

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism in Thailand

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Abstract: *Buddhism in Thailand is the main religion of Theravada Buddhism, but there is evidence that Thailand still has the presence of Mahayana Buddhism transmitted from northern India to neighbouring countries, including Thailand. With the proofs and surveys show that Thailand still exists Mahayana Buddhism among the nation is considered a minor state religion.*

Keywords: Theravada, Buddhism, Mahayana

1. Theravada

That the primary kind of Buddhism dropped at Thailand was that of Buddhism (The school of thought of the Elders) college is incontestible by varied archeologic remnants uncovered in Nakon Pathom's investigations, like the Dharma Chakra (Wheel of Law), Buddha's footprints and chairs, and writings within the Pali idiom, beat stones. Such objects of Buddhist worship existed in the Republic of India before the religious mystic image was introduced that later appeared through Greek influence. Therefore, Buddhism should have reached Thailand within the 3rd century B.C. and should be a lot of or less constant kind of Buddhism propagated by the good Buddhist emperor Asoka. This sort of Buddhism was considered Buddhism or Hinayana (The Lower Vehicle) contrary to the word Mahayana (The Higher Vehicle); shortly, when the Buddha's death, the two faculties emerged. Once Buddha image worship became common in the Republic of India, it unfolds to alternative countries wherever Buddhism was already introduced. This is often meted out by the truth that a lot of Buddha pictures, notably those of Gupta fashion, were discovered within the remains of Nakon Pathom and neighbouring cities. Judgment from religious mystic image fashion realized it might be probable that ancient Buddhist missionaries came to Thailand from Magadha (Bihar State, India).

We have proof from Ceylon's ancient chronicle Mahavamsa that Theravada School was the first Buddhism introduced in Thailand, as propagated by Emperor Asoko. The Asoka missionaries led by Buddhist priests were sent to neither region in one of their sections dealing with Dhamma propagation. One of these regions was regarded as Suvarnabhumi, where it was said that two Theras (senior monks), Sona and Uttara, continued. Now views vary where precisely this Suvarnabhumi territory is Thai scientists claim it's in Thailand and its headquarters is in Nakon Pathom, while Burma academics claim Suvarnabhumi is in Burma, the capitol is in Thaton, a town in eastern Burma close the Martaban Gulf. Still, other Laos and Cambodia scientists say Suvarnabhumi's land is in their territories. Historical records in this regard being meagre as they are, arguing about the precise boundary of Suvarnabhumi might not be useful. However, considering all points, one thing seems clear beyond dispute.

That's Suvarnabhumi was a word that was widely used in old moments to indicate that portion of Southeast Asia that now encompasses Southern Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Malaya. Suvarnabhumi is a mixture of "Suvarna" and

"Bhumi." Both words are Sanskrit; the former means wealth, and the latter means land. Therefore, Suvarnabhumi implies Golden Land or Gold Land. Taking into account the abundance of nature that has just been mentioned in that part of Asia; the term seems appropriate. The reason the academics of Thailand articulated the opinion that Nakon Pathom was the capitol of Suvarnabhumi owing to revealed archeological findings in the neighboring region. As mentioned above, none of those in Burma, not even Thaton, could find such a large and varied number of ancient relics as found by Nakon Pathom. Those archaeological artefacts related to Emperor Asoka and subsequent Guptas by era and fashion. Even the Great Stupa of Nakon Pathom (Phra Pathom Chedi) is identical to the renowned Sanchi Stupa of India, constructed by Asoka, mainly if the Shikhara or bottom part were to be removed.

A large number of Thai archeologists consider the Shikhara to be later a complement to the pagoda, which, in other words, mixed Thai esthetics and Indian architecture. The term Pathom Chedi (Pali: Pathama Cetiya) also means "First Pagoda," Probably Suvarnabhumi's first pagoda constructed. This would readily blend into the Mahavamsa document that at the injunction of Emperor Asoka, Theras Sona and Uttara came and set up Buddhism in Suvarnabhumi land. Realizing that Asoka ruled from 269 to 237 B.C., we can fairly say that Buddhism extended to Thailand during the 3rd century B.C. It is important to remember that the background of the introduction of Indian culture to Southeast Asia also began more or less during the same period.

2. Mahayana

The sect has extended to neighboring countries like Sumatra, Java and Kampuja, Cambodia, with development of the Mahayana Buddhism in India, particularly under King Kanishka, in the north of India, during the second quarter of the first century AD. The Mahayana Buddhism has probably been transferred to Burma, Pegu (Burma) and Dvaravati (now Nakon Pathom, Western Thailand) from Magadha (in Bihar, India) at the same time as it reaches the Malay Archipelago. At that time, though, it probably had no stronghold there; hence, there was no spectacular trace left of it. Beginning in the early fifth century A.D. In succession, Mahayana Buddhist missionary began to go to Sumatra from Kashmir in north India.

