

Chapter II

The Origin, and Development of Buddhism in Thailand

Introduction

Thai Buddhism was based on the religious movement founded in the sixth century B.E., by Siddhartha , later known as the Buddha, who urged the world to relinquish the extremes of sensuality and self-mortification and follow the enlightened Middle Way. The focus of this religion is on man, not gods; the assumption is that life is pain or suffering, which is a consequence of craving, and that suffering can end only if desire ceases. The end of suffering is the achievement of nirvana (in Theravada Buddhist scriptures, Nibbana), often defined as the absence of craving and therefore of suffering, sometimes as enlightenment or bliss.¹

By the third century B.C., Buddhism had spread widely in Asia, and divergent interpretations of the Buddha's teachings had led to the establishment of several sects. The teachings that reached Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) were given in a final written form in Pali (an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Sanskrit) to religious centers there in the first century A.D. and provided the Tipitaka (the scriptures or "three baskets"; in Sanskrit, Tripitaka) of Theravada Buddhism.

So, when Buddhism arose in India, it also, could quickly grow into a great religion, due to a multiplicity of different reasons. Nevertheless, after several centuries it began to decline, and by the thirteenth century C.E. it had disappeared from its native land altogether. A different set of environmental factors played a part in both the rise and the decline. At its inception, the spiritual climate of India was ideal for the founding of a new religion; Brahmanism had lost its appeal and the alternative ascetic practices that some resorted to were not suitable for the majority of

¹ George, A.Sioris, *History of Buddhism* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2004), in <http://www.librarything.com> (12 June 2009)

people. Buddhism provided a path to Nirvana that everyone could take, and the innate compassion at the heart of the Buddha's teachings drew many to it.²

This chapter would cover the History, Origin and Development and the emergence of Buddhism, and the life of Buddha, in the 6th century B.E., basic tenets of the belief system, and the major sects throughout Asia.

2.1 Brief history of the origin of Buddhism in India

Firstly, we can trace back the origin of Buddhism during the Vedic Age (1000 BC-600 BC) or Epic Age, where numerous small republics and kingdoms, in India, developed in arrogance and tyranny. According to the history, in that period the lower caste undergo the exploitation of the people that belonging to the upper castes, such as Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors). The higher castes did not allow the lower castes like Shudras and untouchables to have their say in the society. This period also saw a rift developing between the Brahmins on one hand and the Kshatriyas on the other. The rising popularity and aspirations of the Brahmin priests began to collide with the authority of the Kshatriyas, who formed the ruling class of each kingdom or republic. The Kshatriyas were alarmed by the rising power of the Brahmins, but they could not do much as they required the services of the Brahmins in all religious rituals and state occasions.

In this period that Buddhism arose in India in the 6th century B.C.E. and it quickly grew as great religion, due to a multiplicity of reasons such as: "Buddhism provided a path to Nirvana that everyone could take, and the innate compassion at the heart of the Buddha's teachings drew many to it". Besides, the preaching of Lord Buddha revolves around attaining salvation from worldly sufferings, universal brotherhood, peace and non-violence, would also play an important factor or role in India society.³

² G.Bailey, G. and Mabbett I, *The sociology of Early Buddhism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), in [http:// www.flipkart.com](http://www.flipkart.com) (15 June 2009)

³ G.Bailey, G. and Mabbett I, *The sociology of Early Buddhism*.

Though Buddha was immensely accepted during his lifetime and the number of adherents continued to grow, it was only during the royal patronages of kings and rulers that added up to its domain. A number of Buddhist councils were held in different parts of the country. The First Buddhist Council was held during the 5th century at Rajgaha under the noble support of King Ajatasattu. The Second Buddhist Council was organised at Vaisali a hundred year later.

Buddhism flourished during the reign of King Ashoka the great, and Buddhism came to be established at the national level. Ashoka, after being greatly shocked at the bloody sight of Kalinga, had a change of heart. He later followed Buddhism and decided to lead a peaceful life. He set up a number of monuments and stupas all around the country. These pillars and stupas bore the noble teachings of the Buddhist faith. He even sent emissaries to far off countries to spread the message of Lord Buddha. After the death of Asoka, there followed a period of persecution under Pusyamitra Sunga (183-147 BCE).⁴

The second royal patron for Buddhism was Kaniska , and under his auspices, the Fourth Council was held. In the 2nd cent. before Christ King Kanishka sponsored a fourth religious council at Kashmir, at which the Sanskrit canon of the scriptures is said to have been fixed. This fixation was demanded by the new schism that broke between two radically different concepts of Buddhism, to become known as Mahayana (great vehicle) and Hinayana (small vehicle).

Kanishka promoted other changes. The relics of Buddhist saints came to be worshipped, images of Buddha were made objects of popular veneration, monasteries were opened to temporary residents and students who were taught secular subjects, and, in general, Buddhism was further transformed from an exotic cult to a religion of the many. Until the rise of the Gupta dynasty around 320 A.D., Buddhism fairly held its own in India. But under the Guptas Hinduism became dominant.

In spite of several brilliant representatives, the Buddhist religion, as I said declined on Indian soil -partly by absorption into the Hindu tradition which made Buddha an incarnation of its god Vishnu, partly by the Moslem invasion which was

⁴ Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism* (Windhorse Pubns January 1995), in <http://www.amazon.com> (15 June 2009)

intolerant of Buddhist anthropocentrism, and partly by the exportation of the valid Buddhist spirit into other countries in Southeast Asia, as well as in Tibet, Mongolia, China, Java, and Japan. Buddhism became increasingly a tradition of elite scholar-monks who studied in great monastic universities like Nalanda and Vikramashila in Northern India. Buddhism failed to adapt to changing social and political circumstances, and apparently lacked a wide base of support.

It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama, since no biography was recorded until hundreds of years after his death. Today, much of his life story is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different--and even contradictory--accounts of Gautama's life.⁵ But, before to talk about the strong influence that Buddhism would have in Brahmanism or Indian society, as well as in the world is more opportune for me, to give, a short introduction of the life of Siddharta Gautama.

2.2 Short introduction of Buddha's life

Buddhism, grew out of a philosophy of life as conceived by a person two thousand years ago, before Christ, into a world religion. This man was called Siddharta Gautama, an Indian prince, later known as the Buddha, (one who is Awake, derived from the Sanskrit word 'bud' that means "enlightenment".) and he was the founder of Buddhism, and the capital of his kingdom was Kapilavastu. It was prophesized that Gautama (who was named Siddhartha) would become a saint and renounce the world. In fact, A hermit, who lived in the mountains not far away, noticing a glory about the castle and interpreting it as a good omen, came down to the palace and was shown the child. He predicted: "This prince, if he remains in the palace after his youth, will become a great King to rule the Four Seas. But if he forsakes the household life to embrace a religious life, he will become a Buddha and the world's Savior." At first the King was pleased because of the prophecy, but later

⁵ Kenneth Boa, *Cult, World Religions and the Occult* (London: Cambridge, 1977), p. 35.

became troubled at the thought of the possibility of his only son leaving the palace to become a homeless recluse. Therefore, his father, King Suddhodana, took all possible care to keep Gautama in a palace full of luxuries and comfort.

