

THE “KHIT-PEN” THEOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL MODEL: A NEW METHODOLOGY FOR CONTEXTUALIZING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THAILAND

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Introduction

The “Khit-Pen” Theological Model is in a sense an adaptation of the Thai indigenous concept of adult learning developed by Dr. Kovit Vorapipatana, former Deputy Director General, Department of Educational Techniques, Ministry of Education. It is an educational model that was successfully launched by the Ministry of Education in Thailand in the 1970s with the purpose to encourage common people to be more willing to accept innovation in their daily lives, and to teach them technical skills. The model was later adapted to fit the needs of developing countries (such as the Philippines, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Ghana) because it is essentially problem-centered, and works well in a problem-posing training program.

The term “Khit-Pen” literally means “to think” or “to be able to think.” The assumptions underlying the development of the “Khit-Pen” Theological Model reflect two philosophies which play a major role in characterizing who we are, first, as Thai people, and second, as Thai Christians. The first assumption, a Buddhist philosophy about life, assumes life is suffering; this suffering can be cured; in order to cure this suffering, the origin of the suffering must be identified. The belief “Life is suffering” is central in Buddhist teaching. As a Buddhist country, Thailand finds its identity and origin in Buddhist beliefs and practices. Every aspect of the Thai life is deeply rooted in Buddhist thinking. Though Buddhism provides a way or ways to counteract suffering, too often the people have the tendency to shut out frustration and take refuge in the common Thai idiom “*Mai Pen Rai*” (or “never mind,” or “it is nothing”) which is characteristic of the average Thai. In other words, such a philosophy has implanted deep within the people a sense of passive resignation to fate, thus impairing their ability to counteract the problems and to seek for solutions. In short, the Buddhist philosophy of life has prevented a Thai from being able to take proactive steps toward finding solutions for his or her own problems. It intrinsically has a paralyzing impact on the people, thereby depriving them of their intellectual strength to resist suffering in life.

A second assumption lies in the Greek-influenced Western philosophy of education, deeply embedded both in the nation’s educational system and in the imported traditional Western theological education program. This philosophy has characterized both the church’s training methodology and the system of Thai education in the past and in the present. The influence of Western traditional philosophy in the national school system and the uncritical transmission of theological knowledge from the West to the Thai context have resulted not only in the detriment of the leadership potential of the learners, but also in their ability and freedom to read and reflect upon the truth of the Scripture for themselves and their community.

The “Khit-Pen” Theological Education Model may be explained in terms of a contextual theological endeavor that proceeds with different theological priorities and criteria than those on which current theological education is based. The model is capable of being adapted to all levels of church leadership and addressing various issues of concern. It sets out to tackle theological questions and issues found within a unique context of the Thai churches which have not been adequately discussed by the traditional Western educational models. It is a “synthetic model” that attempts to balance the insights and ways of thinking from different educational and theological models presented in this study and reaches out to incorporate them into developing a methodology that deals with prevalent issues confronting the Thai churches. In essence, it is a “middle-of-the-road,” a “both/and,” theological education model that takes pains to maintain the integrity of the Scripture, while seriously acknowledging the importance of integrating the scriptural and spiritual insights with truths found outside the scriptural and theological realm (Bevans 1992:81f).

Following Wesley's inductive method of doing theology and the ecumenical spirit of the Wesley Quadrilateral which "calls for greater induction, integration, contextualization, and contemporarization" (Thorsen 1990:231). The "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model bases its development primarily on important features from Groome's model, Elmer's model, Freire's model, Pazmiño's model, Hiebert's model, and Vorapipatana's model. Methodologically, these models lie in the same level as each is descriptive of how to deal with the components of the contexts in the learning process. While making a dichotomy between the secular models and the theological (spiritual) models is outside the scope of this study, it might be helpful to note that Elmer's model, Groome's model, Hiebert's model, Pazmiño's model, and Wesley's model have incorporated spiritual dynamic and theological implications into their methodological components. However, the educational philosophy and implications that are found in Freire's and Vorapipatana's models can also be integrated into the tasks of theological reflection and the development of the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model. It may appear that the components for formulating the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model which have been drawn from these models do overlap. The formulation of a new model has been conducted based on a simultaneous interaction and integration between these theological and educational models.

