

Chapter II

The Rise and Success of Dhammakāya Temple

2.1 The Origin and Background of the Temple

2.1.1 The Figure of True Driving Force ⁵

The fact that the founder: Khun Yay Chandra Khon-nok-yoong, of Dhammakāya Temple, one of the biggest Buddhist temples in Thailand, never ceases to amaze almost every listener the first time. Her name was not as well-known as the name of the Temple to outsiders; in contrast, her role of decision making was highly influential among Dhammakāya insiders as she was not only held as the Founder of Dhammakāya Temple but also as the ‘Vijjā Dhammakāya’ meditation teacher to the Temple’s pioneer group of monks and laypeople including the Abbot Dhammajayo himself.

Khun Yay Chandra was born to Mr. Ploy and Mrs. Pan during the early morning of Thursday 20th January 1909 into a farmer’s family of nine children. She had no chance of studying in school as in those days there was not yet state education. Her lack of chance for reading and writing never decreased her wish to learn — she made a classroom of the vast paddy fields of her youth. The farmer’s life made Khun Yay Chandra used to hardship and endurance. One of her outstanding characteristics that distinguished her from the rest was her diligence.

In 1935, Khun Yay Chandra decided to travel to Bangkok to find a job and looked for the chance to study the Knowledge of Dhammakāya Meditation with the Abbot of Paknam Temple. She at the first worked as a maid in a wealthy family who was a major patron of Paknam Temple. She saw that this family would be the connection she needed to introduce herself to Paknam Temple. In this family, she finally met her first meditation teacher: Khun Yay Thongsuk Samdaengpan and had the chance to practice meditation until she could attain the high level of Dhamma.

Reportedly, Khun Yay Chandra’s meditation practice evolved to the extent that she could explore the realm of heaven and hell.

In 1938, Khun Yay Thongsuk took Khun Yay Chandra to Paknam Temple and there she met the Abbot of Paknam Temple: Sodh Candasaro, for the first time. Since then, her life in the enclosed Meditation Workshop as a Buddhist nun (Mae Chee) began and continued until the passing away of the Abbot. Her adept in meditation, her attentiveness and devotion to her Master’s command earned her a legendary compliment

⁵ Dhammakāya Foundation, **Second to None** ‘The Biography of Khun Yay Chandra Khon-nok-yoong’; (Thailand: SPK Paper & Form Ltd. Partnership, Bangkok, 2005.), p.12

from the Abbot ‘**My daughter Chandra is number one — second to none,**’⁶ as this compliment the Great Abbot was to give only once throughout his life.

Venerable Dhammajayo, the present Abbot of Dhammakāya Temple, has his own way of telling the present generation about this legendary compliment of the Great Abbot of Paknam Temple: ‘Throughout Luang Pu Wat Paknam’s life, he taught the Dhammakāya Meditation at Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen (Paknam Temple in Bhasicharoen district). He sent his disciples, both monks and nuns, to disseminate the teachings in many places. This brought wide acceptance of Dhammakāya Meditation, both in Thailand and abroad. Among his numerous students was a Buddhist nun who meditated so well that the Great Master praised her, saying, ‘Chandra is second to none.’ He was referring to the distinguished meditation teacher, the Master Nun Chandra Khon-nok-yoong (Khun Yay Acharn), who later founded Wat Phra Dhammakāya.’⁷

Around 1954, the Great Abbot of Paknam Temple had all his students summoned, saying that within five years he was going to die but that they should all continue to propagate the method of Dhammakāya Meditation throughout the world - and that it would be very important and beneficial for humankind. He also instructed Khun Yay Chandra to stay and teach the knowledge of Dhammakāya at Paknam Temple while waiting for a successor to arrive. He ordered,

‘(Daughter) Chandra! Don’t be in a hurry to die! Don’t give up the teaching life for the seclusion of the forests! After my passing the others will have to rely on you to teach the knowledge of Dhammakāya and keep them on the straight and narrow path. If you don’t teach them, they will fall victim to the work of the Mara.’⁸

Khun Yay Chandra followed the Great Abbot’s final instruction accordingly. She offered meditation class by making use of the living area in her own resident. Soon after, as the number of her own students grew, the capacity of Khun Yay Chandra’s humble kuti was exceeded. There was no longer enough space for everybody to sit for meditation. The group who came to meditate with her raised 58,000 Baht from scratch, allowing them to build a small two-storied house within the compound of Paknam Temple. It was a purpose-built for meditation teaching — the first home of ‘Dhammaprasit’ — the precursor of the Dhammakāya Foundation/Temple.

