechee*s living in temples in Thailand. Typically, the roles of *maechee*s at temples are more restricted than those of monks. Their activities are predominantly in the area of domestic work to support the monks whereas the monks' roles are related to religious activities such as leading ceremonies and going on alms rounds.

The issues of ambiguity regarding the position of *maechee*s are well documented. On the one hand, Thai authority treats *maechee*s as lay women because they are not associated with the Buddhist *sangha*. On the other hand, the public treat

*maechee*s as religious persons. The ambiguity of *maechees'* status is manifested in the Thai language. Falk (2002) comments, "This is further expressed in the terms of address used by lay people, who sometimes refer to the mae chis (*maechees*, italic by author) as laity and sometimes as religious persons by using the classifiers *rup* or even *ong*, which are normally used for monks" (p.42).

Because of these ambivalences in the status of *maechee*s. they lack access to some resources. *Maechees* do not receive the same official support that monks are granted in terms of public transportation and medical care. This is because they are not recognized by the Thai *sangha* and the government. Second, since *maechees* have abandoned the lives of householders, they are no longer eligible to vote in public elections. The government defends this treatment by saying that *maechee*s, who have abandoned worldly matters, should not participate in the election, a worldly activity. This ambiguity of *maechees'* status has kept their lives challenging financially and socially. Thus, *maechees* rely on support from a small population of believers to sustain their lives and to deal with medical and other issues.

Lack of educational opportunities is another typical concern for *maechees*. While the government supports monks in pursuing higher education through two Buddhist universities, it does not provide any educational opportunities for *maechees*. The consequences of this lack of education are serious. While Thai society expects *maechees* to provide care for abandoned children and the elderly and to educate children with Buddhist teachings, *maechees* are not able to fully meet these social expectations because of the lack of higher-level education and professional experience.

As a part of the efforts to improve the status of *maechee*s, the Thai Nuns'

Institute was established in 1969 at Bowon Niwet Temple in Bangkok. There,

*maechee*s can receive education up to the level of Parien Nine (Sanitsuda, 1999; Falk,

2002). In 1972, the Institute became part of the royal patronage. Another effort to

improve the status of *maechee*s was made by the late Maechee Khunying Kanithaa.

She proposed a bill that recognizes *maechee* as ordained persons and includes

provisions for their education and various kinds of government support such as monks

receive now (Tsomo, 2004).

Today, an increasing number of *maechee*s live in the 850-plus nunneries that are

independent from temples. Here they do domestic tasks and also perform religious

activities that were predominantly carried out by monks in the past (Falk, 2002). They

cook as well as go on alms rounds. They clean the nunneries and also lead religious

ceremonies.

*Maechee*s going on alms rounds is a relatively new phenomenon. Thai people

have traditionally thought that they would not be able to accumulate merit by giving

alms to *maechee*s. However, Falk (2002) notes that people who give alms to *maechee*s

now feel that their act is equally meritorious as giving alms to monks.

Background of Maecheee Sansanee and the Sathira Dhammasathan Center

Maechee Sansanee is the founder and director of the Sathira Dhammsathan

Center. In addition to her prominent roles in social service and education for Thai

people, she is also an internationally recognized spiritual leader. She is the co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, an international, multi-faith network. In September 2005, she received the Spiritual Leadership award at the Sounds of the Sacred Awards Gala in Beverly Hills, California for her anti-violence efforts. She is also active in the peace process in the Middle East. She was the first woman who visited Palestine in the official capacity of a Buddhist nun.

Maechee Sansanee was born in Ayuthaya, an ancient city in the central part of Thailand. She and her elder sister were raised by her mother and aunt. After she finished two years of college education in Ayuthaya, she left her hometown and went to Bangkok to continue her education to become a teacher. While she diligently studied, she also entered a top-ten model competition. She was selected as the winner and became a fashion model. She also became involved in business, working in public relations for a prestigious company.

Her life reached a turning point when Sansanee decided to become a *maechee*. Her decision came after long contemplation about the real meaning of her life. Maechee Sansanee became a *maechee* in 1979 at Wat Siriporng temple. In 1987, she followed her teacher's advice and bought a plot of land near the temple. She and her colleagues worked hard to change this barren plot into an oasis-like Buddhist garden.

Today, the Sathira Dhammasathan Center is well known for its rich natural environment full of lush plants and a peaceful lotus pond that encourage people to practice meditation. It is located in Soi Wacharaporn in the Ram Intra area on the

outskirts of northeast Bangkok. In the same neighborhood is the Children's Center

Kindergarten[1] located across the street from Wat Siriporng Temple. The meditation

center hosts over 10,000 visitors each year, including regular participants of the

weekend meditation retreat programs and visitors from all over Thailand and abroad.

The meditation center is structured around its central *dharma* hall, *Dharma*

Saalaa. In the front of this dharma teaching hall is a decorated Buddha statue sitting on

a raised platform. The hall is serenely but comfortably designed with willow leaves

hanging from the ceiling, grass mats spread on the floor and cushions for people to sit

on. In the back of the *dharma* hall is an audio control room, a book stand, a few

benches and tables. Around the dharma hall are located a large grassy area with an

enormous papal tree, guest rooms, a restaurant, a library, a book store, office buildings,

massage places, and a new building for the graduate program. Further back are

accommodation facilities for *maechee*s and volunteer staff who reside in the community.

Maechee Sansanee educates and works with other *maechees* to maintain the

activities at the meditation center. When I visited in 2008, eleven *maechee*s and

approximately forty to fifty people worked as full-time volunteer staff in the community.

Some receive compensations depending on their needs and others do not. In addition to

the full-time staff, numerous people help the community as part-time or seasonal

volunteers.

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[1] Kindergarten in Thai context is preschool education as people in the United States would calls.

One of the most important daily activities of *maechee*s is meditation. Their daily schedule is designed so that they are able to practice meditation most effectively. They wake up at 4:30 a.m. and begin prayers at 5:00. After that, several of the *maechee*s go on alms rounds in the surrounding community. Other maechees set up a breakfast table next to a cafeteria. Maechees, except for Maechee Sansanee, eat breakfast at 8:00 a.m. After breakfast, they clean assigned places as well as their own private space. They go to their assigned work positions at 9:00 a.m. Sometimes meetings are also called around this time. After lunch at 11:00 a.m., they go back to their assigned positions and work until 6:00 p.m. when they perform evening prayer. They do not eat dinner since it is not allowed for monks and nuns. On Monday evenings, some *maechee*s attend a meeting of senior managers of Sathira Dhammsathan to share updates on each project.

Chapter Four: Methodology

The quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader, are valued.
(Robert Stake, 1995, p.135)

This chapter presents the research design, data collection, and data analysis methods used to address the research questions: What are Maechee Sansanee's characteristics as a leader? What is her impact on followers? What is her larger impact on Thai society? This chapter presents discussions on the use of case study research to address these questions, instrumentation including interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, and the data analysis technique. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the methodology.

Research Design

Stake (1995) wrote, "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). This definition best fits the present study. It is an investigation into the leadership of Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta, a single individual leader, and describes her emergence and influence. She is a critical case of a leader that deserves documenting as a single case study. Her international reputation, her remarkable status in contrast to the typically low status of women in Thai Buddhism, and her effective presentations to the public make her case a unique and strong one. A single-case design is appropriate for

this study because Maechee Sansanee is a critical case which can inform leadership theory and practice.

The case study approach is an appropriate research strategy for this study because it allows a researcher to take contextual conditions into account (Yin, 2009). Contextual information allows the researcher to generate a detailed portrayal and particularity of a subject. Patton (2002) wrote, "[Q]ualitative inquiry elevates context as critical to understanding" (p.63), so data obtained for this study must be seen in context in order to understand the meaning of the data. Bryman (2004) notes the benefit of a case study research in the field of leadership as it provides "a detailed sense of the context that forms the backcloth to the ways that leaders implement the change process" (p.752). The case study approach benefits this study also because it allows a researcher to utilize multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, participant observations, documents and artifacts (Yin, 2009).

Data Collection

Interviews, participant observations, records and documents were the main sources of data for this study. They were collected both in person during my fieldwork and online while in the United States. Participant observations were conducted intermittently during my three fieldwork trips: (1) ten days in July, 2005, (2) eight weeks in July through August, 2006, and (3) eight weeks in January through March, 2008. Interviews were conducted from January to March, 2008, after I received official

approval from the National Research Council of Thailand. Records and documents were collected from February 2004 through May 2009.

Interviews

Maechee Sansanee and 21 followers who worked at Sathira Dhammasathan were interviewed for this study. The followers were interviewed based on an assumption that people become leaders only with followers (Ciulla, 2004). The profile of the interviewees is shown in Table 4.1. The selection was made according to the purposeful sampling method suggested by Patton (2002). This method assumed that I could learn a great deal from them about Maechee Sansanee's leadership.

Followers who had been working with Maechee Sansanee for more than five years and who played key roles in the Sathira Dhammasathan community were identified. Among those identified, volunteers were solicited and interviewed. The interviewees included Maechee Sansanee, six other maechees, five kindergarten staff, and ten administrative staff in the community. Among the 21 followers interviewed, more women than men were included; this generally represents the gender distribution among members in the community.

Table 4.1: List of Interviewees in Sathira Dhammasathan

Pseudonym Name	Gender	Years Working with Maechee Sansanee	Position	Current Role
Ms. Suchada	Female	9	Maechee	Counselor
Ms. Benchamas	Female	12	Maechee	Counselor
Ms. Krittaya	Female	9	Maechee	Assistant meditation Instructor
Ms. Yada	Female	6	Maechee	Administrative staff for meditation retreats
Ms. Supang	Female	15	Maechee	Visitor screening
Ms. Rungrawee	Female	1	Maechee	Visitor screening
Ms. Kanokthip	Female	12	Business Manager	Business administration
Ms. Karnda	Female	14	Volunteer staff	Finance
Mr. Suchart	Male	21	Volunteer staff	Horticulture
Mr. Paranyu	Male	16	Volunteer staff	Media production
Ms. Hattaya	Female	5	Volunteer staff	Massage therapist
Mr. Danai	Male	28	Volunteer staff	Coordinator
Ms. Nivarin	Female	12	Volunteer staff	Editor
Ms. Vorrapan	Female	10	Volunteer staff	Grant writer
Ms. Mathuros	Female	15	Volunteer staff	Translator, Webmaster
Ms. Napassorn	Female	8	Volunteer staff	Secretary for Maechee Sansanee, Translator
Mr. Veerapong	Male	22	School administrator	School administration
Ms. Apinya	Female	13	Teacher	Teaching
Ms. Juraiwan	Female	15	Teacher	Teaching
Ms. Pimolsri	Female	20	Teacher	Teaching
Ms. Sansanee	Female	15	Teacher	Teaching

Six individuals who did not directly work with Maechee Sansanee at the time of the interviews were also included, including experts and professionals outside the Sathira Dhammasathan center. Three academics, one journalist, one non-governmental organization staff, and one kindergarten director participated (see Table 4.2). Since these experts were not directly involved in the activities of the community at the time of the interviews, their comments helped me validate information that I gained from followers.

Table 4.2: List of Experts Interviewed

Pseudonym Name	Gender	Occupation	Experience of Working with Maechee Sansanee
Ms. Issareeya	Female	University Faculty	Yes
Mr. Jakkrapop	Male	University Faculty	Yes
Ms. Kwanjai	Female	Journalist	Yes
Ms. Yuwadee	Female	Non-governmental Organization Staff	No
Ms. Sarocha	Female	University Faculty	No
Ms. Maneeya	Female	Kindergarten Director	Yes

Semi-structured interviews were used to minimize the barriers for interviewees in order to explore their own unique experiences, impressions and thoughts. The semi-structured format also allowed me to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998). Interview questions are presented in Appendices B, C, D as the interview protocols for Maechee Sansanee, the followers, and the experts, respectively.

Interviews were conducted in either Thai or English, depending on the interviewee's preference. An interpreter was present at each Thai-speaking interview to assist me in following our conversations. The interpreter received training on the research design of this study and its interview protocol to ensure uniform quality of interviews.

Interviews were recorded by digital and tape recorders. As Patton (2002) notes, using this technical equipment in interviews is essential because it allows a researcher to "record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee's perspective" (p.380). Recording also allowed me to freely interact with the interviewee without worries about missing important notes. It also helped improve accuracy in translating and interpreting data spoken in Thai or English, neither of which are my native languages. Both Thai and English interview tapes were transcribed into their respective languages. The Thai interviews were selectively translated into English by a native-Thai speaker.

Participant Observation

Observations offer information about "peoples behaviors as they naturally occur in terms that appear to be meaningful to the people involved" (Mertens, 1998, p. 317). Observation allows the researcher to understand the context within which people interact, to maintain an inductive perspective, and to notice routines that members of the community take for granted. Further, observation provides a triangulation tool for other

types of data, which increases validity and comprehensiveness of the study (Conger, 1998)

Participant observation is particularly useful as it allows a researcher access to a group that is being investigated and gives a viewpoint from an "insider" or "emic" perspective (Yin, 2009). Participant observation is not only a method of data collection but also an overarching strategy of field work. Denzin (1978) noted that effective participant observation would encompass the interviewing, observation and direct participation, document analysis, and introspection as components of its overall field strategy. Because of the researcher's role as a participant observer, "the interviews themselves tend to be more open-ended, and observation is often less concerned with frequency counts of events and more concerned with interaction patterns and detecting the meanings believed to underlie behavior" (Conger, 1998, p. 112).

Patton (2002) suggested that an observer pay attention to several aspects of the research setting. First, the program setting, including the physical environment of the program, needs to be observed and described. Second, the human and social environment needs to be described. The researcher needs to attend groups and subgroups of members, observe interactions between individuals, note the direction of communication patterns and decision-making patterns. Third, specific program activities and participant behaviors need to be described in a comprehensive format. Patton also noted that the researcher needs to attend to the native language that is used among the program participants and to the nonverbal communication patterns.

My observation for the current study entailed active participation in the Sathira Dhammasathan community (Spradley, 1980). I became involved in the activities at the meditation center and Maechee Sansanee's kindergarten. The program setting and the human and social environment were observed and recorded throughout my fieldwork. For the purpose of systematic observation of specific program activities, 13 units were selected. They included a Dharma talk session on Sunday mornings, annual offering events, daily activities at the meditation center and kindergarten, staff retreat and meetings, and other opportunities to spend time with Maechee Sansanee in semi-private settings. Table 4.3 summarizes the observation units that I selected. In each unit, observation notes were created based on Patton's framework: (1) program setting, (2) human social environments, and (3) details of program activities (Appendices D and E).

Table 4.3: List of Observation Units

Location	Unit of Activities and Programs	Frequency of Activity	Type of Observation		Times Observed by Researcher
			Participant	Direct	
Sathira Dhammasathan Center	Meditation retreat	Weekly		x	Approximately 14 weekends, intermittently
	Dharma talk session	Weekly		x	Approximately 14 weekends, intermittently
	Morning activities and interactions at meditation center	Daily	x	x	Approximately 14 weeks, intermittently
	Afternoon activities and interactions at meditation center	Daily	x	x	Approximately 14 weeks, intermittently
	Staff meetings in meditation center	Occasional		x	Several times
	Offering event	Annual		x	Twice
	Volunteer retreat	Occasional		x	Once
	Attending guest-hosting events in the community	Occasional		x	Several times
	Meeting with Maechee Sansanee in a private setting	Occasional	x	x	Several times
Outside Sathira Dhammasathan Center	Attending temple events with Maechee Sansanee outside the community	Occasional		x	Once
Children's Center Kindergarten	Classroom interactions in kindergarten	Daily	x	x	Approximately 8 weeks
	Staff meeting in kindergarten	Weekly		x	Several times
United States	Hosting Maechee Sansanee in the University of Minnesota campus	Occasional	x	x	Once

Documents and Records Review

Documents and records provide background information about the research setting (Mertens, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined records as materials that were prepared for official reasons and documents as those that were prepared for personal reasons. Data obtained from documents and records is also useful in the triangulation of interview data.

Documents and records need to be selected carefully to ensure the appropriateness within a variety of sources of data. Hodder (1994) reminds the researcher that available materials need to be interpreted carefully with understanding about when they were created and for what purposes. He also gives a suggestion that the researcher pay attention to the suitability of the materials for general understanding of the case.

With these precautions in mind, a variety of records were selected for the current study, including promotional materials through the media and on site. A relatively small number of documents that were created for personal reasons, such as letters and gifts from kindergarten teachers, were included to deepen my understanding of the research setting.

Records were collected from various sources during the course of this study (see Table 4.4). They included: periodical magazine *Sawika*, brochures, information materials related to programs, Maechee Sansanee's biography, dharma teaching

materials, and blog records. All the materials were produced by the Sathira

Dhammasathan Center. In addition to these promotional materials, newspaper articles

from *the Bangkok Post* were also collected and reviewed.

Table 4.4: List of Records Reviewed

Records	Language		Format		Publisher	
	English	Thai	Website	Printed	Sathira Dahmmasathan	Bangkok Post
Sawika Magazine		x	x	x	x	
Brochures	x	x		x	x	
Program Information Materials		x	x	x	x	
Autobiography				x	x	
Dharma teaching materials	x			x	x	
Blog records		x	x		x	
Newspaper articles	x		x	x		x

The *Sawika* magazine is published every other month.   I obtained older issues

as printed copies and recent issues from their website. The 80 to 120 page *Sawika*

magazines were reviewed in terms of content, design, and sponsorship. The brochures

included those related to the meditation center, Children's Center Kindergarten, and

other activities at the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. Many of these were collected

during my fieldwork.