However, Gautama was not satisfied with his materialistic surroundings, and one day, the young prince sneaked out of the palace in his chariot to see the outside world that was still unknown to him. He saw four things that forever changed his life: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a beggar. Deeply distressed by the suffering he saw, he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find the answer to the problem of pain and human suffering. His charioteer told him that all this was a part of life. Then Gautama saw a saint or wander ascetic, and was perplexed by the calmness on his face. The charioteer told him that the saint had renounced all materialistic things and therefore he was content and happy. This incident left an indelible mark on the mind of the young prince, and one night he left his beautiful wife and infant son and began his journey seeking wisdom.

He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests, but became disillusioned with the teachings of Hinduism. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. Legend has it that he eventually learned to exist on one grain of rice a day which reduced his body to a skeleton. He soon concluded, however, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self realization but merely weakened the mind and body.⁶

Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation. While deep in meditation under a fig tree known as the Bohdi tree (meaning, "tree of wisdom"), Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness called Nirvana. Gautama then became known as Buddha, the "Enlightened one." He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering. His message now needed to be proclaimed to the whole world.⁷

⁶ Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress press, 1984), p.4.

⁷ Manich, Jumsai , *Understanding Thai Buddhism* (Bangkok : Office of the National Culture Commission, 1996), p.9.

2.3 Buddhism as a religion that captured the enthusiasm of the people

After attaining Enlightenment, the Buddha proceeded to Sarnath, near Benares, and delivered his first sermon in a place called Deer Park. From this time on the Prince was known by different names; some spoke of him as Buddha, the Perfectly Enlightened One; some spoke of him as Shakyamuni, the Sage of the Shakya clan; and still others spoke of him affectionately as the Blessed One. He went first to Mrigadava in Varanasi where the five mendicants who had lived with him during the six years of his ascetic life were staying. At first they shunned him, but after he had talked with them, they believed in him and became his first followers. Then he went to Rajagriha castle and won over King Bimbisara who had always been his friend.

From there he went about the country living on alms and persuading men to accept his way of life, and men responded to him as thirsty men seek water and hungry men seek food. Two great teachers, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, and their two thousand disciples came to him. At first the Buddha's Father, King Suddhodana, suffering inwardly from his son's retirement, held aloof, but afterward became his faithful disciple; and Maha-Prajapati, the Buddha's step-mother, and the Princess Yasodhara, his wife, and all the members of the Shakya clan, believed in him and followed him. And multitudes of others became his devoted and faithful followers.

For forty-five years the Buddha went about the country preaching and persuading men to follow his way of life, but at last, at Vaisali on the way from Rajagriha to Sravasti, he became ill and predicted that after three months he would enter Nirvana. Still he journeyed on until he reached Pava where he was made critically ill by food offered by Cunda, a blacksmith. Then by easy stages in spite of great pain and weakness, he reached the forest on the border of Kuninagara castle. Lying between two large sala trees, he continued his teachings to his favorite disciples until the last moment. Thus passed into the unknown the greatest of the world's teachers and the kindest of men.

Under the oversight of Ananda, the Buddha's favorite disciple, the body was cremated by his friends in Kusinagara castle. Seven of the neighboring rulers

under the lead of King Ajatasatru demanded that the ashes be divided among them. The King of the Kunsinagara castle at first refused and the dispute even threatened to end in war, but by the advice of a wise man named Dona, the crises passed and the ashes were divided and buried under eight great monuments. Even the embers of the fire and the earthen jar that had held the ashes were divided and given to two others to be likewise honored. So, as I mentioned above, Gautama Buddha passed away at the age of 80 in Kusinagara castle near Gorakhpur (in the state of Uttar Pradesh).

During His own life, Gautama Buddha discarded the Vedic Brahmanical system, which divided the society into various castes and further alienated the people from one another on the basis of their birth. He strongly opposed lengthy rituals, animal sacrifices and ceremonial worship. According to his doctrine, the existence of God is irrelevant. He laid emphasis on self-effort to attain salvation. He believed that everyone could achieve the path of Nirvana as salvation from their materialistic life.

After that, during the time of Siddharta Gautama, in India was a land of prevailing social unrest and political instability. There were sixteen major states and several smaller ones in northern India alone. Though there were many different forms of government, monarchies and oligarchical republics were predominant. A money economy had developed, giving rise to an immense accumulation of wealth in the mercantile class in particular. Merchants were frequently wealthier than kings, creating a dire struggle between political and economic power. As A.K. Warder observes, "In this society most people found their freedom seriously and increasingly restricted, their property and their lives insecure, the future uncertain and probably worse than the past".

The Brahmins, the top social caste, had become extremely powerful due to their crucial role in the execution of sacrifices, which, if correctly performed, had immense mystical potency. Nevertheless, few could afford to pay for these sacrifices. Brahmanism, with recondite teachings that were understood only by the uppermost elite, had little appeal for the masses. Many were dissatisfied with Brahmanical society, and a number of unorthodox philosophical sects arose. The main schools were those of the Jains, Ajivikas, Lokayatas, and Agnostics. But the rigorous ascetic practices engendered by most of these were too exacting for the majority of householders.

The presence of Buddha, in that period, play an important role in Indian society. Buddha founded an unorthodox philosophical school, in which demanded no intense physical austerities; his teachings were simple and empirical, accessible to all. Unlike Brahmanism, which was essentially ritualistic and mythological, the Buddha's teachings were inherently psychological. He stated that each person could achieve Nirvana, the ultimate spiritual fulfillment and dissolution of the ego. He preached in the vernacular, Pali, so even the lower castes could hear his message. Buddhism effectively ignored caste – all castes could follow the Middle Way and eventually gain enlightenment, no matter how low they were in society.

An order of nuns was established alongside an order of monks; in all of this there was a pervading notion of social equality that gave the religion strength. As well as the religion's optimistic outlook on the potential of each individual to transcend suffering, its accessibility and democracy rendered it immensely appealing to the people. The establishment of the Sangha played an important role in the religion's rise. The Sangha referred to the community of monks and nuns which linked all Buddhist monasteries together; it served as a spiritual example for the lay community. Buddhism was a proselytizing religion; its monks and nuns were zealous about spreading the Buddha's message, and some monks even risked their lives by traveling out of India to preach the way out of suffering.⁸ Thus, the Sangha played a crucial role to the early success of Buddhism.

Buddhism was also highly economical. The lavish expenditure required for Vedic sacrifices had taken its toll on many; monarchs had often taxed their subjects for the funds and those in poorer circumstances had no means of assuring their personal prosperity by sacrifice. Following the Eightfold Path of the Buddha, on the other hand, cost nothing. The royal patronage Buddhism gained from its very inception further strengthened the religion. The Buddha, a Kshatriya prince who had forsaken his former life to gain enlightenment, attracted the notice of many kings. Bimbisara and Ajatasatru of Magadha and Prasenajit of Kosala were only a few of the numerous rulers who converted to the new religion. The support of the ruling class

⁸ G.Bailey, G. and Mabbett I, *The sociology of Early Buddhism*

would become significant to the propagation of Buddhism, but it was only one of the many factors that surrounded the religion's rise. It was the innate merit of the Buddha's teachings that, sowed in the right historical environment, assured the religion a blossoming future.