While the author recognizes the important role memorization plays in the teaching/learning process, it strongly maintains that in order for a learned truth to become a lived reality--a pattern of one's life--one needs the ability to reflect upon the information and integrate it into his or her own life. Thai church leaders are usually trained to memorize the information they have received from their trainers and to transmit the information to their local congregations, irrespective of its relevance. In other words, like the Buddhist philosophy, such a traditional Western model of education, embedded with Greek-influenced Western philosophy, places the learners in a passive, receiving, and container-like role which often leads to the teacher dominating, instead of educating the learners. As a result, national church leaders are not often equipped to exercise their intellectual ability and creativity.

On the contrary, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model is designed to be an interactive, dialogical approach to theological training which calls for active learners who are learning to think and takes into account the learners' unique and diversified need and potentials and the cultural relevance. The "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model is, in a sense, a "redrawing of the theological map." According to Andrew F. Walls, the "conventional [traditional] theological education too often employs a pre-Columbian theological map which no longer reflects reality," that arises from the situations of the non-Western world (1996:18). The "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model intends to reflect particularly on, and respond to, realities confronting churches in Thailand.

The Structure of Khit-Pen Theological Education

The central structure of the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model operates through five stages. The next section details each of the five stages along with illustrations of the first year's use of the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model at SEANBC.

Stage One: Preparation

About two weeks before the first semester began in June 1997, I conducted an in-house "SEANBC Poll" among the new students to secure information about their life stories, their callings, and expectations. The inquiry had seven questions: How did you become a Christian? What is one, tangible evidence of your new life? What are your expectations in coming to SEANBC? What teaching and learning styles do you most enjoy? What teaching and learning styles do you least enjoy? What courses of study do you think would be most helpful to your future ministry? What courses of study do you think would be least helpful to your future ministry? The responses have helped greatly to shape not only the content and method of teaching; they have also helped prepare the students and teachers for meaningful teaching/learning process.

Preparation refers to the activity that Thomas Groome calls "an invitation to the students to name their present action in response to the particular focus of the unit" (1980:208). Such an invitation to the students may be in the form of questions. The use of questions has proven to be a helpful method of preparing the students to become active participants in the teaching/learning process. According to Robert H. Stein, Jesus was successful in eliciting responses (verbal and nonverbal) from the audience through the use of questions. Raising questions in a variety of ways and within a variety of situations,

“Jesus forced his audience to become involved in the learning process” (1989:23). As a result, Jesus was not only able to prepare his students to participate in the learning process, he also forced them to think about what he or they were saying using questions on many occasions. As the teaching/learning process progresses, the students express their reactions, feelings, sentiments, overt activity, valuing, meaning making, understanding, beliefs, relationship, and the like. The goal here is to elicit an expression (verbal and nonverbal) of the students’ knowledge which arises from their personal engagement in the world. Such an invitation to the students to participate in the teaching/learning process helps pave the way for the teacher to create a friendly and relational environment that is conducive for learning to take place.

In the Thai context, the *Khune Kruu*, or the educated one (a Thai word for teacher), normally initiates a friendly and relational environment. Thai educator Suntaree Komin says when the teacher begins to show “humanistic oriented values” such as gratefulness, care-consideration, kindness, forgiveness, mutual helpfulness, and obedience-respectfulness, students experience confidence and feel empowered to participate in the teaching/learning process. This is because, according to Komin, such values shown by a teacher are usually characteristic of the common people, the less educated ones. Highly educated people are often perceived and characterized by “a concern for self, striving for success in life, and a high sense of ego esteem” which suggests a widespread social gap between the two (1990:60). When a teacher makes an attempt to bridge such a gap and shows the reversal of their role and status, he or she, in effect, creates within the students what Freire calls a new sense of “partnership in learning” (1995 [1970]:56-61).

In other words, preparation involves the recognition of the reality Pazmiño calls “a larger framework” of the students on the part of a teacher (1992:132). It is the teacher’s attempt to know what and why he or she is teaching as well as when, where, and whom he or she is teaching. Understanding the larger framework of the students not only enables a teacher to appreciate the diversity and the complexity of the students and their backgrounds, it also helps a teacher to consider a variety of approaches, methods, and techniques in his or her teaching. Preparation is a result of a teacher’s recognition that authentic learning takes place best in a friendly, nonthreatening, and mutual environment.