The program information materials included program descriptions, application

forms, and guidelines for the meditation retreat program and the new *Sawika Sikkhalai*

graduate program. *A life history of Maechee Sansanee* (Montira, 2005) was published

in a limited print run in 2005 while I was staying in Bangkok. *Dharma* teaching

materials were occasionally produced in English to introduce Buddhist teachings and

Maechee Sansanee's work to non-Thai visitors. They included booklets that featured

important Buddhist teachings and Maechee Sansanee's art book, *One Stroke Dharma*

(see Appendix E). The blog record was obtained from Sathira Dhammasathan's website.

These postings included reflections and comments from center visitors.

　Media content was collected mostly from the website (see Table 4.5). The

website allowed visitors to listen to 50 different radio shows that had been aired in the

past. Older shows were available in audio tapes. It also provided access to several

short video clips of Maechee Sansanee's talks that were used in TV commercials. I

obtained a CD of her 2-minute show, *Dhamma Sawat Dii*. Since I did not have an

opportunity to watch other TV shows, I relied on information that appeared in

interviews and documents. In addition, several audio and visual materials on dharma

teaching obtained from the Sathira Dhammasathan Center were not viewable because of

technical incompatibility.

Table 4.5: List of Media Appearances

Shows	Language		Form	
	English	Thai	Website	Tape/CD
Sawika Radio Show		x	x	x
Dhamma Sawat Dii TV Show		x	x	x
Video Clips		x	x	

Data Analysis

Data analysis in the current study consisted of three steps: (a) organizing descriptive accounts, (b) constructing categories or themes, and (c) developing a model that explains the data (Merriam, 1998). First, descriptive accounts were created and organized as I completed the first round of reviewing interview transcripts, observation notes, documents and media content. They were organized in a word processing software and manually grouped into categories.

Second, categories and themes that cut across the data were sought, organized and constructed. Units of data that included meaningful or potentially meaningful segments of data were identified. Each unit of data was compared with other units and sorted into larger categories. These categories were revisited over and over so that "some categories may be subdivided, and others subsumed under more abstract categories" (Dey, 1993, p. 44).

As I completed the second round of data review, I verified, modified and consolidated categories that I had created during the first round. I also named the categories so each concept described a phenomenon. Because of the ethnographic perspective that was used in the current study, categorization was based on information that I obtained from study participants directly, not dependent upon my pre-conceived notions. The categories were triangulated with those created by a Thai researcher. Findings based on the first two steps are described in Chapter Five. Finally, the last

level of data analysis involved developing a model that explained the data. The model

is described and explained in Chapter Six.

Validity and Reliability

Construct Validity

Since case studies use subjective judgments to collect the data, concerns are

raised that they lack operational sets of measures (Yin, 2009). In order to ensure

construct validity, several measures were taken in this study. First, this study involved

triangulation of the data collected through multiple sources: (a) interviews, (b)

participant observations, (c) records and documents review. The availability of multiple

sources of evidence ensures triangulation among different data sources, thereby

improving the credibility of this case study.

Second, throughout the course of this study, several Thai key informants were

consulted for appropriateness of interview protocol and plausibility of interpretation for

validation. In addition, a completely independent coding process was conducted by a

Thai researcher and used to check alignment with the results that I obtained.

Internal Validity

Merriam (1998) wrote, "Internal validity deals with the question of how research

findings match reality" (p.201). Yin (2009) states that internal validity refers to the

correctness of inferences made by a researcher. Stake (1995) suggests that a researcher

may increase confidence in her interpretation by using *methodological triangulation* (p. 114, emphasis in original), i.e., triangulation of multiple sources of data. Triangulation was exercised as rigorously as possible to make informed judgments about Maechee Sansanee's leadership. Member checking, which took place in both planned and unplanned situations, was useful since the research period extended to six years. Merriam (1998) states that long-term or repeated observations of the same phenomenon could reduce the concern of internal validity; therefore, my intermittent but long-term participant observations helped to increase the validity of the findings as well.

Reliability

Reliability traditionally refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In a qualitative case study, it is not an appropriate criteria (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that reliability in the qualitative research context refers to dependability. Merriam explained dependability as "*whether the results are consistent with the data collected*" (p.206, emphasis in original). This kind of reliability can be partly ensured by clarifying my own assumptions as well as my position in relation to the study participants. My cultural assumptions and the likely positions that I would hold in relation to members of the Sathira Dhammasathan community and other Thai individuals are discussed in the next section for this purpose. As an additional measure to increase reliability, as Yin (2009) suggested, I developed a case study database to ensure clear documentation of my research procedures.

Culture-Related Considerations

Knowledge about the cultural patterns of a country where fieldwork takes place offers a researcher multiple lenses when examining behaviors and phenomena of interest. Researchers are cultural beings that are shaped by their own cultures. This allows each researcher to produce uniquely different work and also to reserve absolute judgments about a culture that is not their own.

Cultural differences need to be acknowledged in a cross-cultural research study such as the current study, both in terms of the national cultures in which fieldwork takes place and the cultures from which the researcher originated. Relative comparisons of cultural differences are useful in verifying one's findings and analyses that emerge through subjective perspectives.

For example, I need to take into account the national cultures of Thailand, the location of the fieldwork, and the cultures of Japan, my cultural of origin, and the United States, the temporary location for my graduate education and the cultural background of the audience of this study. If I find a particular theme striking, a risk may arise that it is simply my reaction to a culturally different practice or something unknown. I may find something noteworthy because it is similar to a value that I have developed in my cultural background.

Hofstede's (2005) theory of cultural dimensions provides a useful framework for this purpose. According to his theory, a country's national culture is characterized

by degrees in five cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation.

In the power distance index, which compares general acceptance of unequal distribution of power among 74 countries, Thailand ranked 34th whereas Japan and the United States ranked 49th and 57th, respectively. People in Thailand do not feel as much discomfort with inequality in society as people in Japan and the United States (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Suntaree (1990) supports this argument by her observation that Thai people avoid shaking the existing orders. Thai people believe that face-saving is important. They also believe that they should avoid public confrontation and criticisms regardless of the persons' ranks. Hofstede's argument may resonate with the choice of self-protective leadership as the desired leadership style in Thailand, as suggested by the GLOBE Study.

In the context of the current study, I would therefore anticipate that a Maechee is a leader whose status is carefully protected in Thai society. This may impose a limitation on my data collection, since I may not be able to obtain responses from interview participants that may potentially affect Maechee Sansanee's images and reputations.

Hofstede's individualism index ranks the United States, Japan, and Thailand as 1st, 33rd, and 56th out of 74 countries, respectively (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This means that I would observe more collectivistic behaviors in Thai people than individualistic ones. In addition, I would also anticipate that while I may take

collectivistic behaviors for granted, the U.S. audience of this study may not understand them in the same way. This suggests that the study will have a weakness of limited relevance of its findings to other cultures.

Suntaree (1990) provides a contrasting view: Thai people are individualistic rather than collectivistic. She wrote, "Thai social system is first and foremost a hierarchically structured society where individualism and interpersonal relationship are of utmost importance" (p.160). An act of *kren jai*, that is, "to be considerate, to feel reluctant to impose upon another person, to take another person's feelings (and 'ego') into account, or to take every measure not to cause discomfort or inconvenience for another person" (p.164) is valued as a way to save face for another person. Rather than challenging Hofstede's view of Thailand as ranking low in the individualism index, Suntaree seems to emphasize another important dimension of social relationships in Thai society: social relationships created by interpersonal relationships in which each individual carefully develops, maintains, and updates to suit their needs. Her finding provides me with a meaningful orientation as to personal relationships that I may observe in my fieldwork and encounter personally.

Suntaree (1990) explains that Thai people maintain human relationships by using the notion of gratefulness (*bun khun*). Gratefulness is an expression of a persons' psychological investment in the other person. It also constitutes a basis for human relationships. Whether there is gratefulness involved in a relationship between persons is an important indication for "closed-personal" and "psychologically invested"

relationships (as cited in Suntaree, 1990, p.6). Therefore, gratefulness "involves a deep sense of obligation which is enduring, stable, and reliable".

Thai culture may be collectivistic but not in institutions, rather as families and close communities. The GLOBE study found that leadership in Thailand is characterized by in-group collectivism as opposed to institutional collectivism. House (2004) defines In-group Collectivism as "the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families" (p.30) . In-Group Collectivism is differentiated from Institutional Collectivism, which is observed in Confucian-based Asian cultures. It is defined as "the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action" (p.3).

The masculinity index indicates a country's tendency to value masculine perspectives and behaviors as opposed to femininity. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), the three countries are ranked as Japan (2nd), the United States (19th), and Thailand (64th). Thailand is described as a country where femininity is valued. In this culture, for example, qualities that are appreciated in women, such as emotions and beauty are considered important. As Suntaree (1990) suggests, Thais' emphasis on emotions is related to their tendency to avoid conflicts. Since I come from a strongly masculine culture, findings related to femininity may look more significant to me than to individuals from the United States. Therefore, I will need to triangulate them using multiple sources of information.

Limitations

Although various measures were taken to ensure validity and reliability, the present study has several limitations. First, a concern exists related to external validity, a concern as to "whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study" (Yin, 2009, p. 43). A single-case study such as the present study is more vulnerable to the claim of lack of external validity than a multiple-case study (Stake, 1995).

Stake and Trumbull (1982, cited in Stake) propose a notion of "naturalistic generalizations" (p.85, cited in Stake, 1995), as an alternative kind of generalization to conventionally discussed explicated generalizations. They stated:

> Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves. (Stake, 1995)

Thus, the present case study expects to overcome the criticism of lack of external validity by presenting a "rich and thick" description of Maechee Sansanee's leadership. By reading the current study, readers are expected to be able to reproduce the image of her dynamic leadership in themselves. They are also expected to project them on to their own professional, academic and personal experiences.

Finally, my inability to conduct long-term and continuous fieldwork as well as my somewhat limited Thai language ability may have presented barriers for me with

regard to comprehensive data collection. These shortcomings are addressed by ensuring

accuracy of translation and seeking multiple sources of information.

Chapter Five: Findings

This is the place of Dhamma and we have Maechee Sansanee, the firm and strong leader like a Bodhi tree. She's the one we can trust confidently. And she makes us stronger. We can be stronger both inside and outside as we work here. (Ms. Apinya, personal communication, March 3, 2008)

Research Question 1: Leader Characteristics

Achievement

Maechee Sansanee's most visible achievement in her career as a *maechee* is the dynamic and multi-faceted Sathira Dhammasathan Center.   Under this large umbrella project, many subsets of projects have been developed. In this section, I describe these projects based on my record and document reviews, direct and participant observations, and interviews.

Table 5.1 summarizes the main projects that operate in the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. They have operated on a significant scale and become highly visible in Thai society over the years. The current study does not list every project that has been implemented in the center but rather those which seemed remarkable to me during the course of my study. First, the development of the meditation center is the core of all other programs that follow. Second, projects related to education and social services have developed. They include the development of: weekend retreats, the *Sai Samphan House* shelter program, *Cit Prapason* (Pure Mind) Project for family and youth, *Sawika Sikkalai* Master's degree program, and the Children's Center

Kindergarten. Third, projects related to media production include TV shows, radio

shows, website with multimedia materials, and print media. Finally, projects that

address community outreach include visits to male and female prison inmates.

In addition to these institutionalized projects, Maechee Sansanee and her

community have been active in a number of short-term events and programs. Table 5.2

includes a list of activities that occurred in the year 2008 (Sathira Dhammasathan's

website, April 30, 2009).

Table 5.1: Examples of Maechee Sansanee's Projects

Type	Project	Primary Audience			Scope	Notable Characteristics
		Adult Female	Adult Male	Children		
Facility	Meditation center development	x	x	x	Hosts 10,000 visitors per year.	Environmentally friendly Aesthetically pleasing Comprehensive wellness facilities and services including massage house, restaurant, book store and retail shop
Education & Social Work	Weekend retreat program	x	x		Provides meditation instruction to 5,000 persons per year.	Meditation instructions based on breathing
	Sai Samphan House shelter	x		x	Assisted 300 women and children	Healing from violence and trauma
	Cit Prapason (Pure Mind) project			x	Provides parenting education to 400 adults and children per year.	
	Sawika Sikkalai Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Master's Program	x			Will educate 50 persons per year	Offering a venue for Buddhist education for lay women under a formal university system
	Children's Center Kindergarten			x	Educates 300 children per year for xx years	Combined Waldorf and Buddhist philosophies in education
Media Production	Dhamma Sawat Dii TV show	x	x	x	Nationwide, daily	Two-minute *dharma* teaching
	Sawika radio show	x	x		Nation-wide, every Saturday	Live show from meditation retreats

Table 5.1(Continued): Examples of Maechee Sansanee's Projects

Type	Project	Primary Audience			Scope	Notable Characteristics
		Adult Female	Adult Male	Children		
Media Production (Continued)	*Sawika* magazine	x	x			Variety of feature articles, visual appeal
Community Outreach	Visits to prison inmates	x	x	x (Fetus)	Assisted 3,000 prison inmates through lectures	
	Emergency relief for *tsunami* victims in Southern Thailand	x	x	x		

Retreat Center Development

Maechee Sansanee started the Sathira Dhammasathan Center on a six-acre bare plot of land with only three young plants on it. Over the last twenty-one years, it has grown to be a nunnery and retreat center that is unique for several reasons.

First, it is called an oasis in Bangkok, since the retreat center offers people a natural environment for relaxation and refreshment that is difficult to find in most parts of this large and busy city. As volunteer staff proudly assert, "Every corner of the Sathira Dhammasathan Center is picture-perfect;" her meditation center presents an integrated image of spirituality, nature, and comfort. The physical attractiveness makes visitors feel calm, rejuvenated, and comforted. These feelings have led to the creation of three types of healing in the community: *dharma*, nature and community healing (Parichart, 2004)

Second, the center provides a rich environment for meditation practice, in particular for walking meditation. The diverse natural components of the walking meditation environment include a pond, naturally-made paths, woods, caves, grassy hills, streams with wooden bridges, and various kinds of plants. Over the years, Maechee Sansanee has improvised much of the natural landscape in the center as she practiced walking meditation.

Third, the center is unique because it provides a venue and infrastructure for comprehensive Buddhist educational and social service programs that cater to people of all ages. A holistic health program is another important feature of the center. Various

kinds of massage services, skin care, and healthy vegetarian meals have gained

popularity among female guests. On weekends, about forty to fifty visitors enjoy these

services, some just dropping in and others making reservations in advance. They listen

to dharma talks that are aired through audio speakers while enjoying the health and

beauty services available.

Weekend Retreats

A meditation retreat program takes place every weekend. It is currently the

largest educational program that is offered at the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. From

Fridays through Sundays, the center hosts on average 100-150 people who participate in

meditation training. Almost all participants are women and many come with friends or

family. They appear at the meditation center with medium-size baggage since they

often stay for two nights in the simple lodging facility. They wear a white meditation

suit throughout the weekend and listen to dhamma talks, participate in prayer sessions

and practice meditation either sitting, lying, or walking. They eat breakfast and dinner

together in a dining area outside and wash dishes in three basins of water after meals. A

typical day during a meditation retreat is shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Typical Day of Meditation Retreat

Time	Activity
4:00 a.m.	Bell of wisdom rings
5:00 a.m.	Morning prayer session
6:00 a.m.	Yoga or meditation
8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Practice through community work
10:00 a.m.	Dhamma talk/Meditation practice
11:00 a.m.	Lunch
12:00 p.m.	Free time in present moment
1:00 p.m.	Meditation practice/Questions and answers
4:00 p.m.	Walking meditation
5:00 p.m.	Evening prayer session
7:00 p.m.	Dhamma talk/Meditation practice
8:00 p.m.	Private time

Sai Samphan House Shelter

Sai Samphan House is a shelter home for mothers and children, providing them with support to heal and recover from various challenges in life. Such challenges include pregnancies that were unwanted or occurred due to sexual assault and/or domestic violence. *Sai samphan* means relationships in Thai. The shelter provides women and children with a safe place to stay both short- and long-term as well as support for their childbirth and parenting. *Maechee*s assist women through counseling based on the Buddhist ideal of mindfulness. This helps victims of sexual violence to heal their psychological traumas (Sanitsuda, 1995).

Some of these women receive training in the community and become volunteer staff at Sathira Dhammasathan or in the Children's Center kindergarten. Other women receive retail training and work in the *Sai Samphan* Restaurant. The young children

attend the kindergarten located in the same neighborhood. Through this program,

Maechee Sansanee has encouraged and empowered women to heal and regain control of

their lives based on her belief that a woman can raise her child in a loving way even as a

single parent. She says in her documentary film:

> I am also a child of a single mother. My mother brought me up in a single parent family. I think I can apply my experience to the *Sai Samphan* House. I want to teach them to respect themselves. Then, they will live in this world and help their children survive. That's how I try to build the world through the children. (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004)

In addition to long-term assistance for the women who stay at the *Sai Samphan*

House, *maechee*s offer counseling on a daily basis to visitors**,** advising them on various

issues of daily life.