The Faith spread from Sumatra to Java and Cambodia. By approximately 757 A.D. In Sumatra (Buddhist Era: 1300) and throughout Malaysia and the Archipelago, the rule of the

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

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Srivijaya ruled with his headquarters was expanded. Part of South Thailand fell under the reign of the King of Srivijaya (from Surattani downstream). Being Mahayanists, Srivijaya's rulers gave great encouragement and support to Mahayana Buddhism's propagation. Today we have plenty of proof in South Thailand to support that Mahayana Buddhism once prevailed there. This proof is discovered in big amounts of stupas and chaityas and pictures, among which Buddha and Bodhisattvas votive texts (Phra Phim), all of them of the same sort as in Java and Sumatra. The influences of the Mahayana are indicated by both the chetiyas in Chaiya (Jaya) in South Thailand and the Nakon Sri Thammarath (Nagar Sri Dharmaraja).

Between 1002 and 1182 A.D. Kings of the Surya kingdom governed Cambodia exclusively. Their Kingdom has spread throughout the Thai region of today. The Suryavarman rulers, being adherents of Mahayana Buddhism with a potent mixture of Brahminism, have done much to propagate and establish the Northern School tenets. An exciting rock poem, now maintained at the National Museum of Bangkok, informs us about 1017 A.D. In Lopburi, in Central Thailand and once the capital city (B.E. 1550), governed one of the kings of Nakon Sri Thammarath who had linked his ancestors to the Srivijayan leaders. The queen had a child who subsequently became Kambuja's leader (Cambodia) and held Thailand for a long time under Cambodia's suzerainty. There was a great deal of amalgamation of the religions and cultures of the two countries during this period.

The rock poem under account likely relates to one of the kings of Suryavarman who was related to blood with the leaders of Srivijaya. We also know from the poem just stated that the prevalent type of Buddhism in Lopburi was that of Theravada and that Mahayana Buddhism, already developed in Cambodia, became common in Thailand only after Thailand fell under Cambodia. There are no signs, however, that Mahayana School has in any manner substituted Theravada.

This was because Theravada Buddhism was firmly based in Thailand when the Mahayana School was brought there. A rock poem in the Cambodian language shows that monks from both colleges, Theravada and Mahayana, were discovered in a Brahmanic Temple close Lopburi City. During this age, much of Thailand's remaining Brahmanic culture could be ascribed home to its origins in Cambodia. Many of the kings of Cambodia themselves were devoted followers of Brahminism and its ways of life. This era can be called the Mahayana Period, their predecessor. During these times, Sanskrit, the Hindus' sacred language, took its root deep in Thailand.

3. The Organization of Sangha

Formerly the Sangha organization, and by the Bhikkhu Sangha Act administration (B.E. 2484, A.D. 1943), Thailand's Sangha organisation was on a state-like row. The Sangharaja or Supreme Patriarch is the Kingdom's most important digital Buddhist. The King selects him from among the Sangha's most junior and skilled representatives in dealing with the government. The Sangharaja appoints a board of church ministers led by the Sangha Nayaka, The

function of the prime minister of the State is comparable. Four boards of the Church, namely the Ecclesiastical Administration Board, the Education Board, the Propagation Board and the Public Works Board, function under the Sangha Nayaka. Each board has with its staff a Sangha Mantri (similar to a secular administration minister).

The Sangha's four committees or ministries are to carry over the entire proceedings. ten ministers, all senior Sangha monks, are produced up of the Ecclesiastical Ministry, which in its way refers to the cabinet. There is also an Advisory Assembly (Sangha Sabha), which is equal to the National Assembly and has been chosen by numerous essential monasteries, of which 45 are representatives. The Sangha Sabha functions as the Ecclesiastical Ministerial Council's advisory body. Under the Sangha Sabha, the Sangha administration remains in line with the country's secular administration. All monks and novices (Samaneras) must live in monasteries scattered across the country. In cooperation with local individuals, each convent has its dean designated by the Ecclesiastical Ministerial Council.

It can be pointed out here that all of Thailand's divine appointments are based on academic achievements, seniority, personal behaviour and popularity, and further up in the Sangha, contacts with monks. The Ministry of Education has a religious affairs department which acts as a liaison office between Government and Sangha. In cooperation with the Ecclesiastical Ministerial Council, the Department of Religious Affairs works on all matters that influence the Sangha. For example, it issues all legal directives relating to the entire monk-gathering; it keeps records of Sangha property, such as land, etc.; It maintains the priests and monastery truth and numbers. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also schedules the Sangha officials' annual proposal. It can be noted that all shrines and monasteries are ownership of the State.

In 1962, the Bhikkhu Sangha Act was repealed in 1943, but a new law was enacted. Under current legislation, the registries of Sangha Nayaka, Sangha Mantris and Sangha Sabha have been abolished. The Mahathera Samagama (Council of the Elders) leads by the Sangharaja itself, made up of not less than four sects and not more than eight subordinate servants (Maha theras). The Mahathera Samagama straight governs the whole sangha in collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

4. Education of Sangha

As is well understood, the original idea of joining the monkhood of men during or soon after the moment of the Buddha was to achieve freedom from worldly life through the Master's learning. Of course, such an idea stems from man's sense of aversion to mundane things. In other words, men entered monkhood in those far-off days with the sole purpose of getting rid of the miseries of life and obtaining spiritual freedom or Nirvana. Such self-renunciation instances are discovered in the Buddhists' religious texts. With the moment, as is only average, many of the Buddha's premature follower's concepts and methods have changed. Today, more than 2,500 years after Buddha's passing, even if the idea of becoming a Bhikkhu remains very elevated

among Buddhists of all lands, it should be recognized in practice that the original admonitions of the master about why and for what purposes man entered the monkhood have deviated. Generalizing any issue is often dangerous but it can not be said very well that today, in Thailand, as in other Buddhist nations, the habits of Buddhist men who join monkhood are significantly influenced by the traditional dictation, the desire for training and other internal factors rather than a desire for emancipation. Many enter the Sangha through real enjoyment of spiritual existence and study of religion, or through the desire to serve Buddhism and their nation. Finally, in the Thai Sangha also those whose lives are strongly dedicated to the supreme objective of emancipation and the advice of others towards that objective are not entirely missing. In Thailand, with many devoted disciples in Sangha and the laity, there were, and are, holy and capable masters of meditation. In Thailand there are also the so-called Thudong bhikkhus monks, who follow the ancient way of modest living embodied in 'strict observances' or in the Dhutangas.

One includes those who become monks, sometimes for their lives, and the other who enter the Order. The Thai Buddhists are considered great merit-earning achievement to serve in the monkhood even for a short period. This age-old custom is followed even by kings. For example, the current ruler, H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej also noted the tradition for twice a month. Four months with full pay for serving in monkhood are authorized to leave government officials. The idea is to enable young men to acquire Buddhism knowledge and thus become good citizens. Life as a monk provides them with a practical understanding of how it should be an optimal Buddhist living. The overall inclination in rural districts is still to offer more deference to those who have worked in monkhood already. Such individuals should be more "adults" than those who have not experienced the lives of the monk.

Besides, Thailand was once and still considered a place of apprenticeship for waters (monasteries and temples), in which all men could, irrespective of their position of life, go and profit. This is particularly so in the event of the countryside's economically disabled men. There is no shortage of instances in which people jumped fast on the rank ladder of life after being educated while in monkhood. There are no cultural limitations or cultural prejudice against the return to private lives of monks if and when they are unable to fulfil their responsibilities as monks. There are cases where, for some reason or the other, men entered monkhood more than once, although such practice can not be said to be in public esteem. Looked at from this point of view, the institution of entry into Thailand's monkhood, besides being a route to gain personal and religious insight, is a method of social uplifting which could benefit those not so well placed in life. A distinct tale is judged from the concept of embracing the existence of a monk as stated by the Buddha, whether or not such exercise is praiseworthy.

Indeed, even today when modernism enters Thailand profoundly, approximately half of the primary schools in Thailand are still waters. With sex and offences on the rise in the nation, Thailand today is hearing more and more the scream for a stronger Buddhist lives. In Thailand, the

traditional education of monks and novices centres primarily on the study of the Buddhist Doctrine (Dhamma) and Pali, the language in which the scriptures of Theravada are composed. There are three grades of the past, the research of the Doctrine, with exams accessible to both monks and non-specialists.

The ones passing such tests are known as "Nak Dhamma," which means one who knows the Dhamma. The second, i.e. The Pali survey, has seven grades, beginning with the third grade and finishing with the ninth grade. The word "Parinna," meaning academic degree of Thai language, is called by the students who pass the Pali exam "Parian" (Pali: Parinna = penetrating know-how). For instance, following their titles, priests and novices completing the first Pali exam are allowed to compose "P. 3." Generally speaking, the researches of Dhamma and Pali go hand in hand and require at least seven years to finish. The rigidity of both lessons and especially the Pali language can be assumed because very few learners are able to reach the largest level in an ongoing examination, the Parian 9 course.

In the good old days when life was less productive than now, moving away from even the reduced Dhamma and Pali exam was of great value in obtaining critical public positions. Things are quite distinct now, though; even those who have been active in the most significant Pali exam, the 9th grade, discover it challenging to get the right job. A fresh perspective on the schooling of monasteries in Thailand has created early.

With the rapid advance of science and the shrinking of the world, Thailand's Buddhist leaders, both monks and laypeople, are awakened to the need to impart broader education to Sangha members if the Sangha is to serve the Buddhist cause well, "for the benefit of many, for the welfare of many." Two higher learning institutes for monks and novices are now functioning in Bangkok as a consequence of the fresh perspective.

One is the Rajvidyalaya Mahachulalong-Korn, and the other is the Rajvidyalaya Mahamongkut. Both are organized on a new basis of universal diversity, and both seem to make satisfactory progress in this direction. Among the remarkable characteristics of these two schools is the inclusion in the curriculum of specific secular topics not inconsistent with the practice of monks (Vinaya); the objective is to offer monks an all-round education in an attempt to allow them to serve stronger the purpose of Buddhism during contemporary circumstances.

So much for "long-term" monk schooling. Those who enter permanently into the Order, mostly during the Vassas or Buddhist Lent for three summer months, are trained shortly and devoted to the main principles and features of Buddhism.

These people enter the monkhood, as noted above, either by their genuine desire for knowledge of the dhamma, by custom or, generally speaking, by the dhamma.

Wats and Monks

The word "wat" means a combination of monastery and temple. It is the monks and novices' residence. Thailand, as a whole, has about 21,000 wats. There are almost two hundred wats in Bangkok alone. There are as many as 600 registered monks and novices in some large wats in Bangkok. Wats are Thai painting and design centres. Thai culture flows from wats to a considerable extent. Wat-lands and buildings are given by royalty, wealthy individuals, and the overall audience. What is Thai rural life's most vital institution? The agricultural community's cultural existence focuses on wat. A wat provides the society as a recreation centre, dispensary, college, community centre, a shelter for the elderly and the poor, cultural service and health organization, town clock, restaurant, media organization and data centre, in addition to bringing out the apparent religious activities. A wat is led by a "Chao Avas" (monk) who is sensitive to wat order preservation, adequate execution of spiritual facilities and ceremonies, and inmates' general security.

There are also "church kids" in wats, besides priests and novices, who help priests and learners in multiple respects, such as carrying and organizing meals, cleaning dormitories, washing blue clothes, etc. Usually, in one manner or another, these children have linked to resident monks, and their remain is safe. Most of them are students with far-off homes who would find it impossible to get an education otherwise.

This is particularly the case in Bangkok, where it is hard to get housing and where all more significant county teaching positions are located. The 1954 census shows that in Thailand there are as many as 119,044 temple kids, which is not a tiny number. Therefore, the establishment of the wat, in itself a donation of Buddhism, has in no small extent attributes to the Thai Buddhists' security and advancement. Of course, among reduced strata of culture, the benefits in this respect are more visible than for the happy few. In addition to engaging in doctrinal study and observing disciplinary rules (Vinaya) in genetic engagement, monks are expected to be "people's friends, philosophers, and guides." One of the most typical forms in which monks assist promote social sustainability among different sections of the community is to preach to crowds mouth to mouth or over the radio. The reality that Buddhism stresses the need to pursue a moral existence to achieve joy here and hereafter may not be out of position to reiterate. Cooperation and blessing of monks are indispensable in most ceremonies and it all, whether private or public. In fact, in the lives of the ordinary Thai Buddhists, priests are people from the cradle into the tomb who are continually turned to help them morally.

In urban areas, the function of priests is even more crucial because local temple is the cultural core of the society and not only a secure one. People come at the church together and have a sense of camaraderie. Religious rituals and ceremonies on wats always accompany social activities: they are opportunities for people, particularly young people, to enjoy themselves at festivals, fun and festivities. This spiritual activity element enables ordinary people to rest and satisfy their recreational requirements. There were not a few marriage alliances that started at wat premises from quick

con contacts. As a spiritual and ethical example, monks are the most venerable individuals who are near to people's life in Thai nation culture. In moments of crises, individuals give guidance and motivation to monks. The Sangha has recognized the laity's attitude to regard and regard with few changes and has worked up to the morality of the faith in particular.

Layperson

Throughout its more than 2,500 years of existence, Buddhism has been closely linked to the community of laypeople. The word 'Upasaka' is the female equivalent of 'Upasika,' and there were many 'Upasakas' and 'Upasikas' in Buddhist culture straight from his creator, whose faith in the Teachings of the Master led to the dissemination of the Doctrine. The names of Buddhist supporters like Anathapindika, Visakha, Asoka, Kanishka, etc. are still on Buddhist lip. The Buddhism could not have distributed to the present without the sponsorship of Emperor Asoka and its past might have been distinct. In India, the nation of its birth and in most countries where its signal has been acknowledged, Buddhism is received without delay from people of all classes, especially the ruling class. The history of Buddhist protests in China, Japan, Burma, Ceylon and Tibet, etc., amply justifies this declaration. In the event of Thailand, too, since its entry into the nation, Kings and Commoners have kindly greeted and sponsored Buddhism. It is well known that numerous Thai rulers have been ordained monkhoods and have become known in the Dhamma for their erudition. Perhaps the most prominent among this category of national supporters is King Mongkut, Rama IV.

Thai men are also very much involved in greater comprehension and co-operation between the religious group and the monkhood. After all, personal experience is more important than mere theoretical understanding. In one of his lectures, Buddha himself encouraged his supporters to carry out their responsibilities well in order to let the Dhamma last a long time in the globe. One of the responsibilities of religious leaders, as instructed by the Master, is to take care of the needs of the priests. It is therefore traditional custom for layperson in all Buddhist nations, particularly in pursuing Theravada Buddhism, to see that monks have not been granted the absence of four requirements, namely nutrition, apparel, refuge and medication. Although existence in any sector in the current sustainable economy is not that simple, no one can tell somewhat that in Thailand, monk-life benefits significantly from a surplus of the above four requirements. Since Bhikkhus is not permitted to pursue any academic operations, it is evident that for their life, they rely entirely on the laity.

In exchange for this voluntary assistance offered by the audience, monks are anticipated to lead exceptional life to profit both themselves and those who point to them as educators and guardians. We saw how moral monks influence the people. The laity and the Bhikkhu Sangha in Thailand cooperate closely and voluntarily. To a considerable part, this is because some of its employees are sure to be discovered in an ordinary Thai household who have worked in the Sangha for some moment. Yellow roses

are a symbol of the Master to the masses, and Bhikkhus are Dhamma supporters to be deferred in all circumstances. It is important to remember that before the State takes legal intervention against them, Bhikkhus or Samaneras discovered capable of serving offences are officially stripped of their yelks positions, and this is accomplished regularly under the permit of the principal monk or abbot. "To do bad" is a cardinal point in Buddhism's doctrines (Kusala Kamma). Therefore, the idea of doing meritorious acts is very deeply integrated into Buddhist minds. There are countless ways to do great or do great (Punna) among the Thai Buddhists. Every moment he provides monks alms or adds to any religious ritual, a person gets value. Obtaining ordination in monkhood for a short time naturally carries great value. Besides that, there are other techniques for obtaining value, such as reducing the caged birds or releasing the caught fish, plastering the Buddha's gilded leaves or religious monuments, connecting a fresh temple to the construction or maintaining the ancient one, etc.

The Law of Karma, which has the corresponding result of each action and the faith in renaissance, is two important factors in developing this strategy. While all healthy Buddhists aspire to the "Nibbana," which is the greatest happiness in Buddhism, many still think that it is not easily accessible and are born on this island, in heaven or on some other land or, worst of all, in the hell. As long as they live, they must try well, so that both in this life and the life to come good results will be achieved. "Be a signal for yourself. Every man must strive for his salvation."-These were the words of the Master. Because of this, Theravada Buddhism is often said to have an individualistic attitude. However, as the lengthy period of its life will demonstrate, it is very compliant.

Indeed, Buddhism's tolerance has always permitted for instance in Thailand, many of the views and methods that have often helped to complement or broaden their ideas or to complete holes to be consumed by other outlets. In this connection, animism and Brahmanism can be cited; Both are essential supplements to Thailand's popular Buddhism. An overseas writer rightly noted that an easy-going nature is the behaviour of the Thai people towards their religion. They don't bother to differentiate between the different components of their Faith; it's all a piece for them. Only the advanced few are worried about the reasoning and simplicity of the Doctrine. They know too much about their legends, their festivals, their ideals, and their general message that "goodwill make good." All in all, the Thais can be said to appreciate their religion. Religious observances are sacred occasions for them as social and recreational. Besides, Buddhism is enough for the vast bulk to think, think and appreciate.

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