In the “Khit-Pen” Theological Education Model, preparation includes participants’ (teacher’s and students’) acknowledgment of the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit, the divine resource, and the dependence upon His leading of men and women “into all truth” (John 16:13-15). Knowing the diversity as well as the complexity of the students can lead a teacher to discouragement and despair. A mutual reliance and trusting on the power of the Holy Spirit leads teachers to a sense of wonder, awe, and reverence for the workings of God in and through the lives of all participants. It leads to a dependence on prayer before, during, and after the actual teaching. This reliance leads to the teacher’s openness to the re-thinking, re-designing, as well as revising his or her teaching agenda in response to the work of the Spirit and to the sharing of the students’ stories. In this stage of preparation, the teacher makes certain that students feel comfortable, welcome, equal, and empowered to participate in the teaching and learning process.

Stage Two: Exploring the Issues

One of the most difficult questions confronting Christian churches in Thailand both in the past and present is the question of whether or not Christians should observe the Thai calendar,¹ which marks mainly Buddhist religious events. The question is occasionally raised. But the churches in Thailand have not been able to provide any practical directions on the whole issue, thus leaving it perpetually unanswered.

A question came up in one of my classes regarding the *Songkran* day, or the water festival, on April 13. Like other Buddhist religious events, *Songkran* day remains unaddressed by the Christian community as a whole. Although it is traditionally considered the Thai new year, Christians usually do not observe this day at all since it appears to convey heavily [a Buddhist] religious connotation. The students were invited to investigate the *Songkran* festival in order to understand fully their own culture and to be able to draw some implications for living a Christian life in the society. From the exegetical study of the *Songkran* day, students have learned to select elements to adapt from a wide variety meaning in the festival. While it is generally considered the Thai new year, *Songkran* is also

the day of cleansing the spirit and refreshing the soul. The Thai Buddhists will pour water on Buddha's image and on one another on that day. It is an opportunity to gain merit and fun as it is full of celebration. It is the day of relationship renewal among family members as many will visit their parents and other elderly people in order to pay respect to them on this special occasion. One ritual commonly performed which signifies one's respect to his or her older relatives and friends is the pouring of water on their hands. While performing this ritual, family members will ask for forgiveness (*Kor Aho Si Kaam*) if they have done anything to offend their relatives in the past year; and they will expect a good wish, a sign of forgiveness (*Aho Si*), in return.

One outcome that grew out of the discussion was the recommendation of the class to adapt good and neutral elements to be used in Christian rituals. From the study, the class has submitted that while the Christian community may refrain from performing religious activities on the *Songkran* day, the Thai churches should strongly encourage the practice of *Aho Si Kaam* ritual among believers. The *Songkran* festival can be a day the Thai Christians express their respect, reconciliation, and appreciation to others in the society. For example, a local church leader may perform foot washing on that day by clustering around each member to wash his or her feet. The water used on this occasion may be adorned with flowers petals and perfume similar to the water the Thai use for their elders. This ceremony can be done meaningfully as it is a good reminder of our servanthood to one another.

The "exploring the issues" stage refers to what Paul Hiebert calls the "exegesis of the culture" where the teacher and the students will study local questions and issues from an objective, nonjudgemental point of view (1994:88). This study also technically is called a phenomenological study of issues which the teacher and the students uncritically gather and analyze traditional values, patterns, and practices within the students' community with a purpose to understand them, not to judge them. Groome calls this stage of exploring of the issues "an invitation to the students to begin making a critical reflection," done from their own perspectives (1980:211). The teacher and the students look discerningly at present situations to see what are obvious [the issues and questions] and also to attempt to go below the obvious to become aware of their sources and development. The purpose here is to have an overall picture of the concerns and questions prevalent within the context in which they live. In short, it is an attempt to enable students to identify and to express their opinions on situations confronting them.

The exegesis of the culture is crucial to the task of theological education because it helps Thai students to understand their own cultural and traditional issues in the light of the Scriptures. I agree with the remark of Darrell L. Whiteman that being born [in Thai culture] does not guarantee a thorough understanding of one's own culture as we often have assumed. "Until non-Western Christians learn how to exegete their own cultural context as well as they exegete the biblical text," no amount of theological knowledge "will automatically enable and encourage church leaders to plant and grow indigenous, contextualized churches" (1997:5).

In Thai context, exploring of issues begins when the teacher and the students take time to look at some prevailing questions the people are asking inside and outside the church. Such questions may be cultural (e.g., questions about ancestral worship or traditional rites and rituals), religious (e.g., Buddhist ceremonies and practices), social (e.g., AIDS diseases or poverty), and political (e.g., participation in the demonstrations for democracy). The goal is for the teacher and the students to be informed of the realities of life and to be able to accurately raise the issues, needs, and problems that should be addressed. Also, the students should be more ready to seek for answers and learn when they focus on the real issues and questions within their situations.

The "exploring the issues" stage also may refer to observation, one of the methods Wesley regularly used in the formulating of his theology. Discussing the inductive character of Wesley's writings, Thorsen points out that Wesley's method of writing consists of "observation, investigation, written record, comparison, and induction from experiments" (1990:103). In observation, Wesley would attempt to "understand the need" in order to direct careful analytical attention toward noted facts (1990:105). He would then try to familiarize himself with facts [in the world] so as to find some constructive explanation of such facts. Wesley's observation, however, extends beyond merely having knowledge about the fact in the society. As a "Bible-Christian" or "a man of one book" (Wesley's statements, quoted in Thorsen 1990:67), his observation usually would lead to an attempt to understand and respond to concerns in the society based on his investigation of the truths available in

the Scripture. This brings us to third stage of integrating the scriptural truths with issues and questions confronting people in the society.

Stage Three: Integrating with the Scripture

Paul and Frances Hiebert refer to this stage as “the recognition of the authority of the Scriptures and a thorough knowledge of their teachings” (1987:16). It involves a careful study of the biblical message within its own historic and cultural contexts. Consequential to our knowledge of the cultural issues and questions, it is the Scriptures that stand in judgment on all cultural elements. Scriptures affirm that which is good and condemn that which is evil. Elmer calls this stage a “recall” or “mastery” of important information from the Scripture which is foundational to learning (1984:235). (The new model is in contrast to the traditional theological model in that the prior theological education model normally used the Scriptures at the outset. It also varies from the regular “Khit-Pen” model which does not consider Scripture.) The Scripture is the standard of truth upon which all other issues are reflected and judged. An attempt to understand one’s circumstances in light of the scriptural truth at this stage may also be referred to as an “exegesis of the Scriptures,” and the attempt to bridge the truth of the Scriptures to the realities of one’s own circumstances (Hiebert 1994b:89). In this stage, the teacher will take the lead in helping the students understand what the Bible has to say regarding issues and questions confronting the community. The teacher’s task is neither to impose on the students his or her own conclusion nor to force biblical meaning to fit local cultural categories, thus distorting the biblical message. Rather, the teacher’s role is to help the students grasp the scriptural truth so that they may grow in their abilities to discern the scriptural truth in light of their own circumstances. This is in contrast to the traditional model in which the students were told what the Scripture said and meant; whereas in this model the students are involved, with the guidance of the teacher, in studying Scripture and finding God’s answer for themselves and their communities.

Groome calls this stage a “critique of the Story [Scripture] in light of the stories [realities] and a critique of the students’ present stories in light of the past Story” (1980:220). In other words, it is the students’ attempt to explain the realities of their circumstances in light of the Scripture.

In Thai context, the process of integrating with the Scripture begins when the teacher and the students, having familiarized themselves with prevalent issues confronting the church, commit themselves to investigating the Scripture with the hope to find answers from the Word of God. With the help of the teacher, the students begin to make sense of local issues and questions confronting them in the light of the Scripture. For example, Christians in Thailand have relied heavily on the missionaries’ opinions regarding how to respond to the questions of ancestral and traditional practices in Thai society. The words of the missionary have become the primary source of religious authority by which the cultural issues are judged and evaluated. The students should be encouraged to study the Word of God to gain their own “heartsight” regarding issues confronting them instead of relying on someone’s “hearsay.”

This process of “integrating with the Scripture” may also refer to what Thorsen calls “Wesley’s inductive approach to Scripture” that is used in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral model of theology (1990:128ff). While affirming the primacy of Scripture as “the only sufficient source commonly available to people for investigating the nature of God and of life,” Wesley also recognizes the importance of tradition, reason, and experience. Tradition, reason, and experience play a vital role in understanding, interpreting, and applying the truth of the Bible to one’s life. In other words, the truth of the Scripture becomes most meaningful and relevant when it addresses the immediate needs at hand. Since learning and ministry do not occur in the abstract, the task of investigating the Scripture in light of the students’ whole lives involves not only the students as individuals, but also involves the community as whole. This leads us to consider the role of the community in the teaching/learning process.