Cit Prapason (Pure Mind) Project

Cit Prapason (Pure Mind) Project offers programs for families and youth. First,

it promotes the spiritual well-being of pregnant mothers and their babies. Parents who

are expecting a baby gather and learn to become calm and gentle parents through

listening to dhamma talks and doing breathing exercises and massage.   Second, the

Parent's School program teaches parents and caregivers of children up to 10 years old

how to interact with their children in a healthy, loving and meaningful way. The

program includes informal lectures about the physical and spiritual development of

children, story-telling, songs, creative movements, and hands-on activities in arts and

crafts. These programs are based on the idea that parents play an essential role in

promoting children's physical, emotional and spiritual development.

Sawika Sikkalai Master's Program

Sawika Sikkhalai Master's Program was launched in spring 2009 at the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. The program idea had existed in an informal way for the past ten years, "support[ing] and offer[ing] women the opportunity to learn the values and way of life of simplicity, compassion and right thought, in order to be liberated from suffering" (Sathira Dhammasathan brochure).

Through the collective efforts of the official Thai Buddhist system, religious leaders, academics, and members of Sathira Dhammasathan, this informal program has evolved into a formal Master's Program operated as a part of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. A complete university building with several classrooms, a cafeteria, and other facilities have been constructed on the meditation center grounds. This effort has been well-received by Thai society as it addresses an increasing need for formal Buddhist education for lay women (*Sawika*), especially those who have completed their college education, to advance their understanding of Dharma. The *Sawika sikkalai* program will train women as Buddhists, some of whom may become important leaders in Sathira Dhammsathan.

The Master's program will serve the need for advanced programs in formal education for the urban middle-class and educated population. Meeting their needs implies that there will be new avenues for income and a potential for wider support for Sathira Dhammsathan. Further, this program will serve as a genuine opportunity for Thai women to pursue their interest in learning about Buddhism. Since such

opportunities were not available before, this is an important advancement in women's access to Buddhist education.

Children's Center Kindergarten

Children's Center Kindergarten serves as a center of early childhood education in the community surrounding the center. At this school, about 300 children between the ages of two and six years old learn in a multi-age classroom environment. The school originally started as a child care center at Siriporng Temple to serve the needs of neighborhood residents who had to leave their children home when they were at work. Over the past three decades, the child care center has grown to become the current kindergarten. Maechee Sansanee dedicated her time to establish the school with the initial support of other education experts and the Department of Religious Affairs.

An innovative feature of this school is the fusion of Buddhist education and Waldorf education. Waldorf education, originated in the early 1900s by Rudolf Steiner in Austria, emphasizes a child's educational and personal development including art and humanistic capacities (Trostli, 1998). Based on the particular principles of Waldorf education, the school's general focus is on play and activities, along with stories and songs that stimulate imagination in children's minds. Children learn through playing in a natural environment. They play in an unpaved playground on bare feet, exploring and experimenting with wood, tree nuts, leaves, and fabrics. Much less emphasis is placed on preparation for academic competitions. This nature-oriented Waldorf approach has nicely blended with the Buddhist philosophy of seeing human beings as a part of nature.

Maechee Sansanee strives to bring the idea that life is beautiful through the fusion of Buddhist and Waldorf education. Ms. Maneeya, an early childhood education expert and also a long-term colleague of Maechee Sansanee, recalls when she first started Waldorf education in her preschool program. Ms. Maneeya had already introduced Waldorf education into her school as a pioneer in Thailand and offered to help Maechee Sansanee in setting up her own. In the process of curriculum development, they collaborated in writing songs, poems, and choreographed physical movements for children. Underlying these activities was an intention to bring a beautiful world to children through art and music. Ms. Maneeya argues that some adults find these artistic activities touch their hearts because they appeal to their souls whose quality is the same as young children's. She says, "We need something that encourages us in a beautiful way" (personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Media Production

Today, all of the Center's media content is produced entirely by internal staff and facilities. Maechee Sansanee has impressed people in Thai society through a number of TV shows over the years. She currently appears in two TV shows, a two-minute *Dhamma Sawat Dii* [Hello] (see Table 5.3 for national coverage) and a 30-minute *Aria Saan Dai*. Both are aired daily on different channels across the nation at different times. An hour-long weekly show *Ni Lae Chiivit* [This is Life], that ended recently, was publicly recognized by Thailand's former prime minister, Thaksin Sinawatra, as a highly commendable program for Thai people (Montira, 2005).

Table 5.3: Coverage of *Dhamma Sawat Dii* TV Show

Channel	Frequency
Nation Channel	7 days/week
H Plus Channel	5 days/week
MCOT	3 times a day for 7 day/ week

Maechee Sansanee also has her radio shows. A show called *Sawika* [Buddhist women] is aired nationwide from 9:00 to 9:50 a.m. every Saturday. This show is produced live every weekend during a morning dhamma talk session at the meditation retreats. The *Sawika* magazine, a bi-monthly publication, is produced by the center's internal staff and distributed to its members. The main content of the magazines is feature articles about experts such as famous monks. Celebrities such as actors, singers, and TV personalities are also frequently featured. Some issues highlighted members of the center talking about their experience of temporarily becoming a nun or about their own life projects. The magazines look visually appealing, using many color photos and much art work to enhance their text.

Maechee Sansanee and her colleagues who are music producers and singers have also created numerous songs for people of all ages, but especially for families and children. The songs are well-received and enjoyed widely in Thai society. A follower commented that she used to listen to some of the songs at her workplace before she became involved in Sathira Dhammasathan. Themes of the songs include happiness,

motherhood, nature, and compassion. Her breathing song is an especially popular one in

Thai society since she uses it when she teaches a breathing exercise to the audience:

> Breathe in … breathe out
> Like a blooming flower
> Be strong and stable like a mountain
> Relaxed like a river, calm like a big blue sky

(Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004)

Community Outreach

Maechee Sansanee reaches out to teach unconventional groups in Thai society

as well. She visits prisons to teach inmates mindfulness and the courage to become

better persons. She told them in a lecture:

> Live as a pure human being. Never fall on temptation of rage or anger. Others
> may judge you but you will not judge yourself. Be determined never to do
> wrong again because that is the cause of your suffering. If you only have a few
> more minutes to live, live those moments in freedom. This is what everyone
> here can do (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004).

When she visits a female prison, she teaches its inmates, especially those who

are pregnant, how to be gentle-minded mothers. She encourages them to have calm and

loving feelings toward their fetus through breathing songs.   In addition, she has even

taught Thai boxers, athletes who are engaged in this very violent activity, to practice

boxing with mindfulness because practicing boxing does not mean they can be cruel.

Civic Engagements

Maechee Sansanee is active in program development on governmental and non-governmental levels. For example, she has been a member of a youth spiritual development committee of the Board of Directors for the Thai Health Promotion Fund. This fund was created by using tax funds associated with tobacco consumption in Thailand. Mr. Jakkrapop, one of the experts who were interviewed for this study commented that the initiative was started for a good cause using funds that are generated by unhealthy activities. In this unique nationwide endeavor, Maechee Sansanee assisted the committee in formulating activities and programs that could promote spiritual well-being among youth (Mr. Jakkrapop, personal communication, February 19, 2008).

Maechee Sansanee's new image of a Buddhist nun has led her to international prestige. She is one of the first *maechee*s who are known internationally. In 2000, she was invited to join the delegation to the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in New York as the only female representative from Thai Buddhism, and since then her name and reputation have been spreading across the world. Because of her visible presence at the 2000 World Peace Summit, she was invited to join the Global Peace Initiative two years later. She was one of the 500 women leaders who gathered from different parts of the world to demonstrate their commitment to world peace through collaborative action. She was given a privilege to meet with his Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. Recently, Maechee Sansanee visited the Middle East as the first Buddhist nun to work for the promotion of the peace process in the area.

Buddhist Leader Characteristics

Maechee Sansanee identifies herself first as a Buddhist, and then as a leader. Leadership is not her goal but is a part of the process by which she attains the Buddhist goal of freedom from suffering.

First Being a Buddhist

When asked about the achievements in her life, Maechee Sansanee answered calmly that living without suffering in whatever roles that are assigned to her is her achievement. In order to reach this goal, she uses the different kinds of roles and duties assigned to her to practice selflessness in order to reach the larger goal of living without suffering. She said:

> My achievement is not worldly but spiritually, it means the awakening of mind while doing the duty, no matter what kind of duty is or what I am supposed to be. … For me, the achievement does not depend on approval of other people nor the success of that work. It depends on the state of not suffering while playing your supposed role. (personal communication, March 2, 2008)

She undertakes her projects to keep herself free from desire for achievement. As she says, "While I work, I experience defilement in myself. I use work in order to understand the feeling" (personal communication, March 2, 2008). She writes in her dharma leaflet:

> We must work for both inner and outer peace, while being grateful for our opportunity to be alive and live for the present. We need to become more selfless, and be without any ego, which means that there are only actions, but no actors. If we become mistaken that there are indeed actors, doers, then we will face spiritual suffering and delusion (*A Walk of Wisdom* leaflet).

For example, being the founder and director of the Sathira Dhammasathan

Center is a long-term practice of selflessness that she has undertaken for more than

twenty years. In my interview, she explained the complexities of the states of mind that

she has experienced related to owning a property like the retreat center. Dilemmas

came into her mind on many occasions during the development of the retreat center.

When her teacher advised her to purchase a six-acre plot of land as a good deed, she felt

hesitant about the idea of a *maechee* making a significant materialistic commitment.

Her teacher's further advice that she use the property with wisdom made her choose to

use that land for good deeds.

As the retreat center grew in terms its scale, programs, and reputation, it started

to demand more resources, staffing, supervision, public relations, and new ideas for

programming.   Maechee Sansanee has constantly reevaluated her involvement in her

property trying to find a fine balance between improving the retreat center and its

operation and keeping her personal desires or lust from arising. She shared her feelings:

> It is like the practice to understand myself deeply … It's like I have to practice
> more and more until one day I know that I can pass while just seeing it and
> without formation. It's like the practice that I won't doubt the answer to it.
> Understanding is the base of seeing things without illusion or false impression.
> And I won't complain, either. (personal communication, March 2, 2008)

Today, she confidently feels that the Sathira Dhammasathan Center does not

have to belong to her. She now believes that the center belongs to someone else. This

is evident when she emphasizes that the construction of the center was made possible by

a team effort. She also express this determination by calling the center the "property of

the dead" (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004), a metaphor that suggests the impermanence by which everything, including the center, will change over time.

As stated by almost every colleague interviewed, the center accepts anybody who wants to come and learn about life. This shared notion of openness was made possible by Maechee Sansanee's determination to undertake the practice of selflessness and to teach her followers about it. She has committed to making her own property be useful to other people. Ms. Supang and Ms. Pimolsri admire Maechee Sansanee because of her courage, generosity, and patience toward others as they use her private property. Ms. Pimolsri humorously commented that "Khun Mae even thanks visitors for coming and using her place as they liked!" (personal communication, February 27, 2008) As Maechee Sansanee states in her documentary film, "All work is to make my ego smaller so I can work happily," (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004) and she has demonstrated how the Buddhist sense of work is achieved through her own example.

When asked about her inspiration for her work, Maechee Sansanee corrected me, saying that she would rather frame her intention in terms of a driving force instead of calling it inspiration. She found that inspiration has some nuance of desire, which she tries to control in her practice. She states clearly that gratefulness for Buddhist teachings is the driving force in her life. She feels that having gratefulness as a base of her work serves as a "victory flag" in her life. Her deep sense of gratefulness has led her to develop faith in serving people through work. She said, "I have a faith to use my life to serve someone else. I have Sathira Dhammasathan to serve people without carrying this place." (personal communication, March 2, 2008)

Then Being a Leader

For the sake of the work to be done at the Sathira Dhammasathan Center, Maechee Sansanee values teamwork. She creates a team by giving opportunities to followers. Almost all the followers whom I interviewed commented that she gives opportunities to anybody who is willing to learn and do work. Ms. Juraiwan says, "Maechee Sansanee gives opportunities to everyone, uncovers talent and values in them and provides a stage that they can perform their assigned responsibility." (personal communication, February 14, 2008)

Teamwork not only has the function of accomplishing assigned tasks for the retreat center but also serves as an educational opportunity for followers. Just as she practices selflessness while engaged in the development of the retreat center, Maechee Sansanee also encourages her followers to use work as a venue where they practice selflessness while striving to accomplish good work. She believes that each member of a team has a great potential to become a spiritual leader for himself by making a constant effort to attain the small self through work.

Maechee Sansanee interacts with her followers by demonstrating emotional capabilities. Many followers commented that she empathizes, encourages, and supports them. In doing so, she teaches them how to check their emotions, whether good or bad, when they arise. She encourages them to practice this kind of reflection for self-checking their egoistic emotions. Thus, Maechee Sansanee observes and reflects on herself.

Since she is such a remarkable *maechee*, sustainability of the Sathira Dhammasathan Center is a common question of observers. Maechee Sansanee seems to be more prepared to deal with the sustainability issue than other people might think. Her attitude about the future successor of the community seems to be rather relaxed. She said, "Sathira Dhammasathan is not successful just because there is a leader that our society accepts. But if someone here can be enlightened, that's the real success of Sathira Dhammasathan." (personal communication, March 2, 2008) She also accepts and encourages her followers to openly discuss the future of Sathira Dhammasathan once she no longer serves as the director.

Mother

My interviews with followers have shown that Maechee Sansanee is a mother for many followers. She is called Khun Mae [mother] by her followers and receives a deep sense of trust from them. Ms. Wilai commented, "A mother never does wrong to their children nor hates them." Many followers said that Maechee Sansanee is a second mother for them so they address her as such. Some followers commented:

> I feel that I have two mothers. One is my mother living in the upcountry who gave birth to me. Maechee Sansanee is my second, spiritual mother who helps me develop in every aspect – idea, spirituality, perspectives, and lifestyle… everything. (Ms. Wilai, personal communication, February 13, 2008)

> I have worked closely with Khun Mae. I have lived with her since I was fourteen. I don't feel that she is my boss but she is my mother. (Mr. Danai, personal communication, February 27, 2008)

Maechee Sansanee nurtures, guides and support her followers. Mr. Suchart, a long-term follower, commented:

> Mother Sansanee is a teacher and a mother. When I don't know something, she teaches me. When I have some thought that is stubborn, she tries to teach me as if a mother teaches her child. She points to a false view in me. She also brings my strength forward for me to use. That's why I feel happy working with her. (personal communication, February 22, 2008)

Followers have a great sense of gratefulness to Maechee Sansanee, and this makes them feel they want to pay her back whenever they have opportunities. For example, many followers commented that they decided to stay in the Sathira Dhammasathan community partly because they feel obligated to repay her kindness by working for her community. Mr. Danai, another long-term follower, gave an account of his strong feeling of indebtedness to Maechee Sansanee:

> Whatever I can do for Khun Mae, I would do my best. This is Thai way, gratitude. If she has to lose her arm today, and you ask me "Danai, Can you give me your arm so her arm won't be cut?" Yes, absolutely. When I compare my life and her life, I think that my life makes less benefit but hers has much more worth for people in the whole world. So whatever I can sacrifice for her, I would do. … This is the relationship that makes me sacrifice my life. I know that in reality, it's impossible to have arms replaced. But I don't know how to explain my feelings otherwise. Again, it is like if Khun Mae has to die, let me die instead of her. I would be glad to give my life to her. That's my feeling for the relationship between she and me. (personal communication, February 27, 2008)

Maechee Sansanee herself promotes the image of mother in her projects. She says, "I work with a heart of a mother" (personal communication, March 2, 2008). She herself does not have a child but interacts with others just like a mother would do with

her child. The image of mother is also promoted in Sathira Dhammasathan as an institution. The *Sawika* magazine issued in spring 2004, for example, featured Mother's Day. It included thoughts about mothers shared by numerous well-known individuals, including popular celebrities. This kind of celebration of motherhood also resonates with the national sentiment toward mothers in Thailand, as most evidently presented in its celebration of the Queen's birthday.

The image of a mother that she presents today probably reflects her own mother, who passed away when Maechee Sansanee was in her teens. Her mother was a devoted Buddhist and raised her and her elder sister without her husband. This led to Maechee Sansanee's belief that a Buddhist woman can raise her child lovingly on her own if she has wisdom. She says, "If the child is born to a mother with wisdom, they will become a walking monument of a mother" (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004).

Because of her own experience of being raised by an independent, thoughtful, and capable mother, she came to believe in the various potentials of women to contribute to the betterment of society. She comments, "The wisdom of women will change the world softly, tenderly, and lovingly" (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004). Thus, her mother has been a role model and an important point of reference for Maechee Sansanee in her development of an ideal image of women.

Organizational Structure and Functions

Maechee Sansanee is the leader of an organization with a clear hierarchical structure. It is composed of two distinct groups, a group of *maechee*s and a group of lay

volunteers.   The organization in theory consists of two layers (Figure 5-1); on the top layer are eleven *maechee*s, with Maechee Sansanee as the leader, while on the bottom of the chart are several administrative units which include dozens of lay volunteers.

