

FACULTY RESEARCH EDITION
of
The Savannah State College Bulletin

Published by

The Savannah State College

Volume 20, No. 2

Savannah, Georgia

December, 1966

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The Influence of Religion on The Political Process in Burma

by

Johnny Campbell

Introduction

In a traditional society, religion is one of the dominant forces which tend to weld the society into a cohesive group. Its dogmas, tenets, and doctrines are accepted largely without questioning and exert great influence on the lives and behavior of the group. When, however, a traditional society interacts with a more dynamic society and subsequently undergoes profound socio-economic and political changes, the influence of religion on the society tends to become less pervasive, less encompassing. The degree to which religion, as a binding social force, is displaced by secularization, depends on a host of factors, but in most instances, "wherever the modernization process has had an impact, it has contributed to secularization."¹ Professor Von der Mehden avers that secularization has meant

a loss of the power of religion in India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, and the Middle East. The modern political elite, in accepting western ideologies and nationalism as guides to national policy, has tended to erode the influence of the formerly powerful clerical groups. Burma, as well, can be described as a nation in which religion is becoming isolated from political decision-making, but with far less determination than her neighbors.²

In Burma the Ne Win Government, which has moved increasingly toward strong-arm tactics to accomplish its objectives, is finding that the power of religion is still formidable. "The monks, roughly a tenth of all Burmese adult men, remain the one substantial element that resists assimilation into the new military society, and Ne Win has taken great pains to treat the priesthood with care and overt sympathy, remembering no doubt their important political role before the war."³ In 1963, the Ne Win Government passed a National Solidarity Act which abolished political parties and required all religious organizations to register with the Government. According to the *New York Times*, "Moslem, Christian and other religious groups agreed to comply. But the 20,000 member Association of Young Buddhist Monks threatened to form suicide squads to demonstrate their oppo-

¹James S. Coleman, *The Politics of Developing Areas*. (Princeton, 1960) p. 537.

²Fred Von der Mehden, "Buddhism and Politics In Burma," *The Antioch Review* XXI (Summer, 1961) p. 166.

³John Ashdown, "Burma's Political Puzzle," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, XLV, September 17, 1964, p. 516.

sition."⁴ The opposition of the monks led to a complete reversal of policy by the Ne Win Government.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the process of interaction between religion and politics in Burma. Why has religion remained such a potent force in Burma? The answer to this question lies, we believe, in the historical relationship between politics and religion in Burma. This paper seeks, therefore, to explain the preponderance of religious influence existing in Burma in terms of historical factors which are deeply embedded in the consciousness of the Burmese. Professor Pye writes:

Historically, . . . religion was the very basis of most of the Burmese social and political structure, and thus it should be expected that the process of modernization would create difficult issues about the place religion should continue to occupy in Burmese life.⁵

When one speaks of the religious influence in Burma, one has in mind the influence of the Buddhist monks — the *pongyis* (monks of full standing). There has existed, historically, a close relationship between religion and culture in Burma — the relationship has been so close that Burman and Buddhist are virtually synonymous. Indeed, for all practical purpose, Buddhism can be said to have always been the state religion of Burma.⁶ The school of Buddhism native to Burma is called the *Theravada* or Way of the Elders. Every large village has its Buddhist monastery and the *pongyis* are ubiquitous figures in Burma. "Of all the conservative forces in Burma" writes King, "*The Sangya* or order of Buddhist monks, is perhaps the strongest."⁷

Our analysis of the influence of religion upon politics in Burma will cover four periods: 1) the pre-British monarchy; 2) the nationalist movement of the 1920's; 3) the period 1930-1945; and 4) the post-war period.

The Pre-British Monarchy

According to Cady, "the most important nonpolitical segment of the society in old Burma was the Buddhist *Sangha* . . . The monks were influential because they touched virtually all elements of the population and because they were revered by the people."⁸ Though the *sangya* was a powerful force in old Burma, evidence seems to indicate that the Burmese king was unchallenged in authority. As a body, the *sangya* was apolitical.

⁴The *New York Times*, May 6, 1964, p. 6.

⁵Lucian W. Pye, *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building*. (New Haven, 1963) p. 190.