For Khun Yay Chandra, after the passing away of the Great Abbot, training a new generation of students and passing on the Dhammakāya tradition to a successor was the mission the Great Abbot had left her with.

2.1.2 The Successor and His Abbotship⁹

In the book of Khun Yay Chandra’s biography, one chapter is devoted to highlight how the Successor had faced the complication to locate and eventually met his long-searched meditation teacher (Khun Yay Chandra). The meeting was a historical

⁶ Ibid. p.54

⁷ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Journey2Joy**, (Singapore: The Print Lodge Pte. Ltd., Singapore 409961, 2007), p.30

⁸ Dhammakāya Foundation, **Second to None**, op.cit., p.64

⁹ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Tomorrow the World Will Change**, (Singapore: The Print Lodge Pte. Ltd., Singapore 409961, 2007), p.48

event and a life changing for the Successor. His name was Chaiyaboon Sutthiphol. He was born in Singhaburi Province, Thailand, to Mr. Janyong and Mrs. Juree Sutthiphol in 1944. Unlike others in his contemporaries, he had an insatiable appetite to know about Buddhism and all things supernatural.

The article in a magazine called ‘Vipassanā Banteungsarn’¹⁰ which retold the heroic efforts of Khun Yay Chandra and Khun Yay Thongsuk during World War II was his prime mover in seeking out Khun Yay Chandra at Paknam Temple. At that time he was a student of Suan Kularb School expectantly to ask the unanswered questions about the religion and learn meditation practice with her. However the first visit was a disappointment.

Waited until in October 1963, while studying Economics at Kasetsart University, in Bangkok, he decided to look for Khun Yay Chandra again. This time, he was introduced to Khun Yay Chandra. She was now in her fifty-third year. On their first meeting, Khun Yay Chandra did not waste much time with pleasantries but had him sit for meditation, teaching him the method. Since that day, he came to practice meditation with her every day.

In the beginning, when the student started to study the knowledge of Dhammakāya for himself, Khun Yay Chandra would always be there to give him encouragement - something he never received even from his own parents. She passed on a recipe for success to him - saying that he should strive continuously, while making sure that his technique was correct. He had to meditate every day without exception. Even if he was so tired that he fell asleep sometimes as he meditated, he should still meditate anyway. He should be observant of whether he had kept to the technique Khun Yay Chandra had stipulated. Khun Yay Chandra made a lot of time for this earnest student until he was able to attain the Dhammakāya for himself.

Consequently, he started to introduce some of his university friends, male and female, senior and junior, to practice meditation at Khun Yay Chandra’s place. Soon, many more young students showed up at Dhammaprasit House to practice meditation. Khun Yay Chandra did not only teach them meditation but also trained them in morality. It was to take her ten years to train up the first group of the young generation to her satisfaction – a team who could co-operate on any task without internal conflicts.

Khun Yay Chandra shared something hard for most to give, which is inner virtue amassed through the self-training of many decades under the tutelage of The Great Abbot of Wat Paknam. She was more to her students than many of their own parents, giving them the spiritual dimension to their lives - linking the knowledge of Dhammakāya in the oral tradition from its founder. Not being able to read or write was no bar to her mastering supreme knowledge - allowing her to teach even disciples much better educated than herself.

On the 27th of August 1969 a short time after graduating at the age of 25, Mr. Chaiyaboon Sutthiphol entered into the monkhood, accomplishing his intention for his life’s dedication to Buddhism as ‘Dhammajayo Bhikkhu’. This ordination was a great

¹⁰ **Vipassanā Banteungsarn**, Bangkok: Song-kua Pracha Printing, Co., Ltd., Issue no. 4, Year (number not clear).

milestone for Dhammaprasit House which eventually had in its midst, a very talented meditation teacher. At that time Khun Yay Chandra was already sixty-years old.

