

Chapter IV

The Evaluation of the Factors of Dhammakāya Temple's Success

The scope of this Chapter covers the work of investigation into the factors of Dhammakāya Temple's success in modern Thai society. In order to ensure that this thesis can provide a substantive and accurate academic analysis, the researcher decides to employ theories of Sociological Typology approach to help scrutinize and explain the rise and success of Dhammakāya Temple and the pivotal factors of its religious achievements.

4.1 The General Feature of Typological Theorized Approach

Due to the sudden rise of multi-cults and new religious movements in every nook and cranny of the globe from the mid-1960s onwards having accelerated conceptual complexity and confusion in the Sociology of religion when analyzing and studying religion, religious organizations and religious movements, sociologists have felt obliged to create new Typologies to understand and interpret the changing face of existing religious phenomena with the attempt to develop a general Typology of Sect/Cult/Movement which embraces and which could be applicable to, every aspect of the sectarian and religious movements of any kind of religious tradition; however according to the present advance of Typology studies, there is none of any formulated-typology-in-religion theory being shown to be of use in the analysis of every aspect of existing religious Movements/Sects/Cults, even though sociologists have put forward the definitions of Cults, Religious Movements, Sects, etc., and give broader definition and analysis of the concept of Religious Movements, Cults, Sects, etc., in order to develop the theory to cover the interpretation of both sociological factors and religious elements.

Therefore in working on theoretical approach to analyze a certain religious phenomenon, it is mainly reliable on the decision of individual researcher in adopting the Typology-in-religion theory which is seen enable to grasp aspects of reality in a manner relevant to the particular studied problems.

The advantage of the Typological-theorized approach adopted into the classification of religious movement is it provides a neutral stance toward the analysis and the conclusion system on the studied issue, as Typology-in-religion theories formulated by sociologists are originated with the primary aim to understand religions: trying to predict what religions will eventually do and what will become of religions; to do this, sociologists employ demographic techniques, survey analysis, ethnography, and various other methodological approaches in order to create a comprehensive and insightful formulation. It is important to note that sociologists study religion not to prove, disprove or normatively evaluate religion. Sociologists are not interested in

whether a religion is right or wrong. Thus typological theories are assumed to be a useful analytical and heuristic device for the measures of religiosity.

Typological theories in religion also provide alternative, naturalistic explanation for many elements of religion including the emergence of new religious phenomena as these theories approach religion from slightly different perspectives, trying to explain:

1. the function of religion in society;
2. the role of religion in the life of the individual
3. the nature (and origin) of religion.

1.2 The Theoretical Approaches Adopted to the Evaluation of the Factors of Dhammakāya Temple's Success

In this thesis, the researcher intends to provide the multi-approached characters toward the factors of success of Dhammakāya Temple in multi-relationship as: regarding the social situation through the analytical model of Psychic Deprivation, regarding the Dhammakāya Meditation effectiveness through the exploratory model of the Temple's aim, regarding the world concept through the investigatory model of the Temple's world view, and regarding the contexts of Buddhism through the examinational model of Buddhist modernism and revival of meditation. All the mentioned aspects are done through the use of the following four Typology-in-religion theories.

The reason of selecting the following four Typological theories is each contains a certain salient feature enabling to grasp the full significant nature/structure in a manner relevant to the particular studied problems in this thesis. Furthermore, the selected typologies are originally formulated specifically for the classification of religious movements in the world and having been examined to see if they are useful in the quest to understand Dhammakāya Temple. They are also able to widen the discussion-to-be in this Chapter as links can be made to other religious movements which were existing yet not immediately obvious. The four Typological theories as well as their functional roles in the work of analysis in this thesis are described as follows:

1. The Five Types of Deprivation Theory formulated by Charles Y. Glock and R. Stark. (the objective of adopting this theory to analyze the existing social psychic situation is to depict how Psychic deprivation gave Dhammakāya Temple the added advantage in utilizing Dhammakāya Meditation and its teaching to reach and recruit new Dhammakāya meditators from the urban society.)
2. Wilson's Typological Model of classifying new religious movements, describing seven positions of the new movement based on the movement's aims. (the objective of employing this theory to explore the Dhammakāya Meditation effectiveness is to reason why Dhammakāya meditators unlike other traditions' practitioners, consistently embrace and attach to the Temple's meditation practice; resulting in the constant increase of accumulated numbers of Dhammakāya meditators.)
3. Roy Wallis' Typology classifying the new movement into three different categories based on the movement's views. (the objective of adopting this theory to investigate the world concept of Dhammakāya Temple is to

provide a vivid illustration showing how Dhammakāya Temple views the world at large and where they position themselves in this world to make Dhammakāya Meditation a fulfillment.)

4. Lance Cousin's Typological Categories of the new movement based on the movement's roles. (the objective of adopting this theory to examine Dhammakāya Temple in the contexts of Buddhism is to offer a broad sense of the Dhammakāya Temple's success in two germanes as: 'Buddhist modernism', and 'Revival of meditation'. Interestingly, Cousin's theory is the only one out of these four, which is designed specifically to classify new Theravāda Buddhism movements.)

The followings are the further discussion of the four Typologies in details:

1.2.1 An Attempt to Address Modern Social Psychic Deprivation

The use of Typology Theory to classify new religious movements by Charles Y. Glock and Stark R. identify **Five Types of Deprivation** but only Psychic Deprivation is identified as a feature of Dhammakāya Temple. The Five Types of Deprivation depend on different kinds of strains felt by each demographic group of people. Every type gave rise to a particular type of religious group, respectively: sect, church, healing movement, reform movement, or cult. The Five Types of Deprivation¹¹⁶ causing the rise of particular type of religious group can be detailed as follows:

1. Economic Deprivation - giving rise to sect
2. Social Deprivation - giving rise to church
3. Organismic Deprivation - giving rise to healing movement
4. Ethical Deprivation - giving rise to reform movement
5. Psychic Deprivation. - giving rise to cult

Deprivation is distinguishable into relative and absolute deprivations. Physical abuse, starvation, and poverty are seen as forms of absolute deprivation, whereas relative deprivation can be defined as the discrepancy between what one expects in life and what one gets. Both absolute and relative deprivations are causes of the deprived one's receptivity to particular (religious) messages: 'Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'¹¹⁷. Deprivation was seen by generations of scholars, not necessarily Marxists, as the cause of both personal religious commitment and sect and cult formation.