Stage Four: Interacting with the Community

The word “community” here refers primarily to the people both inside and outside of the church. Interacting with the community then means becoming involved in the church ministry and in the service of the community. Interacting with the community turns out to be a major emphasis of the SEANBC teaching curriculum. In the 1997/98 school year the school has committed itself to

maintaining “the continuous mingling of cognitive and behavioral activities--the relationship between knowing and doing, rhetoric and behavior, reflection and action, theory and practice, cognitive and psychomotor, truth and experience, witness and life” (Elmer 1984:226-243).

To accomplish this goal, nearly half of the total course requirements involves students’ interaction with the people in the community. In addition, a required classroom session for all students doing the course “Supervised Ministries,” a good learning counterpart is designed for those assigned to field practicum in each given semester. To interact with the community is, in a sense, an attempt to demonstrate the students’ “street credibility” by relating to the people where they are, as opposed to simply showing one’s “library credibility” which is often out of touch with the realities of life (Griffiths 1990: 11-12).

In the process of attempting to understand life from the biblical perspective, it is important that the students interact with the church in which they serve and with the surrounding community in which they live. The students’ involvement in the community not only helps them see the connection between theory and practice. It also helps the people in the community to feel empowered to reflect and interact with themselves and their contexts. According to Hiebert, the involvement of the people in “evaluating their own culture in the light of new truth draws upon their strength” (1994b:89a). He perceives the community involvement to be a move to encourage people to make a “critical response” to prevalent issues and questions confronting them, since the people have better knowledge of their own culture and are in a better position to critique it (1994b:89b). He goes on to point out that to involve the people in the community (by engaging in dialogue in an attempt to respond to issues) is to help them to grow in the discernment of the scriptural truths in light of their own circumstances. An act of involving the people in the process of investigating and applying Scripture to realities in their lives puts into practice the biblical teaching of the priesthood of believers within the community (1994b: 90).

“Interacting with the community” may also be explained in terms of what Outler calls “experience,” the fourth component of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral which plays a crucial role in Wesley’s theology (1985:31f). The scriptural truths are confirmed by experience which reflects an immediate relationship of the Bible to people’s lives. Experience helps the students to see the relation of what Elmer calls “recall and application” in which the students now make decisions about what to do with the information they have learned in the classroom with the help of the community (1984: 237). Through their commitment to dialogue, students are encouraged to live interdependently with God and with the people in the community. They are to demonstrate the embodiment of what Pazmiño calls a “new reign of Jesus Christ” with a distinctive call to serve other fellow human beings (1992:50). It is an awareness of the connection between theory and *praxis* in education that implies getting involved in social issues and problems. In this stage, teachers and students have the responsibility to show the connection between their “commitment to God’s reign and the dominant virtues and ideals of their community or society” (1992:52).

In Thai theological education context, the “interacting with the community” occurs when the students become actively involved in the ministry of the church and in the service of the community. During the semesteral break in October 1997 I took a group of thirty students from SEANBC and other schools to the Leoy province, about three hundred miles from Bangkok. The goal was two-fold: to help a local church in an evangelistic effort and to take part in the ongoing community development program. The trip was an experience altogether new to the students. Traditionally, seminaries in Thailand spend the semesteral break preaching the gospel with little concern for social responsibility. At the evaluation meeting the students testified as to how their lives had been profoundly changed and shaped by the field trip. The trip not only gave them the opportunity to share and show the gospel message; it also gave them a memorable life experience of learning from people in the community.

In this stage, after the students have learned about the truth of the Scripture, they then decide how they should act when guided by biblical principles and focused on insights they have received from their involvement with the church and the community. Such input affirms and attests the reflection as well as decision they make, which results in the formulation of their own theologies regarding the issues and questions in the context in which they live. This leads us to consider the fifth and final stage of the teaching/learning method introduced in the “Khit-Pen” Theological Education Model.