⁶E. Michael Mendelson, "Religion and Authority in Modern Burma," *World Today*, XVI (March, 1960) p. 111.

⁷Winston L. King, "New Forces in an Old Culture," *The Antioch Review*, XXI (Summer, 1961) pp. 157-58.

⁸John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*. (Ithaca, 1958) p. 49.

. . . the court chronicles contain clear evidence that the king brooked no clerical challenge to his authority over the state. He punished summarily any indication of defiance or rebellion. Neither the personal influence of the *thathanabaing* [royally appointed head of the *sangha* Buddhists] nor the humanitarian principles of the Buddhist faith seem to have moderated appreciably the unrestrained violence which characterized most of the reigns.⁹

Although the *sangha* as a group was apolitical, individual monks wielded great political influence. Monks were frequently employed in peace negotiations involving civil strife, their prestige is thought to have lent sincerity to the proposals.¹⁰ The monks are said to have led revolts, but "Monkish participation in rebellion was almost invariably on an unauthorized and individual basis."¹¹ At the royal court, the principal religious personage was the *thathanabaing* who was assisted by a council. The *thathanabaing* was the recognized leader of the entire Buddhist order. Because of his official standing, the *thathanabaing* was used by the king, more or less, to control the order of monks. "The *thathanabaing* exercised religious authority under royal mandate and served also as the channel for making royal authority effective throughout the monastic community."¹²

The Nationalist Movement of the 1920's

When the British annexed Burma to the empire following the third Anglo-Burman War (1885-86) a clean sweep was made of the old order. The *thathanabaing* was relieved of his functions at the court, along with the other ecclesiastical officials. The period from 1886-1918 witnessed a sharp decline in the influence of the monks. But the end of World War I saw the upsurge of nationalistic feelings in Burma. And the monks played a very important role in the nationalists' campaign against the British. If the monks constituted a potential political force in old Burma, they became an active force during the aftermath of World War I. Writing about the role of the monks during this period, Von der Mehden says:

If any period can be called the high tide of *sangha* sharing in the political process it was the 1920's . . . their activity took the form of a politically oriented national *sangha* association, publication of newspapers and tracts, and advice given to politicians and the lay flock on political, economic, and social issues.¹³

It is to be noted that most of the monks who participated in the nationalist movement of the 1920's were the younger ones who at the

⁹John F. Cady, "Religion and Politics in Modern Burma," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, XII (February, 1953) p. 151.

¹⁰See Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 52.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹³Von der Mehden, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

time were not thoroughly indoctrinated to their passive role in society. A degree of self-interest was inherent in the monks' participation in the nationalist movement. Perhaps the most significant reason was the general decline of influence under British rule. For the monk, at least "until British time, taught every male child in the kingdom between the ages of six and thirteen and advised him, as well as his wife, an all matters until his dying day."¹⁴ Under British rule, however, there was a gradual lessening of influence — in point of fact, there was a discrediting of the monks' learning, with the subsequent decline in prestige and in their support.

One of the leading personalities to emerge from this period was a young monk, U Ottama of whom Von der Mehden says, "wore the robes of the *pongyi* but spoke the words of a political agitator. The combination had a profound influence on the Burmese religious community."¹⁵ U Ottama told his followers that the existence of Buddhism itself was threatened, that it was necessary to leave the monastery to defend the religion. In 1921 U Ottama was arrested by British authorities and sentenced to jail for ten months. Again in 1924 he was arrested — this time he was given a sentence of three years. The lasting contribution of U Ottama was that he transformed "an essentially political problem into a religious one."¹⁶

The principal political organization which emerged during this period for the articulation of interests and grievances was the General Council of Buddhist Associations (G.C.B.A.). The G.C.B.A. was the political offspring of the Young Men's Buddhist Association which first began operating around 1906.