All of the Five Types, only Psychic deprivation is classified by the feature of Dhammakāya Temple. Psychic deprivation may arise when people experience a lack of a meaningful value system around which to organize their lives. Such a condition may well be caused by a perceived social exclusion and may result in disillusionment or despair. The quest for a faith, ethic or experience is an attempt to address this deprivation.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Glock, Charles. Y. and Stark, R. **Religion and Society in Tension**. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1965), p.248

¹¹⁷ St Matthew 11:28

¹¹⁸ Glock and Stark, op.cit., p.248

In Thailand, psychic deprivation arises in the life of many well-educated, morality-conscious Thais in the urban society during the course of transition in the country's agriculture-based economy to an industrial-driven society. This group of urban people experiences the lack of the meaningful spiritual system to guide their lives. They perceive traditional sermon in typical temples as irrelevant to their lifestyle. Apart from that, traditional Buddhist temple attendance does not resonate with their expectation.

Dhammakāya Temple has seen through this psychic situation and adopted a far-sighted 'friendly-user' policy in running their religious services and providing their morality programs in accordance with the needs and aspirations of this urban middle class. The key components of the Temple activity is the meditation courses both short-term and long-term organized in systematic standard with the utilization of computerized databases for operational record keeping, and with mentors and attentive staffs provided. Lodging is individually designed compartments to offer personal privacy and keep meditative atmosphere observed. The Temple makes sure every given element will make the meditation retreat a real feast for their urban-educated participants and meditation lovers

The Temple offers an approach to life that there is no contradiction between being prosperous and spiritual development. This makes Dhammakāya followers feel that the relevant teachings and the purpose of life can be found in this temple. At Dhammakāya Temple, the concept of purification through the practice of Dhammakāya Meditation Technique is emphasized, in accompanied with five-precept observation and financial contribution. The success of the Temple's Dhamma propagation in this way enables the Temple becoming a homogenous hub characterized by the prosperity and the seriousness in religious involvement of its members.

Danna Marie Cook in her thesis¹¹⁹ opined her idea about the factors of success in Dhamma propagation of Dhammakāya Temple as '... The Thai middle-class is newly developed and searching for meaning in their new status. The Dhammakāya movement has made itself relevant to them through its adaption of a Protestant ethic connecting their worldly success to their own goodness and through encouraging their participation in the new open market of Thailand.'

Santisuda Ekachai¹²⁰ in her article in Bangkok Post Homepage talks about the factors of Dhammakāya Temple flourishing alongside with the modern urban lifestyle because of the appropriate address to the urbanists' spiritual needs as she says '... The growth explosion of the Dhammakāya movement coincides with the economic growth of Thailand and the emergence of a working middle-class. Many of the temple's critics attribute the success of the movement to this exceptional ability to reach the Thai middle-class. 'Whether you agree with its teachings or not, the Dhammakāya movement's birth and popularity has grown out of the religious needs of Thais in modern, urban communities''

¹¹⁹ Danna Marie Cook, op.cit., p.42

¹²⁰ Santisuda Ekachai, Article in Bangkok Post Homepage www.bangkokpost.com (accessed February 2002); 21.12.98 **Phra Dhammakāya Controversy: Keeping the Faith**

As per Schober's opinion¹²¹ '...The movement provides a spiritual practice which fits well with a busy, consumer lifestyle; it offers a useful perspective, as ...Thai urban professionals are both hard pressed for time and pragmatic.'

It is to say that Dhammakāya Temple amid facing the heavy long-running public criticism has successfully provided a great help to those seeking relevant spiritual development in the modern Thai society by tagging a spiritual dimension into their lives without interrupting the smooth flow of their urban lifestyle, their career success and their prosperous status. It confirms one of the factor contributing to Dhammakāya Temple's success in their religious mission.

1.2.2 The Revival of Interest in Buddhist Meditation Practice

Typical Buddhist temples reserve meditation practice for monks and novices. Teaching meditation to laity in general public was scant in Thai society. Dhammakāya Temple with its mission to establish social morality and propagate world peace through inner peace acknowledges the urgent need of occupying itself with the task of perpetuating Dhammakāya Meditation Technique to wide range of people in order to revive the system of Dhammakāya Meditation Technique and strengthen the Buddhist's faith. The Temple makes Dhammakāya Meditation practice easily accessible by people of all walks of life through media, publications, branch centers, etc., just to name a few. They have gone all out to attract people interest in mediation practice until meditation is now regarded as a must-do activity in many contemporary lives.

The interesting point to discuss here is, looking at the end-result of the Temple's meditation propagation task, the numbers of Dhammakāya meditators have been accumulating with the passing time, surpassing other contemporary meditation traditions taught in other places in the country. An analysis shows the lack of competence in keeping the followers continuously attach to the meditation Tradition is the key component causing the absence of success in gathering the strong congregation of the other Traditions.

This thesis intends to employ Bryan Wilson's Typological Model of classifying new religious movements¹²² which describes seven positions of the aim of new religious movements to explore the Dhammakāya Meditation effectiveness in order to reason why Dhammakāya meditators unlike other traditions' meditators, consistently embrace and attach to the Temple's meditation tradition after having tried the practice; resulting in the constant increase of accumulated numbers of Dhammakāya meditators. However, after having carefully examined Wilson's Typological Model, only two out of the seven positions of which are held by Dhammakāya Meditation's characteristics. The two positions are Thaumaturgical Aspect and Conversionist Element (these two are discussed in detail in the following pages). The Wilson's seven Typological positions as well as each position's brief description are shown as follows:

¹²¹ Schober (1995:320) referred in Rory Mackenzie 2007, p.65

¹²² Wilson, Bryan R. **Magic and the Millennium**. (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1973), pp.18-30

1. Conversionist - Proponents seek a supernatural transformation of his/her self to change the world. The typical character of this type of sects/movements are revivalism and public gathering/preaching at mass meetings rather than door to door preaching. Officials and representatives of the sects/movements mobilize the group and use techniques of mass persuasion in order to convert individuals through emotional means. The most popular examples of this position are the Salvation Army and Pentecostal/Evangelical sects, etc. (As this Typological position is featured by Dhammakāya Meditation, opinions and analysis appear in the following pages.)
2. Revolutionist. - Proponents hold that the entire world or existing social order must be destroyed to save humans. (irrelevant to the case of Dhammakāya Meditation)
3. Introversionist. - Proponents view the world as evil to the core; the introversionist response to withdraw from the earth as fully as possible. (irrelevant to the case of Dhammakāya Meditation)
4. Gnostic-manipulationist. - Salvation is possible when people master the right means and techniques to overcome their problems. (irrelevant to the case of Dhammakāya Meditation)
5. Thaumaturgical aspect. - describes the situation as individuals seek special local and magical dispensations which enable them to escape from the problems of the world. The religious movements classified under this category believe in the possibility of individuals having extraordinary or supernatural effects in their lives. This category of Wilson's typology is defined in terms of its posture and response to the world, of the kinds of reactions which dominate the customary practices of the members. (As this Typological position is featured by Dhammakāya Meditation, opinions and analysis appear in the following pages.)
6. Reformist. - Proponents view that people must seek supernaturally-bestowed insights that enable them to mold the world toward good ends. (irrelevant to the case of Dhammakāya Meditation)
7. Utopian. - Proponents view that people, without recourse to divine intervention, must create a brand new social order wherein evil cannot manifest. (irrelevant to the case of Dhammakāya Meditation)

Wilson's Seven Positions are originated from the concept to respond to the belief that the traditional spiritual systems could no longer offer neither mental salvation nor the means to overcome life problems up to their proponents' satisfaction.

4.2.2.1 Thaumaturgical Aspect Make Dhammakāya Meditation Appeal

Thaumaturgical aspect describes when people seeking special dispensation which enabling them to escape from the problems of the world, especially people in a capitalistic society which stresses innovation, competition and individualism. The living-condition of Thai urbanists is alike characterized by being individualistic and going under intense pressure in their working life, competing to make themselves stay competitive and being successful; at times their career environment reaches the state as

serious as crisis and a deadlock. They are in searching for the dispensation to help escaping their individual's worldly problems.

Dhammakāya Meditation with its features of Samātha and Vipassanā integrated into ones advantages the practitioners with the unbroken flow of meditative experience since the start of primary step of Samātha in cooling and calming the mind, continuing to the development of insight or wisdom when entering the stage of Vipassanā. These meditative results are quick and tangible. Dhammakāya meditators realize their mind is energized and being healthy and positive impacting an increased performance in the work place and the ability of resisting temptation to engage in unwholesome practices. Dhammakāya Meditators are thrilled by all these newly-found individual effects and charmed by these extraordinary meditative results. They embrace meditation practice into part of their lives as they feel that Dhammakāya Meditation can help them excel spiritually and materially. This sort of phenomenon attracts members of upward trend society to take an initial step to try the practice; once they experience the appealing element of Dhammakāya Meditation feeling want to engage in meditation.

Thus it is correct to say that Dhammakāya Meditation benefits individual level and make the practice appeal to people as a whole which increasing the Temple competitiveness in keeping the recruited members with the Tradition and to initiate Dhammakāya meditation practice to the wider range of people to allow them to experience meditation benefits by their own; which they will then decide to join the Tradition with willingness.

There are numbers of testimonies written by practitioners who have passed Dhammakāya Meditation courses run by Dhammakāya Temple, witnessing the compelling attractiveness of Dhammakāya Meditation such as Rory Mackenzie in his Ph.D. thesis¹²³ wrote about his own meditation practice with a Dhammakāya English monk named Venerable Nicholas Thanissaro as:

‘I was able to concentrate on the substitute image two fingers breadth above the navel. The inside of my body appeared grey and cloudy, although the ideal is to visualize a clear interior. I also noticed my head falling to one side and felt that I was falling asleep. According to Wat Phra Dhammakāya members, this is a result of the mind moving from the head to the centre of the body. I was surprised to discover that the image I was focusing on became smaller and spun around, and it was as if I was being drawn into a mental journey that led into a world with which I was unfamiliar. To prevent that journey continuing, I focused on restoring the mental picture of my chosen image. I lost track of time, and was disappointed when Phra Nicholas drew the exercise to a close as I found it to be physically and mentally refreshing....’

In the same page, Rory Mackenzie also commented that:

‘... It is very easy to understand the attraction of Dhammakāya meditation. In my case it quickly delivered a sense of mental and physical well-being. I felt that to have embarked on the journey I described would have brought a heightened sense of calmness and mental power. The presenting nature of this journey, however, indicated a Buddhist pathway and to take it would have meant considerable adjustment in my

¹²³ Rory Mackenzie, op.cit., p.104

Christian commitment. Phra Nicholas made the point that images which arise during meditation should be explored; the implication being that they may lead us into a deeper understanding of reality. I can well understand how Dhammakāya meditators find their practice refreshing and invigorating, and why many would wish to spend considerable periods of time meditating.¹²⁴

Dr. JoAnn Borda Sainz, Ph.D. (U.S.A.), another Dhammakāya Meditator, says about another attractive aspect of Dhammakāya Meditation practice he witnessed as:

‘I want to share the fact that Dhammakāya meditation offers a quick and non-complicated vehicle to pursue inner happiness and peace and a change of outlook on life and humankind, an outlook of hope and peace....’¹²⁵

In the following page, he said¹²⁶ ‘...Prior to 2005, my religious and spiritual experiences provided only pieces of a puzzle to my understanding of life’s spirituality. I had begun my religious studies as a six year old, and later chanted. I was exposed to many different forms of meditation, prayers, many religions, sects and many languages Hinduism, Buddhism, Quakerism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, mysticism, Brazilian Candomble Hindu, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Spanish. Now, here I am, in 2005, learning Pāli, in yet another quest for the Divine, through the Dhammakāya.’

In term of an increased performance in the work place, Dr. Aaron Stern, Ph.D. (U.S.A.)¹²⁷ clearly confirms this regards as he wrote, ‘...Meditation has had a number of tangible benefits in my life and my family life. I took up Dhammakāya meditation while I was in my doctoral program. Meditation reduced the intense stress associated with simultaneously completing my doctoral dissertation, teaching 40-50 undergraduate students, and searching for a job. It became important to me to find the time to meditate, typically early in the morning or late at night. Without meditation, I could have easily succumbed to the pressure of my responsibilities as a student and simply given up pursuing the doctorate, even after investing so much time and money. Instead, I found that meditation helped me to concentrate when writing my dissertation. My teaching improved also, as shown by the higher scores on teaching evaluations written by my students.’

In the later paragraph, he wrote about his ability of resisting temptation to engage in unwholesome practices as ‘... The more I have meditated, the more I have realized that the human mind is strong but very susceptible to influences that may weaken its powers of concentration and clarity. Dhammakāya meditation helped me see the value of keeping the mind relatively free of unnecessary clutter and other things that may impede this clarity. This is an important reason why I decided to stop consuming alcohol because I started to find that even small amounts –say, one bottle of beer –made my mind fuzzier than I expected. The alcohol buzz soon lost its attractiveness. My decision greatly pleased my wife as well and I hope it will serve as a good example for my children.’

¹²⁴ Rory Mackenzie, op.cit., p.104

¹²⁵ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Journey2Joy**, op.cit., p.216

¹²⁶ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Journey2Joy**, op.cit., p.217

¹²⁷ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Journey2Joy**, op.cit., p.72

It is important to note that the testimonies imported here with the intension to back up the analysis that Dhammakāya Meditation contains the effectiveness in producing admiring results to the practitioners in term of mental development and heightening the level working competency but not serve as a verifiable fact promising that the same results can be experienced by every practitioner.

4.2.2.2 Conversionist Element Add More Confidence

By using the Dhammakāya approach in teaching Dhammakāya Meditation practice to people regardless of race, faith, gender and without an attempt of faith conversion but rather concentrate on the element of behavior conversion, Dhammakāya Temple gains an advantage for the absence of inter-faith conflicts and the presence of widen-range opportunity for the introduction of Dhammakāya Meditation.

At the concentration of behavior conversion, Dhammakāya Meditation practitioners gain the first-hand experience of the change of their behaviors for the better. Some have gone as far level as the transformation of self after having joined Dhammakāya community and get on to meditation practice in groups. Dhammakāya Meditation Practice is seen as mechanism of conversion (of people's behaviors in the way they are pleased); moreover within Dhammakāya community, its members are confident that Dhammakāya Technique is efficient to generate world peace for humankind through the improved quality of mind and behaviors by practicing Dhammakāya Meditation. With this confidence inside its members' mind, Dhammakāya Meditation does not only contribute to the present Thai society but has also been pushed beyond the frontier across the oceans to benefit international communities.

Dr. Aaron Stern, Ph.D. (U.S.A.)¹²⁸ in his writing further opined his opinion as '...Meditation does not need to be a religiously-motivated activity in order to reap its advantages. Meditation only requires a commitment of time and some perseverance. The only case in which I would question the appropriateness of meditation is for a person with a serious mental illness or psychosis. Otherwise, there is every reason to believe that meditation has substantial potential for improving the quality of life for all living creatures by increasing the capacity of human beings to feel more relaxed, mentally alert, and at peace with themselves. And if people feel at peace with themselves, they will feel at peace with the world; something our planet direly needs.'

4.2.3 Dhammakāya Temple's World View Offering It an Edge to the Greater Success in Modern/Post-modern World

The best known effort to develop genuine typologies of New Religious Movements, as the scheme to explain and understand them is that of Roy Wallis¹²⁹, whose typology based on their relationship to the prevailing structure of social relations, divides new religious movements into three categories in accordance with their orientation and posture towards the world as: World-rejecting, World-accommodating, and World-affirming movements. Like Bryan Wilson, who was his teacher and

¹²⁸ Tawandhamma Foundation, *Journey2Joy*, op.cit., p.72

¹²⁹ Roy Wallis, *Three Types of New Religious Movements in L Dawson (ed.) Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp.525-544

colleague at one time, Roy Wallis sought to formulate a similar approach, based on the orientation of religious organizations in the world. Therefore, his typology is linked to the Wilsonian view of the responses of new religious movements to stress that derives from rationalization. As Bryan Wilson adequately argued:

‘...if sociology of religion is to move forward, we must create categories which allow us to study comparatively the social functions and developments of religious movements.’

Bryan Wilson aimed to create a typology which could be applicable, not only to a specific religion, in his case, Christianity, and its religious organizations and movements, but which would also be useful for the analysis of organizations and movements of other religions. Later, Wilson’s analysis of new religious movements’ responses to the world, became a model approach for the study of new religious movements in the transitional period, adopted by Wallis and can be cross-cultural and used to explain religious phenomena of different times and contexts.

The first type, **World-rejecting** movement condemns society as a whole, including its institutional structure and values, and wants to replace that world with another set of values and institutions. The second type, **World-accommodating** movements, stresses the enrichment of spiritual life of individuals as opposed to the gaining of worldly possessions and there is often an emphasis on the collective life as an end in itself. The third type, **World-affirming** movement ‘claim to possess the means to enable people to unlock their physical, mental, and spiritual potential, without the need to withdraw from the world’¹³⁰. Thus, the world-affirming type focuses on individual changes whereas the world-rejecting type has as a goal redoing society itself.

The followings are detailing Roy Wallis’ Threefold Typology which introducing a classification system of new religious movements based on movements’ views on and relationships with the world at large, as well as the brief description of each category.¹³¹

1. World-rejecting - the movement views the prevailing social order as deviant and a perversion of the divine plan. Such movements see the world as evil or at least as materialistic. They may adhere to millenarian beliefs. The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (a.k.a. ‘Hare Krishnas’), the Unification Church, the Brahma Kumaris and the Children of God exemplify world-rejecting movements.
2. World-accommodating - the movement draws clear distinctions between the spiritual and the worldly spheres. They have few or no consequences for the lives of adherents. These movements adapt to the world but they do not reject or affirm it.

¹³⁰ Roy Wallis, op.cit., pp.7-8

¹³¹ Roy Roy Wallis, **The Classifications of Religious Movements: The Nature of New Religious Movements**. Compiled by Lorne L. Dawson, Wiley-Blackwell, 2003, p.111

3. World-affirming - the movement might not have any rituals or any formal ideology. They may lack most of the characteristics of religious movements. They affirm the world and merely claim to have the means to enable people to unlock their 'hidden potential'. As examples of world-affirming movements, Wallis mentions Werner Erhard's est and Transcendental Meditation.

According to Wallis' Sociological Theory, Dhammakāya Temple's ideology is placed under 'World-affirming' category as the Temple is observed as not only not rejecting the world but also happily model itself upon various aspects of the world, such as technology know-how, etc., which are useful to the Temple's religious purpose: the spread of Dhammakāya Meditation knowledge. The practice of Dhammakāya Meditation is to purify and elevate the quality of the practitioners' mind but not to emphasize individual enlightenment (in order to leave this world) as the lofty vision of the movement is to continue their perfection pursuit to save all living beings in Samsāra to enlighten and reach the utmost of Dhamma.

There is congruence with Dhammakāya Temple's practice in term of robust recruiting strategy to increase numbers of Dhammakāya Meditators throughout the world. By utilizing the satellite technology, the Temple places importance on meditating together especially on special occasions to create a national and international community for those specific time of meditation. Moreover, meditating in groups gave the psychological advantage.

It is obvious that Dhammakāya Temple acquire every possible means available in this world to achieve the goal of making Dhammakāya Meditation convenient for as many as people to access and experience it. The analysis that the advent of modernization of this era has weakened Buddhism, perhaps other religions as well, is not correctly applicable to the case of Dhammakāya Temple because as the Temple's world view in positioning itself as world-affirming, Dhammakāya Temple enjoys the best use of every modern and cutting-edge technology in their religious missions especially in terms of propagation of Dhamma and meditation. The Temple's working concept of 'not to escape or withdraw from the world and its values offer it an edge to the greater success in the modern/postmodern world comparing to other religious movements in the contemporary.'

Rory Mackenzie in his Ph.D. thesis¹³² confirms this point together with his own opinion as '... Wat Phra Dhammakāya respond by saying that they are empowering lay people to engage with, rather than renounce the world they live in, through moral and meditation training. This synthesis of spirituality, economic success and consumerism, however, does not sit well with many Thai traditionalists.'

Furthermore, through the attainment of the inner Dhammakāya, the practitioners discover knowledge that make them feel happier and become more well-adjusted individuals. This converges on the Abbot Dhammajayo's explanation about the experience in the stage of Dhammakāya attainment as¹³³ '... With the Dhammakāya, we are like living, breathing libraries, sources of infinite wisdom, purity, happiness and

¹³² Rory Mackenzie, op.cit., p.88

¹³³ Tawandhamma Foundation, *Journey2Joy*, op.cit., p.198

power. Unlock that knowledge through meditation. This is not difficult to do at all if only we give ourselves a chance.’ It means that Dhammakāya Meditation is the technique possessing the quality to enable people to unlock their ‘hidden’ physical, mental, and spiritual potential which contributing to individual changes while still affirming to the world.

Mr. Chan Poi Koun (Singapore)¹³⁴, a Dhammakāya meditator shares his own experience gained from Dhammakāya meditation as ‘... The wisdom I search for in my life is to understand the true meaning of happiness. It is this meditation which helps to unlock the unlimited inner wisdom within ourselves. It far surpasses the results you would get from simply reading or studying. And this knowledge will uplift your mental quality to a high level, not just solve your current issues, but aid you in your future decisions. You will find that you already have a person of great wisdom within you. I believe that whoever practices Dhammakāya meditation will have similar positive experiences and results as I had.’

4.2.4 Buddhist Modernism And Revival of Meditation

Lance Cousin’s Typological Categories of new religious movements formulated based on the movement’s roles is the only one out of the Four theories adopted by this thesis, which is designed specifically to classify new Theravāda Buddhism movements; it offers a broad sense of the new religious movements’ development in two germanes as: ‘Buddhist Modernism’, and ‘Revival of Meditation’ and the success of Dhammakāya Temple in Buddhism can also be placed in these two germanes.¹³⁵

Lance Selwyn Cousin was a scholar in the field of Buddhist Studies, a lecturer and then senior lecturer in the Department of Comparative Religion at Manchester University. After early retirement in the 1990s he settled in Oxford and continued to publish scholarly papers and reviews including a widely cited historical summary such as ‘The Dating of the Historical Buddha: A Review article,’ which was published in The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. In Oxford, he has taught various aspects of Buddhism, mainly in the Theology Faculty and the Pāli and Middle Indian in the Oriental Faculty.

He was a Fellow at Wolfson College University of Oxford and part of the faculty at the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. Prior to this, he was briefly President (2002/3) of the Pāli Text Society (PTS).

His main areas of research concern the history of Buddhist schools, Abhidhamma literature and thought, as well as Pāli, Middle Indian and Buddhist Sanskrit textual studies. Professor Richard Gombrich once described Lance Cousin as the leading authority in the West in the field of Abhidhamma.

He received several awards including honorary professorships incorporating recognition of his contributions from among other places the Mahāmakut Buddhist University, Bangkok, Thailand in 2013.

¹³⁴ Tawandhamma Foundation, **Journey2Joy**, op.cit., p.239

¹³⁵ Lance Cousin S. Buddhism, JR Hinnells (ed.): **A New Handbook of Living Religions**, Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1997, p.17

He has also taught Buddhist meditation for many years and is the Founding Chairman of the Samātha Trust and other related organizations. When he moved to Manchester in 1967, he started the Manchester University Buddhist Society and the class there that lead to the beginning of several similar classes in the rest of the UK and the eventual establishment of the Manchester Centre for Buddhist Meditation in Chorlton. He was an influential teacher and conducted several retreats incorporating the UK, particularly at the Samātha Centre, Greenstreete farm in Wales, USA, Ireland and Sri Lanka.

4.2.5 A Modern Reform in Creating Member Network Quickening its Evangelism

Dhammakāya Temple initiates a religious working system and a member's network which help re-enchanting the volume of members and volunteers constantly. The mid-week meetings of members in different locations of branch centers to talk and work together form the bond among Dhammakāya members (*kalayānamittara*) and keep its members sticking with the Temple and help pushing the Temple's Dhammakāya Meditation and religion-related activities to their own communities.

Doctor Mano Laohawanich, a lecturer at Chulabhorn International Medical College, Thammasat University, a long-stand consistent-Dhammakāya critic gave an interview¹³⁶, analyzing the Dhammakāya branch-expanding strategy as '... it is a community-based religion-administrative type containing unlimited potential multiplying its local member networking system without end.' In his idea, the growingly-powerful Dhammakāya Temple is formidable and can legitimately threaten the nation security.

The Dhammakāya member-networking system (*glum kalayānamittara*) is built up not only to be just a mechanism of Dhammakāya Temple growth and expansion but it is also strategized to be a nurturing system of the Dhammakāya Meditation Tradition. Venerable Dhammajayo expresses his confidence in the ability of the Temple to continue after his death, 'If I die, the system here has already been put in place. If I pass away, the temple can carry on with its mission. Nobody worries about that' (Gearing, 1999).¹³⁷

This sort of member-networking modernization has never occurred in Theravāda Buddhist society, given a new trendy outlook to the long-time forgotten Buddhist meditation and offered the Temple the chance of spreading the message and help the work of popularizing Dhammakāya Meditation practice in Thai Buddhist society.

Dhammakāya Temple adopts the new idea of arranging the Temple's weekly ceremony on Sunday to make it in line with people's present lifestyle and promote a temple's friendly and welcoming atmosphere to encourage people to come to the Temple in group and practice meditation together as being opposed to the theme of traditional meditation which the practitioners are told to find a secluded spot, preferably quiet and meditate individually.

¹³⁶ *Sarakadee Magazine* (February B.E. 2558) p. 87

¹³⁷ Gearing J, 'Between Faith and Fundraising' in *Asiaweek* 17.9.99, 1999, (page numbers unclear)

Moreover, it is easier for practitioners to obtain a quicker and more positive inner experience when meditating together, rather than meditating in isolation or individually. In addition, there is the strong conviction that a greater power of mental purity is generated when members meditate together. Apart from that the group meditation offers a social opportunity to meet the like-minded people who can support each other in the meditation activity.

Mr. Andrew Cowan (U.S.A.)¹³⁸, another Dhammakāya meditator talks about the benefit he gets from joining the meditation practice at the meditation center as he says ‘... Meditation has also supported me in meeting good friends. Prior to coming to the meditation center, I had many friends who engaged in poor behaviors. Often, simply because I had known nothing else, I would spend time with these people and followed them drinking, going out late at night and engaging in other deleterious harmful activities. When I started to meditate, I have been able to come to the center more often and this has brought me into contact with good friends and people who encouraged my behave in the right way. I truly feel that meditation has allowed much of this to occur.’

In conclusion, the success of creating the member networking system and promoting the practice of Dhammakāya Meditation in groups is theoretically classified as Buddhist Modernism.

4.2.6 An Extremely Strong Focus on Dhammakāya Meditation Propagation

The essentially successful factor of Dhammakāya Temple is the focus on Dhammakāya Meditation Technique. Dhammakāya Temple has engaged in operating Dhammakāya Meditation teaching for monks, novices and the Temple’s staff in parallel with a wide range of people throughout the past four decades. The Temple plans to recruit up to 1 million participants in the future; in the present, there are around 100,000 attendants in the Temple ceremony and the actual number of Dhammakāya Meditators is 60,000.

The Temple remains pro-actively in their Meditation propagating. One of the Temple’s action plan in response to its firm world visions is the expansion of Dhammakāya Meditation Branch Center both inside and outside the countries. In 2014 (B.E. 2557), during the Kathina period, the Temple officially announced a particular fundraising project, in order to accelerate the fulfillment. The proceedings is to fuel the Meditation Teaching Program of the Temple’s 161 Meditation Branch Centers located throughout the world.

Dhammakāya Temple also encourages their followers to pursue meditation practice in earnest by advising them to set aside time daily just for meditation in order to make themselves familiar with mind training. The Abbot Dhammajayo emphasizes: ‘Business and the mind should go hand in hand. A business is used in the search for money to help nourish your life, and the mind is used to search for peace of mind in order to get rid of unhappiness...’¹³⁹ By following this instruction, meditation become part of Dhammakāya meditators’ life and is consistently practiced.

¹³⁸ Tawandhamma Foundation, *Journey2Joy*, op.cit., p.112

¹³⁹ Tawandhamma Foundation, *Journey2Joy*, op.cit., p.329

Dhammakāya Temple received the ‘the Best Meditation Center Award 2013’. In accordance to the National Office of Buddhism’s policy to encourage the permeation of Buddhism to achieve the same standard, the Provincial Office of Buddhism has surveyed and selected the best meditation center in their region that reach the standard to present the awards. In 2013 (2556 B.E.), the presenting of the awards ceremony, which has the presenting of the awards and certificates of the Best Meditation Center, was being held on 11th March 2014 at Phichaiyatikaram Temple, Klong San District, Bangkok, Thailand.

Moreover, the unifying of different Buddhist fraternities is known as one of the Abbot Dhammajayo’s visions. In a Dhamma talk on 27.8.05 at the Temple, the Abbot Dhammajayo mentioned the need to bring different Buddhist groups together, ‘... We need to produce a Buddhism in the right direction and bring these different Buddhists together to come up with a unified kind of Buddhism.’ Dhammakāya Temple is developing the facilities to host such a gathering.¹⁴⁰ All these activities are resonating with Cousin’s classification of Dhammakāya Temple as the Revival of Meditation in Buddhism of this era.

4.3 The Legacy of Success Needed To Be Handed On to the Second Phase

Through the participating observation and data analysis, one distinctive factor related to the Temple’s new generation successful operation is found. Throughout the almost five-decade long history, Dhammakāya Temple has offered a new Buddhist world view as spiritual and worldly life going hand-in-hand without contradiction which its members and potential constituencies especially the urbanist communities found attractive and used as a guideline to justify both individual and collective actions. Dhammakāya Temple views the world at large that although the present state of the world is one of misery and unhappiness, one should not despair because with the practice of Dhammakāya Meditation, one can help change it into a better condition. Dhammakāya Temple alike every religious movement develops their own ideology and goals: world peace through inner peace, and uses them for guiding the movement, fostering solidarity and continuation of members’ efforts, attracting supporters and potential constituencies and also representing the Temple/Foundation to outsiders.

At Dhammakāya Temple, the teaching emphasizes that a fortune will not come to those who have no merit. Social happiness and world peace start from an individual’s well-being and inner peace. If human beings lead better lives with a peaceful mind, the surrounding environment will also become better; social prosperity was dependent upon personal achievement.

It is also undeniable that Dhammakāya members possess the necessary social and economic characteristics needed in advancing the Temple’s world religious mission and facilitating the fulfillment. However another undeniable truth is that without the Abbot Dhammajayo’s great effort in propagation drives to establish Dhammakāya branch center worldwide, Dhammakāya Temple would not have been able to succeed to such a great extent in the present day. All of the combinative factors conducive to the rise and success of Dhammakāya Temple and seem to fit Smelser’s

¹⁴⁰ Rory Mackenzie, op.cit., p.63

Typological model.¹⁴¹ Dhammakāya Temple becomes one of the fastest growing religious movements with approximately 60,000 meditators at present¹⁴² and encompassing varieties of religious programs for members and society at large. The analysis of social-demographic backgrounds of Dhammakāya's human resources helps illustrate the extent to which the Temple's members are potentially able to continue Dhammakāya Tradition.

How about the new phase of Dhammakāya Temple from now on? The evidence shows that in the member recruitment process, two main types of recruits constituted the membership of Dhammakāya Temple: descendants of Dhammakāya existing members and non-descendant recruits. The initial distinction between these two groups of recruits is that the former has directly been exposed to Dhammakāya's teachings since early childhood, while the latter came to join the Temple later.

As Dhammakāya Temple has existed approximately four and a half decades, the opportunity for the transmission of membership from parent to children is available. One might argue that being born into a family of the Dhammakāya followers does not necessarily mean a child will follow his or her family's belief. However it would be difficult to reject the idea that indoctrination in childhood may predetermine membership, if not, at least, it suggests that 'recruitment will not be left to chance' because, with or without deliberate intention, parent can fix firmly numerous ideas, attitudes, beliefs and so forth in their children's minds. Thus, for this group of recruits, Dhammakāya Tradition has naturally been adopted during their early ages. They indicated that their mothers, in particular, introduced them to the Tradition.

Another important reason for Dhammakāya members' descendants to follow their parents' religious belief was a cultural trait. In Thai society, a child is normally taught that his parents are figures of respect. Thus, a child should fulfill his filial obligation by returning his mother's overflowing goodness with love, respect, obedience and gratitude.¹⁴³

These Dhammakāya-descendant recruits are possibly being the second or third generations of Dhammakāya's early and existing members. They are considered to be the future of Dhammakāya Tradition. Most of them belong to the Youth's Division created in the peer group structure, implementing Buddhist cultural programs, practicing Dhammakāya Meditation and setting up various kinds of voluntary work which are believed to produce good merit. Dhammakāya Temple provides opportunities for its young members to find and share common interests with members of the same age group. Dhammakāya's success in holding young members helps lessen the degree of labor defection and at the same time, secure the future of the Temple.

Some members' young married offsprings and those when reaching their adulthood or about late twenties due to their curiosity in the power of meditation and/or the increasing interest in spiritual knowledge, decide to become Dhammakāya

¹⁴¹ Neil Joseph Smelser, **Theory of Collective Behavior**, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp.264-271

¹⁴² Rory Mackenzie, op.cit., p.94

¹⁴³ Mulder, **Inside Thai Society**: An Interpretation of Everyday Life, p.64

adherents. After joining Dhammakāya community for a certain period of time, they come to understand that Dhammakāya's mission and ideology is a worth wide cause and they will make the future of Dhammakāya Tradition by perpetuating the Temple's ideology and mission with the sense of pride as considering themselves part of something special.

Dhammakāya members realize it is extremely fortunate to come across the Dhammakāya Teaching. Once having found this marvelous teaching, there is no reason to desert it. Believing themselves as valuable resources of Dhammakāya's mission, Dhammakāya recruits are convinced that they are obliged to propagate Dhammakāya Meditation and act as a world peace ambassador in cooperation with other Dhammakāya members around the world. The sense of individual and group pride, according to the emergent norm theory, is essential for one to be active in the cause and adhere to a movement.¹⁴⁴ And it is another factor of the success of Dhammakāya Temple.

Another Dhammakāya recruitment's channel is made through interpersonal ties and pre-existing social networks which is classified as non-descendant recruits. Personal contacts among relative and friends seemed to be the most influential in facilitating potential recruits' desire to join the member network because they had trust in their recruiters. One recruit said, 'I did not think she (recruiting friend) was going to harm me. We had been good friends quite long before she introduced me to meditate.'

Personal contact plays a significant role in the success of Dhammakāya members' recruitment. Personal contact is not only considered as a gateway to a new belief, but also a valuable source of motivation for them to the temple participation. This effective bond between persons in turn motivated potential recruit to try the Dhammakāya Meditation. For those who do not recognize serious personal problems such as financial crisis or psychic deprivation before joining the Temple, personal contact is the first important channel through which Dhammakāya recruits come to know the Dhammakāya Meditation practice. Thus the decision to join a religious movement of a recruit is a process rather than one whole act and Dhammakāya Temple succeeds in accomplishing the process.

4.4 Dhammakāya Legacy Fighting Its Way Aboard

The brand image of the Dhammakāya Foundation/Temple is attractive to a lot of international organizations as the Foundation's promotion of world peace is certainly appealing. In the homeland, the idea of world peace may be far less zealous among Thai peace-lackluster society; moreover, Dhammakāya Teaching emphasizes on career prosperity and profits, is found contrary to a general belief in Thai Theravāda Buddhism and faced criticism from the Buddhist scholars; however it at the same time attracts potential constituencies as it gives a justification, particularly to those who are engaged in business and all kinds of trade for pursuing profit-making activities, including at the international constituencies.

¹⁴⁴ Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, **Collective Behavior**, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1987, p.247

The evidences also shows that the majority of Dhammakāya members (kalayānamittara) in the overseas countries are drawn from relatively better-off backgrounds, as shown by their occupations and income levels. They are self-employed in retail trades, restaurant owners, worked for private. The mentioned qualifications and distinctive financial characteristic of Dhammakāya members prove to be essential bases for the Temple to come into overseas existence and to blossom.

It is interesting to note that Dhammakāya Temple found the propagation and recruitment in countries where people have little knowledge of Buddhism such as USA and in Europe face less problems than in a Buddhist society like Thailand in terms of encountering resistance whether Dhammakāya Meditation being genuine Buddhist teaching. However, as being the 'imported' or 'transplanted' new religious movement in the foreign land, Dhammakāya Temple must have made some changes and adjustments to be in line with the values and culture of the particular countries. Flexibility in ritual and practices and broad-minded attitude toward dominant religious beliefs accepted among the locals help avoid conflict with the traditional religious bodies, other pre-existing establishments, relatives and neighbors.

Dhammakāya Temple, like other Buddhist Schools such as Mahāyāna Buddhism started its overseas branches mission among the ethnic community. Dhammakāya Temple attract the main support from overseas Thai network. In USA, for example, overseas Thai communities and Laos refugee are key groups of people who support the Temple's missionary activities; however, shortly, after the group expanded beyond the Thai constituency, it is reasonable to say that to some extent, the Temple's overseas branch growth is the result of the concerted effort of overseas Asian fellows and the cross-culture marriage families in recruitment and support.

4.5 Dhammakāya Putting the Best Foot Forward to Build the Golden Future

Dhammakāya Temple's ideological teaching provides a firm ground for Dhammakāya members to propagate the Dhammakāya Meditation practice both in Thailand and elsewhere. However, the ideological rationale of Dhammakāya Temple powerfully motivating the Temple's members to act collectively is considered to be just the first step leading to Dhammakāya's success. In fact, Dhammakāya's expansion could be largely trace to the effective efforts of its members who are inspired by the Temple's ideology. No matter what the ideology or doctrine is and how great it sounds, the real efforts of individual members and the Temple itself significantly account for Dhammakāya's success.

Dhammakāya's efforts to marshal support occurred at two levels: individual and organization. At an individual level, Dhammakāya's effective mobilization is a product of the earnest effort of each member who really intends to propagate Dhammakāya Meditation. The success at this level depends upon the relationship between individual members and their existing interpersonal networks whom they are attracted. At the organization level, the Temple simply set a climate permitting them to recruit and operate by organizing various activities and meetings well fit for the cause.

It is found that Dhammakāya Temple is highly capable of bringing Temple's members together through these activities. A major factor behind this success would probably be the member-networking structure. The hierarchical structure of

Dhammakāya community fit well into Thai society, in which authority, seniority and obedience are observed. Furthermore, Dhammakāya's hierarchical structure makes it possible for indoctrination to be internalized by members of each level and generate high levels of socialization of its members as well as increase the degree of success in sustaining Dhammakāya Meditation as individuals' reasons for being attached to the Temple and active in the cause are closely linked with the process of socialization that gradually takes place in their lives as time goes by.

Since this thesis primarily looks at Dhammakāya Temple from within, the observation of Temple members' attitudes and interactions is beneficial. The analytical approach give a better view of how Dhammakāya members are inspired and mobilized by the Temple's doctrinal teachings and practices, how they act and reach to one another and respond to their pursuit of individual and Temple goals.

The sense of group identity and group pride as well as the affective bonds among the members are a valuable source and factor of motivation for their commitment toward the Temple. They make Dhammakāya members believe that it is their responsibility to carry out the Temple's mission by propagating Dhammakāya Meditation Technique worldwide and protecting the Temple in case of needed.

In the facet of propagation, once the new members are initiated into the Temple's community (*glum kalayānamittara*), the member networking system, the teaching monk as well as the present members would provide 'Good Friend' duty (*Kalayānamittara*) responsible for teaching the new comers basic principles, advising them to the practice of meditation, giving them inspiration and personal guidance, as well as reconstructing the new members' ideological orientation to keep it in line with other Temple members'. This pattern of relationship creates strong bonds among members. Member personal bonds are tied together like a chain as a member could be both a mentor of his/her initiate, and an initiate of his/her mentor in the vertical structure of the community (*glum kalayānamittara*). The strong ties between mentors and initiates facilitate indoctrination along vertical lines and kept Dhammakāya members from denouncing the Tradition in the course of time.

To the question of Rory Mackenzie (2007:71) asking Venerable Nicholas Thanissaro an English Theravāda monk ordained at Dhammakāya Temple whether ... it may well be that the Thai public would be more supportive of Wat Phra Dhammakāya if they were aware of the movement's goal of spreading Dhammakāya meditation throughout the world. It may serve to help them understand why Wat Phra Dhammakāya feels such a need to raise such a high level of funding.

Venerable Nicholas Thanissaro answered this question as he believes Thais would not be supportive for the following reasons:¹⁴⁵

First, jealousy is a characteristic of Thai society. In the words of a Thai proverb: 'you can be good but don't become great', the implication being that you will be criticized if you become too successful! 'Who do you think you are, telling everyone how to meditate?' is a common criticism levelled at Wat Phra Dhammakāya.

¹⁴⁵ Rory Mackenzie, op.cit., p.71

Second, not only is there opposition to Wat Phra Dhammakāya within the Sangha, there is opposition from a number of alcohol and cigarette manufacturing companies. They have suggested there should be less emphasis on the movement's preaching on keeping the Five Precepts – an upturn in morality is not good for their business...

Third, Thai movements tend to be national rather than international. For a Thai organization to become international, it requires the sponsorship of the Thai government. Dhammakāya Temple going internationally by its own effort is viewed as being beyond arrogant.

Conclusion Remarks:

A wide variety of perspectives are raised to be discussed in this thesis through the theoretical evaluation aiming to gradually piece together the jigsaw of the factors of Dhammakāya Temple's success which mainly encompasses salient features and typical qualities of the Temple's core value: Dhammakāya Meditation Practice as the model of Dhammakāya Meditation built, sustains and drives Dhammakāya Temple and its communities (the insiders and the outsiders or *glum-kalayānamittara*).

Through the close observation from inside out, Venerable Dhammajayo is a leader of extraordinary versatility upon which strongly reliant the efficiency of his gained knowledge of *Vijjā Dhammakāya* building up a proven track record of zero failure in navigating all his initiated religious projects on the failure-free direction ending up with incomparable accomplishment earning himself the absolute confidence and authority among the Dhammakāya communities: monks, novices and lay Upasakas Upasikas and the Temple's member network. It is a substantial claim that the fail-safe know how received through the knowledge of *Vijjā Dhammakāya* embody the Abbot to be the key figure behind the resounding success of the Temple.

Thus, it is to say that, the real root cause of Dhammakāya Temple's success is Dhammakāya Meditation as it is the crucial element transforming Venerable Dhammajayo to be a successful Abbot, and starting, sustaining, and driving the Temple to be a great growing temple.