Once ordained, the new monk would need to have his own temple to use as a school of meditation. They aspired to spread the word of Buddhism and Dhammakāya Meditation to bring peace to all countries in the world. It seemed very certain that Dhammaprasit House could no longer fulfil the strong and virtuous ambitions of its members if they were to complete their mission. Khun Yay Chandra knew it was the right time to start building a temple of her own. She started to entertain the idea of building a new temple from scratch, planning everything for the building of the temple. This had been her intention for a long time but she had been waiting for her successor to ordain first.

Before starting on the work of building the temple, Khun Yay Chandra called a meeting of everyone involved in order to avert any problems likely to crop up in their work. She said that although the temple was large and would take a long time to complete, she insisted that it be built to the highest standards. She predicted that personal conflict would be sure to rear its ugly head as they worked together on the temple. The situation needed a lot of patience and Khun Yay Chandra used to use the motto, ‘We may disagree, but we must never be opposed.’ (i.e. everyone can voice their opinion, can discuss their views, but this must never lead to deadlock). This meant that however many people there were, they would be unified in their quest to attain the Triple Jewel, the Dhammakāya inside.

At the time when she started out with the temple, there were very few volunteers to help her – but they were all those she had trained up herself, from the time they were still students. And those students were very exceptional, because normally in teenage, no-one thinks to lead a life of celibacy. But this group, who she trained up became more and more interested in meditation and wanted to keep the Eight Precepts for the rest of their lives, and for the gentlemen, many wanted to take lifelong ordination too. Thus, there were about ten monks or volunteers in the temple, helping Khun Yay Chandra to build the temple. These group of people thought nothing was beyond them. They would find a way to bring success to the temple.

This is why Khun Yay Chandra said she was a multi-millionaire. She was not a millionaire in terms of western economic values, but in terms of Buddhist economic values -where it’s not just about figures, where even faith and goodwill are counted as assets.

Venerable Dhammajayo once recalled his own life history at this juncture: ¹¹ ‘I was not born in time to study with the Great Master. (Luang Pu Wat Paknam) I mainly learned about Dhammakāya Meditation from Khun Yay Acharn. I obtained some knowledge from monastic teachers who were her contemporaries but my principle understanding came from Khun Yay Acharn herself. From her, I felt a great sense of love and harmony. She was kind to me. I sat in meditation with her continuously from the time I was a student at the university and went for meditation together with my school friends at Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen. When we graduated, some of us ordained as monks and others became lay volunteers. This was the community that pioneered the

¹¹ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Journey2Joy**, op.cit., p.32

construction of Wat Phra Dhammakāya. At that time, Khun Yay Acharn was 60 years old, but she devoted all her energy to the temple's construction. At that time, the temple grounds were only open fields.'

The new temple was established with a ground-breaking ceremony on Magha Puja Day, the 20th of February 1970 (2513 B.E.)¹² on the 80 acre piece of land donated by Lady Prayat Paetyapongsavisudhathibodee, together with the initial construction budget of 3,200 Baht (≈USD\$80). The Dhammaprasit group headed by Khun Yay Chandra and the young Venerable Dhammajayo started the work of building the temple after making the vow:

'We will devote all our flesh and blood, body and mind, intelligence and wealth in homage to the Lord Buddha in order to set up a meditation center following the Way of Dhammakāya.'¹³

However inestimable the amount of resources and money is needed, it was obvious that the transcending factor was the quality of the personnel needed to make Dhammakāya Temple a success. In the words of the Abbot (Venerable Dhammajayo):

'The people who perform this work must for sure be loving, with devotion and self-sacrifice to the extent that they are prepared to put their lives on the line.'¹⁴

The construction site was originally called 'Soon Buddacakka-patipatthamma' (Thai: ศูนย์พุทธจักรปฏิบัติธรรม). The main Chapel designed with simplicity and elegance was built on 24th December 1977 of which the foundation stone was laid by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on behalf of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The architecture of the Year award in 1998 is unique in a country where most places of worship exude an ancient and exquisite mystique draped in dark wood, painted pillars and gold leaf.

The place was officially recognized as a temple by the Thai government in 1978 as 'Wat Voranee Dhammakāyaram'. The term 'Voranee' included in the Temple's name to honour the land donor's daughter, was later taken off after the conflict between her and the Temple's administration intensified and numbers of ensuing disputes ending their relationship with acrimony. The main chapel was completed in 1982, and the ceremony for allocating of the chapel's boundary (sima) was held three years later.