Buddhism from its inception was a religion that captured the enthusiasm of the rich and poor alike. It was a religion that preached a way out of suffering, in a simple and direct fashion that could be understood by the common man. Unlike the Brahmanism that had become too recondite and scholarly for the masses, Buddhism fulfilled the spiritual needs of the people; every person could work their way towards enlightenment. Its notions of social equality earned it much success and the establishment of the Sangha gave it strength.

As it was a proselytizing religion it spread quickly. It flourished for centuries, and during the lifetime of Gautama Buddha, as I said, a large number of people, as well as many Kings became his followers and Buddhism became the state religion of a number of states like Magadh, Kosala and Kaushambi. Buddha, at that time was also sending out the first group of sixty disciples to propagate his Doctrine. So, during the Buddha's lifetime, Buddhism spread rapidly through the great personality of the Buddha himself and through the spirit of renunciation, self-discipline and sacrifice of the disciples who formed the Sangha and followed the Buddha's example.⁹

2.4 The reign of the king Ashoka, and his conversion to Buddhism

Initially, Buddhism remained one of the many small sects in India. The main breakthrough came when King Asoka (ca. 270-232 BCE) converted to Buddhism. He did not make it a state religion, but supported all ethical religions. He organized the spreading of Buddhism throughout India, but also beyond; most importantly to Shri Lanka. Three months after the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana (passing away), his immediate disciples convened a council at Rajagaha. The disciples still

⁹ Ven. Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress press, 1984), p.28.

living up to these ideal, continued to spread Buddhism far and wide. In the first century of Buddhist Era, two Buddhist Councils were held to protect and preserve the purity of the Buddha's teaching. The First Council was held by 500 Arahants at Rajagaha after the passing away of the Buddha. The purpose of the Council was to fix the Doctrines and the Disciplines as taught and laid down by the Buddha. At this Council the Venerable Kassapa was the president, while the Venerable Upali and Ananda were chosen to recite the Vinaya and the Dhamma respectively. They were very important personalities who have been specialized in the two areas of the teachings: The Dharma: Ananda, the closest constant companion and disciple of the Buddha for 25 years. Endowed with a remarkable memory, Ananda was able to recite what was spoken by the Buddha. And the Vinaya: Upali remembered all the Vinaya rules.

Only these two sections - the Dharma and the Vinaya - were recited at the First Council (no mention was made of the Abhidharma yet). Though there were no differences of opinion on the Dharma there was some discussion about the Vinaya rules. Before the Buddha's Parinirvanana, he had told Ananda that if the Sangha wished to amend or modify some minor rules, they could do so. But Ananda forgot to ask the Buddha what the minor rules were. As the members of the Council were unable to agree as to what constituted the minor rules, Maha Kassapa finally ruled that no disciplinary rule laid down by the Buddha should be changed, and no new ones should be introduced. No intrinsic reason was given. Maha Kassapa did say one thing, however: "If we changed the rules, people will say that Ven. Gautama's disciples changed the rules even before his funeral fire has ceased burning." At the Council, the Dharma was divided into various parts and each part was assigned to an Elder and his pupils to commit to memory. The Dharma was then passed on from teacher to pupil orally. The Dharma was recited daily by groups of people who regularly cross-checked with each other to ensure that no omissions or additions were made.

Most importantly, there lived at Vesali a large number of monks who were lax in discipline. The elders of the Order then challenged them to an open

debate. After the lax monks had been defeated, seven hundred Arahants held the Second Council to revise and confirm the Canon.¹⁰ According to the Theravadin school (Rahula), about one hundred years after the Buddha's passing away, the Second Council was held to discuss some Vinaya rules, and no controversy about the Dharma was reported. The orthodox monks (Sthavarivada) said that nothing should be changed, while the others insisted on modifying some rules. Finally, a group of monks left the Council and formed the Mahasanghika - the Great Community. (The Mahasanghika should not to be confused with Mahayana.) According to another version (Skilton), the Second Council may have had two parts: initially in Vaisali, some 60 years after the Buddha, and 40 years after that, a meeting in Pataliputra, where Mahadeva maintained five theses on the Arhat. The actual split may have occurred at Pataliputra, not Vaisali over details of the Vinaya. In the non-Theravadin version of events, the Mahasangha followed the original Vinaya and the Sthaviravada (the Elders) wanted changes. What exactly happened is unlikely to be ever revealed, but the first split in the Sangha was a fact.

In B.E.218 there came to the throne of India one of the greatest men in history, King Ashoka, the first Buddhist emperor who ruled the Mauryan Empire for 41 years. In the early years of his reign, Ashoka was a fierce king. In the eighth year of his reign, he invaded and conquered Kalinga, a country of brave people in the south. The horrors of this conquest made him so remorseful over the suffering of the people that he gave up war completely. And it was at this time that king Ashoka became converted to Buddhism. From this moment he adopted the policy of Dharmamavijaya (conquest by righteousness or conquest of men's hearts by the Law of duty or Piety) in place of Sangamavijaya (conquest by war), and spent the rest of his life promoting the Dharma or the Law of Piety throughout his great empire.¹¹

He was changed from Candāsoka, or Ashoka the fierce, to Dharmāsoka, or Ashoka the Righteous, whose example all later great Kings tried to follow. Ashoka not only decided to renounce violence, and propagate the faith by building stupas and

¹⁰ G. Bailey, G. and Mabbett I, *The sociology of Early Buddhism*

¹¹ Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism* (USA: Princeton University, 1976), p. 111.

pillars in respect of all animal's life, but he also pushed people by enjoining to follow the Dharma. He also built roads, hospitals, houses, universities and irrigation system around the country. He treated his subjects as equals regardless of their religion, politics or castes. In accordance with his policy of piety, King Ashoka had his edicts inscribed on rocks and pillars which were scattered everywhere throughout his empire to carry his message to his people.

In the 18th year of reign, the Third Buddhist Council was held under his patronage at Pataliputra, his capital, with the object of purging the Sangha of heretics and preserving the pure teachings. It is said that 1,000 Arahants participated in this Council and the Venerable Tissa was the President. The Third Council was held to discuss the differences of opinion among the bhikkhus of different sects. At this Council differences of opinion were not confined to the Vinaya, but also concerned the Dharma. The President of this Council, compiled a book called the Kathavatthu which refuted the heretical, false views and theories held by some sects occurring at the time. The teaching approved and accepted by this Council became known as Sthaviras or Theravada, "Teaching of the Elders". The Abhidhamma Pitaka was included at this Council.

After the Council, nine missions of the elders were sent to preach the Dharma in various states and foreign countries. Of these, the first mission headed by the Elder Mahinda, son of King Ashoka himself, carried the message of Buddhism to Ceylon, as well as the Tripitaka to Sri Lanka, along with the commentaries that were recited at the Third Council. These teachings later became known as the "Pali-canon". The second mission headed by the Elders Sona and Uttara was sent to Suvarnabhumi which some scholars identified with Nakorn Pathom Province in central Thailand.¹²

More than that, the Buddhist legends present Ashoka as being an active supporter of the Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist order of monks, even though he was probably much more interesting in the religion of laity. It was during the reign of Ashoka that such missionaries introduced the religion to northwest India, south India, and Ceylon. As a result of Ashoka's conversion and promotion of Buddhism, the

¹² Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity Progress press, 1984), p.29.

moral tone of his empire was undoubtedly improved. There was a great respect for life .His emphasis on tolerance resulted in a greater cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism among the Indian. Much more important for the Buddhist historian was his role in extending the sphere of the religion not only to other parts of India but also to the outside world. So, from northwest India the religion was then carried into central Asia and eventually to the civilized countries of the Far East, China, Korea, and Japan, and from south India and Ceylon, it was transmitted to the countries of Southeast Asia, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia.

In conclusion, this form of Buddhism reached what is now Thailand around the sixth century A.D. Theravada Buddhism was made the state religion only with the establishment of the Thai kingdom of Sukhothai in the thirteenth century A.D.

The details of the history of Buddhism in Thailand from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century are obscure, in part because few historical records or religious texts survived the Burmese destruction of Ayutthaya, the capital city of the kingdom, in 1767. But, the anthropologist-historian S.J. Tambiah, however, has suggested a general pattern for that era, at least with respect to the relations between Buddhism and the Sangha on the one hand and the king on the other hand¹³ ; so as my intention and responsibility, for this project, I will continue to analyze and investigate this phenomenon , during the work in my III chapter on modern Thai society, as well as an accurate analysis, on the first form and factors of influence of Buddhism that was also present in modern Thai society, together with education and Structural inter-Relationship between Buddhism and Sangha and Thai State.

2.5 The main supportive factors of Buddhism that have influenced Thai society

There are many different points of view and opinions between Thai scholars and other countries, like Burma, Laos and Cambodia, when exactly

¹³ T. Stanley, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), in [http// www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) (15 June 2009)

Buddhism did reach of the world known officially as Thailand. Some scholars claims that during the reign of Ashoka that Buddhism was introduced to Thailand, through missionaries and emissaries spreading the teaching of the Buddha in Central Asia, Southeast Asia as way of life. Instead, others are of the view that Thailand received Buddhism much later.

From my research I found that in early time Nakhon Pathom over two thousand years ago did not belong to Thailand. It was the Kingdom of Mon Khmer who had their capital at Dvaravati also known later as Nakhon Pathom. The Thai emigrated from the south of China to this part of the country only in the XIII century, when they conquered the country from the Khmers and Mons, and established the Thai kingdom of Sukhotai in approximately A.D.1238. So probably the Theravada Buddhism, according from archeological finds and historical evidence, would reach its influence in Thailand and exactly in the territory of Nakhon Pathom, (first as Dvaravati) during the permanence of Mon Khmer in that city or capital. From 50 kilometers from Bangkok, now we can find the great Pagoda at Nakhon Pathom, and other objects or relics sought in other parts of the country, as testmoning historically the fact that Buddhism also in varied parts or forms reached Thailand in several period such as:

- 1) Theravada Buddhism.
- 2) Mahayana or Northern Buddhism
- 3) Burma Buddhism.
- 4) Sri Lanka Buddhism.

Before to talk about the modern Thai society with its influence of Buddhism, my intent is now to go head and proceed for a better and accurate study on Buddhism's influences, and to know when and how Buddhism came really in Thailand and when it influenced for the first time this country.¹⁴

¹⁴ Manich Jumsai, *Understanding Thai Buddhism* (Bangkok : Office of the National Culture Commission, 1996.), p.12.

2.5.1 The first forms of influence of Buddhism in Thailand

Buddhism must have reached Thailand during the 3rd century B.E, and it must have been more or less the same form of Buddhism as was propagate by the great Buddhist Emperor Ashoka.¹⁵ This form of Buddhism that came from Sri Lanka was that of Theravada Buddhism, and it was probably introduced the first time in Thailand, by two missionaries or emissaries known as Sona and Uttara, as far as over two thousand years ago to at Suvarnabhumi, or Land of Gold.

This new land where the two Buddhist ambassadors landed was thought to be the present site of Nakhorn Pathom, because certain archeological objects, had been found at this place. Indeed, through the various archeological remain unearthed in the excavations at Nakhon Pathom, we can see not only the presence and influence of Theravada School in Thailand, from Sri Lanka, but also we can notice many relics such as The Dharma Chakra (Weel of Law), the Buddha footprints, and the seats, and the inscriptions, in the Pali language, all of which are in the rocks. In fact, such objects of Bhuddist veneration probably would exist in India before the introduction of the Buddha image in this country, which appeared later as a result of the Greek influence.

So, this form of Buddhism was known as Theravada or Hinayana (the Lower Vehicle) in contradistinction to the term Mahayana (the Higher Vehicle); both of them have sprung up soon after the passing away of the Buddha.

As I said before, Theravada Buddhism had been introduced in Thailand as well as other different countries only when the worship of the Buddha image became really popular in India. This is the motive and the fact that many Buddha images, later had been found in the ruin of Nakhon Pathom and the neighboring cities. Also, judging from the style of these images of the Buddha found in Nakhon Pathom, we can even notice, the real influence of the early Buddhist in Thailand from Magadha or in Bihar State, India.¹⁶ Other images of the Buddha as well as footprint and sacred

¹⁵ Karuna Kusalasaya , *Buddhism in Thailand* (Bangkok: Chomthong, 2001), p.5.

¹⁶ Manich Jumsai, *Understanding Thai Buddhism*, p.11.

caves can be found in the less population places of the Thai country, visible for miles around.¹⁷ Bronze and stone images of the Buddha are constantly found in unexpected places of the while digging the land for irrigation, road construction and other purposes.

Thus, Theravada Buddhism both literally and metaphorically, has its root in the soil of Thailand, and influence of Theravada school can be seen in main aspects of the Thai life, Thai culture, Thai tradition, Thai history and in their learning, as well as the presence of Buddha images of various sizes on small altar-table, in their homes.

Also, many Thai people are wearing oftenly small Buddha images around their neck as objects and sign of veneration and recollection or as amulets for adornment and protection, and so on.¹⁸

Most importantly, through a chronological record of historical event of Sri Lanka, also Known as Mahavamsa, it would show to us and support the view that the first form of Buddhism reached to Thailand was that of the Theravada School propagated by the great King Ashoka by missionaries or emissaries like Sona and Uttara. This form of Buddhism, before arrives in Thailand, it became in Sri Lanka a national creed and closely associated with Sri Lanka monarchy, and Ashoka openly declared his faith in the Three Jewels as Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, showing and living in monastic community and working actively for over a year.¹⁹

During the early years of Ashoka's reign before ha was converted to Buddhism, he must have ruled as any other king of India, indulging in the pleasures of hunting and permitting merry-making by feasting and drinking. In the ninth years of his reign, he sent an expedition to conquer a tiny enclave of Kalinga on the eastern coast of India, which still remained independent up to that time. The horror of Kalinga war, which involve the killing of some 100,000 people, filled him with such remorse that he became converted to Buddhism. Thus, he decided to make not more warfare

¹⁷ K.E. Well , *Thai Buddhism:Its Rites and Cerimonies*. (British: London university press, 1960), pp.4-5.

¹⁸ Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World* (Bangkok: Unity press, 1984.), p.12.

¹⁹ Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism* (USA: Princeton University, 1967), p.115.

and devoted the rest of his life to the protection and the propagation of the Buddha's teaching. It was about this time also that he embarked on his practice of inscribing his precepts on rocks and pillar, for he felt that the rocks are durable and offer the best medium for the spread of his message to posterity.

After Ashoka's conversion, he decided that his mission was to work for the welfare and happiness of all his subjects. To fulfill this aim, he had wells dug alongside the well traveled roads to provide water for travelers and animals, made provisions for the medical care of all living beings, issued regulations restricting the slaughter of animal for food, and propagated useful plants for their medicinal values. Here indeed is the unique feature of Ashoka's reign; for the first time in Indian history a monarch has embarked on a program of social welfare for the benefit of his subjects. Undoubtedly his espousal of Buddhism, a religion of infinite love and compassion for all sentient beings, led him to propagate and spread the teaching of the great Master, Buddha.

So, returning back to the history and Chronicle of Sri Lanka, we can apprehend from the propagation of the Dhamma through the Mahavamsa records that the King Ashoka sent many missionaries guided by Theras Elders in at least nine territories. And one of these places or territories was probably known as Suvarnabhumi, Thailand, where Sona and Uttara, considerate the Elders Monks, in 3rd. century B.C carried Theravada Buddhism as devotion and spiritual example and teaching of the Buddha.

Before, I said that there are many different opinions between Thai scholars that claimed that Buddhism came first in Thailand (and later it would spread in other countries like Burma, Cambodia and Laos) and Burmese scholars that said that Buddhism was carried in that country earlier of Thailand, and so on.

Now, others disputes and controversies were there between Thai and Burmese scholar concerning the exact position of Suvarnabhumi's land. Scholars of Burma would insist that Suvarnabhumi was probably in Burma near the Gulf of Martaban, as well as other scholars like Laos and Cambodia which claimed that the territory of Suvarnabhumi was in their lands. But, Thai scholars express the opinion that it was in Thailand and its capital had been at Nakhon Pathom. However, disputes and controversies on this point may seem useless and difficult, beyond the simple

discussion, because there are not so much proofs or demarcation on Suvarnabhumi territory.²⁰

Today, if we make an attentive investigation on the Sanskrit word Suvarna and Bhumi, we can notice that meaning is referred to Gold and latter like word stand as Land. Thus, Suvarnabhumi could mean the Golden Land or Land of Gold. Despite its meaning of Golden of Land, normally in the former period Suvarnabhumi was also a term used widely to describe that part of Southeast Asia, such as Burma and Thailand. According to the archeological finds unearthed in the area that surrounding Suvarnabhumi city, it brought further conviction and reason in Thai scholar that the Capital of Suvarnabhumi was at Nakhon Pathom.

If we go back to the history of Thailand, we can notice through manuscripts and evidences, that the Indian people came this part of the world, so called Suvarnabhumi, Land of the Gold, (which comprised the entire Malay Peninsula.) even before the advent of Buddhism. They were traders bent on making commercial profits, gold in particular. They took gold back to India, so much so that a lot of gold, perhaps more than what we have here, went to India. This state of affairs existed several millenniums ago with the result that a large quantity of Thai gold found its way to coffers in India.

I emphasize this point just to enable you to visualize also the influences that came from the commercial traffic between India and Thailand that existed before the age of Buddhism. Undoubtedly, the Indians came to Suvarnabhumi, now known as Nakhon Pathom, in search of commercial profits. With them, they brought also, articles of material value as well as substance of spiritual and cultural worth. After Buddhism was well founded in India, it finally was brought to Suvarnabhumi, and so both occultism and Buddhism found their way in Thailand. Furthermore, according to the history many objects and ancient relics, later, had been found in Nakhon Pathom, or Suvarnabhumi, but not in other mentioned places or countries like Burma. Indeed Burmese scholar, could not show openly or broadly any kind of ancient archeological finds, or prove inherent the presence of Theravada Buddhism in its country as the first place where Ashoka's missionaries went, the first time, for spreading not only the

²⁰ Karuna Kusalasaya , *Buddhism in Thailand*, p.8.

teachings of the Buddha, but also Stupa, Pagoda and the Wheel of Law or Dhamma of Indian religious culture.

Probably, all of these objects, came only in Thailand, Suvarnabhumi, not only as commercial profit, but later, as the real approaches of Indian religion from Sri Lanka. Furthermore, if we analyze in Pali the word Pathom Chedi, we can see that it means the First Pagoda that with probability was built in Suvarnabhumi.²¹ So, I can conclude by saying that Theravada school spread to Thailand from the Great Ashoka's missionaries, during the 3rd century B.C era, and therefore Sona and Uttara, according of the Mahavamsa, went to Suvarnabhumi for establishing Theravada Buddhism as religion and system of beliefs, as well as by carrying, great influences, and benefits in this territory.²²

2.5.2 Mahayana or Northern Buddhism and its Influences in Thailand

Early Buddhism in Thailand is thought to have been derived from unknown Mahayana tradition. With the growth of it in India between the 1st c. until the 6th century A.D., many sects or groups spread to the neighboring countries, such as Sumatra, Cambodia and Java during the reign of King Kanishka, approximately in the second half of the first century.²³ But, it also developed into different form, from region to region, and place to place. To get an idea of it, is better for me turn back to India, and its origin. A century after the death of Buddha, there was present a Second Buddhist Council, at Vaishali in India, in 383 B.E, in which new interpretations of doctrine were condemned by conservatives, also known as the Theras Elder, who become the originators of Theravada orthodoxy. The reformers, also accused the conservatives of being too self-absorbed and dogmatic. So they split into two groups

²¹ Karuna Kusalasaya, *Buddhism in Thailand*, p.64.

²² Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism*, pp.113 -117. Of much more importance to the spread of Buddhism was the dispatch of Buddhist missionaries not to the distant Mediterranean and from south India and Ceylon, it was transmittted to the countries of southeast Asia like Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

²³ Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*, p.33.

of monks. One came to be called Theravadins and the others, Mahasanghikas. But the ideological split was confirmed in the third century B.C.E, during the time of Great King Ashoka, where eighteen different sects or groups had arisen out such as: Theravada with its eleven groups, and others seven schools or sects of the Mahasanghikas.

However, not of these sects survived long, except the two major sects which later flourished under the King Ashoka, known the first one as Theravada group, which spread to the South, whereas the second one belonged to the Mahasanghikas sect also known as Mahayana.

Theravada differently from Mahayana Buddhism would tend toward doctrinal conservatism, and this is the motive why it has been given the pejorative name Hinayana or “Lesser Vehicle”, by its rival, who call their tradition Mahayana or “Great Vehicle”.²⁴ Thus, Mahayana prevailed in Northern countries classified as; China, Korea, Japan, Nepal, Tibet and Mongolia. So, after a brief explanation of Mahayana Buddhism, I would like to return back to the influence of Mahayana or Great Vehicle for investigating the place where Mahayana really went in the first period of its history.

Primarily, it is probably that Mahayana Buddhism was introduced in Burma or Pagan (Lower Burma), and Dvaravati, known as Nakhon Pathom in Western Thailand, from Magadha, India. Mahayana Buddhist missionaries from Kashmir, in the fifth century A.D., began to go to Sumatra in succession, and later from this place they spread to Java and Cambodia. Later in 757 A.D., part of south of Thailand came under the rule of the King Srivijaya, which his empire along with his capital Sumatra, spread throughout the archipelago and Malay as peninsula. King Srivijaya, being Mahayanist tried to support and encourage the propagation of Mahayana Buddhism, in south of Thailand. In fact, through relics, Stupas or Chetiyas images, and other discovering we could notice the influences and wide evidences of

²⁴ Hans Wolfgang Schumann , *Buddhism* (Madras,Indian/London: England,1973), p.91.

Mahayana Buddhism in South Thailand in place like Nakhon Sri Thammarath and Suratthani, as well as Sumatra and Java.²⁵

Besides, there is a brief story now preserved on the stone inscription, in the National Museum at Bangkok, which said that a King who came from Nakhon Si Thammarat, and traced his roots or ancestry to Srivijaya family, ruled in Lopburi and in central Thailand in 1017 A.D., and his son who later became the ruler of Cambodia, kept Thailand under the dominion of Cambodia for a long time. The stone inscription under consideration probably refers to one of the Srivijaya rulers. In addition, in 1008 to 1182 Suryavarman ruler, which were adherent of Mahayana Buddhism with a strong mixture of Brahmanism, did much to propagate and spread the influence and tenets of Northern schools and in that time all Kings that were belonging the Suryavarman dynasty ruled supreme in Cambodia. From this stone inscription is possible also to know that already Theravada Buddhism was present in Lopburi, Thailand and that Mahayana Buddhism, that was established in Cambodia became popularized in Thailand only after Thailand was under the suzerainty of Cambodia.

Theravada Buddhism, however was on a firm basis in Thailand when the Mahayana School had been introduced there, and so there are not indications that Mahayana school dominated the Theravada in any way, in fact in Lopburi in those days where different monks that came from different schools of thought such as Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. However, many influences can be seen in Thailand not only from Mahayana Buddhism but also from Brahmanic culture which survived in Thailand until this period of history with its own origin and sacred Sanskrit language of Hindu from India and other different influences from Cambodia.

In modern times, additional Mahayana influence has stemmed from the presence of Chinese immigrants in Thai society. While some Chinese have converted to Thai style Theravada Buddhism, many others maintain their own separated temples in the East Asian Mahayana tradition. The growing popularity of the goddess Kuan Yin in Thailand (a form of Avalokitevara) may be attributed to the Chinese Mahayanist presence in Thailand. While Mahayana Buddhism was gradually eclipsed in

²⁵ Karuna Kusalasaya, *Buddhism in Thailand*, p.11.

Thailand, certain features of Thai Buddhism- such as the appearance of the Bodhisattva Lokeshvara in some Thai religious architecture, and the belief that the king of Thailand is a bodhisattva himself-reveal the influence of Mahayana concepts. The only other Bodhisattva prominent in Thai religion is Maitreya; Maitreya is called also Phra Sangkrachai, from from a verb meaning to beam, emit, radiate, broadcast. Statues of Phra Sangkrachai can be found in most Thai Buddhist temples and on amulets as well. Thai sometimes pray to be reborn during the time of Maitreya, or dedicate merit from worship activities to that end.²⁶

2.5.3 Burmese Buddhism's influence and its dominion on Thai kingdom

In Burma, Theravada Buddhism flourished in the reign of King Anuruddha, and successively reached its golden era when Burma was united into one country, and its capital city of Pagan became a great centre of Buddhist culture.²⁷ In 1057 A.D., King Anuruddha having its capital at Pagan, became really powerful in the whole Burma and later he extended his kingdom right up to Thailand, and introduced his newly acquired religion to the conquered region, especially in the area such as :Nakhon Pathom, Lopburi and Chiang Mai, covering so the Northern and Central part of Thailand.

Thus, when the Thai people, who are of Mongol stock,settled in what is now Thailand during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries after having been driven out of the Chinese southwestern province of Yunnan, they entered a region already strongly influenced by Buddhism. They adopted the already established religion, and when they formed the Thai kingdom in 1238,they accepted it as their state religion. So, Thailand like Burma at the time received directly Theravada Buddhism as religion, philosophy and way of life, from India, through missionaries sent by Emperor Ashoka, and Anaruddha ardently supported this cause, even though Buddhism in India was already in a state of profound decline. This changing and

²⁶ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin, (USA : Boston, November 2002),in <http://www.ibiblio.org>.(9 June 2009).

²⁷ Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World , p. 31.

Buddhist crisis of values and identity was prevalent in Burma in that period of history, and so Burma underwent some changing, assuming so a different form from the original doctrine.²⁸ Buddhism followers, under the patronage of Anaruddha, (Anawratha), began building the thousands of temples in Pagan, of which the most famous is the Ananda Temple, a masterpiece of Burmese architecture. These temples were supported by generous donations of villages, land, animals, and even slaves from the people. The Burmese accepted the Theravada tradition and its essence only from Ceylon, believing that Mahavihara was the only center of Theravada Buddhism which had remained pure and unsullied throughout the centuries²⁹

Furthermore, Burmese Buddhism exercised great influence and dominion over Thailand, especially in the North, during the period of King Anaruddha where the impact from Burma was more felt. Buddhism as the dominant force in Thailand has wielded a tremendous role in Thai history. Buddhism relics found in North Thailand bear a striking Theravada influence, whereas those found in the south clearly showed their Mahayana influence dated back from Srivijaya days. This means that the Burmese under Anaruddha were content to dominate or annex only the North of Thailand, regardless to extend or spread its suzerainty in South or other part of Thailand. In fact, the South of Thailand was practically ruled by the Khmer (Cambodia) vassal whose capital was at Lopburi.

Thai people, who originally lived in the valley between the Huang Ho and the Yangtze Kiang in China, began to migrate southwards in the 2nd century B.C., as the result of a constant conflict with other neighboring tribes. They became separated into two main groups during the course of their migration, which lasted for several centuries. One group of Thais called *Thai Yai* (Big Thai) went and settled in the plains of the Salween River, Shan States, whereas another group of Thais moved further in South, called *Thai Noy* (Small Thai). So, the Thais in present day can be considerate the descendants of these migrant Thais, with a great deal of mixture of blood through intermarriage which was only natural.

²⁸ Karuna Kusalasaya, *Buddhism in Thailand*, p.13.

²⁹ Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism* (USA: Princeton University, 1967), p.124.

Furthermore, after struggling hard for a long time in place such as; Burma, Assam, China, Laos, Shan States, North Vietnam and Thailand, finally the Thais were able in 1257 A.D., to establish their independent state at Sukhothai in North Thailand, and enter in contact with the form of Buddhism as practiced in Burma during the royal patronage of King Anaruddha. Later, Thai migrants grew in strength their territory and after the death of Anaruddha they became the master of the land and able to exert themselves even more prominently in their southward drive. Much of the Brahmanic influence Buddhism, once in close contact with Khmers passed from Cambodia to Thai people during this period in discussion, based also Thai scripture on Cambodian scripts which derived their origin from India, as well as many Mahayana influences and beliefs practice inherited from Burma and from the days of the Suryavarman and Srivijava period.³⁰

2.5.4 Sri Lanka Buddhism's influence and education on Thai Society

This is the most important period in the history of the spread of Buddhism to Thailand which remains dominant there until today.³¹ According to the chronicles of Sri Lanka, Tissa, King of Sri Lanka, sent a mission to King Ashoka soliciting is friendship. In response to this, Ashoka not only sent some presents but also seized the opportunity to put in favorable word about Buddhism and recommended Tissa, the King of Sri Lanka, to adopt the religion as spiritual teaching of they life. Without waiting for a reply from the Ceylonese about his recommendation, he sent his son Mahinda as a missionary to Ceylon. Mahinda was soon joined by his sister Sanghamitta and the two working together succeeded in converting the King and the court ladies to Buddhism.³² Sanghamitta took along with her to Ceylon a branch of the bodhi tree, and the tree in Anuradhapura now venerated by the Ceylonese is regarded as the outgrowth of that branch. Within a short time the whole of the island

³⁰ Kenneth Ch'en, Buddhism , p.117.

³¹ Karuna Kusalasaya , Buddhism in Thailand , p.19.

³² Kenneth Ch'en , Buddhism , p. 126.

of Ceylon became a stronghold of Buddhism, where learned monks went to neighboring countries such as: Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand to revive and strength Buddhism in these countries.³³

After its introduction into Ceylon in the middle of the third century B.C., the history of the religion was one of growth and development, reach of peace and harmony. After the arrival of the Elder Mahinda, a Council soon was said to be held in this place, and the tradition claimed that it was the Four Buddhist Council where more than 60,000 monks were gathering together under the presidency of Venerable Arittha, the disciple of the Elder Mahinda.³⁴ The importance of this Council was that the Tripitaka, the Pali Canon, which had been transmitted orally from the time of the Buddha was written down in books for the first time, and consisted in of three parts such as: Sutra Pitaka (Basket of Discourse) which contains all the sermons or teaching of the Buddha. Vinaya Pitaka: (states the rules of conduct for the monks and it consists of five books) and the third one the Abhidhamma Pitaka (Basket of further Doctrines) which deals with Buddhist system of thought, both psychological and philosophical and consists of seven books.

Buddhism made rapid progress and was firmly established in Sri Lanka during the first nine centuries after the arrival of the Elder Mahinda, through the contribute and support of many pious Kings and devote people. After that from the 12th until 17 century there were a period of wars and disturbances due to Indian invasions with relative decline of Buddhism. Only in 17th B.E., the King Vijayabahu started the work of restoring Buddhism and he invited monks from Burma, under the King Anaruddha to give ordination to Ceylonese people. His successor was Parakramabahu I the Great and he tried to unify all sects of Buddhism with relative Sangharaja, called also Sariputta. He was able to patronize the Seventh Council in the 17th B.E., and Sri Lanka became again the centre of Buddhism, and the influence of Ceylon ordination known as Lankavamsa was adopted later in 18th by Thailand.³⁵

³³ Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World , p.29.

³⁴ Hans Wolfgang Schumann, *Buddhism* (Madras,Indian/London: England,1973), p.35.

³⁵ Ven.Phra Rajavaramuni, Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World , p.31.

As I claimed above, Parakramabahu was a powerful, Great monarch and supporter of Theravada Buddhism, and he did so much to spread and consolidate the Dhamma of the Buddha in Sri Lanka's Kingdom. Probably, thanks the effort of King Parakramabahu the Great, Buddhism was more compact and solidified in Sri Lanka and later the news spread to the others countries, so monks from Cambodia, Burma, Lanna or North Thailand were gathering together to Ceylon to receive the pure form of the Dhamma. Apparently, the early Bikkhus who returned from Ceylon after studies, established themselves first in Nakhon Sri Thammarath, bearing definitely Ceylon influence such as: Buddha images, Stupas, Dhammachakra in motion also known as the wheel of law and so on. The news of meritorious activities spread quickly to Sukhothai in the thirteenth century AD, and the King of this place known as King Ramkhamheng, invited soon all monks from Nakhon Si Thammarat to Sukhothai to teach his people the new influences from religion, as well as education, culture, tradition and art.

So, the Kings of Sukhothai fostered the new religion, and one of its kings, Lithai, the grandson of Ramkhamheng, invited another learned monk from the Mon country to his Kingdom.³⁶ Under King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, as he is now known, Sukhothai enjoyed a golden age of prosperity. Ramkhamhaeng is credited with designing the Thai alphabet (traditionally dated from 1283, on the evidence of the controversial Ramkhamhaeng stele, an inscribed stone allegedly bearing the earliest known Thai writing). At its peak, supposedly stretching from Martaban (now in Burma) to Luang Prabang (now in Laos) and down the Malay Peninsula as far south as Nakhon Si Thammarat, the kingdom's sphere of influence was larger than that of modern Thailand, although the degree of control exercised over outlying areas was variable.³⁷ For centuries, since the establishment of the Thai Kingdom in the thirteenth century AD, the prime role of influences and traditional Thai art, education and religion, had been to show devotion to Buddhism. Buddhist art in the early period of Thai history is believed to have emerged in the Sukhothai Kingdom, a

³⁶ Manich Jumsai, *Understanding Thai Buddhism*, p.10.

³⁷ Wikimedia Foundation, Inc 51 Franklin.

highly sophisticated state in the golden Thai historical era, thirteenth to fourteenth century.

However, as I described above, long before the first Thai state became the supreme power, there were different ethnic groups, cultures and religions in the region encompassed by modern Thailand. Prior to the Thai people adopting Buddhism as their religion in the first phase of the Thai Kingdom (in 1287 AD), the art of the Mon and the Khmer, as I said, both cultures and influences of Hindu origin, were flourishing in the region too. Despite regional diversities, Buddhism dominated much of this area as the Thai Kingdom began to subjugate other tribal groups. Even at this stage, Thai art was integrated with Buddhism as the religion came to dominate the indigenous Thai cultures.

Nevertheless, the relatively ephemeral existence of the kingdom of Sukhothai (compared with the other great Thai kingdoms of Ayutthaya and Lanna) represents a golden age that laid the foundations of a structured state capable of establishing Theravada Buddhism as its state religion and asserting its power and cultural identity by assimilating the heritage of its predecessors. In the early period, Thai art was genuinely an expression of the development and influence of Buddhism in the Thai kingdom. As part of their drive to implant Theravada Buddhism, the rulers of the Sukhothai imported patterns of art as they emanated from the different populations subscribing to that form of Buddhism. Apparently distinguishing themselves as much as possible from their essentially Sinhalese, Mon, or, to a lesser extent, Pala models, the artist-monks of Sukhothai emerged from this ferment to develop a form of expression that met their religious preoccupations but was nevertheless unique, capable of imposing itself in turn as a model for the other Thai states. There is good reason to believe that the first known Thai artists were Buddhist, monks active during the Sukhothai Period. Consequently, it is appropriate to suggest that the early existence of Buddhism was a major contributor to the foundations of a truly Thai art form. The Buddhist art forms from Sukhothai and the historical

frameworks of Thai art and culture within classical Thai art and Thai folk art are both forms that significantly revealed Buddhist influence in Thai Kingdom.³⁸

Now, returning back to Lithai king, he was a devout Buddhist, and he wrote treatises on Buddhism, one on cosmology called “Tribhumigatha” which still exist in this day.³⁹ This fact is recorded in one of the king’s rock inscriptions, dated about 1277 A.D. More than that, Ceylon was widely practiced and it became very popular in Thailand, and in fact some Thai kings such as king Dharmaraja Lithai of Sukhothai and king Borom Lokanath of Ayudhya period decided to enter the Holy Order of bhikkhu Sangha according to the Ordination Rite of Lankavamsa Buddhism by inviting a patriarch from Ceylon to be the presiding monk over his ceremony.⁴⁰ In addition, the impact of Ceylon was perceptibly felt. The influence of Buddha images, Stupas, monasteries, and even Buddha footprints played an important factor in that period, as well as the study of Pali language of Theravada Buddhism also made a great progress in all matters dealing with the Dhamma.

I noticed in Thailand for a long period, that even though there are several influences from other countries such as: religious beliefs, Brahmanic rites and ceremonies, all of them would have not antagonism with each other ,despite, as the different forms of Buddhism already existent in Thailand as well as the Lankavamsa ‘s presence which had been introduced later from Sri Lanka. In my last analysis I can say that history repeat itself because when Sri Lanka under the King Kirtisri in 1747-1781 A.D., the Upasampada Ordination was lost due to a decline of Buddhism, Thailand later payed back its debt, by sending in that land Buddhism monks under the leadership of upali, a well know monk who worked and died in Sri Lanka ,the country he loved no less than his own.⁴¹ All in all, Sri Lanka and Thailand in particular has shared a long history of influences, and a strong bond in regards to where religious relations were concerned. At times when Buddhism in Thailand was in recession,

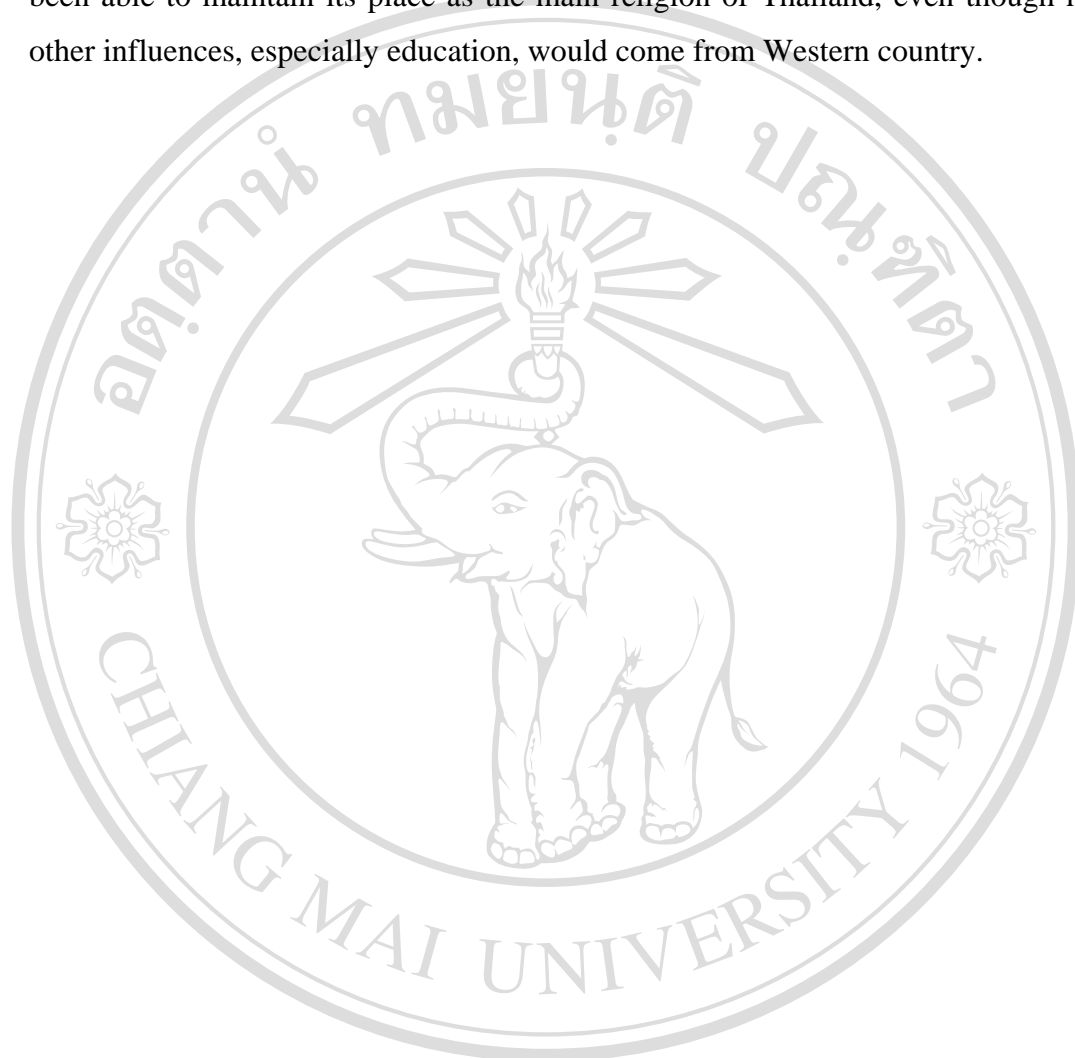
³⁸ Boisselier J, *The wisdom of Buddha* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd;1993), in [http://www. books.google.co.th](http://www.books.google.co.th). (12 June 2009).

³⁹ Manich Jumsai , *Understanding Thai Buddhism*, p.12.

⁴⁰ Karuna Kusalasaya ,*Understanding Thai Buddhism* , p.21.

⁴¹ Kenneth Ch'en , *Buddhism* , p.119.

assistance was offered by Sri Lanka and visa versa if the situation was turned. Such relations still continues to this day and Buddhism, also in modern Thai society, has been able to maintain its place as the main religion of Thailand, even though many other influences, especially education, would come from Western country.



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