Figure 5-1: Organizational Chart of Sathira Dhammasathan Community
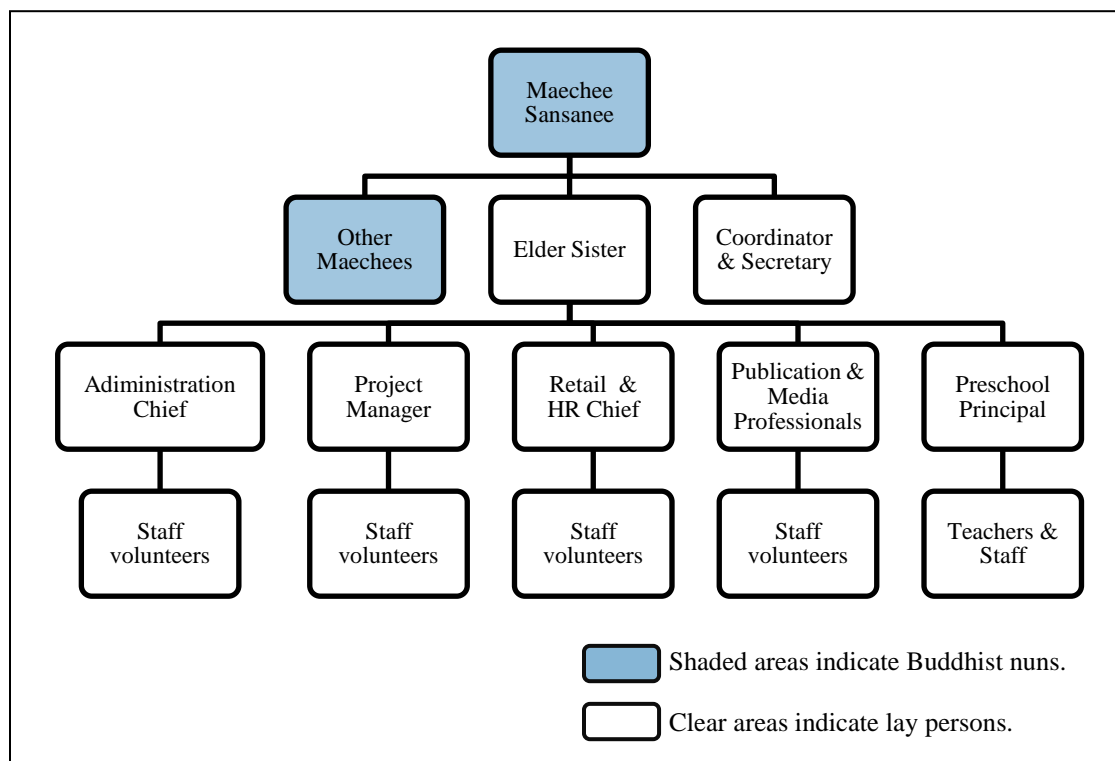
While Maechee Sansanee takes charge of the Buddhist teaching aspect, Maechee Sansanee's elder sister manages all secular or business activities. Under her elder sister's supervision, lay volunteer staff provides various kinds of services to the *maechee*s, such as finance, human resource, administration, and management of more than a dozen projects of different sizes. The division of dharma and secular

responsibilities along with Maechee Sansanee and her elder sister's direct partnership seem to be key factors for successful business operations at the meditation center. They ensure streams of funding in various forms including partnerships, projects, and sales of novelty items and services. Maechee Sansanee is not physically involved in monetary transactions but is very aware of the whereabouts of the resources.

Each team and project has a leader who has substantial experience working in the community. Team leaders assign tasks to their staff, supervise them and report to Maechee Sansanee or her elder sister. Once an event is announced, leaders of each team go back to their teams, plan their actions and tell their members what to do.

Leadership according to Hierarchy

Maechee Sansanee displays a top-down style of leadership, rather than bottom-up, that accords with her organization's hierarchy. This style was observed in the organizational character of the meditation center, her roles in various occasions, and her communication styles. First, her protected status suggests that she holds a high status. She is the director of Sathira Dhammasathan, a speaker and a special guest for many meetings in Thailand and abroad. Even though the status of *maechee*s is not generally high in Thai society, she is treated as a special type of *maechee* because of her prominent work and reputation.

Second, the hierarchical organizational structure of the meditation center and the specified roles of staff teams indicate that she assigns tasks to each unit to accomplish her projects. Third, her restriction of appointments to selective parties and individuals

suggests her busy schedule and her ability to control communication. Even within the community, Maechee Sansanee meets with her colleagues on selective occasions and times. For example, *maechee*s meet with Maechee Sansanee to give her updates and discuss issues on a designated Buddha day (*wan phra*) of a week. If an issue is minor, *maechee*s discuss it among themselves and with senior *maechee*s to find a solution to the problem. Lay volunteers who are in charge of support teams or projects generally give Maechee Sansanee updates at weekly meetings. Her elder sister oversees the kindergarten program on behalf of Maechee Sansanee and gets updated at weekly meetings with all the teachers and staff.

Situational Leadership

While she is generally an autocratic leader, a closer look at her interactions with her followers suggests that she changes her degrees of authority depending on the situations. For example, she gives detailed directions to her staff person, even a long-term colleague, who is still developing his professional skills. In her interview, she quoted her own interaction with Mr. Danai, her long-term follower who manages sound effects during her speech. She would say to him, "You need to keep the volume lower than that. If you keep it loud, nobody wants to listen to it." She taught him in this way as she understood that he was dedicated to serving her but needed concrete instructions from time to time.

Maechee Sansanee delegates responsibilities to her followers who share a vision of the organization and have competencies to achieve it. Ms. Apinya, the head teacher

of her kindergarten commented that Maechee Sansanee now requires fewer meetings and updates on school management. She feel that it is because Maechee Sansanee feels comfortable with her kindergarten staff running the school and trusts that they will do the jobs as she had instructed.

Maechee Sansanee invites participation from her followers when she feels it is appropriate. I observed a two-day meeting of executive members of the Sathira Dhammasathan. The attendees included her long-term followers who were also professionally successful, such as TV personalities, university faculty, former company executives and current professional staff members of Sathira Dhammasathan. They brainstormed visions and strategies for the future of their community in a relaxing atmosphere.

Personal Traits

From my interviews with Maechee Sansanee's followers and my own observations, several personal traits have emerged as key reasons for her success as the leader of the Sathira Dhammasathan community and a visible *maechee* in Thai society. They include determination, high energy level, aesthetic pleasantness and expressiveness.

Many followers commented that Maechee Sansanee has a strong determination about what she intends to do. Her elder sister commented that this trait was already visible when she was young (cited in Holt, 2004). Sansanee made many important life decisions on her own and followed through on them (Montira, 2005) . For example,

when she moved to Bangkok to continue her university education, Ms. Sansanee decided to enter a national model competition. Unlike other contestants, she never relied on her family's support to prepare for the contest. She did prepare well on her own and eventually won the first prize in the contest.

Ms. Sansanee's determination to become a *maechee* came as a big surprise to her family and Thai society. Her elder sister remembers when she learned about Ms. Sansanee's career change from model to *maechee*, which was clearly a difficult decision for most young women at that time to make.

> On the day she decided to become a nun, I did not even know about that. I heard about her decision in the newspaper. I had to come and see her. She explained that she believed that becoming a nun in this temple is the best thing which can happen to her (cited in Holt, 2004).

Many followers commented that Maechee Sansanee was hard working and that she worked fast. They understood that her energetic and fast-paced thinking and working have made it possible for her to do a large amount of work in great depth and breadth. Several of her followers have commented that they have learned from her how to cope with mental and physical tiredness and have their energy renewed in a short period of time.

Meditation and breathing are the key for her renewed energy. Whether walking or sitting, members of this community practice meditation in action as they engage in assigned work throughout a day. Maechee Sansanee commented on the effect of meditation on work:

> I use work as the focus of meditation. While I am working I follow my breath. I do a lot of breathing exercises and make sure that I am always aware of what I am doing. My mind is calm, my breathing is calm. This is the reason why I have been able to work so hard. (Batchelor, 2000, p. 301)

Many followers as well as the general Thai population comment on Maechee Sansanee's pleasant appearance. First, her simple and clean look, in white robes and with shaved head, gives many people comfortable feelings. Second, her graceful posture, her voice during a dhamma talk, and her gentle behavior give a peaceful impression. Maechee Sansanee's aesthetic pleasantness is not limited to her own physical appearance but is extended to her productions. The retreat center filled with numerous plants and a serene atmosphere imparts a peaceful spiritual feeling to visitors. Ms. Maneeya still remembers her overwhelming feeling of awe when she visited her in the tranquil meditation center for the first time decades ago.

Maechee Sansanee is explicit in her expressions. She uses different facial expressions, eye contact, and voice tones during her talks. Her gesture of raising her index finger to emphasize her points is commonly observed and remembered. Her pictures often portray her warm attitude toward various individuals, including hugging her spiritual friend from abroad, speaking to children curiously, and bowing to the Dalai Lama with an appreciative look.

Skill Sets

From my interviews with Maechee Sansanee's followers and from my observations, several skill sets were identified as key reasons for her development into

the successful leader of the Sathira Dhammasathan community and a visible Buddhist nun in Thai society. They include skills in public relations, public speaking, problem solving, media expertise, and creative and innovative thinking. Many of them seem to have been acquired through her own explorations and professional experiences as a fashion model and a public relations executive in the corporate sector.

Maechee Sansanee's public relations skills and media expertise have made it possible for her to communicate Buddhist teachings in a contemporary way for several different purposes. First, she uses them for spreading dharma. In her TV and radio shows, she shares Buddhist teachings in a way which address the audience's concerns, such as issues related to family, work, and everyday life. Second, she uses public relations and media for recruitment of participants for the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. Third, she uses them to invite the general public to support the Center by donating to gain spiritual merit.

Maechee Sansanee has an ability to draw people's attention and keep it. Ms. Maneeya recalls the shaky feeling that she had when she was invited to Sathira Dhammsathan to give a lecture to teachers who were attending a training session. She said:

> The teachers were waiting for me in complete silence. As I walked on a gravel path to the dhamma talk hall, I found myself shaking. I had to be very careful not to make any sounds when I walked on the gravels. In most lectures where I had spoken in the past, I had to censure my audience for their lack of attention before I talked. Maechee Sansanee, she is very unusual. I was impressed with the way Maechee Sansanee had kept her audience extremely attentive and quiet. (personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Maechee Sansanee's programs are well-received by Thai people partly because of her excellent public speaking skills. In addition to her pleasant appearance, she speaks clearly, succinctly, but eloquently. She speaks to a wide variety of audiences, from school children, teens, families, and teachers to government officials, company workers, and international audiences.

As Ms. Supang commented, Maechee Sansanee has an exceptional ability to put together a lecture within a specified period of time addressing an appropriate topic that fits the context. For instance, Maechee Sansanee might give a 15-minute lecture at a meeting of a nationally known financial company with 2,000 employees about how to love their careers (personal communication, February 15, 2008).

Maechee Sansanee's problem-solving skills manifest in various situations in her work. She understands the gist of problems quickly, connects the problem with Buddhist teaching, and communicates a solution to the person in a way that she can understand. On an individual level, she listens to the concerns of her followers and the individuals who visit Sathira Dhammasathan. She sometimes responds to several visitors in a row within a limited period of time.

On an organizational level, she handles problems that are complex and sensitive in nature. Since a *maechee*'s status is ambiguous in Thai society, she is sensitive about her interactions with people who have official status. Even in a situation with such status differences, she manages the difference effectively, behaves calmly and works for positive and constructive solutions with the other party.

Many followers commented about Maechee Sansanee's creativity. Sometimes unusual, Maechee Sansanee thinks out of the existing box. Many of her ideas are useful ones that help conserve natural resources or convert a small amount of resource into a large amount of benefit. Over the years, she has impressed many followers as she creatively improvised the landscape of a walking meditation course at the retreat center. For example, she came up with an idea to create a grassy hill in the center of the retreat center area using "waste" soil. The soil was dug out when making a well that would be used to water plants. Today, the serendipitous hill has green grass and is a favorite part of the retreat center where families sit down to rest and children slide (Mr. Danai, personal communication, February 27, 2008).

Maechee Sansanee inspires entrepreneurial projects in Sathira Dhammasathan. The Creating Forest Project is one of the most profitable projects started by this community. Mr. Suchart excitedly shared his story with me:

> I want to tell you right now about this very useful project of planting the cannonball tree that Khun Mae started. I planted this plant when it was about one foot tall. I took good care of it and it had grown to be a big tree quickly. One day, a storm came and the tree was struck by a lightning. When I went to see the tree, all I saw was numerous seeds that popped out of the broken tree and scattered on the ground. I took the seeds and planted in a nursery to grow new plants. I grew more than thousands plants. And Khun Mae said, Er… "Why don't you sell the plants to earn some money. You can use the money to take care of the [Sathira Dhammasathan] garden". What a great idea she gave me! Khun Mae gave me an opportunity to take part in the project both in selling the plants to visitors and in improving the whole garden. (personal communication, February 22, 2008)

Maechee Sansanee recognized the business potential in Mai's planting efforts and suggested that he sell the plants for fundraising. Currently, the cannonball plant sales have reached a total of 600,000 Thailand baht, approximately US$19,000. This exciting project gave Mr. Suchart a great sense of confidence in his work. In addition, this horticulture work has become financially self-sustainable and generates a stable income for the community.

Maechee Sansanee has an excellent ability to adopt international ideas into her projects to enhance their qualities. Her open-minded attitude, minimal fear of risks, curiosity and flexibility in ideas make many interesting fusions happen in her programs. For example, Maechee Sansanee is a pioneer in Thailand for integrating European-originated Waldorf education into traditional Buddhist education. The Waldorf and Buddhist blend of early childhood education has turned out to be an effective program to nurture children's minds and souls. Both elements were integrated into a beautiful curriculum that focuses on nature as well as art, language and music without losing the strengths of each tradition.

Resources

Maechee Sansanee receives funding from various sources to realize her projects. The most noticeable funding source is her fundraising initiatives. She effectively raises funds using visuals and encouraging individuals to get involved in her projects. Because of her past careers, Maechee Sansanee had a relative advantage related to access to resources. Some resources were made available because of her family support,

especially from a wealthy entrepreneur, and others were brought through various networking that she has developed over the years. Still other resources have been brought to the community as Thai society recognizes more and more successful projects implemented by the organization.

Maechee Sansanee's public relations materials are designed beautifully with numerous visuals. For example, a color-printed, English brochure, titled, *a Gift of Wisdom*, addresses several major projects of Maechee Sansanee: the *Sawika Sikkhalai* Project, the *Sai Samphan* House, the prison program for pregnant mothers, and the kindergarten. The brochure encourages readers to give donations to these programs as a gift of wisdom. The *Sawika Sikkhalai p*roject brochure, printed in mono-color and written in Thai, encourages the reader to make a small donation every day: 10 Thailand baht, approximately 30 cents per day, for example, 300 baht (approximately US$10) per month, and 3,600 baht (approximately US$115) per year.

Maechee Sansanee receives funding support from various organizations and through various grants for the important work that she does in Thai society. For example, some resources come from the corporate sector. A TV production company donated a series of 2-minute spots that aired for eight years. A publishing company donated the launching of printed magazines. The magazine has a list of corporate sponsors. For example, a *Sawika* magazine issued in 2004 listed a variety of corporations including Seven Eleven, Siam Drinking Water, and The Rose Garden Resort. Although direct observation was not possible, connections with important organizations such as Thailand's royal family, foreign embassies, the United Nations

and celebrities both in Thailand and abroad, play an important role in giving her projects credibility.

Finally, the Sathira Dhammsathan community receives constant support from the laity in its neighborhood, such as donations of daily meals and necessities. The *maechee*s' practice of publicly soliciting alms, which is relatively unusual for a *maechee* community, suggests the stability of support from the local community.

Research Question 2: Impact on Followers

The second research question in this study concerns the influence Maechee Sansanee has had on her followers. In order to determine this, it is helpful to know the reasons why the followers became involved in the Sathira Dhammasathan community. This provides background information for understanding the impact of Maechee Sansanee on her followers.

Reasons for Getting Involved in Sathira Dhammasathan Community

Followers arrive in the Sathira Dhammasathan community and meet Maechee Sansanee for varied reasons. The reasons given for becoming involved in the Sathira Dhammasathan community are summarized in Table 5.4. They are categorized into six themes: practicing Buddhism, opportunity for education, apprenticeship, seeking refuge, professional opportunity, and family-friendly environment. Some followers, especially those who joined the community relatively recently, had known about Maechee

Sansanee from the media before they approached Sathira Dhammasathan, but others did not know about her at all.

Table 5.4: Reasons for Getting Involved in Sathira Dhammasathan

Major Themes	Related Concepts
Desire to practice Buddhism	Becoming *maechee*s (*maechee*s)
	Spiritual exploration (lay followers)
Opportunity for education	Teacher training
	College education
Apprenticeship	Limited formal education
Seeking refuge	Unwed mothers
	Violence victims
Professional opportunity	Personal connections
Family friendly environment	Convenience, safety

Practicing Buddhism

Practicing Buddhism is a primary reason for coming to Sathira Dhammasathan for many individuals whom I interviewed. Most *maechee*s had held a strong determination to become *maechee*s before they first visited the retreat center and had been looking for an appropriate place to accomplish this goal. For example, Ms. Rungrawee had wanted to become a nun several years before she was ordained. She had questioned herself for years as to whether she wanted an ordinary life in which she gets married or a spiritually-based life. As she regularly watched Maechee Sansanee's TV show on teaching, she felt her determination to become a *maechee* becoming stronger. She chose to seek a place for Buddhist practice in Sathira Dhammasathan although she considered both options of staying in Thailand and going abroad for

ordination. Other *maechee*s found Sathira Dhammasathan through advertisements in the newspaper and other print media.