At the time when starting out with the temple, as seen from the old pictures, the temple was no more than barren land. There were no trees to give shade because the soil was virtually infertile. Venerable Dhammajayo needed to create an environment suitable for meditation. Trees were needed to shade the place and a network of canals was designed to make the temple cool and suitable for meditation.

Having dug out the canals in the 80-acre area, Venerable Dhammajayo invited all the supporters of Dhammaprasit House to take a tour round the site. Once they saw the plans of the temple falling into place, everyone got together to contribute the funds necessary for building the first kuti on the site.

¹² Tawandhamma Foundation, **The Sun of Peace**, (Thailand: New Witek, Co., Ltd., Bangkok, 2007), pp.93-95

¹³ Dhammakāya Foundation, **Second to None**, op.cit., p.104

¹⁴ Dhammakāya Foundation, **Second to None**, op.cit., p.106

In the beginning, life at the new temple was full of hardship. Work within the monastery ground went on all day and all night. However, such difficulties failed to discourage the pioneers who were more intent on the meritorious task of constructing the new temple.

2.1.3 Three Components of Establishing the Temple

The plan of work, the plan for personnel and the financial plan were the key components. At the time of establishing the temple, the whole of the plan of work was already in the heart of Venerable Dhammajayo. However, the financial plan and the plan for personnel were still undeveloped. There was only the plan of work - the plan for personnel and finances were to come hand-in-hand later on.

To make the plan of work manifest, the Abbot started to build the temple with his own two hands and the determination to build the ideal place for meditation and Dhamma practice. He prayed that when people came to see the driving force of virtue in the temple, that they too would be inspired to give a helping hand with the Abbot's scheme. At that stage the temple did not have a lot of money. Furthermore, the number of people always seemed to outstrip the resources available to give support. Khun Yay Chandra in her daily routine sat for meditation to facilitate the arrival of donations and volunteers needed for the temple construction to be fulfilled.

She also took the duty to receive the temple's visitors as at the beginning the Abbot Dhammajayo was young and newly ordained, coupled with the fact that most of the visitors were Khun Yay Chandra's disciples from Paknam Temple coming to see Khun Yay Chandra in her new place. They had great faith in her and wanted to help her finish the Temple. Her reception would reinforce their confidence in her mission and accelerate their help. Researcher witnessed some justification in describing Khun Yay Chandra as a mother lode of wealth for the Temple due to the huge donation raised by her influence augmented by her adept in the knowledge of Vijjā Dhammakāya, successfully funding every project.

2.2 The Successes of Dhammakāya Temple

2.2.1 The Start of the First Tiny Step of the Huge Master Plan

Once the fundamental amenities of the temple had been completed, Venerable Dhammajayo expressed his wish to give Dhamma training courses in both theory and practice, for the benefit of young people and the general public, in order to elevate their quality of mind and forge virtue in society. This was part of his master plan for building up a foundation of personnel for the temple.

As a way to propagate and strengthen the religion, the Abbot Venerable Dhammajayo set out to make the children and adults coming to the temple into truly learned people. This meant making them learned both in the ways of the world and in the ways of Dhamma. The Abbot recognized the importance of this link between the two fields of knowledge coining the motto:

‘Knowledge must go hand-in-hand with virtue’

In 1972, the ‘Heirs of the Dhamma’ (Dhammadāyāda) Training Scheme was organized for this purpose for the first time. The Dhammadāyāda Training Program had been announced around the universities as a ‘Summer Course in Meditation Training’.

It was the first major project of the Temple and from that time onwards became an annual fixture.

Generally, Dhamma teaching and the recruitment of new people to ordain as a monk are nothing new as it has been traditionally done by almost every temple in the country. But at Dhammakāya Temple, the Dhammadāyāda Training Course becomes the oldest and longest lasting Dhamma training program as well as continuously making the Temple popular among the university undergraduates until these days. Jeffrey S. Bowers, in his thesis,¹⁵ attributes the ordination program reaching its long-time success to the temple's skillful management, he said:

‘... the temporary ordination system for students and merit-making activities have been modernized, made convenient and institutionalized.’

Bowers¹⁶ also viewed the Temple's recruitment strategy and its reason of targeting the university students as what he wrote ‘... the movement saw itself as representative of what younger members of society, particularly students, desired from Thai Buddhism and Dhammakāya Meditation. Khun Yay Chandra's followers at Wat Paknam were primarily young, collaged students. This is one reason why the movement continued to appeal to, and focus its recruitment on college students when the movement shifted to Patumthani.’

