

Influence of Thai Cultural Patronage of Buddhism by Kings in the Past

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Abstract

This academic article has three objectives. 1. To study the Buddhist expansion under influential patronage by previous Kings in covering the historical events, social and political conditions; 2. To explore the ways that Buddhism retained unique cultural and religious features through Monarchs' patronages; 3. To analyze how Buddhism patronages has influenced culturally, materially, monastically and socially to contemporary Thai society.

The findings of this article were found that Thai culture has been continuously and steadily changing under the guidance of previous kings ever since Buddhism first spread over Suvarnabhumi, ancient Thailand. The emergence of Buddhism in the Suvarnabhumi Kingdom is attested to by historic buildings and artifacts such as Phra Pathom Chedi. Throughout Thailand's history, an increasing number of Buddhist temples, pagodas, and stupas have been constructed. Tradition, philosophy, and belief are examples of non-material culture that is also transmitted. These cultures are still well-known today, and several have turned into popular tourist destinations. Buddhist customs and ceremonies, like Phapa, Kathina, and Ordination, are still observed in Thailand today. All of these Thai cultures are products of the historical patronage of Buddhism by Thai monarchs.

Keywords: Patronage, Buddhism, Thai Culture, King

Introduction

Buddhism is practiced in Thailand. Although the constitution makes no mention of it, the majority of Thai Buddhists believe that Buddhism is the country's official religion. The King is a Buddhist and the Supreme Patron of Religion, according to Chapter 2, Article 7 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560. (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560: 4). Since Buddhism first established itself in ancient Thailand, things have always been this way. More than 2,300 years ago, in 218 B.E., King Ashoka dispatched elder monks Sona and Uttara to Suvarnabhumi in order to spread Buddhism. (P.A Payutto, 2540, p. 143). Buddhism has since played a significant part in forming Thai culture, leading to the

development of Thai Buddhist tradition, ethics, morals, customs, art, philosophy, and so forth.

Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are the Three Triple Gems that comprise Buddhism, which has had a significant historical influence on Thai culture. Buddhism includes monks and temples in addition to the Dhamma, or the Buddha's teachings. Thai people have a strong connection to monks and temples. In civilization, temples are everything. They serve as the hub for bringing people's thoughts together. (Asst. Prof. Chawiwat Suwannapha, B.E. 2559). Nevertheless, a variety of circumstances, including different religions and beliefs, philosophies, foreign cultures, science and technology, and so forth, have caused the degree of Buddhism's effect on Thai society, and its culture, to shift over time. The purpose of this academic paper is to study, examine, and analyze the influence of patronage of Buddhism by Kings in the past on Thai culture.

Patronage of Buddhism by Kings in the Past

Traditional Buddhism, such as Hinayana or Theravada, is practiced in Thailand. There is solid proof that this branch of Buddhism moved from southern India to Sri Lanka and subsequently to Suvarnabhumi, often known as the Golden Peninsula. Even before Thailand was formally created, Buddhism has long been in the Golden Peninsula. How many Thai people lived there prior to Buddhism's arrival on the Golden Peninsula is unknown. Buddhism, however, has thrived in this region. Theravada Buddhism is also practiced in Burma, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Laos in addition to Thailand. (Sanit Samackan, B.E. 2539: 18) This is mostly due to the historical influence of monarchs' support of Buddhism.

1. Theravada from King Ashoka Period (B.E. 218)

Buddhism was initially introduced to Thailand around B.E. 218. At the time, the third Buddhist Council in Pataliputra was greatly sponsored by King Ashoka. He dispatched monks to spread Buddhism in nine branches across different countries when the Buddhist Council was finished. Sona and Uttara, the two elder monks, were one of the nine branches. Ancient structures and relics like Phra Pathom Chedi serve as witnesses to the establishment of Buddhism in the Suvarnabhumi Kingdom, which is thought to be Nakhon Pathom Province. (According to the Burmese, Suvarnabhumi is the southern Burmese city of Thaton.) (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 143).

The Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom Province provides proof of ancient Thailand's Buddhist-influenced material culture. It demonstrated how Buddhism was ingrained in Thai culture from a very young age. Building religious structures in the shape of stupas for worship is a custom that is closely associated with the Buddhist culture from India. This is demonstrated by the construction of stupas in countries like Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia that have embraced Buddhism. The belief in hereditary "relics" (Phra That) is the cause of this. (Suthachai Yimprasert, 1990: 132) According to this theory, the Brahmin Tona stepped

in to distribute the Buddha's relics to several cities after the Malla ruler of Kusinara burnt his body. The cities then constructed stupas to house the relics. Consequently, all stupas (Chedi) are "relic stupas", meaning they are the Buddha's relics. (His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, B.E. 2469: 4-5).

2. Mahayana Period (B.E. 620-1550)

King Kanishka sent monks to spread Buddhism throughout Central Asia and was the Great Sponsor of the 4th Mahayana Council in 620 B.E. at Jalandhar, a historic city in the Punjab state of north India. During that period, King Mingti sent a goodwill ambassador to King Luang Mao, the Thai ruler of the Ai Lao Kingdom, and introduced Buddhism from Central Asia to China. As a result of the ambassadors' introduction of Buddhism, 51,890 households in 77 Thai provinces underwent their first conversion.

The King of Srivijaya in Sumatra gained strength around 1300 B.E. and expanded his realm to include Surat Thani Province. The Chedi Phra That Chaiya and Phra Maha That Nakhon Si Thammarat serve as testimonies to this day, demonstrating how the King of Srivijaya's belief in Mahayana Buddhism contributed to its development throughout his kingdom and the southern region of Thailand.

When the Suryavarman dynasty ruled Cambodia in 1550 B.E., the king was strong and ruled over much of central and northern Thailand. The Lopburi period got its name because he made Lavo, or Lopburi, one of the capital cities to rule the region. The king of Cambodia adhered to Mahayana Buddhism, which originated in the Srivijaya Kingdom. However, Brahmanism and Mahayana were combined throughout this period. As a result, the locals were exposed to Brahmanism, which had arrived in a novel form, as well as Theravada Buddhism, which had been transmitted from the past, and Mahayana Buddhism. Consequently, monks from both sects and followers of both kinds were present. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 143-145).

The evidence of Buddhism's influence on cultural evolution spans over a millennium, from 620 B.E. to 1550 B.E. The historical record shows that more than 51,890 households in 77 Thai provinces practiced Mahayana Buddhism. Constructed during the Srivijaya era, the Chedi Phra That Chaiya is today a tourist destination situated in Wat Phra Borommathat Chaiya Ratchaworawihan, the location of the Lord Buddha's relics. For the province of Surat Thani, it is a significant place of worship. Additionally, Phra Maha That Nakhon Si Thammarat is located in Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan, the principal Buddhist temple (wat) in the southern Thai province of Nakhon Si Thammarat. It is now a popular tourist destination. Buddhist landmarks that symbolize the growth of Thai Buddhism-based material culture throughout the Mahayana Period are both of these temples.

But as was previously mentioned, Brahmanism and Theravada Buddhism both had an impact and had already established themselves before Mahayana Buddhism. Temples, stupas, tradition, custom, ritual, ceremonies, and other material and non-material

manifestations of culture were the outcome of this. The following generation inherited these things.

3. Theravada Paganism (B.E. 1600)

Anawrahta Mangcho, also known as King Anuruddha the Great, became the ruler of the Pagans (Burma). He united the Burmese and subdued the Mon. He then extended his domain to include Dvaravati, Lan Xang, Lopburi, and the Lanna Kingdom. Theravada Buddhism was practiced by King Anuruddha. He had a deep royal religion and promoted Buddhism.

Take a look at the Thai population in China. Following China's invasion, they all moved southward in succession. They founded the Nan Chao Kingdom following the fall of the Ai Lao Kingdom. Son of Khun Borom of the Nan Chao Kingdom, Khun Thao Kwa founded the Yonok Chiang Saen Kingdom in Suvarnabhumi in 1299 B.E. Over time, the Thai people dispersed across the central, northeastern, and northern parts of modern-day Thailand. The Thai people in the northern, or Lanna, region was somewhat influenced by the Khmer when the Kingdom of Cambodia came to power. The local Thai population, who had long practiced Buddhism, adopted the Pagan form of Buddhism as the Pagan Kingdom grew to power, till it expanded throughout the northern region. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 145)

Temples, stupas, sculptures, and other works of art are examples of the material culture that Buddhist culture left behind throughout this time of unceasing development. Numerous artworks from this era have also been discovered. The majority are painted on the ceiling and walls of temple pagodas. (Samorchai Phonsawan, B.E. 2553).

4. Theravada from Sri Lankan

Scholars with extensive knowledge of the Dharma and Vinaya can be found in Sri Lanka. The initial writings of the Tipitaka, the texts that are now taught in schools, were created there. Monks from Sri Lanka wrote the majority of them. Monks and students from various nations came to Sri Lanka to study Buddhism as a result of this accolade. In the tenth century of Buddhism, Buddhaghosa the renowned Pali language teacher, traveled to Anuradhapura to study at the Mahavihara. During King Ramkhamhaeng the Great's reign (B.E. 1822-1843), Thailand started to embrace Sri Lankan Buddhism and art. (Siam Saenkhat, B.E. 2549: 1).

4.1 Sukhothai period (B.E 1800-1897)

Around B.E. 1800, the Pagan and Cambodian kingdoms had lost ground during this time. The independence of the Thai people had been achieved. The Sukhothai Kingdom arose in the south, while the Lanna Kingdom arose in the north.

In terms of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, King Parakrom Bahu the Great took the throne in 1696 B.E., unified the nation, enslaved the Tamils, encouraged religion, and brought the monks together into a single sect. Additionally, he gave the order to hold the 7th Buddhist Council. In Sri Lanka, Buddhism flourished in both practice and education. After studying the

Dhamma and Vinaya and being ordained as new monks, monks from different nations returned to propagate the Sri Lankan Buddhist system in their home nations. Some invited monks from Sri Lanka to accompany them. These Thai and Sri Lankan monks immediately acquired reputation in Thailand after founding a center to propagate Buddhism in Nakhon Si Thammarat. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 146)

In Thailand, King Ramkhamhaeng took the throne in 1820 B.E. He asked the Supreme Patriarch from Nakhon Si Thammarat to live at Wat Aranyik in Sukhothai after learning of the monks' stellar reputation in Sri Lanka. Buddhism in Sri Lanka took off after that. The original monks and the Sri Lankan monks were the two factions that initially existed, but they later united to form a single sect. Buddhism in Mahayana faded and eventually vanished. The Phra Buddha Sihing, constructed in Sri Lanka, was transported from Nakhon Si Thammarat to Sukhothai during this time. Mahayana art started to give way to Sri Lankan art; for example, the Phra Mahathat Nakhon Si Thammarat pagoda was converted into a stupa in the Sri Lankan style.

The fifth king, King Lithai, took the throne in 1897 B.E. In B.E. 1904, he invited Sumana, the Supreme Patriarch of Sri Lanka, to Sukhothai. Following the conclusion of Buddhist Lent, he received temporary ordination at Wat Aranyik. He summoned monks to study the Tripitaka at the Grand Palace, wrote the book Tephumikatha, also known as Traibhum Phra Ruang, and preached morality to the populace himself. He constructed a pagoda, enshrined the relics brought from Sri Lanka, planted a Bodhi tree from Sri Lanka behind the pagoda, and had a duplicate of the Buddha's footprint printed. By splitting the Sangha into two factions, the Khamavasi and the Aranyavasi, he also started to organize the Sangha.

4.2 Lanna Thai period (B.E. 1802-2030)

Although the Lanna Thai period overlaps with the early Ayutthaya period and the Sukhothai period, it is divided for convenience.

B.E. 1802 – 1853, King Mangrai ruled Chiang Mai. He supported Buddhism, such as building Wat Chiang Man.

In 1977 B.E., during the reign of King Sam Fang Kaen, a large ancient stupa in Chiang Rai was struck by lightning and the Emerald Buddha was discovered.

During King Tilokarat's reign, which lasted from 1978 to 2030 B.E., he was briefly ordained at Wat Pa Daeng in 1990 B.E. Later, in 1998 B.E., a group of monks studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka were sponsored by the royal family. The Bodhi tree was with them when they returned. Thus, the building of a monastery called Wat Photharam or Wat Chet Yot was mandated by His Majesty. At Wat Photharam or Wat Chet Yot, His Majesty funded the establishment of the First Buddhist Council of Thailand in 2020 B.E., which was the eighth Buddhist Council after Sri Lanka. Lanna Thai Buddhist literature flourished during this time, which roughly spanned the middle of the 20th century to the end of the 21st century, primarily during the rule of Phra Mueang Kaew, B.E. 2038–2068. Phra Sirimangkalachariya,

who wrote Mangalatthathipani, was one of several monks who studied Pali texts. The Panniyasa Jataka was presumably written around this time period. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 148-150).

When examining the process of faith (*saddhā*) transmission and the establishment of prosperity for Theravada Buddhism during the early stages of Thai state formation, it is indisputable that the kings of these early Thai states particularly the Phra Ruang dynasties of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai and the Mangrai dynasty of Lanna were instrumental in fostering a strong belief in Sri Lankan-style Theravada Buddhism among the Thai populace. They also played a significant role in fostering prosperity for Buddhism in the form of religious figures, religious Dhamma, items, and customs. (Dr. Dinar Boontham, B.E. 2555: 63) The four main features of the Sukhothai and Lanna kings' contributions to the expansion of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lankan style are as follows: 1. Being a wise man who understands the Dhamma, 2. Leading society spiritually, 3. Leading the creation of Buddhist art, and 4. Leading the propagation of Buddhism to nearby countries. (Dr. Dinar Boontham, B.E. 2555: 65)

4.3 Ayutthaya period (B.E. 1893-2301)

The belief in Buddhism during the Ayutthaya period did not, according to the evidence, tend toward high Dhamma principles. The majority of people were engaged in earning virtue, helping monks, constructing temples, holy sites, holy artifacts, ceremonies, and festivities, such as honoring the Buddha's footprints and relics. Sacredness, miracles, and supernatural abilities were also highlighted in meditation. There was a great deal of sorcery and black magic. This was a defining feature toward the conclusion of the period, at least. This period divided into four parts.

The First Ayutthaya Period. During the years B.E. 1994-2031, King Borommatrailokanat brought order and strength to the nation's governance. He was also a strong advocate of Buddhism. He appears to have abdicated and spent eight months as a monk at Chulamani Temple in 1998 B.E., following in the footsteps of King Ashoka and King Maha Thammaraja Lithai. Later, in 2025 B.E., he commissioned a group of poets to write the Mahachat Kham Luang book and set aside a portion of the Grand Palace for the construction of a temple called Wat Phra Si Sanphet. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 151).

The Second Ayutthaya Period. During the reign of King Songtham in 2163 - 2171 B.E. As a monk, he learned the Dhamma with great skill. He traveled to teach novices and monks at Chom Thong's three royal pavilions because of his faith. This shows how long the custom of instructing monks in the Grand Palace has persisted. In addition to ordering the completion of the Tipitaka and the assembly of royal scholars to compose the Mahachat poem in 2170 B.E., he also ordered the construction of a pavilion to replace the Buddha footprint discovered in Saraburi and a pavilion to replace the Phra Mongkhon Bophit, which King Chairachathirat had been constructing since 2081 B.E. It was discovered that temple construction became more and more common throughout this time, not just for the king. It

was often said that “When the country is good, they build temples for their children to play with.” Those who were wealthy frequently constructed temples for their families in order to preserve the ashes of their ancestors and as educational institutions. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 152).

The Third Ayutthaya Period. The reign of King Narai the Great, 2199–2231 B.E. There is proof that the practice of becoming a monk was highly favored throughout this time. Many people avoided government affairs and ordaining because it seems that those who were ordained during this era had strong royal favor. Many of those who were ordained as monks were compelled to disrobe after it was discovered that they knew nothing about religion. In this era when Phra Phetracha and Khun Luang Sorasak were surrounding the palace and preparing to seize power. By donating the palace as a royal border, ordaining the royal officials as monks, and relocating them to the temple to live in safety, he saved their lives.

The expansion of trade with Europeans was a significant development during this era. The Europeans came to spread Christianity as well as engage in trade. Despite his great belief in Buddhism, King Narai the Great allowed for religious freedom. Apart from granting individuals the freedom to practice any religion, he also backed other faiths, particularly Christianity, which was introduced by the Westerners. For instance, he directed the building of St. Paul's Church in Lopburi and Tanavasi, as well as St. Joseph's Church, which serves as the bishop's house in Ayutthaya.

His friendship with King Louis of France at the time was particularly close. Even the church and King Louis believed him to be a Christian. King Louis encouraged King Narai to convert and dispatched an embassy to build cordial ties. “When God pleases him to convert, he will inspire faith in his heart at that time”, King Narai shrewdly conceded in 2228 B.E. In terms of religious affairs, this was a significant event since, in any other case, the affairs of the nation would have undergone a significant transformation.

A significant amount of Buddhist literature from the third Ayutthaya period has persisted to this day. The majority of it was written while King Prasat Thong, King Narai the Great, and King Phetracha were in power. But it was either written in Thai or translated into other languages. There is no record of it in the Pali language. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 152-154).

The Fourth Ayutthaya Period. B.E. 2275-2301. Ordainment became so commonplace under King Borommakot's rule that future nobles with titles and ranks had to undergo ordination before being appointed. Members of the royal family were also ordained. Nantopananda Sutta, Phra Malai Kham Luang, Punnovat Kham Chan, Royal Questions to the Sangha, and other significant religious texts were created during this time.

The religious dynasty in Sri Lanka had vanished at this time, and there were no monks left to conduct the ordination process. In order to ask Thai monks to ordain Sri Lankan men, King Kiratisirirajasingha dispatched an expedition in 2293 B.E. In 2296 B.E., the Thai monks,

under the leadership of Phra Ubali, visited Kandy and lodged at Wat Buppararam. At the time, Phra Ubali was a well-known monk. King Borommakot and the Supreme Patriarch trusted him to choose over ten competent monks to go to Sri Lanka. (Siam Saenkhath, B.E. 2549: 37) They conducted the ordination process and thereafter consecrated individuals to carry on Sri Lanka's religious dynasty. The result of this was the establishment of the Ubaliwong, Siamwong, or Siam Nikaya sect, which was the biggest monastic group in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, there is evidence that there was a significant fascination with superstition and witchcraft towards the end of this time, which may have contributed to the nation's fragility and mirrored the nation's turmoil. Later, in 2310 B.E., the Burmese took control of Ayutthaya. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 154-155).

4.4 Thonburi Period (B.E. 2310)

In Thonburi, King Taksin took the throne in 2310 B.E. Despite the fact that it was the time of the founding of a new city, he handled religious matters to the best of his ability. In addition to renovating a few existing temples and establishing other temples in the capital as royal temples, he only constructed one new temple, Wat Bang Yi Ruea Nuea (Wat Ratchakri). To aid the religion, he encouraged monks who were well-versed in the Dhamma and behaved well to be installed as royal monks. He picked and gathered the Tipitaka texts from the provinces to create a royal edition. But his rule came to an end before it was finished. He commissioned the production of an enormous and beautiful Traibhumi pictorial book in 2319 B.E. that, when unfolded, measured more than 34 meters in length. In the same year, he started doing Vipassana. The Emerald Buddha was later carried from Vientiane by the Thai army in 2322 B.E. He became highly interested in meditation in the last years of his reign. It was finally reported in 2325 B.E. that he had a mental illness and had to force the monks to dive in order to demonstrate their innocence. When he realized he was an Ariya, he had the monks honor him. The city descended into anarchy as a result of the monks' refusal to comply, and Somdet Chao Phraya Maha Kasatsuek was forced to step in and be put to death, bringing an end to the monarchy. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 155-156).

4.5 Early Rattanakosin Periods (up to King Rama IV)

King Buddha Yodfa Chulalongkorn took the throne in 2325 B.E. He then constructed a new capital on the east side. He constructed and refurbished numerous temples, such as Wat Phra Chetuphon, Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Wat Saket, and Wat Phra Sri Rattana Satsadaram in the Grand Palace. Temples were also constructed by numerous royal officials, including Somdet Krom Phra Rajawang Bowon Maha Sura Singhanat, who constructed Wat Mahathat. He commanded a gathering of monks and royal scholars to convene the 9th Buddhist Council at Wat Mahathat in 2331 B.E. They then made a copy of the royal Tipitaka edition, which they called the "Big Gold Edition" (Thong Yai). Two other variants were then produced by him: the "Gold-plated Edition" (Thong Chup) and the "Gold Lining Edition" (Rong Thong)

edition. In addition to senior officials' residences and the palaces of royal officials, he mandated that Buddhist texts be taught in the Grand Palace. In order to enforce monastic conduct, purify the religion, and carry on the custom of asking Sangha the question, he established the Sangha Law.

King Rama II was crowned in 2352 B.E. by King Phutthaloetla Naphalai. During this era, Wat Arun Ratchawararam, Wat Molilok, Wat Suthat, and other temples had renovations. He dispatched eight monks to study Sri Lanka's religious dynasty in 2357 B.E. The party brought back six Bodhi tree shoots on the way back. He gave them instructions to plant one tree at Wat Mahathat, one in Wat Suthat Thepwararam, two in Nakhon Si Thammarat, and one in Wat Saket. In Kelantan, someone asked to plant one tree. He ordered the reading of Buddhist chants in 2363 B.E. and, in collaboration with Somdech Phra Sangkharat (Mee), held the Visakha Bucha ceremony in Rattanakosin for the first time as a major holiday of the year in 2360 B.E. Somdech Phra Sangkharat (Mee) expanded the Pali studies curriculum during his rule from three levels (Parian: Tri, Tho, and Ek) to nine phrases (Prayok).

King Nangklao took the throne as King Rama III in 2367 B.E. In contrast to earlier reigns, he commanded the production of multiple additional royal editions of the Tipitaka, making them more comprehensive. He had the Tipitaka, particularly the Suttas, translated into Thai. More than in previous reigns, he supported the building and renovation of several temples and constructed and renovated royal monasteries. Wat Chaloem Phra Kiat, Wat Thepthidaram, and Wat Ratchanatdaram were the temples constructed under this rule. A variety of royal monasteries, including Wat Phra Chetuphon Wimon Mangkharam, Wat Ratchaoros, and Wat Suthat Thepwararam, have been inscribed with his orders to gather books pertaining to literature, medicine, and archeology. In order to make the teaching of Buddhist texts at the Grand Palace more comprehensive, he enlarged and promoted it. In addition to providing support to monks and novices who passed their exams and their parents, he mandated that Buddhist professors be hired at all royal monasteries. For the first time, a royal school was founded when His Majesty ordered a teacher to teach Thai to children. He carried on the custom of posing numerous queries to the monks.

During this time, Prince Mongkut (King Mongkut prior to his accession to the throne) lived in Wat Mahathat, the Supreme Patriarch's home. He had been ordained as a novice in 2360 B.E. and as a monk in 2367 B.E. (during King Rama II's reign). A monk named Sai, also known as Phutthawangso, a royal monk who served as the abbot of Wat Bowon Mongkol, impressed him with his rigorous discipline after he passed the fifth level of the Buddhist examinations. He wanted to act similarly and rigorously. He subsequently relocated to Wat Samorai (Wat Ratcha Thiwat) to live there. He was ordained as a new monk in 2372 B.E. and split off to form the Thammayutika sect, also known as the Thammayut Nikaya. The Thammayut sect was founded in 2376 B.E., as evidenced by the laying of the border stone

and the tying of the new Wat Samorai boundary. He then moved to Wat Bowonniwet, which subsequently developed into the Thammayut sect's headquarters.

After 27 years of ordination, King Mongkut took the throne as King Rama IV in 2394 B.E. at the age of 47. Since he had the chance to travel, meet people, learn about the country's events and shortcomings, learn about the current state of affairs, learn English, and understand the temperament of Westerners, all of which he would have to deal with in the government service in the future, being ordained for such a long time was very helpful to him in the administration of the nation. In addition to restoring Phra Pathom Chedi, he constructed new temples, including Wat Boromniwat, Wat Sommanas Vihara, Wat Pathum Wanaram, Wat Ratchaprathit Sathitmahasimaram, and Wat Makut Kasatriyaram. In 2394 B.E., he established the "Long Chad Edition" of Tipitaka, backed Vietnamese monks, and ordered the first "Makha Bucha" ceremony, all of which were regarded as the first formal acknowledgement of Mahayana Buddhism. (P.A Payutto, B.E. 2540: 156-160).

Buddhism as the Cultural Mediator

Buddhism spread throughout Thailand and became deeply ingrained in Thai society as a result of the historical patronage of Thai kings. Other religions and beliefs, like Brahm - Hindu, Shamanism, Witchcraft, and Black magic (Saiysat), do exist, but they never receive as much official support or endorsement from monarchies or members of the ruling classes. