Constructing "The Middle": The Socialization of Monastic Youth in Buddhist Northern Thailand[*]

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Abstract

Temporary Buddhist monasticism is an important institution in Thailand for the socialization of boys and young men. By ordaining for some time, they learn the ideals of Thai Buddhist morality. Scholarship on youth's socialization into cultural models has often suggested a linear, unidirectional process in which "agents of socialization" instill in younger generations notions of what it means to be morally good. Such models presume consistent reinforcement of cultural models, often with the help of socially entrenched institutions. How young monastics experience divergent notions of what it means to be a good monastic, though, demonstrates that such a unidirectional model does not adequately address the ways in which morality and cultural models are constructed within interactions. I argue that religious institutions act as not only sites for the cultural reproduction of moral ideals but also sites of everyday interactions where young monastics and their lay supporters reconstruct moral ideals anew. [morality, cultural models, youth, Thailand]

[*] This is a post-peer-review version of a manuscript published in the journal *Ethos*, Volume 46, Issue 2, pp. 180–205. The final version may be accessed via the following link: https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12201.

บทคัดย่อ

สถาบันสงฆ์ และ การอุปสมบทหรือการบรรพชาชั่วคราวในประเทศไทยเป็นสถาบันสำคัญเพื่อสอนเด็กชายกับเยาวชนชายในการเข้าสังคมในช่วงที่บวชเป็นพระภิกษุสามเณร โดยที่พวกเขาจะได้เรียนรู้เกี่ยวกับความเป็นคนดีตามทางแนวพุทธศาสนา บ่อยครั้งที่งานวิจัยเรื่องการสอนให้เยาวชนรู้ถึง ระบอบวัฒนธรรม (“cultural models”) นี้เป็นกระบวนการสอนแบบที่เป็นเส้นตรงและทิศทางเดียว ซึ่งคนที่สอนให้เด็กเป็นคนดีต้องปลูกฝังให้วัยรุ่นปรับตัวเพื่อเป็นผู้ใหญ่ที่ดีของสังคมไทยในอนาคต กระบวนการนี้สันนิษฐานว่าสถาบันที่สำคัญต่างๆ ในหลายส่วนงานเป็นตัวช่วยปลูกฝังและส่งเสริม ระบอบวัฒนธรรม ดังกล่าวอย่างต่อเนื่อง อย่างไรก็ตามพระภิกษุสามเณรที่บวชใหม่พบความคิดเห็นหลากหลายกว่าเดิมในเรื่องพระวินัยและการทำตัวให้เป็นพระภิกษุสามเณรที่ดี ความคิดเห็นหลากหลายนี้แสดงให้เห็นว่ากระบวนการการสอนที่เป็นทิศทางทิศเดียวนั้นไม่พอเพียงที่จะอธิบายถึงการสอนเรื่องศีลธรรมและความเป็นคนดีตามระบอบวัฒนธรรมดังกล่า ผู้เขียนเห็นว่านอกจากสถาบันสงฆ์จะเป็นตัวกลางในการส่งเสริมและจำลองวัฒนธรรมกับประเด็นต่างๆ ในเรื่องศิลธรรมแล้ว ยังเป็นสถานที่ที่สำคัญที่พระภิกษุสามเณรกับฆราวาสศรัทธาได้สร้างความคิดเห็นใหม่ที่หลากหลายเกี่ยวกับศีลธรรมและพระวินัยในแต่ละวันด้วยเช่นกัน [ศีลธรรม, ระบอบวัฒนธรรม, วัยรุ่น, ประเทศไทย]

During April and May, the hottest months of the year in Thailand, when schools are on summer break, Buddhist temples across the country host “novice summer camps” (Thai: *khrongkan buat sammanen phak rueduron*). Lasting between one and four weeks, these camps give boys, mostly between the ages of ten and seventeen, the opportunity to temporarily ordain as Buddhist novice monks. While each district in Thailand organizes its own camp, most districts’ summer camps are similar in their aims and structure. They allow boys to temporarily experience Buddhist monasticism, including learning how to put on the iconic yellow-orange monastic robes, memorizing some of the primary Pali-language chants recited in ceremonies, and studying in more detail the Buddha’s teachings (the Dhamma). For the novices, these studies often focus on the Vinaya, the code of disciplines the Buddha promulgated for the monastic community (the Sangha) to follow. Novices and monks practice the rules of the Vinaya to train themselves to be moral exemplars in society. Novices and monks differ in their age and the number of rules in the Vinaya they are supposed to follow. To be a monk, one must be at least

twenty years old, so boys in the summer camp ordain as novices. Novices have ten precepts to follow while monks have 227. While the number of rules may differ substantially, the expectations people have for how novices and monks should comport themselves are similar. Lay Buddhists support the monastic community through offerings of food, money, and other resources so that the monastics can continue to practice and spread Buddhist teachings.

In Thai Buddhism, temporary monasticism is common. While a few will remain monks their entire lives—and generally praised and revered for doing so—the vast majority of Buddhist monastics will be in the robes for only between a few weeks and a few years. At the end of the summer camp, the majority of boys (between seventy-five and one hundred percent, depending on the particular camp) will disrobe, leaving monasticism and returning to lay life and their regular schools. The minority who remain stay as novices for several years in order to complete secondary school, which they can do for free as novices. As such, Buddhist monasticism is an institution in Thailand that male youth often spend some time in but is generally not a life-long commitment.[1]

How long a boy stays in the temple largely depends on his socio-economic background and willingness to endure the requirements of monastic life. As the abbot of one temple I knew explained, “Normally, boys will ordain because the Sangha holds novice summer camps. There boys can ordain for free, the camp supports their studying for free, they live in the temple for free, and they go to school for free.” The camps provide several weeks of free care over the summer, and for those boys who stay as novices after the camp, they can continue their secondary schooling for free at a temple school. Such schools teach not only Buddhism but all required courses like math and science. As such, temples can improve one’s socio-economic position through education while at the same time instilling important moral and religious

lessons. As many informants expressed to me, boys who ordained as novices for as long as possible would become "good people" (*khon di*).

These benefits come at a cost, though. As the abbot above continued to explain, "Sometimes novices have to live within boundaries. They have to live within the rules and live within the Vinaya. It's not the same as youth outside [these rules]." Socially, then, there is the idea that as many boys should ordain for as long as possible to gain the education and moral training; however, the strict rules of monasticism can be onerous, especially for adolescent boys who would be expected as novices to refrain from eating after midday, playing sports, dating, and other activities. To help ensure boys can gain the moral socialization provided through monasticism, some rules are relaxed or exceptions are made. As one lay supporter of a temple explained, "Will [the monks and novices] be able to endure the rules?… Too strict, they can't do it. Too lax, they can't do it." Another woman added, "We can't make things too strict. We can't make things too lax. We have to make things in the middle [*pan klang*]." But how is "the middle" made? How are exceptions made without undermining the monastic rules that are supposed to be transforming boys into good, moral persons?

Making exceptions to rules does not necessarily weaken the power of rules to structure and maintain social order. Robert Edgerton notes in his thorough study of rules and social order that "when a society succeeds in redefining as a legitimate exception behavior that would otherwise be objectionable and disruptive, the sway of rules is extended, not diminished" (1985, 257). Thus, making exceptions to monastic rules for adolescent boys may not undermine the rules' ability to help socialize boys into inhabiting moral ideals. Yet, how does this process of deciding when and where exceptions are going to be made happen? Are there certain individuals who decide?

In this article, I explore these questions by looking at the institution of Buddhist monasticism in Thailand and its role in socializing boys to be particular kinds of moral men in society. By institution, I mean the physical space of the monastery, the Thai state’s regulations defining its purpose and boundaries, and also the interactions among individuals considered inside the institution (the monastic community) and outside it (the lay community) which help define its boundaries. While I remain mindful of the larger, historical socio-political forces that shape the institution of monasticism, I am mostly concerned in this article with how the interactions of individuals within and without the institution shape its role in youth’s socialization. Temporary monasticism in Thailand has historically been a key site for the moral development of boys. To understand how exceptions to monastic rules are—or are not—made, I focus on the interpersonal relationships among monastics and the co-constitutive relationship between the monastic community and the lay Buddhist community that materially supports the former. In so doing, I contribute to our understanding of institutions’ role in youth’s socialization and internalization of moral ideals. I argue that, within everyday interactions among monastics and between monastics and laity, “the middle” between being too strict and too lax with monastic rules is constructed and it is this ability to negotiate expectations of following rules that boys are being socialized into through their experience within the monastic institution.

The Psychological Anthropology of Youth, Socialization, and Institutions

Psychological anthropology has long been interested in how children and youth learn cultural models of morality through processes of socialization. This interest in large part stems from the fact that how societies make sense of ontogenic maturation and the transformation into social adulthood varies across time and place. Child and adolescent development, then, is a key

period where broader social forces' impact on individual psychology is highly evident. While many societies develop particular rites and rituals to aid in the transition from childhood to adulthood (Gilmore 1991; Turner 1967; van Gennep 1961), socio-economic changes in late capitalist societies often radically change such social markers of having reached adulthood (Arnett 2000; Côté and Allahar 1996; Côté 2000). That adolescents are physiologically and psychologically transitioning into adulthood at the very same time that societies' ways of making sense of life course categories and their transitions are themselves changing has led scholars to attend more closely to what the study of adolescent and youth can tell us more generally about how individual changes across the life course and broad cultural change inform one another (e.g., Burbank 1988; Condon 1988; Worthman 1987).

Drawing upon and critiquing developmental psychology's models of human development, scholars have focused on such things as child-rearing practices (e.g., LeVine et al. 1994), the conversational narratives of children's experiences (Miller 2012), and ecological models of youth's development in context (Super and Harkness 1986; Weisner 1998) to understand the reproduction of cultural models of morality across generations. Psychological anthropologists have convincingly argued for the need to take into account the variability of cultural context when it comes to understanding child and adolescent development.

Focusing on everyday routines and how children draw on cultural material around them in their environment to both adapt to and thrive in their communities, Thomas Weisner (2002) proposes an ecocultural theory of understanding human development in context. In many ways, this approach is similar to Charles Super and Sara Harkness's concept of the developmental niche, which "attempts to describe this environment [the cultural regulation of the child's surroundings] from the point of view of the child in order to understand processes of

development and acquisition of culture" (1986, 552). Like Peggy Miller's (2012) narrative approach that highlights how children's personal storytelling of their experiences through culturally appropriate narrative frameworks helps socialize them into their particular cultural milieu, Super and Harkness emphasize the importance of focusing on how children themselves experience their environment and processes of socialization. Miller's work further demonstrates that children draw on heterogeneously complex models when constructing their personal narratives.

Such heterogeneous models arise, in part, because a number of different agents shape children's environment in an attempt to guide socialization towards their own position on social norms: childcare providers such as parents, older siblings, or other kin; the state; schools; and religion. Given the environment within which children are socialized is not a neutral space, scholars have often turned to studying institutions as mediating factors in children's socialization. For instance, the work of Robert LeVine and colleagues (LeVine, LeVine, and Schnell 2001) demonstrates the ways in which schools act as a vector for social change by socializing girls and young women into certain ways of being and registers of speaking that give them access to state and international bureaucracies. Girls, in turn, bring these practices back to their home villages, reshaping their local cultures. As such, the socialization of youth not only reproduces culture, youth can reshape culture through their experience of socialization within institutions (LeVine 2011).

Whether youth reproduce or change culture through their socialization, a key question remains: By what mechanism do younger generations learn cultural norms? Or, bringing in the discussion above on Edgerton's theory of rules and rule exceptions, we may also ask: How do youth learn what cultural norms must always be followed and for which ones exceptions can be

made? One possible mechanism is internalization, the incorporation of social expectations into one’s own sense of self so that following required rules becomes “natural” and self-evident.

For Melford Spiro (1987), “agents of socialization” are the primary method by which younger generations learn and internalize social norms and moral ideals. Through rewards and punishments, “the child not only learns what the agents of socialization judge to be good and bad behavior, but he also learns to concur in their judgment; in short, he models his behavior in accordance with their norms” (Spiro 1987, 137). According to Spiro’s model, individuals who have already internalized these social norms are responsible for guiding others to similarly internalize them. Childhood and adolescence, then, are periods in the life course in which individuals internalize lessons taught by these agents of socialization whether they be parents, teachers, older siblings, or others in relative positions of authority. This process is unidirectional: the agents of socialization teach those not yet socialized, and the subjects of socialization receive and internalize these teachings.

Elaborating on Spiro’s work and drawing on cognitive psychology, Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn (1997) have suggested that socialization involves the internalization of cultural schemas, socially constructed concepts of what is taken to be normal and natural. According to Quinn (2005), the internalization of these cultural schemas depends upon consistent reinforcement. Such consistency provides a scaffold upon which cultural schemas may be frequently practiced, used, and incorporated into one’s self-concept until the schema becomes seemingly obvious and self-evident. After having successfully taken up these cultural schemas, one may presumably aid in the socialization of others. The notion of cultural schemas does not preclude the possibility of multiple, competing cultural models (Strauss 1997). Multiple models may be internalized and drawn upon in different contexts. To be fully culturally competent in

each of these contexts, all the various cultural models need to be internalized and incorporated into one's cognitive models. As such, cultural schemas allows for both the reproduction and change of society as individuals become competent in various models and purposefully or accidentally use one context's schema in another situation. As children continue to develop into adolescence and young adulthood, they gain the cognitive abilities necessary to possibly reflect on schemas they have internalized.

The idea that youth inhabit a particular social position apt for social transformation has been the basis for many studies (e.g., Cole 2010; Ewing 2006; Hebdige [1979] 1991; Rose 1999; Weiss 2009), including a recent special issue of *Ethos* (Korbin and Anderson-Fye 2011). Of particular interest is the way in which youth can be agents of social change because of their social status as youth. Jennifer Cole (2004), drawing on the sociologist Karl Mannheim's ([1971] 1993) notion of "fresh contact," has argued that youth belong to a social group which re-evaluates historically meaningful cultural material—like intergenerational relations or ideas about gender—to direct culture in novel ways when possible or necessary to access resources. Such studies direct us to pay closer attention to how youth experience social institutions anew and may, thus, indirectly affect social reproduction.

Institutions, and largely religious institutions at that, play a key role in framing youth's "fresh contact" with cultural practices and providing the scaffolding for the internalization of cultural norms. In studies such as Rebecca Lester's (2005) on young women in a Mexican Catholic convent and Saba Mahmood's (2004) on the Muslim piety movement among young women in Egypt, the central analytic these scholars use to understand processes of internalization is embodiment. Contrary to the largely cognitive approaches to socialization discussed above, embodiment looks at how practices on and with the body mediate the internalization of social

norms into individual cognitive models. A focus on embodied experience has allowed scholars to look at how individuals experience the cultural forces that shape them (Csordas 1994; Desjarlais 1992). By submitting oneself to an institution’s rules of bodily comportment, one comes to internalize the cultural schema of the institution. The literature on the embodiment and internalization of cultural models has largely depicted an uncomplicated process in which those being socialized actively engage in this process.

More recently, scholars have noted that youth entering particular institutions do not always share the same understanding of the institution’s purpose as the institution itself (e.g., Anderson-Fye and Floersch 2011). As Katie Hejtmanek (2016) demonstrates, youth in the United States living in mental institutions may have ideas of their treatment and its ability to transform them to become “better” that are markedly different than those who work at the institution. As such, scholarship at the intersection of youth and institutions draws our attention to what happens when agents of socialization and those coming to embody cultural models have divergent understandings of what this process is accomplishing. Here we can begin to see ways in which internalization is not a simple, unidirectional process by which agents of socialization instill cultural schemas into those being socialized. Rather, the construction of social norms and cultural schemas is a dialectical process between the socializers and the socialized.

Similarly, youth’s experience of the monastic institution, as we will see, does not suggest a clear scaffold of consistent reinforcement. Young monastics’ socialization into the rules of monasticism is inconsistent. They must not only learn to live by the monastic rules; they must also learn when they need to be strict in following the rules and when they can be more lax. How youth fulfill their role as novices varies depending upon a number of factors such as with whom

they are interacting in any given circumstance and how long they have been monastics. What exactly this role is emerges out of interactions among monks, novices, and their lay supporters.

By focusing on how young monastics experience monasticism, I suggest that rules, rule exceptions, and the cultural schemas of morality that inform when one ought to follow a rule or when it can be relaxed take shape within interactions between “agents of socialization” and those being socialized. Thus, while the lay women quoted above discuss the need to find “the middle” between too strict and too lax, this middle ground is constructed within another sense of “the middle”: within interactions between young monastics and their lay supporters. The negotiation between too strict and too lax also has a temporal element to it. The longer a boy is a novice, the more likely he is to have to engage in this negotiation process and is, therefore, more likely to adopt a flexible orientation towards his monastic rules. While those boys who ordain for a short period of time—at programs like the summer camps—follow a process of socialization meant to direct boys to internalize strict moral ideals where all rules ought to be followed, those who remain novices for several years find themselves navigating a range of expectations about their monastic role. Through navigating these divergent expectations, young monastics and their interlocutors remake cultural models of what it means to be a “good” monastic.

Looking at the interpersonal construction of what it means to be a good monastic also allows us to investigate the ways in which morality is constructed within what Steven Parish (2014) calls the “space between persons.” By focusing on the interface between youth and institutions, which attempt to instill certain notions of morality in those under their direction, we can see how these notions of morality are constructed in this space between persons and institutions. In the case of young monastics, the institution and its notions of morality they are interacting with are represented not only by older monks. Lay Buddhists also have particular

expectations about monasticism and the moral behavior it is instilling in young monastics. It is in this space between the institution as actors such as lay supporters or older monks who hold expectations and the young monastics encountering them that I situate the construction of the moral domain.

While psychological anthropology has long been concerned with moral development (e.g., Briggs 1998; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1987), the broader field of anthropology has only recently returned its focus to the domain of morality (Cassaniti and Hickman 2014). Of particular interest within this burgeoning literature has been "ordinary ethics," the way in which everyday discursive interactions construct the moral good rather than looking for the moral good within the realm of philosophical ideals or explicitly delineated moral judgments (Das 2012; Lambek 2010; Lambek 2015; Lempert 2013). Given psychological anthropology's long-standing focus on person-centered ethnography (Hollan 2005), the discipline is well positioned to illuminate how morality is constructed and reshaped within small, quotidian events among everyday people going about their lives.

Jarrett Zigon (2014), for instance, proposes a phenomenological approach to the study of moral "assemblages" (Zigon 2010), which highlight the fuzziness of morality and ethical decisions in lived experience. Zigon goes on to argue for the importance of "attunement," of how individuals entangled in social relations are always already a being-in-relationships. "This attunement manifests itself as the potentiality to become engaged with and become entangled in diverse and particular relationships that makes possible the vast diversity of ways of living we find in the social world" (Zigon 2014, 22). A psychological anthropology approach to the phenomenological experience of morality and its interpersonal construction allows us to see how "[e]thical frameworks are integrated into experience" (Parish 2014, 46).

This article's focus on how institutions mediate the interpersonal reproduction of cultural schemas similarly allows us to see how institutions mediate the integration of ethical frameworks. Just as an institution—the people who make it up and enact its goals—and the youth it serves may have different conceptions of what the youth are internalizing or being socialized into, they may also have different notions of the moral schemas they are internalizing. By looking at how the cultural ideals of monasticism frame the interaction between monastic and lay communities, I argue that interactions between "agents of socialization" within and around the institution of monasticism—older monks and lay supporters, in particular—and youth not only socializes youth into particular moral ideals, such as what monastic rules young monastics must follow and which ones they can make exceptions for. In addition, such interactions renegotiate the moral schemas of rules and rule exceptions youth may draw upon in other situations. To show this, I trace how programs like the novice summer camps attempt to instill certain moral ideals in youth by subjecting them to the rigors of ascetic rules. Turning to monastics who remain as monastics beyond the duration of the camp, I show how young monastics reinterpret their ascetic rules in ways that often break expectations of the monastic institution.

Buddhist monasticism in Thailand is an ideal case for illuminating how youth experience socialization through institutions. Anthropologists working in Buddhist contexts have noted its important role in the moral development of children (Borchert 2013; Chapin 2014; Eberhardt 2014; Samuels 2013; Spiro 1970), understanding the life course (Eberhardt 2006), and the experience of emotions and personhood (Cassaniti 2015b; Obeyesekere 1985; Samuels 2010). The monastic community, in particular, is a key institution for reproducing Thai society (Bunnag 1973; Jackson 1989; Keyes 1986) as well as potentially mediating social change (Cassaniti

2015a). The emphasis in this research has largely been how youth are socialized into the institution of monasticism. Instead, I show how the ideals youth are socialized into are themselves interpersonally constructed.

Methods

I began this project wondering to what extent a unidirectional model of socialization adequately reflected what was going on in the everyday lives of young monastics and their lay supporters. To study this, I spent two years conducting ethnographic fieldwork in and around the district of “Namsai”[2] about twenty kilometers outside the city of Chiang Mai. The bulk of research was conducted between 2012 and 2014 with preliminary trips made in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, I began long-term fieldwork traveling to various temples, monastic schools, and government schools across northern Thailand talking with monks, novices, teachers, parents, and students about youth in Thai society and temporary monasticism’s role in their moral development. During this time, I also observed the novice summer camp in Namsai that took place between April and May of 2013. A couple months afterwards I temporarily ordained as a monk myself at Wat Doi Thong, a temple within Namsai district, in order to participate in and observe firsthand what monastic life was like for rural monastics. I had become a Buddhist nearly a decade prior to beginning fieldwork. I knew the monks and lay supporters of Wat Doi Thong for about a year prior to ordaining. All were supportive of my temporary ordination as a way to further my research into what the socialization process of becoming a monastic was like.

I was always marked as the *farang* (Western) monk, but the roles and duties I was expected to fulfill were similar to other, non-*farang* monastics. I taught at the temple school, which the novices who ordained for several years to get an education attended. As I ordained shortly after many of the novices did, we together worked on memorizing chants and learning

how to properly attend funerals, house blessings, and other ceremonies across the community to which lay villagers invited us. I remained a monk for nine months.

Through these experiences, I came to see that in many ways the young monastics saw their moral socialization as more complicated than a unidirectional idea of socialization would suggest. In their everyday lives, young monks, novices, and their lay supporters faced circumstances in which hard-line adherence to the moral ideals of monasticism they learned in programs like the summer camp was not possible. It is in these moments I suggest young monastics and their socializers constructed what it means to be a good monk. To understand this process, though, it is important to understand how temporary ordination can socialize young boys into more rigid ideas of morality and monasticism. This socialization is largely evident at the novice summer camps to which I presently turn.

Novice Summer Camps and Learning Buddhist Monasticism

On the morning of April 26, 2013, I awoke around a quarter past four. I was at a small temple in Namsai. While the temple usually housed only a few monks and novices, that morning it was filled with over a hundred novices. Most were still asleep at that hour, tucked in sleeping bags spread across all the temple buildings’ available floor space. It was still dark and cool out, which would change in a few hours when the sun came out, and it became a typical April day in northern Thailand: hot and dry. Around the time I got up, the dozen or so monks in charge of looking after the novices were also arising. At four thirty they began ringing the bell to wake up the novices for morning chanting.

As I sat on the front stairs to the Vihara, the main chanting hall, the novices began groggily streaming in. “How are you?” I asked one of the novices. “Hungry,” was his simple response. Indeed, he probably was quite hungry, having fasted since noon the previous day. It would still

be a few hours before he would be able to eat as the sun had not yet risen and they still had their morning chanting to do. Abstaining from eating between noon and dawn of the next day was one of the ten precepts novices at the summer camp were required to follow. Novices' ten precepts are outlined in the Vinaya and the novices recite them in Pali as part of their ordination ceremony. These ten precepts are:

1. Refraining from killing
2. Refraining from stealing
3. Refraining from any sexual activity
4. Refraining from lying
5. Refraining from any intoxicants
6. Refraining from eating at the wrong time (i.e., between noon and the following dawn)
7. Refraining from singing, dancing, playing music, or attending forms of entertainment
8. Refraining from perfumes and decorating the body
9. Refraining from sitting on high seats or sleeping on high, luxurious beds
10. Refraining from accepting gold or silver (i.e., money)[3]

The restriction against eating after midday is one of the most memorable experiences of a novice summer camp. Nearly all lay men I knew who had ever ordained temporarily for a few weeks at programs like Namsai's camp expressed—often nostalgically—the difficulty in abstaining from eating. Reducing the number of meals is perhaps acutely felt in Thailand where food and eating are integral parts of everyday sociality. A common way of greeting someone anytime of the day is, "Have you eaten yet?" A response of "no" leads to offerings of food or invitations to go eat somewhere. Not being able to engage in these typical forms of sociality weighed on the novices just as much as the basis in the Vinaya for their inability to eat after noon. Besides the robes, which sartorially mark the monastic community as separate from the lay community, practices such as these around eating also distinguish the communities as separate.

That refraining from eating at certain times is such a salient feature of monastic life for both the monastic and lay communities makes it a good practice to focus on as nearly all involved have strong feelings about the necessity of monastics to refrain from eating after

midday. That said, refraining from eating was not the only practice around which "the middle" would come to be negotiated. During fieldwork, there were other practices pertaining to monastic rules or expectations where lay and monastic communities constructed "the middle" between following the rule or expectation strictly or laxly. For example, people negotiated the appropriateness of novices attending festivals where there would inevitably be games, music, and other forms of entertainment. Many were also ambivalent about monastics handling money. For each of these, the stakes of the negotiations were slightly different while the general process of constructing "the middle" was similar. This similarity is likely in large part because of the way the novices' precepts are framed as negative activities that should be refrained from rather than a list of positive activities that should be pursued. Framed as such, laity are more likely to be looking for monastics who are contravening these precepts. I focus on practices and rules surrounding eating as a particular case indicative of a more general process.

The precept about eating is not just about following the rule because it is part of the Vinaya but also because it follows the expectations of lay supporters, who provide the food and other resources for the monastic community. As a thirteen-year-old novice at the summer camp explained:

> If monastics are near laity, then they usually do not do these things [that go against lay persons' expectations] because it might make the lay people not respect the religion…. They might think, "Why are the monks and novices acting like this?" … When afternoon's come, we [can only have] water or any kind of drink—soda or juice—but it's forbidden to eat rice, snacks, or anything that you have to chew.

In refraining from eating after noon, the novices at the camp are learning to uphold strictly the Vinaya and particular ideas of Buddhist morality. If they ate during the summer camp, they would be breaking the laity's expectations of what they should be doing during their brief time as monastics. At the Namsai camp, if a novice were caught eating or hiding food to eat at night, the

monks would scold him for not “adjusting himself” (*prab tua*) to the monastic precepts and make him toss out the food. At another summer camp I knew of, the monks exacted a harsher punishment: the offending novice had to tell the lay people who gathered the next morning to make offerings that he had broken a precept. Oftentimes the novice’s parents would be part of this crowd. In either case, the monks reinforced for novices that eating at night not only broke their precepts but would also disappoint their lay supporters. Such a reminder reinforced for novices what it meant to be and act like a good monastic. In such moments, ideals of monasticism and the cultural schema of being a moral Buddhist by following its rules were reproduced and instilled in the young monastics. In line with unidirectional theories of the internalization of cultural schemas like Spiro’s, young novices in the camp received clearly reinforced messages of what it means to be a good monastic: one who strictly follows his ascetic rules without exception. At the same time, they are internalizing the broader cultural schema of “adjusting oneself” to the social role they are to be enacting. In this case, the young novices are being taught to adjust to the expectations of their lay supporters as the novice quoted above makes clear.

In following the precepts, the novices learned not only that they should follow them to meet expectations but also that practicing these disciplines would transform them in particular ways. Every evening during the camp, the novices came together for a lecture led by one of the older monks. On the evening of April 28, the monk giving the lecture began by asking the novices seated in front of him what they had gotten out of their experiences during the camp, which at that point they had been in for about three weeks. The monk focused on three things the novices should be learning during their temporary monasticism: 1) training themselves to have patience; 2) learning different aspects of Buddhism; and 3) living together in unity.

The novices were frequently assessed by the monks on how they were progressing in these goals of the camp. In these evening lectures, there was often dialog between the lecturing monk and novices such as this:

> **Monk**: Nit [a novice], what have you gotten [out of the camp]?
> **Nit**: I've learned to chant and have made new friends.
> …
> **Monk**: Knowing chants … what else?
> **Nit**: I've practiced unity, sir.
> **Monk**: Unity. Who all have you developed unity with?
> **Nit**: Friends, sir.
> **Monk**: Friends. Anything else?
> **Nit**: Also patience and learning the history of the Lord Buddha.
> …
> **Monk**: You will have learned where the Lord Buddha came from and who he was the child of. It's very interesting…. I know I've talked with various people, and I thought that you were stubborn…. You have come to this program and I've seen that it is possible for you to be still and quiet. This is called being orderly [*riaproi*]. To me it looks admirable, that you're a good man, and that you'd be commended.

In these interactions, the monk reinforces what the novices are to be learning and how they should be transforming themselves. In this case, even though many considered the novice obstinate before ordaining, the monk praises him for beginning to transform into someone with more patience, who is good, and who is *riaproi*, or orderly.

Learning to be *riaproi* and its being a marker of unity draw on a long history of Thai nationalism and comporting oneself in certain ways, which ties these camps to state-sponsored discourses on the ideals of behavior in civil society. Generally translated as neat, tidy, orderly, or proper, being *riaproi* is an important characteristic to develop and demonstrate in Thailand for all, especially those in highly regarded roles like monasticism. When asked what a good monk or novice is like, most informants first mentioned the need to be *riaproi*. As one monk talked about teaching boys to be novices explained, "Being a novice has to be the focus. As such, novices have to be good. They have to be fully *riaproi*. They must speak nicely. They can't do anything

wrong." In appearing *riaproi* and doing all their ascetic practices as they ought to, monastics demonstrate they can "adjust themselves" to their social role of following their monastic rules. They can adjust to being good monks or novices.

At the summer camp, the young novices' lives were dictated by the ideals of *riaproi*-ness even more so than in their ordinary, lay lives. Every morning the novices lined up on the temple grounds with their robes neatly tied. Early in the program this would often take a while as neatly tying a large rectangle of cloth around one's body was an unwieldy challenge for most boys. They needed to help one another and often elicited the help of an older novice or monk who had mastered the difficult art of tying one's own robes. Already this bodily practice connected being *riaproi* with working together. Having lined up, the monks would check their neatness. The novices were particularly fearful of the monk Phra Yim[4] who almost always had a bamboo switch tucked into his belt and was all too ready to give a misbehaving, non-*riaproi* novice a quick hit.

Through these practices to develop *riaproi*-ness and social unity, novice summer camps like the one in Namsai promote national unity through the everyday practices of adjusting oneself to monastic ideals. The institution of monastic education socializes boys into inhabiting particular ideals of Buddhism and monasticism, and, through this, socializing them to have certain understandings of being Thai Buddhists. That the institution of temporary monasticism attempts to socialize boys and young men is in line with many social institutions across the world that focus on transforming youth in particular ways as we saw above. While it is common that institutions—whether religious, educational, or some other kind—socialize youth into moral ideals, the role of monasteries in Buddhist contexts often play a unique role in the reproduction

of morals and social mores. It is this particular role that I turn to presently to better understand the place of novice summer camps in fulfilling this social reproductive role.

History of Monasticism & Moral Development

In much of Buddhist South and Southeast Asia, temples have long been the primary sites of education with monks teaching all subjects: religion, morality, reading, arithmetic, etc. Similar to Thailand, in Sri Lanka, “[m]onks taught reading and writing (mainly but not only to boys), and at the same time taught moral values and literature” (Gombrich 2006, 147). Buddhist monasteries have similarly been the providers of both religious and general educations in Burma (Spiro 1970) and Thailand (Tambiah 1978). For centuries, Buddhist monks have held a key role in socializing youth into the ideals of Buddhist morality.

In addition, monasticism helps maintain and reproduce a Thai national identity. According to the historian Thongchai Winichakul (1994), Buddhism along with the monarchy are two institutions that heavily influence the construction of “Thainess,” a nationalist identity that arose in the late nineteenth century. During that time the kingdom of Siam (present-day central Thailand) began centralizing its control over peripheral areas. Part of the Siamese strategy to create a modern nation-state was to instill a sense of common Thainess among everyone within their territory. A common element of all these areas was the practice of Buddhism. Religion has been an important vector for the Siamese state to construct a national sense of Thainess. By defining what Thai Buddhism is, how it should be practiced, and notions of Buddhist morality, the state could distinguish its Buddhist population as distinct from neighboring Buddhist countries. By taking up Thai Buddhism, Thais would not only reinforce their religious identity but also their national Thainess.

For much of Thailand's history, controlling Thai Buddhism has meant controlling the Sangha, the monastic community, which is at the heart of Buddhist practice. The Sangha is metonymic of the religion. Buddhism requires a community of monastics, ideally a respectable one that behaves morally by living according to their ascetic rules to learn from and to make offerings to (Carrithers 1990). For instance, monks are invited to most ceremonies—funerals, house blessings, breaking ground ceremonies for large construction projects, opening of new businesses, etc.—held throughout the community. Having oneself or one's son enter into the Sangha is another important rite. Many boys and young men who ordain describe their desire to ordain because as part of the Sangha they would be helping to "maintain" (*raksa*) and "spread" (*phoei phrae*) Buddhism. These tasks are the purview of the Sangha rather than lay Buddhists, who materially support the Sangha in this endeavor. By supporting the Sangha, lay persons are distally helping to maintain and spread Buddhism. Boys ordaining at novice summer camps provide opportunities for lay persons to support the Sangha and socializes boys into certain understandings of Buddhism as we saw above.

Temples' role in socializing youth extends beyond just the summer camps. As described above, monasticism is not only a religious institution but also a key educational institution (Keyes 1971). Many temples serve as free secondary schools for families who cannot afford to send their children to government schools. They can save money by sending their sons to ordain as novice monks for several years to get a secondary and post-secondary education. About twenty-five percent of the novices who ordained at the Namsai novice camp fell into this category. They did not ordain just for the few weeks of the camp but stayed on as novices after the camp was over. They would remain novices for several years. Many of them were from

remote, ethnic minority villages—such as Shan or Karen—where schools often only offer primary education and sometimes the first half of secondary education.[5]

This additional educational function of temples, wherein monastics receive an education that often prepares them to be teachers, community leaders, or civil servants when they leave monasticism (the vast majority of Thai monastics eventually disrobe, leaving the Sangha) means the Thai state often tries to regulate monastic education. As a large percentage of novices who ordain for several years of education are also from ethnic minority groups, the temple school provides a key site for instilling in these youth notions of Thainess and how they can become more Thai. By regulating not only their general education but also what they learn about Buddhism and how to teach it to others, the state can shape what Thai Buddhism is and what it means to be Thai Buddhist. In this way, monastic education is an important site for how boys from diverse ethnic backgrounds are socialized into inhabiting a sense of uniform Thainess. Buddhist monasticism is an important vehicle for promoting national unity.[6]

Even beyond the summer camps and other activities at the monastery, Buddhism’s role in socialization extends to broader civil society. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Thai Sangha has been key to the Thai state’s attempts at modernizing its political and civil spheres of life. As early as King Mongkut, Rama IV (r. 1851–1868), the Thai state moved to reform the Sangha, moving it away from its supernatural aspects to teaching a kind of Buddhism in line with Western scientific empiricism. As the anthropologist Thomas Kirsch noted, “Mongkut’s efforts to upgrade the Thai Sangha facilitated subsequent efforts to modernize nonreligious spheres of Thai society” (Kirsch 1978, 63). By directing the Sangha and what the monks taught, the state also sought to impact the lives of laity as well.

State influence over civil life through control of monasticism continued well into the 20th century (Chaloemtiarana 1979). As historian Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian notes about the Thai state in the mid–20th century: "Religion … was identified as a social and cultural institution which effectively inculcated a high sense of morality, belonging, and orderliness among the people" (1995, 140). A moral Sangha who strictly followed their rules was a sign of a moral nation that followed the rule of law. In stipulating the morality of monastics, the state presumed monks would train and socialize the entire nation into its notions of moral comportment.

The role of Buddhism and monasticism in developing the nation's morality has continued into contemporary times. Following the major financial crisis across Asia in 1997, the late King Bhumipol Adulyadej advocated all Thais to embrace his call for a "sufficiency economy." Grounded in Buddhist moral teachings of abstaining from greed and being content with what one has, monastics throughout the country spread this economic-wrapped-in-morality teaching. Reformation of the Sangha and its moral standing came to the fore again in the most recent military coup in 2014. Since the coup, the junta government has put forth measures to curb the seeming corruption of some parts of the Sangha with threats to defrock monks who accumulate great wealth, drive cars, engage in sexual behavior, or fail to follow other major monastic rules. In so doing, the state has attempted to articulate a limit to rule exceptions—what rules must be followed regardless of context.

The moral standing of the Sangha remains important today as monks continue to act as moral authorities for Thais. As government and private schools have grown and spread, moral education in Thailand is still largely handled by monks. In non-temple schools, monks visit once or twice a week to give lectures on morality and Buddhism as well as training in chanting and meditation. Such visits generally entail the students making offerings of food and money to the

monks to make merit. The monks then talk to the students about the importance of following their five precepts as lay Buddhists and the connection between these precepts and being "good" children and students who listen to their parents and teachers and act in ways that would not disappoint them.[7] Novice summer camps and temporary ordination are part of this long history of socializing youth into particular ideals of morality through religion. With nearly ninety-five percent of Thais identifying as Buddhist, the religion remains a key institution for the dispensation of what constitutes ethical behavior.

While the literature on how exactly monasticism in Thailand socializes boys is scarce, what exists describes this process as rather unidirectional (see, e.g., Keyes 1971; for non-Thai cases, cf. Borchert 2013; Samuels 2013). The state mandates reform of the Sangha, the monastic community falls in line behind the ideas of morality promulgated by the state, and these ideas are taught by monks and internalized by youth. As monks are considered the moral and religious exemplars, the laity are expected to fall in line with what monks teach about Buddhism.

Reproducing the Ideals of Buddhist Monasticism

The novice summer camps reproduce this process of state-mandated changes to the Sangha which impacts local conceptions of morality. In the camp, they learn basic versions of the Dhamma and Vinaya that are in line with state-sanctioned ideas about Buddhism and monasticism, often called "state-sponsored Buddhism" (Kitiarsa 2012). Having spent a few weeks learning this form of Buddhism at the camp, they return home to their lay lives and families, spreading this understanding of what Buddhism is and the ascetic strictness monastics should practice. Beyond just the youth themselves, the ideas presented in such institutions can spread to other generations and to others who are not part of the institution. Robert LeVine (2011), as discussed above, notes that youth are an important source of social change because

they interact with institutions like schools, take on new ways of being, and return to their homes with these new customs. These youth socialize others in their local contexts into the ways of being they have internalized, thus perpetuating social change from more a more macro global or national level to the local level. Youth become a conduit between state institutions and local communities. Religious institutions, in particular, play a major role in instilling ethno-religious identities often promoted by the state to be taken up by individual citizens (cf. Cook 2010; Blom Hansen 1996; Jordt 2007; Lester 2005; Mahmood 2004).

By instilling in youth a model of what it means to be a good monastic, the state perpetuates a certain nationalist notion of Thai monasticism. Summer camps and other very short stints of ordination lasting a few days or weeks is the way the vast majority of boys and young men experience monasticism. Having internalized this model, these youth return to their homes spreading what they learned about monasticism to others. Many informants said that one of the main reasons all boys should ordain at some point in their lives—preferably before marriage—was that by ordaining and getting some education at the temple, men could pass this knowledge about Thai Buddhism on to their families when they disrobed and returned to lay life. Some novices at the summer camp were well aware of this purpose of ordination, telling me that when they were older and married with children, they would be able to teach their family some things about Buddhism and monasticism based on their experiences as a novice.

The trainings, while short, do stick with the young temporary monastics. A lay man I knew in his thirties had ordained for just a few days when he was around fourteen. Nearly two decades later, he still recalls a monk teaching him to be mindful of his feet while walking. He associated this constant awareness of the body with ideas of what monastics ought to do. Even in very

temporary ordinations, boys and young men can learn notions of being a good monastic that last a long time and can be told to others.

Yet, as we will see, the minority of novices who stay on as monastics after the camp is over oftentimes circumvent the religious disciplines that are supposed to be transforming them. It is in these moments that the interpersonal construction of cultural schemas become most evident. Rather than the young monastics being socialized into a particular understanding of what it means to be a good monastic according to the summer camp, young monastics, older monks, and lay supporters work out within the "space between" them what the morally good thing to do is within any given interaction.

For those who remain novices, not only does their education change, they also have to adjust how they approach monasticism. During the summer camp, their lives are heavily regimented by the ascetic disciplines expected by lay supporters: awaking early, collecting alms every morning, refraining from playing games or using mobile phones, and refraining from eating after midday among other practices. Without additional responsibilities such as schoolwork, the novices at the summer camp can direct all their energies to these practices. When school starts up again, they have to begin balancing their monastic obligations with their school obligations. They also have additional responsibilities such as doing construction and maintenance work at their temples and participating in community ceremonies like funerals. Balancing these various responsibilities means sometimes the strict frame within which the novices live during the summer camp begins to bend. The monks and some laity are aware of the multitude of obligations novices have. As such, the monastic and lay communities readjust. It is this readjustment process I presently turn to in order to see how the monastic and lay

communities work together to reshape the cultural model of what it means to be a good novice or monk.

Renegotiating the Ideals of Monasticism

One evening in September 2013, about four months after the summer camp was over, I and a couple other monks were returning to Wat Doi Thong. It was a little after five o'clock in the evening. With dusk approaching, the lights in the temple's dining hall were on. As we approached the dining hall in a pick-up truck driven by a local schoolteacher, we disturbed the quietude of the temple grounds that were silent except for a few chickens and the chatter of several of the temple's novices. We saw the novices, who did not know whose vehicle was approaching the dining hall, quickly get up, close the door, and switch off the lights. We realized the novices must be having dinner,[8] and they thought our truck was occupied by lay Buddhist villagers coming to visit the temple. The novices risked breaking the laity's expectation that they would not be eating in the evening, well past midday, a practice that was emphasized at the summer camp.

One of the monks, the principal of the school the novices attended, laughed a little upon seeing the novices trying to hide their presence in the dining hall. Turning to Phra Udom, the abbot of Wat Doi Thong, he said, "[You] have taught the novices very well to hide from the laity." Indeed, a few days prior Phra Udom had told the novices to keep the door closed, especially if they had dinner, and to keep an eye and ear out for laity when they were doing things some may not approve of such as eating after midday or playing sports.

Why are the novices so secretive about breaking monastic rules and sensitive to the possibility of their lay supporters seeing them and having their expectations broken? And why are the monks rather nonchalant about the novices' behavior, joking among themselves about it

and directing novices to hide their transgressions rather than abstain from the behavior, especially since in the context of the novice summer camp the monks are not so lenient towards the novices? The default assumption monastics such as the novices at Wat Doi Thong make is that the laity will expect monastics to follow the strict ascetic disciplines taught during the summer camp. This is in large part because, as we have seen, the vast majority of boys and young men who ordain do so for a short period of time compared to those who stay monastics for several years. The former's experience with monasticism is strict adherence to the monastic rules. Until the novices are more familiar with the laity who come to their temple and what they think about monasticism, novices try to enact their monastic role in line with the nationwide assumption of how monastics should act as promoted by programs like the summer camp. Once novices know the lay person they are talking with is a little more flexible with how strict they should be with the monastic rules, they can begin to bend the rules more.

Scholars working in other Buddhist contexts have noted similar instances of being flexible with the monastic rules. For instance, Jeffrey Samuels (2010) describes how in the Sri Lankan monastery he studied novices similarly commonly ate dinner in the evening. The novices typically hid their eating from laity except in cases where the lay people were familiar with the monks and novices at the monastery. Samuels notes how the affective ties between lay and monastic communities indexed by this sense of familiarity held precedence over strictly following rules. Michael Lempert (2012) explores how Tibetan monks' clandestine sports playing, except for soccer, is tolerated to an extent by the monastery's disciplinarian monks. While soccer is strictly prohibited, monks do still steal themselves away to play at times. Lempert connects the restrictions around sports to other disciplinary practices that create distinctions between different kinds of monks at the monastery. That is, being strict or flexible

with the rules is about creating and maintaining intragroup divisions among monastics. While similar, the case I am presenting here is about intergroup relations around the monastic rules; that is, how the lay and monastic communities interactively determine the flexibility of monastic rules.

The way novices figure out how familiar laity are with long-term novices bending some rules such as not eating after midday can take several forms. For instance, one day late in the morning, a group of local lay villagers came to setup and offer lunch to Wat Doi Thong’s monastics. As the young novices were helping the laity setup tables and arrange cushions for the monks to sit on, one lay woman asked a novice, “Do you eat in the afternoon?” The novice, looking a bit taken aback by the abruptness of the question, answered no. “Do you eat late in the afternoon?” the lay woman questioned further.

“No,” the novice responded again, but this time he qualified his answer. “It’s currently *phansa*,” he continued, indicating that it was currently the time of the Buddhist rains retreat, or *phansa*, a three-month period during the rainy season in which monastics’ travel is restricted. As monastics are expected to travel less during this time, the *phansa* in Thailand has historically also been a time for monastics to be more fervent in their studies and ascetic disciplines. “When it’s not *phansa*, though …” the novice began to explain but then trailed off. At this, the lay woman laughed and the novice smiled. In this brief interaction, the novice and lay woman were working out how to broach the topic of novices eating after midday. What began as a slightly tense situation with the novice not completely familiar with the lay woman and how she viewed how novices should behave, turned into a lighthearted situation with both of them joking about the novices sometimes having dinner.

Regardless of what the novices' precepts may be, the "ordinary ethics" of when it is appropriate for novices to eat is constructed within such interactions. Neither the novice nor the lay woman knew what the other thought about the precept of refraining from eating after midday. In a sense, then, the precept did not fully exist for either until it was formulated in the space between them in the interaction. By making hints and jokes, the two of them established when the prohibition of eating after midday must be observed and when they could make exceptions. Through what Barbara Rogoff and colleagues (2003) call "intent participation," the novice learned about rules and rule exceptions not from a higher authority dictating what ought to be done but by engaging within a particular endeavor of constructing a middle ground between being strict and lax.

In other instances, it is the laity themselves who facilitate the novices circumventing the precept against eating after midday. Another evening during chanting at Wat Doi Thong, a couple of the lay people who had been doing some work at the temple joined us monks and novices. After the chanting was over, Phra Udom informed the novices there was a funeral ceremony that evening and that three of the novices and I were going to be doing the chanting. Asking me and the three novices to stay behind to practice, Phra Udom dismissed the other novices, saying they could go eat dinner. The novices looked shocked. Why was Phra Udom informing them that they could go eat dinner when there were laity right there in the room? Phra Udom had just recently directed the novices to be covert in their dinner eating. Seeing the novices' nonplussed looks, Phra Udom told the novices that the laity present had on their own decided to make stir-fried rice for the novices to eat that evening. It was the laity's decision to offer dinner to the novices.

After Phra Udom, the three novices, and I had finished practicing the chanting for that evening's funeral, Phra Udom and I descended the hill from the main chanting hall to the dining hall. As we walked, Phra Udom said to me, "See. This is why novices in northern Thailand have dinner." On multiple occasions, he and other monks had explained to me that oftentimes novices will have dinner because laity offer it to them. This was particularly true in the north, they said, because when northern Thais make food the first thing they think of is monks and novices. They want to go to the temple to offer some of the food they have made to the monastic community.

Far from reinforcing the model of strict monasticism taught during the summer camp and essential for the reproduction of Thai nationalist ideas of Buddhism, such encounters force novices to rethink how they should be enacting their role. A revised model is constructed by the novices' "intent participation" within a number of different circumstances: the lessons from older monks like Phra Udom telling them they need to hide their transgressions of eating after midday, laity who expect novices to maintain the same strictness observed during the summer camp, and laity who actively reinterpret the monastic rules themselves and encourage novices to follow their interpretation that novices eating dinner can still fit the model of a good monastic. This model is actively constructed between persons. For instance, in the case of the lay woman asking the novice about eating after midday, the novice is trying to gauge to what extent the lay woman would find novices eating in the evening acceptable. Her smile and laugh indicate that her feelings are ostensibly not hurt by such transgressions. Compare this with the novice at the summer camp who indicated novices snacking in the afternoon would "make lay people not respect the religion." Such a view as instilled in the summer camps must be revised by the young novices in other circumstances such as this conversation with the lay woman.

At the same time, the novice leaves a space for the lay woman to uphold a strict view that novices will fast throughout the evening. He indicates that in certain circumstances—such as during the three-month *phansa* season—the novices will be strict. This novice and lay woman dyad, then, do not completely reject the entire model of a good novice who is good because he strictly follows the ascetic disciplines like fasting. They interactively reconstruct the model to allow some flexibility but not complete flexibility as if the rules did not exist at all. As Robert Edgerton notes, rule exceptions can reinforce the importance of rules in other circumstances.

Buddhist communities like Namsai confront a problem: On the one hand temporary novices like those at the summer camp are expected to strictly follow the monastic rules, including fasting between noon and dawn the next day. In so doing, they perform the monastic role as it is expected to be performed and as promoted nationally. On the other hand, though, there must be some flexibility in those rules for youth who are novices for several years. How do they do so without the novices being deemed "bad" for not knowing how to perform their monastic role?

The novices of Wat Doi Thong often had to figure out how to follow "the middle" on their own (cf. Rogoff et al. 2003). There were not clear agents of socialization or clearly defined models for them to learn with consistent reinforcement exactly how they should act as good novices. They had to juggle laity's intentions and try to adjust accordingly. At the end of the school term when the novices of Wat Doi Thong had many days off from school, one of their English teachers, a middle-aged woman from Mexico who had come to volunteer as an English-language coordinator and tutor for the temple and surrounding government schools, invited the novices and me to the local hot springs, a popular tourist destination for local and foreign tourists. A popular activity at the hot springs was purchasing a basket of uncooked eggs and

taking the basket to the main spring. There at the main source, a pool had been constructed. It was full of hot water from the spring and its inner edge was lined with many hooks. Visitors could place their basket of eggs on one of the hooks, submerging the eggs in the hot mineral water thereby cooking them to eat.

We arrived at the hot springs around two o’clock in the afternoon, well after midday. Still, the instructor wanted the novices to have an enjoyable time, so she purchased several baskets of eggs for them to cook and eat. While she was not Thai, she had spent a large amount of time in Thailand and around Thai monks and novices. She was very much aware of the rule concerning eating at the wrong time and that most took that to mean monastics should not eat after midday. However, she was also aware that this rule was often circumvented by the novices.

The novices graciously accepted the baskets from her, but I could tell they were a little uncertain about what to do. As we walked to the pool for cooking the eggs, which was on the other side of the hot spring area, we had to pass by all the visitors. Not knowing exactly how these laity would perceive a group of novices carrying eggs to cook and eat, they walked hesitantly and shifted their eyes to and fro, trying to get a sense of how the laity around them were perceiving them. We reached the pool, and the novices cautiously placed their baskets in the water. They wanted to acknowledge and make good on their instructor’s intention of doing something nice for them. At the same time, they were cautious of how others might perceive—or misperceive—the events unfolding. Their baskets placed in the water, the novices casually walked around the grounds of the hot springs, trying not to pay too much attention to the eggs cooking. Sensing the novices’ discomfort—and probably a bit of my own discomfort, too—I talked with the instructor. Acknowledging her good intentions and reassuring her that the novices did enjoy and appreciate her offer, I suggested it might be best if she carried the baskets back

from the hot springs. After several minutes, the novices collected their baskets and set them on the pool's ledge for the instructor to take. Walking back through the crowd of visitors, the novices seemed much less hesitant, not carrying baskets of eggs.

In incidences like this the novices are constructing "the middle" among laity's expectations and intentions, their own obligations as novices, and how to orient towards the rules. On the one hand, it is important they recognize their teacher's intention of doing something generous for them and not reacting in a negative way towards this generosity such as refusing her offer. On the other hand, they were in a setting with many laity, some of whom may see novices cooking eggs in the middle of the afternoon as breaking their precepts. Ultimately the good intentions of their teacher won out. They accepted the offer and cooked the eggs while trying to conceal it somewhat from other laity.

This process of learning to navigate obligations, expectations, and intentions is further complicated for the novices. As we walked through the throng of laity at the hot springs, it is likely some of the laity would have no problem with the novices eating in the afternoon. In some instances the laity shift their expectations of how monastics should act and how strictly they should follow the rules. As we drove back to Wat Doi Thong along the quiet country roads with the novices sitting in the back, they enjoyed eating their cooked eggs, laughing and joking among themselves. Out of view from observing laity with a multitude of expectations, the novices could disregard the rule that they should not have been eating.

Conclusion

In finding "the middle" between "too strict" and "too lax," novices must constantly adjust and readjust to the laity who are present. As youth, the novices encounter Buddhist monasticism as an institution whose leaders and supporters socialize them to be certain kinds of Thai

Buddhists, reproducing nationalist conceptions and dominant cultural models of Thai monasticism. This social reproduction is evident in programs like the novice summer camps. The way in which novices learn about the ideals of monasticism in the summer camps follows a unidirectional model of youth’s socialization. In this case, the institution has a set notion of what it means to be a good novice and this is instilled in the young novices through a series of rewards and punishments.

Youth’s orientation towards the institution, however, changes as they stay longer as novices. The model of being a good monastic does not always fit the circumstances they are in. Moreover, there is no longer a clear set of socializers who are directing the novices to enact a certain model. They must actively construct within interactions with older monks and lay supporters the model of a good monastic. That is, they construct “the middle” between too strict and too lax within another sense of “the middle,” i.e., the “space between” young novices and older monks or their lay supporters.

As novices and their lay supporters negotiate just how strict they need to be, they adjust how they approach their monastic role and what rules can be bent while still being a good monastic. There is little consistency in how young monastics are directed to inhabit their monastic role. For short-term novices, following the rules of monasticism strictly is emphasized. For long-term novices, though, that strictness associated with “state-sponsored” Buddhism loosens. The ideal of monasticism is not as bound up with strict adherence to every precept such as refraining from eating after midday. Instead, young monastics are encouraged to shift how they present their monastic selves depending upon the circumstances they are in. If they are around older monastics and laity who are amenable to novices bending the rules, they adjust accordingly. If they are not among such individuals, or if they are around others they are

unfamiliar with, they adjust to appear more strict in their performance of monasticism or feel uncomfortable in not performing their role according to expectations. "The middle" between strict and lax is found in knowing how to adjust to these different circumstances. While nationalist notions of monasticism would see novices act strictly in line with a certain model of being a good monastic, their everyday lives and interactions often direct them to be more flexible.

In thinking about how youth are socialized into particular cultural models, it is important to pay attention to how those models are actively constructed in the space between persons. Likewise, when it comes to understanding the everyday construction of morality, it is important to note how moral models shift over the course of socialization. While young novices who have just ordained may be taught one notion of morality, as they proceed in their monastic career and get older, this model is renegotiated interpersonally.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Society for Psychological Anthropology/Lemelson Pre-dissertation Award, made possible by a generous donation from The Robert Lemelson Foundation. Research was also supported by the Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation (Award #1226854) and the Rynerson Research Fund. Post-fieldwork writing was supported, in part, by the Larry & Susan Gianinno Dissertation Write-up Grant and the Bernice Neugarten Award in Human Development. Data were collected with approval from the University of Chicago's Institutional Review Board as well as the Office of the National Research Council of Thailand. My thanks to Ted Lowe and the anonymous reviewers whose feedback greatly improved this article and provided new insights into my data.

Thanks also to Jennifer Cole, Nancy Eberhardt, Colin Halverson, Lindsey Conklin, Kim Walters, and Talia Weiner for their constructive feedback on earlier versions.

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Notes

[1] Currently in Thailand, most temples only ordain males as monks or novices. Some girls and women ordain as female novices, *samaneri*, or nuns, *mae chi*, but are not encouraged to do so in the same way that boys and men are encouraged to temporarily enter the Sangha. While some Buddhist societies permit women to ordain as female monks (Pali: *bhikkhunī*), the status of the *bhikkhunī* community in Thailand is still being negotiated (Battaglia 2015; Collins and McDaniel 2010; Tomalin 2006).

[2] Specific names of places and people are pseudonyms.

[3] It is common for monks and novices in Thailand to accept money from lay donors and to handle the finances of their temples. The reasons for overlooking or reinterpreting this rule are similar to the reasons explored in this article for why monastics and laity sometimes overlook the precept regarding food: it is often about necessity given contemporary circumstances.

[4] "Phra" is an honorific added before a monk's name. While *phra* is also the Thai word for "monk," in the context of preceding a monk's name, it is more akin to calling a monk Venerable. Novices are referred to only by their name.

[5] Education in Thailand is divided into primary (*prathom*) and secondary (*mathayom*) schooling. Each of these divisions contain six grades. Converting to the United States' education system, *prathom* one through six is equivalent to elementary school grades one through six. *Mathayom* one through six is equivalent to grades seven through twelve in the US system. Grades up to *mathayom* three are compulsory. After that students may continue with their general education in *mathayom* four through six. These students often go on to university as *mathayom* four through six are typically more general (*saman*) classes. Alternatively, students may go to a vocational or trade school after completing *mathayom* grade three.

[6] The notion that Buddhist monastic education is only ever a centralizing institution, giving the central Thai state control over peripheral regions has been convincingly critiqued by scholars (e.g., McDaniel 2008). In many ways, Buddhist temples and schools in peripheral regions like northern Thailand have maintained their autonomy and uniqueness from central Thai models of monastic education. Later in this article, we will look at this counter-centralizing process, too. Right now, however, I want to emphasize how Buddhist monastic education in peripheral areas of Thailand is often perceived both among informants and scholars (e.g., Ishii 1986).

[7] In the schools I observed, non-Buddhist students were not required to make offerings to the monks. However, they were generally required to attend the monks' lectures on morality. The principal or teacher introducing the monks would often explain non-Buddhists' required attendance by saying that all religions teach people how to be good persons, and the monks were going to be talking about how to be a good person, so their lessons were applicable to anyone regardless of their religion.

[8] I use "dinner" here in the sense of the main evening meal. For some, this may be referred to as "supper."