Venerable Dhammajayo looked for graduates with a Bachelors' degree for whom meditation was the keystone in life. Because the basic standards for personnel were high, when the numbers interested started to increase, those with faith and money to support the temple followed too. Young students gave their support to the temple.

This was the start of the Buddhist societies in the universities and colleges. The Buddhist societies were to integrate Buddhism into the education of young people in Thailand through their various projects. This was the kingpin in the plan for training the personnel of the Temple. When the number of personnel started to increase, the level of faith increased and the level of support for the Temple started to grow.

Jeffrey S. Bowers¹⁷ opined in this regard that ‘... followers are primarily Bangkok resident university graduates, as the leaders of Wat Phra Dhammakāya made a concerted effort to appeal to this segment of society.’

Bowers¹⁸ as well expressed his judgment on the advantages of employing this sort of recruitment approach ‘... the movement's focus on university students has had two benefits: it brought the students and their parents' money into the temple and it assured the temple of having a wealthier than average following after the students graduated and joined the ranks of Thailand's upwardly mobile segments of society. Reaching the parents of university students was relatively easy once the students became active with the temple through a university's student club.’

¹⁵ Jeffrey S. Bowers, **Dhammakāya Meditation in Thai Society**, MA Thesis (Thailand: Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1995), p.90

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.53-54

¹⁷ Ibid., p.79

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.54-55

Dhammadāyāda Ordination Program had given moral training to hundreds of university students, who swelled the number of residents: monks, novices, lay Upasakas and Upasikas in the temple community.

2.2.2 The Prevention of the Less Desirable Outlook of the Temple

Visitors to Dhammakāya Temple were expected to exhibit the same sort of good conduct and attention to detail as the Temple residents and for this reason the Temple commissioned a sign displaying the Temple's basic rules, namely:

‘The Dhammakāya Meditation Centre is a Sanctuary of Virtue for all Buddhists. It is a place which needs to be tranquil, clean, tidy and restrained, in keeping with Buddhist identity. Thus, visitors should help to sustain the Buddhist religion, so that it can prosper, by keeping strictly to the following rules, under the motto:¹⁹

‘The wise love to learn and practice rules of discipline’:

1. No smoking and prohibition of addictive substances on the premises;
2. No bringing of merchandise onto the premises for the purposes of trading;
3. No promotions or leafleting of any sort;
4. No reading newspapers or other publications which disturb peace of mind;
5. No radios or playing of musical cassettes;
6. No propaganda, electioneering or canvassing. Only true and useful words should be spoken;
7. No dancing, musical performances, shows, lotteries or games of any sort;
8. No courting, petting or fortune-telling;
9. No unauthorized release of animals on the temple grounds;
10. Dress must be polite and modest. No exaggerated gestures of the hands or feet or lying about in the temple grounds, such as are unattractive to see.

This made Dhammakāya Temple outstanding and increasingly gained a reputation for its good discipline amongst other monasteries of Thailand. In this aspect, Jeffrey S. Bowers²⁰ confirmed that ‘... the less desirable aspects of temples absent from Wat Phra Dhammakāya includes: festivals which involve entertainment deemed inappropriate to appear at a temple, gambling, etc.; numerous temple-resident, or stray dogs and their associate mess and monks involved with questionable practices such as tattooing and fortune telling. The temple's growth over the years both in numbers of disciples and in acreage, indicate they succeeded in reaching many who agreed with their outlook.’

2.2.3 The Overwhelming Success Surprised Many Even the Temple Itself

In 1981 the Temple was consecrated. Until that time it had been referred to as the ‘Dhamma Practice Centre’ or sometimes as ‘Wat Voranee Dhammakāyaram’. Since consecration, it has been known as Dhammakāya Temple or Wat Phra Dhammakāya and the number of people attending increased dramatically. The work of the Temple, whether it be outreach, personnel training or construction project done hand-in-hand,

¹⁹ Dhammakāya Foundation, **Second to None**, op.cit., p.118

²⁰ Jeffrey S. Bowers, op.cit., p.54

had been well received by the public. The community resident at Dhammakāya Temple became larger – whether it be monks, novices or resident laymen or laywomen. Even Khun Yay Chandra herself often exclaimed that:

‘I never thought that there would be so many laypeople coming to our temple. When Venerable Dhammajayo was ordained, we expected only twenty acres of temple land. Now even 1,000 acres is full of laypeople.’²¹

Dhammakāya Temple set its assessment of the regular weekly achievement as that: when the congregations come to the Temple, especially on Sundays they should come across the maximum of positive impressions to take back home with them.

Even though, the Temple’s administration knew so well that at the beginning of the Temple, most of the monks were newly ordained and consequently were still training themselves. They did not have much to impress the congregation through their teaching. However, a good impression could still be made on the congregation if the Temple is clean, shaded, and luxuriant – without overlooking small details.

Monks can make sure that they are a good example of enthusiasm to meditate. Everything in the Temple needs to be well organized, starting from peoples’ shoes.

2.2.4 The Secret Recipe Making the Temple Appealing

In the view of the insiders, Dhammakāya Temple has prospered down to the present day because the Temple saw the value of orderliness – meaning that even newcomers coming to the Temple years later could comply with simple things like removing their shoes in an orderly fashion without feeling embarrassed. There would be a sign identifying the shoe rack, a symbol showing where the shoes should be put and a volunteer available to answer any queries. Once people understood, the rules of the Temple did not need to be written down any more, but become part of the Temple culture. Many usually arrogant people have been humbled merely by the sight of a neatly lined-up row of shoes left by a group going for their morning chanting.

Santisuda Ekachai²² in her article: *Phra Dhammakāya Controversy: Keeping the Faith* on Bangkok Post English language newspaper 21.12.98 Bangkok Post Homepage agreed with this regards as she said ‘... Urban Thai society is ruled by consumer culture, and the Dhammakāya movement --by integrating capitalism into its structure --has become popular with contemporary urban Thais who equate efficiency, orderliness, cleanliness, elegance, grandeur, spectacle, competition, and material success with goodness’

The word spread that there was a band of university-educated monks building a huge temple in Patumthani. The news spread to the elder monks governing the province and one day they sent an inspector monk to check whether the temple was up to scratch. The inspector used his usual stratagem of checking only the kitchen and the toilets - because as he explained, you can tell everything about a temple by looking to see if these two places are in order. He disclosed from his inspection that he would expect the new temple to prosper!

²¹ Dhammakāya Foundation, *Second to None*, op.cit., p.124

²² Santisuda Ekachai, Article: *Phra Dhammakāya Controversy: Keeping the Faith* on Bangkok Post English language newspaper 21.12.98 Bangkok Post Homepage www.bangkokpost.com (accessed February 2002)

Jeffrey S. Bowers²³ provided the explanation of Dhammakāya Temple's points of attraction, in his opinion, '... apart from the clean, quiet and orderly appearance of the temple as appealing to numerous follows, the most important aspect is convenience. It is one treasured feature desired by urban dwellers in any part of the world and Bangkok is no exception. Moreover, the temple large parking areas with courteous attendants make parking trouble-free.'

Bowers²⁴ also pointed one notable component toward the Temple's success that '...the idea that Wat Phra Dhammakāya is the future center of Buddhism in the world is significant among followers. Royal recognition of temple members and participation at temple activities works to underscore follower's sense of pride in what they are doing at Wat Phra Dhammakāya.' In Bowers' point of view, this is the crucial factor in keeping the followers continuing, sticking to and supporting the Temple.

Bowers²⁵ as well provided the data analysis of the questionnaire no. 2 in his thesis (1995) suggesting the reason of the incredibly rapid increase of the Temple's followers over the past few decades that '... clearly demonstrate that followers of Wat Phra Dhammakāya see themselves as part of something extraordinary. The most notable example of this can be seen in the question concerning practicing Dhammakāya Meditation. If it is done at Wat Phra Dhammakāya it is considered the most meritorious activity by a large margin.'

When congregations on Sundays constantly increased and major religious festivals reached 100,000, which since 1985 exceeded temple capacity and influenced the temple's decision to expand the site to one thousand acres (4 km²) with the building of the World Dhammakāya Centre project. When the construction work started, Khun Yay Chandra would inspect the site with joy and expectantly. As the heat of the sun diminished in the evening, once she went and bowed in front of the big white Buddha image located in the field and wished:

'Venerable Sir! Please help me raise funds for the robes offering ceremony. May we receive a lot of contributions to help construct the Cetiya. May I be healthy. I feel so weak now.'

On 6 November 1988, Khun Yay Chandra granted by the Abbot Dhammajayo to lead the Kathina ceremony at the temple for the first time. That day the temple was packed to standing room only with congregation members who had come to wish her well. It was not the only time for Khun Yay Chandra, but she led the Kathina many subsequent times and robe-offering ceremonies too. In total, she was to go on to be the president of the Kathina ceremony ten times and for the robe offering ceremony twenty times.

During her final years, sometimes it seems that her concern about the completion of the structure was the thing that kept her going. And due to her great patience, Khun Yay Chandra kept to her normal schedule and met with her visitors every Sunday except in case of an emergency (which was rare). In 1996, Khun Yay's

²³ Jeffrey S. Bowers, *op.cit.*, pp.79-80

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.64

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.103-104

exhaustion became more noticeable. Sometimes she looked as if she might pass out. She spent most of her time in the hospital during the year 1996-1997, especially from September to November 1997.

Khun Yay Chandra passed away peacefully on 10th September 2000 at the age of 92 after engaging in extensive meditation practice, Dhamma teaching and great acts of merit, including the construction of Dhammakāya Temple. This was Khun Yay Chandra, the teacher who provided the Abbot Dhammajayo with the wisdom and illumination in Dhamma, and the support and encouragement to perform meritorious deeds until her very last breath. Her tremendous significance is immeasurable. Therefore, it was only fitting that Venerable Dhammajayo extolled her magnificence with this title: ‘Our Great Teacher Khun Yay Mahārattana Upasika Chandra Khon-nok-yoong, the Founder of Wat Phra Dhammakāya’.

Now, the community living at Dhammakāya Temple numbers 3,000 monks, and novices as well as 1,600 laymen and laywomen - making it the largest temple in Thailand in terms of inhabitants.

Daily Abhidhamma funeral chanting was arranged from 17th September 2000 to 2nd February 2001. Senior monks and executives of monastic orders from various temples throughout the country came to recite the Abhidhamma. There were a hundred monks each working day and two-hundred monks on Sundays with thousands of laypeople also in attendance.

On 3rd February 2002, one hundred thousand monks from 30,000 temples around Thailand, together with a hundred thousand lay people clad in white participated in her final cremation ceremony –the biggest-ever assembly of monks known in Buddhist history. Afterwards Venerable Dhammajayo ordered to have Khun Yay Chandra’s memorial monument, a hexagonal pyramid-shaped hall, built in the original area of the Temple, on an islet setting right behind the Main Chapel. It is a two-stored structure made of gold-tinted plate glass. The lower floor is a museum with an exhibition telling Khun Yay Chandra’s biography as a founder of Dhammakāya Temple. The upper floor houses her one and a half-life-size golden statue.

Conclusion Remarks:

Building a temple from 3,200-Baht capital undeniably equates starting the formidable task from nothing at all. The crux of this purpose-built sanctum: Dhammakāya Temple emerged from the desperate need of the pioneer group of Dhammakāya meditators to continue their meditation practice of Dhammakāya system. With the unshakeable confidence toward the second-to-none capable teacher: Khun Yay Chandra holding the knowledge of the Tradition and sticking to the last command of the late master: Venerable Candasaro, to widely spread the essential entity of Dhammakāya Meditation: Vijjā Dhammakāya; believing that the practice of Dhammakāya Meditation will provide the beneficial effects to all humankind, this pioneer group of Dhammakāya meditators shared the lofty view and joined the seem-to-be mission impossible with the sacrifice of their own promising future to make the mission possible.

Dhammakāya Meditation had been the meditation form of practice unifying and strengthening the members’ solidarity and devotion over the period of its establishment, left it with no chance for the Temple to fail to any threatening challenges along the path. The realization of this marvelous teaching could augment the life of the two great

masters: Luang Pu Wat Paknam and Khun Yay Chandra including numbers of ardent followers; it is thus absolutely right and worth wide in the view of the Dhammakāya followers to preserve, protect and propagate the knowledge to ensure its continuity. And it is the central factor of the pushing start and the ensuing success of Dhammakāya Temple.