The Y.M.B.A. was originally social, religious and educational in purpose . . . In spite of its apolitical proclivity, the interest of the Y.M.B.A. in the religious and social revitalization of Burmese life forced it into conflict with the government on the issues of closing all schools on Buddhist religious holidays, and in time it became a general complaint bureau for those seeking redress for social and religious grievances.¹⁷

In 1921, the Y.M.B.A. was replaced by the G.C.B.A. Fervinal sees this as a significant step in Burma's rising tide of nationalism. He writes:

This marked a definite stage in the progress of nationalism: the severance, if only formal, of politics from religion. Hitherto Nationalists had been linked together, nominally at least, on the basis of their common Buddhism, but the manifesto of the Twenty-one Party was Nationalist, not Buddhist; political, not religious.¹⁸

¹⁴Mendelson, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁵Fred Von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*. (Madison, 1963) p. 136.

¹⁶Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 232.

¹⁷Von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, pp. 32-3.

¹⁸J. S. Furnival, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, (New York, 1956) p. 143-44.

Although the appeal of the G.C.B.A. was toward a larger audience than the Buddhist, on the whole "there remained a close tie between nationalism and religion, and nationalism still drew much of its strength from Buddhist sentiment."¹⁹

What was the result of the political agitation on the part of the monks during this period of heightened political activities? The English Parliament, in 1922, passed the Burma Reforms Bill. The provision for a legislative council was the chief section of the Bill. But Cady writes: "The decade of the 1920's was, on the whole, a period of meagre positive achievement. The welter of political unrest which attended these governmental changes was aggravated by tangible economic grievances and by a rising tide of communal opposition to the presence and activities of Indian residents of Burma."²⁰

1930-1945 The Decline of Influence

The period 1930 to 1945 saw the diminishing of the influence of the monks on the political process in Burma. Von de Mehden writes; "Before 1927 the *pongyis* influenced and planned political activities, while after 1932 the clergy was more and more the tool of the politician."²¹ Two factors contributed to the decline of the monks' influence in the political arena, 1) the political separation of Burma from India, and 2) the impact of western material and intellectual forces. It was during this period that the post-war political leaders of Burma — Aung San, U Nu, Ne Win, Kyaw Nyein, Ba Maw, *et. al.*, gained prominence.

Burma capitulated to the Japanese in early 1942. During the Japanese occupation, many *pongyis* supported the invaders on the erroneous assumption that because Japan was a Buddhist country the monks would be exalted. But the Japanese were not very considerate toward the monks, though they seemed to have been aware of the potential power which the monks could wield. In fact the *pongyis* were subject to a great deal of humiliation under the occupation forces. "The Japanese soldiers were not respectful of Burmese religious feelings. Soldiers were accused of assorted crimes, including *pongyis* to wash the soldiers clothes, using the yellow robes as saddlecloths, . . . desecrating religious shrines, stealing pagoda treasures . . ."²²

Because of the setbacks suffered by the monks at the hands of the Japanese occupation the conservative elements within the order gained the upper hand. Subsequently, political activities of the monks virtually ceased. Their contributions toward repelling the Japanese were almost nil. At the end of World War II, the political power of the monks had virtually ceased on the national level. Because of the pervasiveness of the Buddhist faith in Burma, they con-

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁰Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 242.

²¹Von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, p. 148.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 152.

tinued to exert a great degree of influence at the local level, but the end of war witnessed the emergence of secular-minded politicians who eschewed religion.

Post World War II Developments

The resistance movement in Burma was headed by General Aung San who was instrumental in the founding of the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (A.F.P.F.L.). The A.F.P.F.L. emerged from the war as the leading nationalist party, and it is worthwhile to note the attitude of this party toward the monks and religion in general. The A.F.P.F.L. was definitely a secular-oriented party. In all the official pronouncements of the party, religion was denied a formal place in the structure of interests. It was Aung San's belief that the state should remain neutral on all questions concerning religion.

Burma's new constitution, formulated in 1947 under Aung San's direction, provided for a secular state with no government supported religious establishment. Aung San insisted that the *pongyis* should neither vote nor interest themselves in political affairs.²³

At this point in Burma's history, it seemed as if the divorce between politics and religion was a definite possibility. The governing elite was composed of western-oriented, secular-minded individuals. The monks had virtually retired from the political arena as an organized group, though their influence, locally, was still great. The secularization of religion, however, was short-lived, for Aung San and other prominent leaders of the A.F.P.F.L. were assassinated prior to the granting of independence by the British. Aung San's successor was U Nu, the most religious of statesmen. And with the ascendancy of U Nu to the premiership, the religious question was no longer moribund, but once more became a dynamic issue which was to exert profound influence on politics in Burma.

Nu's Religious Personality

To understand the resurgence of religion under U Nu, one must dwell upon the personality of the man himself. Butwell writes: "Nu has said that he became strongly religious as a result of World War II, and that the most important single influence in shaping his religious outlook was 'the insight I acquired as a consequence of the growing realization of the knowledge I had acquired in previous existences.'"²⁴ U Nu has spent a great deal of his time in the monastery and has written extensively on the subject of Buddhism.

During his stay in office, U Nu encouraged Buddhism by building temples, monasteries, by encouraging Buddhist exchanges on an international level, and by campaigns to convert the hill peoples of Burma to the Buddhist faith. Nu seemed to have believed that he had to pro-

²³Cady, *Religion and Politics in Modern Burma*, p. 157.

²⁴Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Stanford, 1963) p. 64.

vide religious leadership to guide the people into the right path. Guided "morality" might be an apt description of the role which Nu perceived for himself. Perhaps the greatest official act of U Nu toward Buddhism was the sponsorship of the Sixth Great Theravada Buddhist Synod of 1954-56 at a cost estimated in excess of \$6 million.

The consequences of Nu's activities on behalf of the Buddhist faith was, of course, an increase in the political activities of the monks. This encouragement is a bit paradoxical because Nu himself, during the Japanese occupation, deprecated the political role of the monks. He wrote: ". . . to lead the life of a monk is as delicate a task as to balance a grain of mustard seed on the point of a needle. So how can a *pongyi* who must walk so delicately, do the work of a politician, the roughest of worldly pursuits."²⁵

During Nu's first premiership three religious acts were passed which increased the interaction between politics and religions. Firstly, the Dhamma Chariya Act of 1949 established two government-sponsored ecclesiastical courts at Rangoon and Mandalay. This act was designed to weed out the unfit within the *sangha* and to restore order with the hierarchy. Secondly, the Pali University Act of 1950 sought to propagate the Buddhist faith and to supervise teaching and examinations of the Sacred Buddhist scriptures on the part of the monastery *sayadaws* (abbots). Thirdly, the Buddha Sasana Act established a central Buddhist organization representative of all Buddhists in the country. "The Buddha Sasana Act" Cady writes, "committed the Burma government for the first time to active support of the propagation of the Buddhist faith . . ."²⁶

After passage of the Pali University Act, the monks entered the political arena openly. In September 1951, they staged demonstrations demanding the recognition of Buddhism as the state religion, the removal of the Minister of Religious Affairs (a cabinet-level position introduced by Nu) and his subordinates, and the convening of a general synod of monks for the purpose of purifying the faith.

It is quite evident that the increased agitation on the part of the monks during this period was attributable to the religious personality of U Nu, a man who believes that he may be a "Buddha-in-the-process-of-becoming."²⁷ Had Nu steered the secular course which was outlined by the founders of the A.F.P.F.L., it seems highly unlikely that the *sangha* would have become politically active to the degree they did. But it was the election campaign of 1959 and the subsequent establishment of Buddhism as the state religion that politics and religion reached the highest degree of interaction.

Religion and the Campaign of 1959

In April, 1958, the AFPFL split into two factions—the Clean faction led by U Nu and Thakin Tin, and the Stable faction under the leadership of U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein. Because of the

²⁵Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁶Cady, "Religion and Politics in Modern Burma," p. 160.

²⁷Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

schism in the AFPFL and other internal troubles, the political situation in Burma deteriorated rapidly. "By September, 1958, the government in Burma had all but come to a standstill, political considerations were seemingly the only ones that influenced official decision-making, and the public was obviously and increasingly losing confidence in the ability of the Nu-Tin administration to direct the nation's affairs."²⁸

On October 28, 1958, General Ne Win took over the government in a move which was designed to prevent the country from falling into an utter state of chaos. The Ne Win caretaker government was originally slated to hold power for a period of six months and then allow general elections. Elections, however, were not held until February 6, 1960—but the campaign began in the latter part of September, 1959.

Prior to the schism in the AFPFL, the party itself generally eschewed religion in campaigns, but prior to the official opening of the 1959 campaign, U Nu made the promise that if elected, he would make Buddhism the state religion of Burma. Immediately thereafter Nu retired to a monastery. Article 21, Section 24 of Burma's Constitution states:

The abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden; and any act which is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to this Constitution and may be punishable by law.

The Stable faction of the AFPFL charged Nu with using the religious issue for personal political gains. Writing of Nu, Cady says: "He was immersed in politics, but his heart was in religion."²⁹ To a considerable extent, Cady's characterization of Nu is correct and the charges of the Stable AFPFL that Nu interjected the religious issue solely for the purpose of garnering votes is probably not the whole truth. In point of fact, "he had been pressing for making Buddhism the state religion, apparently sincerely, since 1956, when he stated at the conclusion of the Sixth Great Buddhist Synod that he had a 'burning desire to do so.'"³⁰

Nu's promise to make Buddhism the state religion, coupled with his religious personality, was the key element in the 1959 election campaign. Leaders of the Stable AFPFL went so far as to try to emulate the religiosity of Nu during the campaign. But the Burmese people gave Nu an overwhelming victory at the polls. The extent to which religion played a role in the election can be gauged from the fact that the ballot boxes of Nu's faction—the Clean AFPFL, were painted yellow—the color of the monks' robes in Burma.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁹Cady, *Religion and Politics in Modern Burma*, p. 156.

³⁰Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

Buddhism—The State Religion

In 1961, Buddhism was made the state religion by amending the constitution to read, "The State shall maintain, protect and promote Buddhism." A State Religion Promotion Bill designed to implement the new provision of the constitution also went into effect. The initial reaction among the non-Buddhist minorities was adverse—therefore, a fourth constitutional amendment, reaffirming the right of all persons freely to profess, practice and teach their own religions, was passed.

It seems that U Nu was not merely satisfied with a formal Buddhist state. He thought "that the inauguration of the Buddhist state would engender a deeper interest in Buddhism among his people and . . . suffuse all acts within a religious spirit."³¹ One of the immediate consequences of the elevation of the Buddhist faith to the state religion was increased political agitation by the monks. Butwell's account of one incident after Buddhism was made the state religion is revealing.

Although most monks have generally not been politically inclined, the more militant *pongyis* have been—and it was these who led the November 14, 1961, riots in the Rangoon suburb of Okkalapa, which resulted in four deaths and the arrest of 279 persons, including 92 monks . . . the lynching of two Moslems by a mob led by monks was the shameful highlight of the disturbances.³²

On March 2, 1962, General Ne Win staged a second *coup*, abrogated the constitution, thereby disestablishing Buddhism as the state religion in Burma. Paradoxically, in a country where 85 per cent of the people are Buddhists, the disestablishment of religion may have been a blessing for "U Nu's elevation of Buddhism as the State Religion had in the end pleased neither the staunch Buddhists nor the minority religious groups."³³

Conclusions

In the introduction we pointed out that the Ne Win Government despite its totalitarian methods, has moved very cautiously in regards to the monks. In the first real confrontation between the Government and the monks (the National Solidarity Act), the monks emerged victorious. The monks remain a latent political force in Burma; yet there are certain operative factors which prevent the monks from transforming their potential power into a positive factor which could influence the political process in Burma. We have attempted to point to the interaction between politics and religion in Burma, employing an historical approach. Yet our analysis fails to discover much concrete evidence of the monks' seeking to adopt

³¹Von der Mehden, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, p. 107.

³²Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

³³*The Far Eastern Economic Review*. 1963 Yearbook. p. 54.

a program of social, economic, and political reform over the years. In those instances where the monks have demonstrated or entered the political arena, their demands were mostly short-run ones, involving directly the *pongyis* themselves—e.g., demonstrations in the 1920's to prevent the wearing of shoes around religious shrines, efforts to retain the Buddhist schools, and the activities to establish Buddhism as the state religion.

Since the monks hold a great deal of power in Burmese society, it is legitimate to ask why they have not entered the political arena with a wider program of social reforms aimed at the development of their country. Of course, religion in a transitional society is a conservative force, for the power of religion, in most instances, derives from tradition itself and the leaders (religious) often regard the process of modernization as a real threat to their security and authority. But in a country, such as Burma, where Buddhism is so intimately related to the consciousness of the people, religion, seemingly could be a force for modernization. Cady writes: "One of the most important problems which independent Burma faces is how to establish a basis for constructive cooperation between politics and religion in meeting the needs of the new state."³⁴

There have been attempts to form political parties on the part of the *pongyis*. One such party was the Buddhist Democratic Party. King avers that

This was the Buddhist attempt, or more properly the attempt of some Buddhists to develop a social and political philosophy directly out of Buddhism. Most of these attempts are naive and tentative, sometimes in the extreme; but are important because they represent a brand new trend in Buddhism . . . there have been few deliberate attempts to provide or implement a Buddhist philosophy of society and government.³⁵

King attributes the failure of the *pongyis* to develop a social philosophy to passiveness, fatalism, and concern for the spirit. There is a degree of truth in this analysis, yet the very fact that the monks in reference to self-interest, have sought to influence the political process, partly vitiates the passive, fatalistic, non-mundance argument. For in the very process of seeking to maintain or to enhance their personal prestige or influence, the *pongyis* have demonstrated their ability to change and to redirect the course of history.

The very structure of Buddhism is a factor which militates against constructive efforts to evolve a social philosophy. Buddhism is primarily an individual quest for self-development. There exists no organizational framework, nor objective criteria for the selection of leaders, through which a positive program could be developed and given sanction. Pye writes:

³⁴Cady, *Religion and Politics in Modern Burma*, p. 149.

³⁵King *op. cit.*, p. 164.

Even within the monastery little uniformity was to be found in discipline or organization, and the rules that did exist set minimum standards of individual conduct. Advancement occurred without any strict system of selection beyond the general principle that the older the monk, the higher his station.³⁶

In Burma, then, religion continues to influence the decision-making process. But the considerations given to the monks by the politicians are due to the "potential" political power of the monks and the deference accorded to them by the Burmese society itself. As an interest group the monks possess no program, their interests are not articulated and advanced through the process of confronting the politicians with demands, but primarily take the form of reactions against specific proposals of the politicians. This reaction to the politicians can in part be attributed to the structure of Buddhism itself and in part to the emphasis upon the individual rather than upon the group or society. The result of this phenomenon is that Buddhism continues to encompass the daily lives of the Burmese; deference is accorded to the monks, but their role is primarily a negative one—they hold the power to veto—they seldom seek to propose, to innovate.

Religion permeates the consciousness of the Burmese to such an extent that even the modernizing elites find it exceedingly difficult to escape the dilemma between politics and religion in Burma. In his study, Pye notes what he terms a basic Burmese sense of ambivalence toward religion. The analysis is psychological but penetrating.

At a more fundamental level, the ambivalent feeling toward religion creates a serious obstacle to national development and planned social change. The Burmese sense of identity is so closely associated with his religious identity that he is likely to feel seriously threatened by the idea of abandoning his religion. Members of the political elite in particular are likely to find considerable reassurance and comfort from Buddhist religious teachings . . . At the same time, however, the element of insecurity about religion means that it is difficult for the Burman to find in his religion-based sense of identity the necessary security to become a creative and innovating political person.³⁷

Finally, we may conclude by pointing out that the secularization of politics in Burma will, in all probability, evolve at a slower pace than in other transitional societies, because of the historical interaction between politics and religion, the influence of religion on the lives of the individual Burman, the reverence accorded to the monks, and the "ambivalent" attitude of the elite toward religion. This means, in effect, that the process of modernization is likely to take place at a slower pace in Burma than in other developing

³⁶Lucian Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 194-5.

societies, despite Burma's plentiful supply of exploitable resources. This is the case because the *pongyis*, though influential, are largely apolitical. On the other hand, the elites are political, but their religious commitments make them uncertain concerning the place of religion in their society and to social and economic development in general.