Lay individuals found the Sathira Dhammasathan Center through publications, media, personal introduction, or general reputation. All of them participated in meditation retreats there and found them helpful and interesting. Many are working women in urban Bangkok and some are manager-level professionals who work in prestigious companies. These women, feeling tired from the pressures in their competitive career environments, found the Sathira Dhammasathan Center a sanctuary where they could release themselves from stressful work and gain a refreshed mind and body.

Followers Ms. Mathuros and Ms. Napassorn, now the translators for Maechee Sansanee, became involved in the Sathira Dhammsathan community as they sought an opportunity to deepen their understanding of Buddhism. Ms. Mathuros was working as one of the few female executives in a well-known cement company. Ms. Napassorn was running her parent's family business after she received a Master's degree in business administration from a university in the United States. Soon after they became involved in the community, Maechee Sansanee and her colleagues found their strong English skills essential to Center activities.

Ms. Supang, who became a *maechee* a year ago, had been a volunteer at Sathira Dhammsathan for the past fifteen years. She, then a financial manager of a well-known company, first visited Sathira Dhammsathan when she attended a one-day retreat. The

motivation to do this came almost by accident since she would normally have spent her holiday relaxing at a beach. Instead, when she saw an advertisement for a day-long meditation retreat in a newspaper, she decided to attend it. As she practiced prayer and breathing, she found the retreat very relaxing and calming, "just like lying on the beach" (Ms. Supang, personal communication, February 15, 2008). She attended a longer retreat to learn more about meditation. She then became involved in Sathira Dhammasathan as a volunteer and continues working there now as a nun.

Some pregnant women come to Sathira Dhammasathan to train themselves to be good mothers through Buddhist teachings. When Ms. Vorrapan, then a project manager in a non-governmental organization, became pregnant, she felt a renewed interest in Buddhism and started to visit temples. As a new mother, she felt a strong need to learn about dharma for herself and her baby. She found Maechee Sansanee fit her needs and decided to become involved in her community.

Several lay followers shared that they stay in the Sathira Dhammasathan community because they appreciate Maechee Sansanee's teachings that are free from superstitions. Some of these followers had done an extensive search for temples and monks that would meet their spiritual needs before they reached the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. After meeting several Buddhist teachers who relied heavily on superstition, they found that they preferred teachers who would guide them without using those ideas.

Thus, followers decide to get involved in the Sathira Dhammasathan community and work with Maechee Sansanee because they see her as a spiritual guide for their lives, whether as a *maechee* or lay follower. They also like the fact that they can listen to dharma lectures through audio speakers all day long wherever they work in the retreat center.

Opportunity for Education

Several followers I interviewed became involved in Sathira Dhammsathan as they sought an opportunity for education. The educational opportunities included access to higher education, teacher training, and vocational training. For example, Ms. Apinya became a teacher for Maechee Sansanee's kindergarten after she attended her teacher training course. While she taught in the kindergarten and lived in a staff dormitory, she attended college in the evenings and completed her Bachelor's degree.

Apprenticeship

For some followers, working with Maechee Sansanee was not a matter of choice but part of an official appointment of apprenticeship. This is especially the case for followers who were sent here as teenage boys by Maechee Sansanee's family member. For example, Mr. Danai started to work with Maechee Sansanee at Siriporng Temple when he was 14-years old and Maechee Sansanee had just become a nun. He was asked to work as her personal assistant to take care of her daily needs so she could concentrate on her Buddhist training. Since Bo had attained limited years of education, working

with Maechee Sansanee in the temple environment gave him an opportunity to master literacy, math and other vocational skills over the years.

Seeking Refuge

Several followers I interviewed told me that they became involved in the Sathira Dhammasathan community as they sought assistance from the *Sai Samphan* House, a shelter home for women who were unwed mothers or had suffered traumas related to violence. Often arriving with a young child, the mothers needed a place to heal their minds and gain strength to raise their children. For example, Ms. Pimolsri came to Sathira Dhammasathan with her ten-day-old son 15 years ago. Becoming pregnant against her will, she needed a safe place, comfort, and company as well as guidance about how to accept and care for her child with love. Her experience will be described in greater detail in a later section.

Professional Opportunity

Many followers were invited to work at the Sathira Dhammasathan Center because of their professional skills. They had been successful professionals either working independently or as employees of well-established companies, organizations, or schools. They became involved in this community through personal invitations from members or supporters of the community.

Mr. Veerapong left his teaching position at a prestigious junior high school to work in the Children's Center kindergarten as an administrator and media specialist. Ms. Karnda was introduced to Sathira Dhammasathan by Maechee Sansanee's family

member to work in its business administration. Since she had gained trust by working with the family member for nine years, she was asked to be in charge of the finance and human resource sections. Ms. Hattaya, the manager of the wellness section, first came to Sathira Dhammasathan when her teacher in Thai medicine brought her to the center. She became involved in the center as a massage specialist since more were needed.

Some followers with media expertise first came to the retreat center when their supervisors, who were already supporters of Maechee Sansanee, decided to donate media production services. Ms. Nivarin came to Sathira Dhammasathan as an editor because they needed a person who could be in charge of printed magazines. Mr. Paranyu joined the community about 15 years ago when an employee of a media production company. He was asked to produce a TV documentary program that featured the *Sai Samphan* House.

Family Friendly Environment

Several followers became attracted to this community because of its family friendly atmosphere. Ms. Vorrapan, the grant writer, approached Sathira Dhammasathan for a volunteer opportunity because she thought it would be a good place for a stay-at-home mother to spend a few hours a day helping the community while her child played alongside in the center. Mr. Paranyu and his wife Nam also became involved in this center because they could bring their children to the workplace and have them attend Maechee Sansanee's kindergarten.

Impact on Followers

> Maechee Sansanee helps us develop our mind. If we didn't have her, we
> couldn't have as much understanding about life as today. (Nin, personal
> communication, March 3, 2008)

Followers have been influenced by Maechee Sansanee in various areas and

degrees. Table 5.5 summarizes the themes that emerged regarding her impact on her

followers. Several themes relate to their original reasons for arriving in the Sathira

Dhammasathan community. For example, followers who approached Maechee

Sansanee out of an interest in practicing Buddhism felt that they have gained deeper

understanding about it. Those who noted educational opportunities as their original

reason for joining the community felt that their particular educational needs were met.

The reality of the impact felt by followers is more complex than these equations,

however. In fact, deeper understanding of Buddhism was felt not only by those who

approached Sathira Dhammasathan for dharma learning but also by every other

follower except for Ms. Nivarin who claimed that she does not practice Buddhism.

Those who started to work with Maechee Sansanee to meet their needs to go to college

gained not only a college education but also training and work opportunities as

kindergarten teachers. Further, as they worked with children, they gained a greater

sense of compassion and understanding, along with an increased appreciation of

Buddhism.

Table 5.5: Impact of Maechee Sansanee on Followers

Major themes	Related concepts
Deeper understanding of Buddhism	Authenticity (*maechee*)
	Applicability to real world (lay)
Achieving education	College education
Non-formal learning	Life-long learning
Work skills and attitude	Learning by doing
	Like or dislike
	Work with awareness
	Giving the best effort and letting it go
Recovery and empowerment	Surviving trauma
	Restoring self-worth
Self-sufficiency	Simpler living
Interdependence	Becoming a receiver
	Becoming a giver
Relating to others	Boding with family
	Understanding of others
	Emotional control
	Dealing with difference

Deeper Understanding of Buddhism

Most *maechee*s feel that they deepened their understanding of Buddhist teachings by working with Maechee Sansanee. Some commented that their understanding of Buddhist teachings interacts with the happenings in their daily lives in a profound way. Ms. Suchada, a senior *maechee* said:

> I have better understanding of the world. I have more awareness of what I contact using my senses. I have more happiness. I can let go easily…I mean I can accept things easily. Little things come and go. I see *dharma* or the truth more clearly. I am happier now. (personal communication, February 18, 2008)

Ms. Yada, a young *maechee* said:

> Just live my life like this. I am ok with myself. Everyday I live my life without thinking of the future. Follow her concept – Live a happy life, be delivered from suffering together. Now I'm happy that I have a chance to work for improving myself and help others. (personal communication, February 25, 2008)

Some *maechee*s appreciate the technical correctness and precision of Maechee Sansanee's teaching. Ms. Rungrawee commented about the authenticity of Maechee Sansanee's teachings, noting that it is exactly based on Buddha's teachings. Many lay followers feel that Maechee Sansanee has taught them Buddhist teachings that they can apply to their practical lives. Followers have contemplated Buddhist teachings while they engage in a variety of work in the community. Mr. Veerapong, the administrator in Maechee Sansanee's kindergarten and an artist who creates signs for the Sathira Dhammasathan Center, commented that the short but powerful messages of Buddhist teachings promoted by Maechee Sansanee have had deep impact on his ways of thinking. He said:

> When I work here, I get something unconsciously. For example, I participate in weekend activities at Sathira Dhammasathan. I write the *dharma* quotes on the board so I absorb the *dharma* that she wants me to write such as "Live your life easily but aim to do as hard as you can", "Suffering is to be seen, not to be lived", "The mind that wants to give is light, the mind that wants to be gained is heavy". When I do something like this regularly as daily routine, *dharma* can also change my life. Moreover, other people can learn *dharma* from what I wrote. While I absorb *dharma*, suffering decreases. I change by sharing. When I work with Maechee Sansanee, I change both consciously and unconsciously. (personal communication, February 13, 2008)

Ms. Apinya commented:

We won't know that "Seeing suffering, not to live with". Moreover, we won't understand "being happy without attachment"…we won't understand these if we don't know her because she gives us a lot. It's the life stability of one person. She gives us a lot of spiritual viewpoint. About living, let us have consciousness, awareness, mental stability or having a strong foundation as she said to the children that "Let the child have the Buddha mind - awareness, awakening, and alertness. We must have these before the children. That's what she gives us. If we don't have these, we can't develop the children, we can't teach the children. (personal communication, March 3, 2008)

Achieving Education

Maechee Sansanee has provided many young women with opportunities to obtain education. At least two kindergarten teachers I interviewed completed their college education through Maechee Sansanee's support, such as financial and living support along with job opportunities. In addition to these followers who attended regular colleges, Maechee Sansanee encourages her followers, whether *maechee*s or lay persons, to gain higher education through open universities. The exact number of those who completed college education through Maechee Sansanee's assistance is unknown but the accounts of two interviewees in this study show that she recognizes the value of higher education and supports individuals with such aspirations whenever possible.

Non-Formal Learning

Followers who have been with Maechee Sansanee since their youth have gained life skills as they worked with her over the years. For example, Mr. Danai, who has been working closely with Maechee Sansanee for the past 28 years, has learned a range

of skills, such as how to use a bank account and treating people from different

backgrounds in a respectful way. Followers have also developed an attitude of life-long

learning. Mr. Danai feels that he can use the knowledge he gained in Sathira

Dhammsathan in his real life situations. He commented:

> I finished only elementary school. But I don't shut down my opportunity. This
> is what Khun Mae always teaches me. I'm close to her so she has much
> influence on me in the way of thinking. And I don't block myself. I'm open. I
> like to read though my memory is not good. When I read, sometimes I forget.
> But I still like to read, study and learn from work. I don't have an opportunity to
> study in the school or university system. But I can learn from work. I see her
> work and I can learn from it. I have to observe. Planting trees or doing anything
> else I have to observe their growth. This kind of tree likes water, heat or drought,
> I learn like this. (personal communication, February 27, 2008)

Work Skills and Attitude

Almost all the followers whom I interviewed have gained or polished their

work-related skills and developed a Buddhist attitude for work through their association

with Maechee Sansanee. Ms. Pimolsri, who became involved in Sathira Dhammasathan

right after she completed her college education in Thai dance, humorously calls the

center a vocational school which has equipped her with necessary skills. She

commented:

> Before I came here, I couldn't do anything. I want to tell you that Sathira
> Dhammasathan is like Poh Chang College[2] (Laugh). Students in general school
> learn academic matters while I learned about Thai dance and manners of the

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[2] Poh Chang College is a unique institution that teaches arts and crafts to prepare good artists and skillful artisans.

royal palace. But actually I learned nothing. (personal communication, February 27, 2008)

Besides specific work-related skills and capabilities, the followers have learned lessons from Maechee Sansanee that are categorized into three major principles: learn by doing, do whether you like or dislike, and work with awareness.

Many followers learned their work from a beginner's point. As a personal assistant for Maechee Sansanee during public appearances, Ms. Pimolsri's job was to ensure that everything was available for her convenience, from a glass of drinking water to appropriate stage arrangement. She, who is now an excellent personal assistant and back-stage staff for Maechee Sansanee, recalls the anxiety she felt when she had to challenge herself to accomplish unfamiliar tasks. She commented:

> When I stay with Maechee, what I've never done before, I must do. What I've never know, I must know. I can't say "I don't know" or "I can't". Mother Sansanee teaches me that "I can't" will cut your chance. If you want a chance, you have to learn. You have to open your heart to do. (personal communication, February 27, 2008)

A number of followers I interviewed made similar comments about learning to do a job that was unfamiliar to them just by doing it. Ms. Yada learned to manage the hosting of meditation participants every weekend and also to perform bookkeeping for a fundraising project although she had no previous experience in either area. She now feels that she has gained an increased sense of responsibility, confidence, and self-efficacy.

Many followers have learned that work needs to be done whether they like or dislike the job. Ms. Napassorn, a secretary for Maechee Sansanee and coordinator of international relations, shared an insight into the like-or-dislike principle. While part of her job on overseas trips was videotaping Maechee Sansanee's activities, she was feeling that she was not confident in these skills and was sometimes uninterested in the time-consuming tasks. Maechee Sansanee taught her that she had to do the job whether she liked it or not. This lesson helped her keep practicing this particular type of work and eventually brought her a high level of technical skills in videotaping and photography.

The final principle that emerged from the work experiences of Maechee Sansanee's followers was that a person has to do a job with awareness so it is complete. Ms. Pimolsri commented:

> Khun Mae taught me how to clean a table. She taught me to clean it with awareness so I don't have to come back and do it again. If I clean it in a hurry just to finish, I don't have awareness. (personal communication, February 27, 2008)

Recovery and Empowerment

Numerous women and children visited the Sathira Dhammasathan Center to cope with their life challenges and heal their wounds from trauma. Many of those women and children stayed in the *Sai Samphan* House. Based on Maechee Sansanee's belief that women can raise their children lovingly without a husband, mothers were given the support and necessary resources to take care of themselves and their children.

Gradually, these mothers regained their confidence and developed parenting capabilities while living in the shelter and helping the community.

Ms. Pimolsri was one of the young mothers who recovered and eventually became a successful parent and a kindergarten teacher. She said, "[Maechee Sansanee] helped me to be reborn again from a woman who didn't want to live any more. She helped me learn about love and compassion and to love my son" (cited in Holt, 2004). As a kindergarten teacher, she achieved an even more difficult task, that of caring for and giving love to not only her own child but also to other children, following Maechee Sansanee's advice.

Maechee Sansanee encouraged her to become engaged in regular and busy daily tasks as a volunteer and a teacher in the retreat center. She cautioned her against dwelling on negative thoughts about the past mishaps of unwanted pregnancy. Getting involved in everyday tasks helped her stay on a track of positive and healthy living. Every morning, she woke up at 4:00 a.m. to clean the facility. After having breakfast at 6:00 a.m., she bicycled to the kindergarten with her child in the front basket. At 3:00 p.m., after teaching all day, she came back to the center to do more work. She cooked, meditated, prayed and assisted Maechee Sansanee. Negative thoughts, even if they did come, did not stay with her for long. During the six years that she and her child lived at Sathira Dhammasathan, she worked hard to make herself useful to Maechee Sansanee and the community.

Maechee Sansanee gave a woman with disabilities care and support so she was able to become a confident yet caring mother and teacher. Ms. Juraiwan lived in the community for fifteen years. She moved to the *Sai Samphan* House with her three-month-old baby. Over the years, she was concerned about her progressively impaired vision. She felt that she was becoming a burden for the community. As she raised her child and taught at the Children's Center kindergarten, she gradually started to feel that she was being helpful to others. Her experience of living with members of this community helped her feel that she is important and valuable. In her interview, she emphasized that she is happy that she is now able to see values in other people.

Self-Sufficiency

A number of followers commented that they have learned simple living from Maechee Sansanee. Many followers found this a pleasant surprise and started to adopt that kind of lifestyle. Many found that that their sense of satisfaction increased greatly since they stopped wanting more material items. For Ms. Supang, who experienced a drastic change in her lifestyle from being a professional woman to a *maechee*, feels that the happy life that she had previously sought may have had the same quality as suffering.

Simple living means different things to different people. For some, it is less material goods and more psychological well-being. Ms. Karnda said that she has been trying to limit the materials that she and her family own to basic necessities. When she walks around a shopping center, she no longer purchases things according to her

random desires. She feels that simpler living has brought her feelings of happiness and freedom. By owning fewer goods, she feels that she has more room in her mind to better see and understand herself and other people.

For some followers, simpler living means removing themselves from a competition with other people for larger incomes. Mr. Danai shared a story of his previous overwork for the sake of money. For a long time, he worked two jobs, one as a personal assistant for Maechee Sansanee and the other running an eatery at night with his wife. Even if he was exhausted from chronic sleep deprivation, he believed that he deserved the long hours of working because he did not have education. One day, however, he realized that his family was not connecting with one another. He asked himself, "I could earn as much money as a college graduate by working through the night, but where is my family?" (personal communication, February 27, 2008) He decided to reduce his hours helping in his wife's business. He now believes that the self-sufficient life gives him reassurance about his family and the feeling that life is good enough.

Interdependence

Becoming a Receiver

Some members of Sathira Dhammasathan noted that they have learned about humility. This is especially the case for those who have had professional experiences in high positions and who have lived in a relatively high socio-economic environment. Ms. Supang, a first-year *maechee*, was a "big" person in the community for fifteen years

before she became a *maechee*. She worked for a prestigious company as a financial

manager. As a single professional woman, she used to make various kinds of generous

donations to the community on a regular basis without sacrifice to her lifestyle. For

example, she used to bring hundreds of lotus flowers to the community every weekend

for *maechee*s to use for fundraising. She offered clothes and other necessities to

Maechee Sansanee to ensure her well-being. Her visible financial contribution made

her feel she was important to the community.

Ms. Supang felt entitled to act in a confident and outspoken way even when

interacting with Maechee Sansanee. She sometimes confronted Maechee Sansanee

when she found her advice was not being utilized. She recalls, "I was acting like a child"

(personal communication, February 15, 2008). She now realizes that she behaved in

these ways because she wanted to be recognized by Maechee Sansanee as an important

person

Today as a *maechee*, Ms. Supang is training herself to become a "smaller", more

humble person. Since some members of the Sathira Dhammsathan Center show

hesitance about treating her as a less important person, she needs to remind herself even

stronger that she is now a *maechee*. For her, the alms rounds that she attends every

morning are opportunities to practice becoming a receiver. When walking around the

surrounding community to receive offerings of food, she forces herself to change from

being a giver to a receiver. At first, she found it extremely uncomfortable to receive

food because she had always been the provider.

Maechee Sansanee affirms that alms rounds are effective in shifting perspective from a giver to a receiver. She believes that "the rounds are essential, as they make the nuns (*maechee*s, italic by author) grateful to the laypeople and eager to earn the respect they receive" (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Sanitsuda, 1995). She says, "Making alms rounds in the slum also reminds us that we are no better than beggars, that we have no right to be greedy or choosy given the kindness of the poor toward us."

Becoming a Giver

Sathira Dhammasathan is a place where people learn to be givers as well. Maechee Sansanee teaches her followers "Give others more than what you have given." (Ms. Nivarin, personal communication, February 29, 2008), as was quoted by a few followers.   Visitors at Sathira Dhammasathan are encouraged to earn merit by donating money in amounts that are comfortable for them. Children are also taught to be givers in smaller ways. In Maechee Noi's Piggy Bank Project, Maechee Sansanee encourages children to save small amounts of money in a bank that is the shape of a little *maechee,* named Noi. She also asks them to bring it back to her community as a way to practice giving to others.

While many acts of giving are being practiced in the community, the most noticeable, although subtle, form of giving is made by Maechee Sansanee, according to a follower, who is a keen observer. Ms. Nivarin said, "People often describe their involvement in Sathira Dhammasathan as helping Maechee Sansanee's work but

actually she is helping us. She gives us opportunities to work with her" (personal communication, February 29, 2008).

Relating with Others

<u>Bonding with Family</u>

Mr. Paranyu, the in-house TV producer, says that he and his wife feel more connected with each other and with their two young children since they moved their workplace from a company to Sathira Dhammasathan. He stopped frequenting night clubs after work, which was often encouraged in the company culture of which he was a part. The couple has now developed a new kind of relationship which is collegial and more intimate. The proximity of Maechee Sansanee's kindergarten to their workplace offers them convenience as well as an increased sense of safety for and bonding with their children.

<u>Understanding of Others</u>

Several *maechee*s commented that they have gained increased empathy and understanding toward people who have problems since they started to work in the community. Ms. Supang, as she grew up in a comfortable family and worked in finance, had not experienced the challenges that many others do. Therefore, she was confident, efficiency-oriented, busy, and also a critical person. Now that she is seeing people of all ages come to visit the *maechee*s for assistance with all kinds of problems, she sometimes feels overwhelmed but also feels that her eyes have opened to the multiple realities of people in society.

Ms. Suchada is the main caretaker for a girl who was left at the community by her mother when she was four months old. Her mother stayed in the community for a while after she had her baby. One day, she disappeared without telling anybody. Since then, Ms. Suchada and a few other women have raised the girl in the lotus flower house in the community. She ate, played, and took naps in the flower house from morning until evening and slept at night in the *Sai Samphan* House. Ms. Suchada shows understanding of the girl's mother:

> I do my best. If she goes, let her go. I can bring up the girl. Why should I panic? If I panic, be frightened or worried, I can't help her. So I am conscious, and take care of the girl the best at that time. You have to understand that her mother has a big problem and suffers very much up to a point where she can't nurture her child or take her with her. I thank her that she left her child here in her difficult time. If she decided to take her child with her, it could have been miserable for both of them. She knew this place was safe and her child could live here. (personal communication, February 18, 2008)

Many lay followers have created better relationships with their families and friends since they became involved in Sathira Dhammasathan. They learned to look at problems from multiple perspectives. These followers say that they are thankful to Maechee Sansanee for showing them a good model for reframing problems, gaining understanding, and forgiving others. For example, Ms. Wilai has gained greater understanding of her husband, with whom she had conflicts over the years. She was feeling sad that her husband had visited the Sathira Dhammasathan, her workplace, only once in his whole life. She wanted him to have interest in and understand her work and people who she work with. Today, she is starting to understand that her husband's lack

of empathy might have been associated with his lack of receiving empathy in his

childhood.

Emotional Control

Many members commented that they are less susceptible to anger, frustration,

revenge, and other negative mental states and behaviors. Ms. Apinya said, "In our way

of living, we won't be led by emotion, get angry or get confused easily. If you ask me

have you ever gotten confused or suffered by any situation, yes, I have. But it's little

and in short period" (personal communication, March 3, 2008).   Ms. Karnda

commented that, when she gets angry with her husband, she now quickly turns to look

at the other side of her negative emotion. She is now capable of seeing her anger as a

result of lack of understanding about him.

Such emotional skills have made the Sathira Dhammasathan community a

respectful place for everyone who works there. Many followers who used to work in

the private sector commented that the community is a pleasant workplace which has

much less gossip and fewer negative judgments than most workplaces. Maechee

Sansanee emphasizes fostering relationships like brothers and sisters (*pi noong kan*) in

the community. Several staff members commented that members of Sathira

Dhammasathan treat each other equally like siblings, relatives or close friends.

The increased emotional control taught here has impacted parenting styles. Ms.

Pimolsri no longer spanks her child because she has learned other skills from Maechee

Sansanee. As soon as she is about to spank her child for his misbehavior, she catches

herself in that moment. She then reminds herself that she should not let her frustration

or anger make a judgment about her child. Until she was able to freely use her skill of

anger management, she had to work on her problem of frustration, anxiety and fear in

her deeper mind. This debriefing process of her own suffering and pain was guided by

Maechee Sansanee. Over the years, Ms. Pimolsri worked on them until she finally

gained more control of her emotions.

Dealing with Differences

Followers have developed increased capabilities for dealing with differences

through their experiences at the Sathira Dhammasathan community. By working with

colleagues and taking care of guests from diverse backgrounds, many became conscious

of differences in people and understanding of them.

For followers who come from relatively higher socioeconomic backgrounds,

working with people from a lower class as brothers and sisters or even doing office

work in a room that did not have an air-conditioner was a new experience. "We have to

accept everybody as volunteer staff," Ms. Kanokthip said. Unlike the business world

that has screening procedures, her community welcomes everybody who wants to

become involved in it.

Maechee Sansanee herself naturally demonstrates how to work with diverse

people. She teaches, "We open our mind, and let go of prejudice" (Maechee Sansanee,

quoted by Ms. Vorrapan, personal communication, March 4, 2008). Ms. Vorrapan

appreciates that Maechee Sansanee observes her volunteer staff and gives them opportunities to work in a wide variety of areas in the community. Whatever skills and capabilities they have, Maechee Sansanee discovers the talent and directs the person to an appropriate area of work. This has created a sense that everybody, with his different characteristics and capabilities, can play an important role in each position. Ms. Vorrapan commented:

> I feel that people enjoy working with Maechee Sansanee because of her ability to adapt her teaching to various needs and situations of people. She gives us a question and sees if we can solve it. She provides a "stage" for people to work in their own field. She is not strict about set procedures but may guide us and give us feedback. (personal communication, March 4, 2008)

Including persons with disabilities has enhanced the community members' understanding of differences. For example, Ms. Juraiwan is blind today but is assigned a regular position as a kindergarten teacher with the help of an additional assistant teacher in her classroom. As I observed in the community, they also have a deaf person who works as gardening staff.

Research Question 3: Contribution to Society

The third research question posed in the present study was "How has Maechee Sansanee contributed to Thai society?" This question was answered based on a variety of sources of information collected throughout the study. Since her impact on society was not described in a quantifiable way within the capacity of this study, I attempted to

answer this question by providing a synthesis of comments made by a mix of formal

study participants and those who did not participate in the study.

Analysis of media coverage suggested Maechee Sansanee's consistent presence

in Thai media.   A contrary observation was made by an expert, however. Ms. Kwanjai,

a journalist who has featured Maechee Sansanee in a newspaper for more than 15 years,

commented that while she is well known in the country, Maechee Sansanee does not

draw the attention of the entire population of Thailand. She particularly attracts the

female population of the urban middle class (personal communication, March 2, 2008).

This information corroborated my observation that the majority of the weekend retreat

participants seemed to be middle-class women.

Buddhist Education

Analysis of her projects and achievements has suggested that Maechee Sansanee

offers Buddhist education to the general public in Thai society. She teaches about 800

persons each month through her meditation retreat. It is not possible to measure the size

of the audience of her radio shows, TV shows, magazine articles, and other kinds of

publications but their nationwide coverage and distribution suggests that thousands of

people receive her information.

She shares Buddhist teachings in a variety of ways, including formal, non-

formal and informal education. Formal education, which is typically delivered in an

institutional setting, is represented in her well-established kindergarten and new

Master's degree program. Non-formal education, which takes place outside of an

institutional setting, is accomplished in her popular weekend retreat programs. Informal education, which allows learners to learn in many forms in their daily lives, is used in her extensive media outreach. Her efforts to promote Buddhist education for women have allowed women of various social classes to advance their knowledge and practice of Buddhism.

Maechee Sansanee's teaching is characterized by her modern style. In the current study, the modernity was described in two ways: simplified Buddhist language and the use of the media. First, her simplified way of teaching Buddhism makes it easier for the audience, regardless of the level of their knowledge and practice, to approach Buddhism. She presents Buddhist teachings in a way that connects people to their modern life situations. Ms. Maneeya described Maechee Sansanee's modern style in the following way:

> Maechee Sansanee is modern. She tries to put Buddhist idea in a modern way for modern society for the modern time. She tries to find ways for people to touch her. … She tries to make connections with the modern society. It is like let's find their way to connect, not our way. (personal communication, March 5, 2008)

Second, she uses the media effectively to teach the Buddhist ways of life. The media include TV shows, radio shows, a documentary film, websites, a blog and various articles in popular magazines targeted to young people. Her recent series of TV commercials teach Thai people how to become free from negative emotions.

Holistic Healing for Thai Society

Dr. Parichart Suwanbubbha of Mahidol University conducted a research project about the Sathira Dhammsathan community with sponsorship of Thailand's Department of Religious Affairs a few years ago. She noted that Maechee Sansanee's important contribution was developing a remarkable community of nuns who were capable and effective in serving the surrounding community. According to her, Maechee Sansanee has created a place for holistic healing in Thai society using three dimensions: dharma, community, and nature (Parichart, 2004). Her framework of holistic healing is useful in describing Maechee Sansanee's role in providing care and support to the community. At the retreat center, kindergarten, and outside the Sathira Dhammsathan community, countless numbers of people, especially women and children, receive care from Maechee Sansanee directly and indirectly.

The first component of Parichart's framework is the healing through dharma. She created a place where people can heal through learning about Buddhist teaching. The Buddhist teaching of being in the present moment helped a young woman survivor of abuse to focus on her own daily healing rather than dwelling on the past; this was one of the stories of a survivor who recovered in the *Sai Samphan* House. A Buddhist approach for the treatment of trauma is increasingly recognized as an effective method in Western literature. Buddhism teaches about the human mind and the way it responds to painful incidents such as sexual assault. A victim or survivor can use the Buddhist approach to gain a better understanding about suffering related to their particular trauma (Norsworthy, 2004).

As she strove to provide healing for victims and survivors of violence, Maechee Sansanee has also raised awareness about those issues in Thai society, according to Ms. Yuwadee, an expert who works for a Thai non-governmental organization on the improvement of women's status. Maechee Sansanee's voice seemed to especially reach the urban middle-class populations. They started to realize the seriousness of the issues and to take actions in different parts of the society (personal communication, January 24, 2008). Maechee Sansanee helped reduce barriers for Thai people to bring up these issues, which were often kept private and unaddressed.

The second component of Parichart's framework is healing through community. Maechee Sansanee created a place where people can heal through becoming engaged in a community setting. I observed that the community healing had two components: the welcoming atmosphere and members' competence. Welcoming is constantly demonstrated by the *maechee*s and volunteers. Many followers commented that they have been trained by Maechee Sansanee to treat the people in front of them as special people. Because of this teaching they try to perform the gestures to make visitors feel connected with them.

Another important aspect of the Sathira Dhammasathan community is its member's competence. *Maechee*s and volunteers in the Sathira Dhammasathan community have high levels of professional competence. From the daily operations of counseling, lodging, massage services, healthy diet restaurant to occasional special events such as religious rituals and concerts, the community programs and events are

run by professionally trained staff. The high quality professional work gives visitors a sense of satisfaction.

According to the third component of Parichart's framework, Maechee Sansanee created a place where people can heal through nature. Today, the Sathira Dhammasathan center is widely known for its numerous and lush plants and trees on its six acres of land. As she designed the landscape of the Buddhist garden, her commitment to cherishing the natural environment was evident; as described in her documentary film, "Trees never discriminate against people. It gives the same kinds of shade to all people: good people, bad people, rich people and poor people" (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004). She suggests that humans are "one" with trees, as expressed in her song *Chan kap Tonmaai* [Me and Tree], which is popular among families and young children.

Leadership Challenges

Maechee Sansanee emerged as a uniquely different Buddhist nun in Thai society. She pushed forward the image of *maechee*s who are independent and capable, intelligent and yet aesthetically pleasing. Her colleagues feel impressed with Maechee Sansanee's contribution to improving the old views on *maechee*s:

> I think that Maechee Sansanee is the very first woman, the very first nun, who persuaded, who gave the picture, who gave the image of what a nun is. Some part of society starts to accept the nun. … Also her job that she started from going abroad, this is .. This is my own… It is her wisdom to start outside (abroad) work and coming back to inside. Her international images persuade

Thai people to look and to have a new thinking, I mean thought. (Ms. Rungrawee, personal communication, February 15, 2008)

While being recognized as a popular nun in Thai society, Maechee Sansanee is perceived in a variety of ways by Thai people. As I asked about her contributions to Thai society, I naturally encountered a wide range of comments made about her. As I furthered my analysis, I found that Maechee Sansanee handles challenges by making conscious choices based on her unique ethical and practical judgments.

Aesthetics

Maechee Sansanee's projects emphasizes pleasant physical appearances. A volunteer staff person at the Sathira Dhammasathan community told me one day that every corner of the center was designed to be picture-perfect. Her attention to aesthetics, however, is sometimes raised as a concern by the public. For example, an anonymous individual commented that the Buddha statue at the meditation center was being excessively and unnecessarily decorated. Another anonymous individual noted that a beautiful place such as this meditation center is not desirable for some serious Buddhists.

Maechee Sansanee handles this kind of challenge with clear arguments. First, she claims that as long as she does not attach to it, aesthetics is an important and meaningful way to engage people (Maechee Sansanee, personal communication, August 2, 2009). She advocates a middle way: not too much aesthetic attractiveness and not too little of it. While striving to keep a high aesthetic standard within her projects, she makes sure that her aesthetic concern does not turn into attachment.

How does she beautify an object without attaching to beauty? An example of decoration commonly observed in the meditation center may explain part of the answer. Maechee Sansanee uses dozens of fresh plumeria (*lilawadee*) flowers that have fallen from the trees to decorate glass picnic tables in the meditation center. In this effort to upgrade a plain table to welcoming furniture with simple materials, she exercises her welcoming spirit, her recycling ideas, and her understanding of the impermanence of nature, rather than using resources to obtain pretty furniture.

Secondly, Maechee Sansanee uses aesthetic pleasantness strategically enough to overcome criticisms regarding excessive decoration. She uses her talent in aesthetic development as a strategy to engage people in her fundraising efforts. For example, in her recently published photography book, *A Noble Mission* (Pikul, 2009), she achieved an extremely high level of aesthetic quality by portraying her colleague nuns, lay persons, activities and natural objects while minimizing her own photographic representations. She was successful in bringing ordinary objects, people, and landscapes at the meditation center into a coherent art work of over 200 pages while limiting visuals that highlighted her own appearances.

Maechee Sansanee uses her personal beauty and aesthetic pleasantness as a strength because it has been her asset and a practical means for living. Since she was a child, her innate attention to aesthetics was evident (Montira, 2005) . As a fashion model, she must have learned intuitively about aesthetic tactics, including how to interact with people using aesthetics as a communication tool. She must have also

gained trust that an aesthetic approach can make a difference in her life. Thus, beauty is her asset and she uses it in a unique way to do her job as a Buddhist nun.

Improvement of Women's Status

Today, diverse voices are speaking about improving women's status in Thai Buddhism. Some claim that women's inability to be ordained as *Bhikkhuni* means they are denied access to spiritual potential. They argue that women would be better off if they were granted the right to be ordained as monks rather than nuns. This group of people sees Maechee Sansanee as not being helpful in improving Thai women's lives.

Maechee Sansanee's choice is not to advocate for a *Bhikkhui* order. She does not see the reestablishment of *Bhikkhuni* as a priority agenda. Rather, she strives to improve the conditions of *maechee*s and lay women within the traditional system of *maechee*s. This view does not seem to be unusual. The late Khunying Kanitha, another remarkable Buddhist nun who strove for improvements in the lives of Buddhist women chose to advocate for *maechee*'s current important work rather than advocating full ordination or *maechee*s. (Tsomo, 2004). Falk (2007) also provides a common view that *maechee*s in general do not make great efforts to realize the full ordination of women. They are more interested in achieving spiritual development as *maechee*s.

Supporters of the *maechee*' status quo provide a positive view that *maechee*s have more freedom in their activities by not belonging to the *sangha*. Some fear that admitting nuns into the *sangha* implies subordination to the monks (Tsomo, 2004; Falk, 2007). Thus, establishing *maechee*s' social and legal status may imply a trade-off

between gaining benefits that are not granted currently and losing autonomy that is allowed due to their absence of legal status.

Enterprise

Maechee Sansanee's organization is very successful in receiving funds and generating revenues through producing attractive items and services for fundraising. Some people raise the concern that Maechee Sansanee's activities look too much like a commercial enterprise. In such a claim, references are often made to her career background as a fashion model and company executive.

Maechee Sansanee responds to this kind of claim by emphasizing her commitment to doing good things in the present moment rather than dwelling on her past. She described this determination when she decided to become a nun three decades ago:

> What is life? What is my highest potential? How far can I go? I started to ask these questions to myself. I believed that I had too much at that time. I had very good love life. I had all the fame. I had all the success in my career. Why did not I feel that I had enough? (Maechee Sansanee, cited in Holt, 2004)

She once enjoyed a successful career, fame, and wealth as a businesswoman but today she uses that professional spirit in her social action.

The idea of social entrepreneurship would explain her social action using a business-like approach. She not only organizes activities to generate revenue for her organization, she also empowers individuals to make a difference on a larger societal level. She believes that by changing individual ways of living, people as a group can

make a difference on a societal level. "Working in Sathira Dhammasathan is a start for practicing oneself to develop wisdom so you can be part of active agents who work for this society" (Maechee Sansanee, personal communication, March 2, 2008), she said in an interview. She believes that the work that she and her colleagues do in the community will eventually impact the larger society.

Summary

Offering care and support to the community is Maechee Sansanee's main work in achieving the vision. She has developed a kindergarten where children receive exceptional care in a safe and nurturing environment. She has developed a meditation center nestled in rich green woods in the busy city of Bangkok. This has given visitors opportunities to take care of themselves by practicing conscious breathing, engaging in reflections, and learning about Buddhism. She offers support to people whom she meets and listens to their stories. She teaches, guides, and empowers others so they will stand up and make the best decision on behalf of themselves. Her creativity and adaptability have made it possible for her to address the various needs of the community, whether the audience is young children, working women, families, or the elderly.

Chapter Six: Discussion

O how they cling and wrangle, some who claim
For preacher and monk the honored name!
For, quarreling, each to his view they cling.
Such folk see only one side of a thing.
*(The Blind Men and the Elephant, Brown, 1927, p. 228)*

This classic story of the nine blind men and the elephant illustrates the relationship between parts and wholes. A lesson learned from this story is that we will never understand a full picture of an elephant until we collect and analyze every piece of information carefully. Suppose a leadership study is like an elephant, and a researcher must examine as many puzzle pieces as possible in order to gain understanding of the whole leadership process. In this chapter, I will attempt to synthesize my findings at various levels into a coherent story of Maechee Sansanee's leadership.

The current study started with three research questions. The first question was: what are Maechee Sansanee's leadership characteristics? In the previous section, this question was answered by presenting her achievements, personal traits, skills, and her relationship with her followers. The second research question was: what is her impact on the followers? This question was answered by analyzing her follower's comments on their experiences of working with her. The last research question was: what is her contribution to Thai society? This question was answered by analyzing expert's comments about her work and also noting her strategies for handling various leadership challenges.

Emergent Model of Maechee Sansanee's Leadership

Maechee Sansanee's leadership can be summarized in four distinctive

dimensions: moral leadership, servant leadership, social entrepreneurship and aesthetic

leadership. These elements can be visually described using a tetrahedral model[3] (see

Figure 6.1). The model is supported by empirical evidence extracted from the findings

in Chapter Five (see Table 6.1).

Figure 6-1: Maechee Sansanee's Leadership

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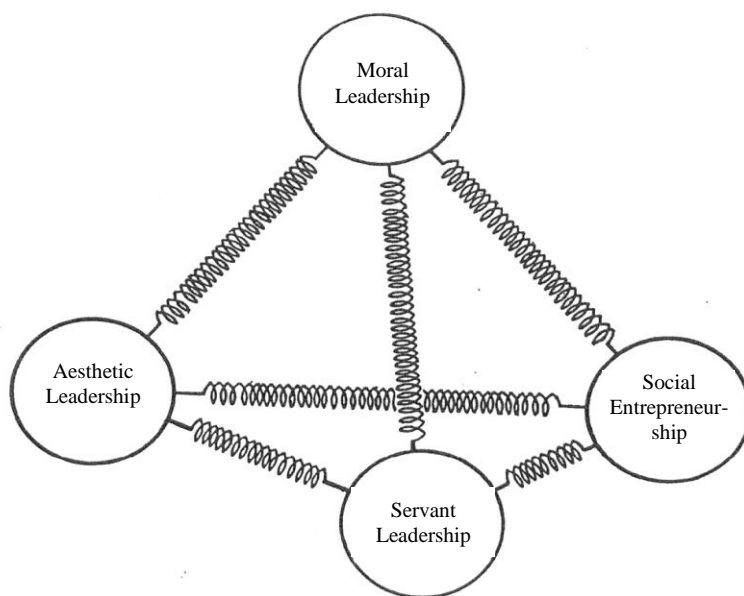
[3] The tetrahedral model was first created and used by the late physicist and educational
reformer, the late Dr. Sippanondha Ketudat (1981).

Table 6.1: Rationale for the Maechee Sansanee's Leadership Model

Dimensions	Empirical Evidence from Findings	Leader Behavior	Precondition of Context	Response to Context
Moral Leadership (1) Buddhist Nun	"Small self leads to a big accomplishment."	Giving Love and compassion	Buddhism as a national religion Humane orientation	Devoted Buddhist as favorable
(2) Mother	Supportive, caring and dependable Mother as moral symbol	Work with a heart of mother	Importance of mother in Thai culture	Mother as favorable
Servant Leadership	Servant for Buddha & others Follower's personal growth and increased willingness to serve others	Live according to Buddhist teachings Serving others	Buddhism as a national religion	Devoted Buddhist perceived as favorable
Social Entrepreneurship	Environmentally friendly projects Combining traditional and international/modern elements	Creative thinking Improvisation Exploit opportunities Awareness of social needs Effective communication Networking	Women active in business Call for self-sufficiency Modern technology	Appreciation of new idea, service, products Support for fundraising effort Easy access to Maechee Sansanee's media content
Aesthetic Development	"Graceful" "Awe" "Extraordinary" "Bringing a beautiful world to children by art of language and music"	Make effort to improve aesthetic pleasantness as long as it does not become attachment	Appreciation of beauty and physical appearance	Aesthetic pleasantness perceived as favorable

Moral Leadership

Maechee Sansanee is a moral leader who promotes morality in the people around her. She does so by presenting herself to Thai society in two roles, a devoted Buddhist and a mother-figure. Both roles are positively evaluated and accepted as promoting moral values in Thai people.

First, she promotes morality as a Buddhist leader. As a Buddhist nun, she practices smaller self through her engagement in work. As she states, "Small self leads to a big accomplishment;" her mission is to reduce ego so that she is free from all kinds of suffering. She demonstrates her sense of morality by her acts of giving. She gives her property to society, opportunities to the followers, and love and compassion to everyone.

Second, Maechee Sansanee encourages a sense of morality in people by acting as a mother-figure. Although she is not a mother in a biological sense, she performs the role of mother for everyone. As a mother, she interacts with the followers in supportive and caring ways. Her followers' bonding with her as a mother was expressed in their feelings of gratitude and indebtedness to her. This mother-child connection encouraged them to maintain their moral behavior. Maechee Sansanee's mother image is effectively communicated to Thai people through the media. Her TV shows, documentary film and photographs show her caring interactions with pregnant women, children, and the elderly.

Servant Leadership

Maechee Sansanee is a servant leader who serves Buddha and other people. While Greenleaf suggested that a leader serves the follower, Maechee Sansanee serves Buddha first and, in the course of serving him, she serves others, including the followers. A salient example of her practice of servant leadership from the current study is her gift of her own property to be the meditation center. Her determination to give it up and the challenges that she faced in accomplishing it were expressed in this study. Her act of giving is a philanthropic effort but this term does not provide an accurate cultural nuance. Servant leadership takes the philanthropy to another level, describing the act as making her less visible as a giver. In the context of Thai Buddhism, servant leadership precisely explains the effect of her giving while, at the same time, achieving selflessness.

Another example of servant leadership observed in the current study is her followers' perceived personal growth through working with Maechee Sansanee. Many of them noticed in themselves an increased level of psychological well-being, emotional control, confidence, skills, knowledge, and improved interpersonal relations as they worked with her. As a result, they felt willing to make themselves useful to others as servants.

Social Entrepreneurship

Maechee Sansanee is a social entrepreneur. She has developed new programs that serve society using a variety of resources in a creative way. She is also capable of

utilizing her extensive connections and networking skills to bring in a maximum level of benefit to her projects.

Her projects address a variety of social concerns such as well-being of families and children, environmental preservation, and community building. She accomplishes these tasks using methods that combine traditional and modern elements, along with Thai and international elements. Further, she strives to utilize simpler solutions rather than complicated ones to address these issues. These attitudes align with the ideal of the sufficiency economy being promoted by His Majesty King Bhumibol of Thailand (Sirina, 2007).

Maechee Sansanee's use of media and other modern ideas as an important channel of dharma teaching is a unique aspect of her social entrepreneurship. Her media approach is successful because of her extensive career experience in the media and because of Thai people's increased access to technology; these have contributed to the success of her media products. Finally, her blending of European-originated Waldorf education with Buddhist education in her kindergarten program is another example of unique combinations. Her extensive travel experience, innate curiosity, and fearless attitude in trying out new ideas have made it possible for her to create a variety of programs that look novel to Thai society.

Her innovative projects have been welcomed in the current cultural conditions in Thai society. Innovations through blending different elements is encouraged and practiced in Thai life. Sippanondha (1990) and Suntaree (1990) recognize that

harmonizing practice is one of the unique capabilities of Thai people. Moreover, Thais are notable for being fond of "plearning," which means to learn while playing, a concept developed by Chai`anan Samutwanit, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University and a former head master of Rachadowut School in Thailand. Thai people seem to actively seek opportunities in which they meet their serious needs while having fun. Sippanondha also noted that the Thai capability of adopting technology and international ideas while adapting them to their cultural context is their strength.

Maechee Sansanee is recognized as a social entrepreneur reflective of the common prominence of Thai women in the business sector. As Kirsch (1996) pointed out, the association between Thai women's active roles in economic activities and their lower status assumed in Thai Buddhism, Maechee Sansanee's entrepreneurial endeavor is an example of Thai women's weakness related to social status being successfully offset by their occupational strengths.

Aesthetic Leadership

The last dimension to be summarized regarding Maechee Sansanee's leadership is aesthetic leadership. This relatively novel concept is described in two parts in this section. First, it is described based on a narrow definition of aesthetics that is related to beauty or aesthetic pleasantness. Observations and document analysis suggested that Maechee Sansanee's projects are visually attractive. Interviews with Maechee Sansanee and her followers indicated that they intentionally achieve aesthetic pleasantness in the development of their projects.

Maechee Sansanee's emphasis on aesthetic development has been well-received in Thai society. While van Esterik (1996b) acknowledged gentleness, grace, composure, and beauty as models of Thai femininity, Thai people also place high regard on beauty and visual attractiveness. Maechee Sansanee produces her projects in a way that aligns with these qualities. She provides images that Thai people appreciate and therefore is recognized as an effective spokesperson for Thai society.

The second use of the term aesthetics is related to sensorial communication. Maechee Sansanee appeals to other people's sensorial impressions, especially by touching to communicate her gentleness and compassion. Observations and document analysis in the current study found that Maechee Sansanee is willing to touch, hug, or at least, approach a person up close in expressing her feelings of love and intimacy.

Her sensorial approach to express affection gives a powerful impression to others, especially in contrast with the approaches prescribed to Buddhist monks. Monks are not allowed to touch women while nuns are allowed to touch men. Monks instead rely on their presence, speech, and other performances to demonstrate their competence, while Maechee Sansanee uses her touching and holding to build rapport, gain trust, and communicate her messages. In other words, she transcends the limited roles that are allowed for Thai Buddhist nuns by achieving something that monks are not able to do.

Potential of Aesthetic Leadership

In the previous section on aesthetic leadership, aesthetics were described in relation to aesthetic pleasantness and sensorial communication. In this section, I broaden the definition of aesthetics related to a specific individual, to a broader epistemological possibility that deals with the quality of information and who produces it. Hansen, et al.(2007) relates aesthetics to "sensory knowledge and felt meaning, and concerns itself with feelings and emotions and the richness of qualities" (p.555). Ropo and Sauer (2008) emphasize that the process of development of aesthetic leadership knowledge is not isolating one. They argue that it is developed through multiple realities of interactions, for example, between the researcher and the practitioners and between the leader and the followers.

I propose aesthetic leadership as a potential research approach on leadership that has methodological and epistemological benefits for several reasons. First, aesthetic leadership encourages a researcher to describe a leader using sensory expressions. Examples include information in the forms of auditory, sensory, and visual impressions along with tastes and smells.

In this study, the aesthetic terms that were used by the followers comprise several sensory impressions. Before he reached the term graceful (*ngot ngaam*), a follower described Maechee Sansanee's clean white cotton robe, straight posture, clear voice, gentle smile, and facial expressions. He used these descriptions to communicate his understanding of her being "graceful". These expressions helped me picture the

exact image of her by matching his descriptions and the images that I had had in my mind. A shared meaning was created between the two of us about Maechee Sansanee's appearance through the use of aesthetic descriptions.

Another follower described the perfect silence of the audience in front of Maechee Sansanee in auditory and visual expressions in explaining her feeling of awe toward her. The meditation center was surrounded by a perfectly designed landscape, deep green plants, lotus ponds, and complete silence. She noticed meditation participants sitting in front of Maechee Sansanee in perfect silence. When she heard the unexpected gravel sounds under her feet, sounding extraordinarily loud in contrast with the silence, she was reminded that it was a complete silence. These examples demonstrate the power of aesthetic information generated by interviewees in providing strong descriptions of Maechee Sansanee and her environment.

Aesthetic information that is intentionally collected and shared among study participants and a researcher can contribute to a deeper understanding of a leader and the leadership context. Figure 6-2 shows the role of aesthetic information in leadership research. Aesthetic information experienced by study participants and the researcher, some of which is shared among them, is useful in two ways. First, it assists a researcher's understanding of study participants' comments. The aesthetic information that is commonly felt by study participants and the researcher can validate her findings. For example, in the current study, my own aesthetic information gave me an intuitive understanding of the follower's aesthetic descriptions. Second, aesthetic information informs a researcher's understanding of the context of the study.

Shared aesthetic information validates the researcher's findings on followers and context. For example, people visiting the Sathira Dhammasathan Center used to be surprised and annoyed with the loud airplane noise that roared overhead every ten minutes. This problem continued until Bangkok's international airport was relocated in 2006 to its current location in Suvarnabhumi. In her dharma talks, Maechee Sansanee often used the example of sound as an opportunity to remind listeners of the present moment in which they live. This example shows the power of aesthetic information in understanding the context of the field. Without my own experience of repeatedly hearing the airplane noise, I would not have understood how she strategically used this noise situation as a teaching moment illustrating one lesson of Buddhist teachings.

Complexities of Leadership

Ideal and Actual Patterns of Leadership

The current study presented an outstanding leader but also suggested the complex nature of the leadership process. The complexities were found in criticisms and counterarguments, visible and invisible aspects of leadership, and the leader's effect on social perceptions and movements. The complexities may be described by a classic framework of ideal and actual structures developed by the sociologist Levy (1966) . He defines *ideal* as "what some set of individuals regards as right, good, proper, preferable, etc." (p.26) According this view, ideal leadership includes a leader's characteristics and behaviors on which people in a particular group would concur. Levy defines *actual* as "that which an objective omniscient scientific observer would observe, whether the

people observed were aware of it or not." Actual leadership in this framework is leader's characteristics and behaviors that actually take place.

Thai people portray an ideal leader as one in a high position of a hierarchy (House et al., 2004) and a strong supporter of Thai values. An ideal leader in Thai society would typically be a male who is committed to Buddhism. While she is not granted an official high position in Thai Buddhism, Maechee Sansanee established her status by achieving excellence in public relations, communication, and organizational and business management skills. These skills were appreciated in Buddhist Thai society because people were ready to respond to popular approaches such as hers.

When a leader makes an unconventional choice, she will stand out as a unique one. Being a deviant or an outlier involves the risk of criticisms. Maechee Sansanee was met with many critiques when she was perceived as not fitting into the ideal leader image in Thai society. Critics showed their disapproval of her for not being a monk, for coming from a high class background, being too active in entrepreneurial activities, and emphasizing aesthetic presentations too much. They felt that she contrasted with their ideal leader image. A leadership study based on an in-depth description of a leader, such as the current study, is beneficial because it captures both the ideal and actual patterns of leader behavior that are unique to the particular cultural context in which they are situated.

Ideal and Actual Knowledge Production

The contrast between the ideal and actual patterns may apply to the kind of knowledge produced in leadership studies. As Levy stated, the ideal of knowledge production in the modern world was seeking rationality, universalism, and functional specialization of knowledge. Based on the assumption that today's accelerated modernization makes world cultures look as if they are converging into one, the leadership scholars have also experienced a similar pressure for producing knowledge that is applicable across all cultures.

The current study actually yields quite the opposite of the modern ideal knowledge, a leadership study that is culturally specific and produces particularistic knowledge as opposed to universal knowledge. It presents a unique Buddhist nun's leadership style, included holistic Buddhist views on life, and used a variety of information sources including formal interviews and sensorial impressions. It portrays the many ways that the nun promoted traditional values in a modernizing society. Thus, the current study blends the modern kind of knowledge that is conventionally seen as ideal, with the traditional and particular kind of knowledge that is regaining importance in the pursuit of leadership and makes a true difference in each cultural context.

The GLOBE researchers assumed that cultural values are stable and continuous. Dorfman, et al. (2004) stated, "Although we acknowledge that global communication, technical innovation, and industrialization can create a milieu for cultural change, a convergence of cultural values is by no means assured. In fact, cultural differences

among societies may be exacerbated as they adapt to modernization while simultaneously striving to preserve their cultural heritage" (p.709). This assertion assures that cultural-specific leadership research is worth the investment because of the special kind of knowledge that it can produce.

Ideal and Actual Methodology

The distinction of ideal and actual patterns is useful in the methodology for leadership research. Researchers have the ideal quality and quantity of information that they would like to obtain but, in actuality, there is a great deal of limitation in accomplishing it. Van Maanen's (1979) explanation regarding the two kinds of data that a researcher handles explains this dilemma well. He distinguished operational data from the presentational data that a researcher can obtain in fieldwork. Operational data can be obtained through observing spontaneous, candid interactions and activities engaged in by members of the community. Presentational data can be obtained by watching official functions and the media.

Because of the more public image of the presentational data, it is plausible that a researcher may not have as much access to observational data as presentational data. A consequence might be that they will get more information that supports a leader's positive public image than information that reveals her day-to-day back-stage interactions with followers. No studies should rely on a single data source. Knowing that there are ideal and actual aspects of information available to a researcher increases

the credibility of the study, adds humility in judgments, and poses a potential for future leadership research.

Limitations of Study

There are several limitations in the current study. First, the information that I collected about Maechee Sansanee did not represent perfectly balanced viewpoints although I made every effort to achieve it. Much of the information is in favor of her rather than against her. People generally made positive comments about her, while negative comments were not easy to obtain in my fieldwork. Because of the lack of balance in information, it is especially difficult to thoroughly answer my third research question that relies on comments from people other than her immediate followers.

I noticed that some negative reactions were expressed in a subtle way by visitors at the meditation center. For example, I found some participants being reluctant to participate in her activities such as the *dharma* talk sessions and singing time. They expressed their resistance by not being there or simply not doing the activity. However, I did not pursue opportunities to obtain comments from these unwilling participants, which could have been used as an alternative view of Maechee Sansanee.

I noticed one follower who gave the most candid critique about Maechee Sansanee, based on her long-term observation. She explained several criticisms that she had heard from people who are not associated with the meditation center. In doing so, she also emphasized that Maechee Sansanee successfully handles such criticisms. I evaluated that she was the only interviewee who provided constructive criticisms.

The general lack of negative comments is explained from a cultural perspective. In Thai society, criticisms and negative comments are considered as sensitive matters. Therefore, Thai people tend to avoid making negative comments in order to avoid direct conflict with others and having someone lose face. This concern becomes heightened when the stake of negative comments is high, such as in this case of making judgments about Maechee Sansanee, a highly-regarded *maechee*. It is plausible, therefore, to think that interviewees were afraid of the negative consequences of sharing criticisms of Maechee Sansanee with me, so they refrained from making unfavorable comments about her.

The lack of negative comments was also due to the shortage of experts who had intentions and willingness to share critical views about Maechee Sansanee with me. Because of the Thai cultural orientation of protecting status and face, interview participants may have felt obligated to limit their comments to positive aspects that they thought she would deserve to receive. Experts played a rather unexpected and unique role in this study, however; they played a consulting role in conceptualizing leadership, women's roles, and spirituality rather than providing critical information that directly addressed my research questions.

Conclusion

Maechee Sansanee is an extraordinary leader of the Sathira Dhammasathan Center. She provides her organization with a clear vision for a community where people have less suffering in their lives. She achieves this goal by supporting and

engaging her followers. They trust her, share the vision, and implement it in their organization and in their lives outside the meditation center.

The Sathira Dhammasathan Center has been well-received in Thai society. Each month, nearly one thousand people visit her garden of serenity and beauty. As they walk around the woods for meditation, sit by the pond with the Victoria lotuses, or speak with the *maechees* at the relics hall, visitors find themselves relaxed, rejuvenated, and healed. The Sathira Dhammasathan Center is popular because its vision reflects much of the current desire and hope of the Thai people who are struggling to cope with a society that is rapidly changing in material conditions, values, and lifestyles.

While her projects increase their significance and audience, Maechee Sansanee strives to maintain her small self by giving credit for the success to others, allowing others to use her personal resources, and simply helping others without conditions. *A Noble Mission*, the title of her latest image-rich book that portrays the history of the Sathira Dhammasathan Center, may well represent her personal enthusiasm for her work along with her sense of humility. It may also symbolize the contrasting aspects of her work: a determination to do the best job to achieve her vision by realizing her highest potential, while recognizing the ever-changing nature of social issues, her own limitations as a human being to address them, and the power of collective wisdom that she and her followers have cultivated to address the issues.

Maechee Sansanee has influenced Thai society by presenting herself as a mother-figure and a devoted Buddhist. But more than just these images is the unique way in which she disseminates them throughout society. Helgesen (1995) once coined

the term "interactive charisma" to describe a successful Greenwich Village newspaper editor who made himself accessible to subordinates and community members in the 1980s. Twenty years later in this era of popular modern technology, a leader such as Maechee Sansanee may be described as having a "virtual interactive charisma." She captures people's hearts by making herself accessible to them through a variety of media resources. Images of her and her projects along with her voice and theme music on TV and radio engage the audience and make powerful impressions in their minds.

Maechee Sansanee is the leader of a successful organization and a maechee community while also being an outlier of the general population of women. A woman such as she is not easily found in today's world since women generally face far more challenges than men in rising as leaders. In particular, the abilities and resources that she has utilized are not available to many *maechees* who often lack basic access to education and other social resources.

Success stories generally have both expected and unexpected aspects. Gladwell (2008) described successful individuals in a variety of fields and from multiple perspectives, including personal, family, and cultural backgrounds, that could have contributed to their extraordinary excellence. He noted that arbitrary chance advantages may have boosted the person's positive qualities to reach a particular successful position. He suggested that success is not fully explained without taking these multiple factors into consideration.

Using Gladwell's perspective, Maechee Sansanee's success may be explained as a combination of personal, family, and cultural backgrounds as well as the unique

advantages that were available to her. First, Maechee Sansanee had innate

characteristics such as determination, an action-oriented temperament, and physical

attractiveness. These qualities probably set her up as a potential leader in the early stage

of her life. Second, her family environment nurtured and enhanced her personal

strengths for her to become an exceptional *maechee*. The family's Buddhist tradition

and her mother's nurturing and strong heart gave her a sense of commitment,

independence and confidence. She experienced hardship in her childhood such as

having little connection with her father and the passing away of her mother in her teens.

However, the nurturing environment of extended family and the support system that she

developed in the course of her life helped her overcome these difficulties.

Third, Thai society's cultural orientation to promote beauty as an important

quality of women made engaging in a fashion career a logical initial option for her to

choose in her life. Even today, Maechee Sansanee's media appearances receive positive

responses because of this cultural conditioning to appreciate beautiful images.   It may

be possible that the pleasant impressions that she naturally creates with her appearance

and interactions are one of her unique advantages over other people. Indeed, these

advantages have allowed her access to various kinds of resources, status and networks,

which continue to benefit her and her organization.

In the current study, Maechee Sansanee's leadership was described through four

dimensions: moral leadership, servant leadership, aesthetic leadership, and social

entrepreneurship. She teaches moral values and demonstrates moral behaviors to others.

She serves the Buddha and the community by following Buddhist teachings and making

herself useful to others. She carries out responsibilities of moral and servant leadership using her social entrepreneurial projects and aesthetic development. Thai society appreciates women's prominent roles in economic activities and efforts in beautification. Based on the data I have collected, it could be stated that these cultural conditions have allowed Maechee Sansanee's projects to prosper in Thai society.

Many theories that explain leadership, cultures, and Thai gender relations have contributed to the emergence of this four dimensional model. By being open to diverse knowledge in multiple fields, as Küpers and Weibler (2009) suggest, this study strove for an integrated approach that allows readers to understand "parts" and "wholes" of Maechee Sansanee's leadership as well as their interrelationships. In particular, the review of a variety of leadership theories created venues that allowed different aspects of her leadership traits and behaviors to surface throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Leadership approaches that describe a leader's traits and skills, those that focus on leader-follower relationships, along with those from other conceptual perspectives such as culture, gender and ethics, enhanced the deep understanding of Maechee Sansanee's leadership in this study.

Maechee Sansanee has realized her potential using her exceptional capabilities in creativity. She created numerous projects influencing people's lives. As Adler (2006) emphasizes "combining the global influence and entrepreneurial skills of business with the inspirational creativity and improvisational skills of the artist community" (p.497) as a hopeful approach to the today's increasingly challenging world, Maechee Sansanee's social entrepreneurial activities with artistic emphasis will

motivate people to create jointly a better world. While *maechee*s have less social

recognition and resources than monks, they have more freedom from influence by the

traditional *sangha* administration in pursuit of their activities, studies, and meditation.

Maechee Sansanee has emerged as an exceptional leader in Thailand and the *maechee*

community by utilizing her leadership and entrepreneurial skills while realistically

recognizing constraints and possibilities.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol (1)

Depending on research participants, interview questions will be read in English or Thai.

<u>Maechee Sansanee Sthirasuta</u>

I am conducting this interview since I would like to know how you emerged as a leader and how you have influenced people around you and society. You have received a consent form to sign, which indicates your consent to this interview. The interview will be recorded.

Questions

1. What kinds of activities and projects have you been involved in recently?
2. What are the highlights of the achievements in your life?

      2.1 What are the achievements?

      2.2 How do you feel about them?

3. What do you think are the critical elements of leadership?
4. What are your goals?
5. What is your vision for Thai society?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol (2)

Depending on research participants, interview questions will be read in English or Thai.

Followers

I am conducting this interview since you are actively involved with Maechee Sansanee's community. You have received a consent form to sign, which indicates your consent to this interview. The interview will be recorded.

Questions

1.What do you do in Maechee Sansanee's community?

      1.1What is your role?

      1.2What do you do in a typical day?

2.How did you become involved in this community?

      2.1 How did you get to know Maechee Sansanee?

      2.2 How did you get involved in the work you are currently doing?

3. How did your experience in this community affect you personally?

      3.1 How did Maechee Sansanee affect you?

      3.2 How did the work in which you are involved affect you?

      3.3What are your plans or hopes for future?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol (3)

Depending on research participants, interview questions will be read in English or Thai.

<u>**Experts**</u>

I am conducting this interview since you are aware of Maechee Sansanee's work. You have received a consent form to sign, which indicates your consent to this interview. The interview will be recorded.

Questions

1. What do you know about Maechee Sansanee's work?

2. How did you find out about her work?

3. How do you think Maechee Sansanee has influenced Thai society?

4. What do people in Thai society see her?

Appendix D: Observation Protocol (1)

Areas of Observation	Observation Points
1. Program setting	• What colors are they? • What is the size? • What is the purpose? • How does it look? • How much space is available? • How is the space used? • What is the nature of lighting? • How are people organized in the space? • How do the participants react to the physical setting?
2. Human and social environment	• What groups and subgroups do people belong to? • What kind of interactions do they have? • How often do they interact with one another? • In what direction do they communicate? • What are the characteristics of people in each group or subgroup? • How do they make decisions? • Who decide about activities? • How open are decisions made? • How are decisions communicated to the community?
3. Program activities and participant behaviors	• What do people do in the program? • How do they experience it? • What is it like to be a participant? • What would one see if one were watching the program in progress? (Detail points in Appendix E)

Appendix E: Observation Protocol (2)

Program Activities and Participant Behaviors
Observation Points

At the beginning

- How is the activity introduced or begun?

- Who is present at the beginning?

- What exactly was said at the beginning?

- How did participants respond or react to what was said?

In the middle

- Who is involved?

- What is being said by staff?

- What are participants doing?

- What is being said by participants?

- What are the variations in how participants are engaging in the activity being observed?

- How does it feel to be engaged in this activity?

In the end

- What are the signals that the activity unit is ending?

- Who is present at the time?

- What is said?

- How do participants react to the ending of the activity?

- How is completion of this unit of activity related to the other program activities and future plans?

Appendix F: Cover Page of *A Noble Mission: Mercy of the heart*

(Pikul, 2009)
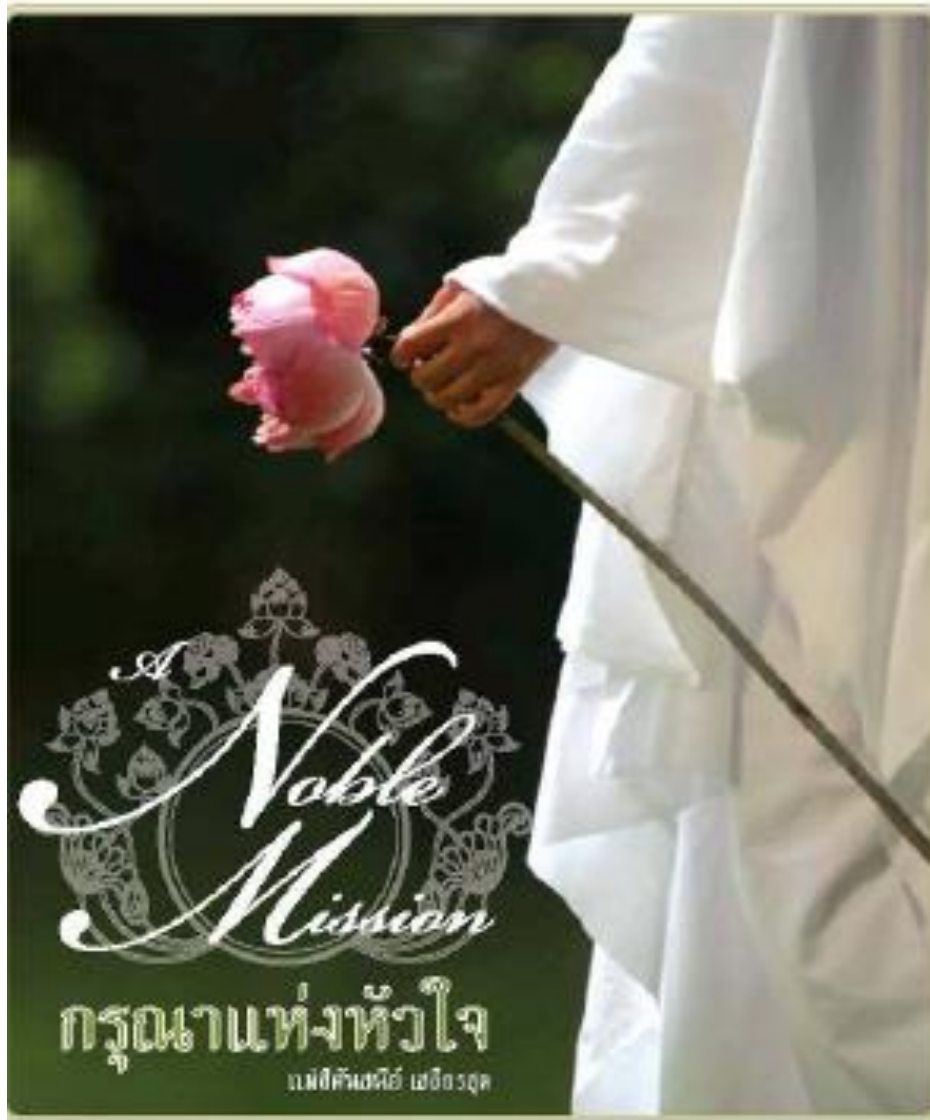
Appendix G: Maechee Sansanee's *One-Stroke Dhamma*

Become happy by giving love, without expecting anything.

(Maechee Sansanee, 2003)