Stage Five: Implementation

Implementation occurs when the students carry into effect the insights they have learned from the previous stages. They have been equipped to think, reflect, and act upon issues from a biblical perspective and from the perspective of their own worldviews, cultures, values, and social and historical situations. It is the result of critical integration with the Scripture and an interaction with the community. The students are enabled to reflect on the teachings of the Scripture in the light of their socio-cultural frameworks and to see the relation between their faith and the contexts in which they live. It means learning the truth, applying the truth to one's life [and the life of the community], making adjustments and refinements until there is a confidence in making such an arrangement a pattern in his or her own life and the lives of the people in the community.

Shortly after the conclusion of the second semester a group of three students came to talk to me about their vision to put into practice the term project they had previously developed. The paper was part of the requirements for the course "Church Planting in the Thai Context" which I was teaching. They recognized the importance of the principles they have learned from the class and felt that they have collected a good deal of helpful information about the people in their designated area. During their frequent visits to the people in the community, relationships were built and contact made. They saw great potential for starting a new church among the people within that community. In a real sense, these students had taken initiative to implement the knowledge and information they obtained from the course and intended to apply such insights in the communities in which they lived.

Implementation, then, refers primarily to the students' ability to integrate, to re-invent, or to reproduce the truth they have learned and to incorporate it into their personal as well as their communal lives. In the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model, implementation may be explained in terms of the students' attempt to put into practice the insights they have learned from their investigation of the Scripture and interaction with the community. In a sense, because they have formulated their own theologies regarding the issues--based on the reflection of the biblical message in the light of their own situation--they are able to attempt to "blend" text with the contexts. According to Hiebert, such an attempt is considered Christian, for it explicitly seeks to express biblical teaching. It is contextual, for it is created by people in the context, using forms they understand within their own culture (1994a: 90-91). Elmer calls this stage "recall and resolution," the task that requires a life-long interactive cohabitation between orthodoxy and *orthopraxis* (1984: 238). It is an opportunity for the students to do what needs to be done in response to the issues and questions of the context. The students come to recognize that "Christian" is a whole way of being in the world, a lived response rather than a theory about. And for this reason, as Groome maintains, our religious education should invite people to decision--a decision that is guided by the church in the community (1980: 221).

Khit-Pen as a Paradigm for Education

Central in the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model is the primacy of the Scripture upon which the five stages are founded. Flexibility, as opposed to rigidity, inherently permeates the whole operation of this indigenous theological education model. Since the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model is intended to be used, or placed, in any educational setting, with any curriculum structure, and by any theological traditions, it is therefore highly flexible as well as adaptable. In a culture where the teaching/learning process is often characterized by rigidity and legalism, flexibility allows the students freedom and creativity to respond immediately in new varied and contextually appropriate ways. Flexibility is a whole new paradigm of living and serving, because the students are thinking and interacting. Therefore, flexibility or adaptability, as opposed to rigidity, is a key feature of the way the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model operates. The flexible quality of the new model is illustrated in the institutional mission statement of the South East Asia Nazarene Bible College. This document states the school is committed to

developing national lay and ministerial leaders who are prepared in both academic and applied theology through holistic, integrated ["Khit-Pen"] theological education...This education should be built upon strong biblical and theological foundations with major concern for the educational and sociocultural differences of the students... It will be delivered in multi-level, multi-schedule, multi-location, multi-language, and multi-delivery systems... SEANBC

emphasizes the integration of theory and practice. The academic study of theology, Bible, and ministry must be applied to the life and work setting of the minister.

This integration is accomplished through a series of Supervised Ministry courses... SEANBC emphasizes contextualized curriculum in order to develop a strong indigenous church. Our goal is to equip students to understand Christian faith in terms of their own cultural context. Instruction will be structured to help the students to think, reflect, and act upon beliefs and practices from the perspective of his or her own worldview, culture, and social and historical situations. (Report to the Commissioner of Education 1997:1-3)

In this case, then many levels of flexibility are envisioned in the new institution.

While Vorapipatana's "Khit-Pen" model of education has its focus primarily on nonformal adult education, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model adapts its methodology to be used in other educational settings. With flexibility being a key feature, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model enables the teachers and the students to fit biblical truths to any persons, in any place, and by any church denominations. While putting flexibility at the center of the process, it by no means implies diminishing the centrality and the primacy of the Scripture as the source of authority in the task of theological education. Rather, the process infers that if the truth of the Scripture is to be truly and effectively relevant in responding to the issues and questions confronting the Thai churches, the methodology on which the theological education is based has to be highly and uniquely flexible.

Also, it should be noted that the model's consistent emphasis on problem-solving, interaction, cohabitation between theory and *praxis*, as well as its adaptable quality, is cherished overtly not only by theological educators in Thailand, but also by some in North America. Among them is Christine E. Blair, Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, who perceives educational models with such an emphasis to be the "answer to the problems" of theological education. In her insightful article "Understanding Adult Learners: Challenges for Theological Education," she writes:

I favor a dialogical, problem-solving educational model, in which teachers and learners are coinvestigators into the practice of ministry. Teachers bring the expertise of their discipline, their religious faith, and their experience of the church into this dialogue to guide students, while in turn honoring their students' knowledge, faith, and experience; teachers know that in teaching they also learn. This model... seemed to be the answer to the problems we professors were encountering... I do believe faculty members can be helped to understand adult learners better, and to develop more effective teaching models and strategies. (1997:21)

As this new model sets out to equip and encourage teachers and students to use their thinking ability in reflecting and integrating biblical truth in the light of their own situations, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model can be implemented in settings other than the formal classroom. In fact, it can be adapted in residential theological institutions, local churches, Sunday schools, lay training institutes, discipleship training centers, as well as any other extension learning programs. The "Khit-Pen" characteristics are adaptable.

Khit-Pen Diagramed

The way in which the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model functions may be diagrammed in terms of an Eastern image of religious activity common to Asians, a wheel spinning or "spinning wheel." The spinning wheel is of great cultural significance to the Thais in a variety of ways. First, it signifies the "cyclical" thinking pattern of the people, as opposed to the "linear" thinking pattern traditionally held in the West. According to Koyama, the Thai people live in a world of "many-timeness," of recurring seasons, of life being renewed at regular intervals which reflects the sense of harmony and recurrence of time. This worldview is in contrast to the Christian worldview (with Western influence) which has a linear concept of time (1974:41). The perpetual rhythms of living and learning are not separated or thought of in different sequences. Second, it represents the continuousness of life activity (as in the wheel of Karma). Third, using the spinning wheel as a diagram of the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model points to the fact that the task of the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model is a process, an ongoing, life-long commitment. The "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model strongly emphasizes the

value of life-long learning. It firmly holds that as long as the wheel of one's life keeps spinning, there is always need for one to learn by being a "Khit-Pen" man or woman.

One point for evaluating the lessons in the first year at SEANBC was to see whether or not the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education dynamics were present in the life of the students. As it is shown in the diagram, if the full understanding, appreciation, and effectiveness of this model is to be realized, the five stages must be functionally connected. The diagram of the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model may be drawn as follows:

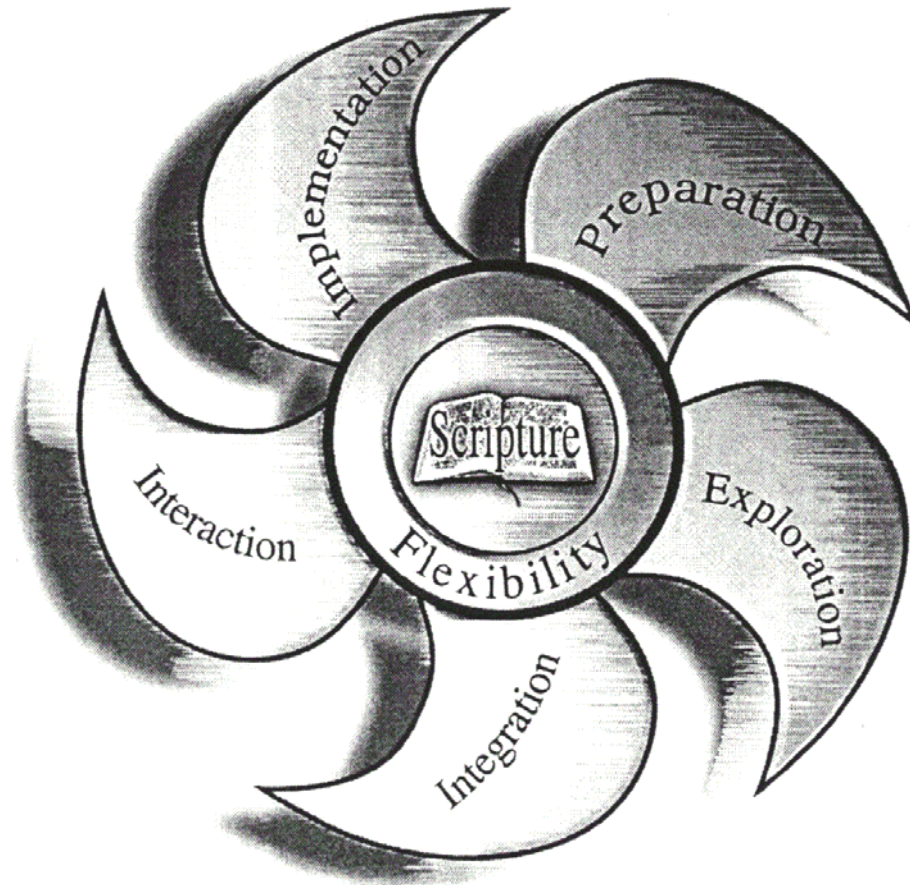


Figure 7: Diagram Showing the Connection Between the "Khit-Pen" Model's Five Stages.

Observation

When successful, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model will increase the effectiveness of Thai pastors in relating the gospel to the realities of life, and the problem will be solved. Thai students in Bible schools and seminaries will learn to exercise their intellectual ability in reflecting the scriptural truths in light of the issues and questions in the context in which they live. They will learn from, and interact with, the people with the intent to understand the cultural context in which they minister. As a methodology for contextualizing theological education, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model will help students to know the Scripture and their people, and to be able to blend text with the context.

It is quite difficult to comprehend fully why Vorapipatana's "Khit-Pen" model of education was not widely caught on by Thais. I notice, however, that resistance to innovation and reluctance to take risks on the part of Thai educators in the past seemed to be one of the main reasons for such refusal. Since the primary concern of Vorapipatana's "Khit-Pen" was essentially to enable learners to break away from traditional fatalism and passivity (or to "think outside of the box"), it was unlikely to gain

wide popularity from traditional educators who were accustomed to maintaining their bureaucratic structure and status quo.

However, the demands for the country's development have given Vorapipatana's "Khit-Pen" model a new appreciation of nonformal ways of providing education for those who either have not had access to formal schooling or whose formal education has proved inadequate or irrelevant. In the wake of a push toward industrialization and development which demands the participation of large sections of population, the formal system of education fails to give them the skills they need to compete in technological societies. The existing formal institutions are incapable of undertaking a task of such magnitude.

Likewise, the "Khit-Pen" Theological Education Model steps outside anything that has ever been done before in Thailand. As an integration and interaction between the West and the East, this model synthesizes and applies concepts and principles in line with successful contemporary models. It sets out to answer specific questions and issues that have been raised for leaders in Thai context. It helps leaders to think through the issues and problems in light of the scriptural truth. Through this model Thai church leaders are equipped to exercise their intellectual ability and creativity, thereby formulating their own thinking pattern in applying biblical truths in the light of the issues and questions within their life context.

Notes

1. The Thai religious calendar includes several special days marking Buddhist holy days. *Asalha Puja* coincides with the full-moon day of the eighth lunar month, and for the Buddhists is a special day of religious significance. It commemorates the day when the Buddha preached his first sermon to his first five disciples more than two thousand five hundred years ago. *Khao Phansa* which coincides with the rainy season that starts around July and lasts for about three months. This is a time when it is very inconvenient for people to travel. It was recorded in the Buddhist Scriptures that some farmers complained to the Buddha that his disciples damaged some of the crops when they walked through cultivated fields. The Buddha thus made it a rule for all his disciples to refrain from traveling during the three months of the rainy season. *Makha Bucha* is an important religious day for the Buddhists in Thailand. It is the *Makha Bucha* day or the day to commemorate the occasion when 1,250 disciples of the Lord Buddha voluntarily came to visit their spiritual master without prior appointment. In the full-moon night of the third lunar month, the Lord Buddha reached to them what is now known as the Heart of Buddhism, which can be summed up as the three principles. First, to refrain from sinful acts, speeches and thoughts. Second, always to engage in virtuous conduct. Third, to endeavor to purify one's own mind. The way to achieve all these is to practice *Sila* (Moral Conduct), *Samadhi* (Meditation), and *Panya* (Wisdom).

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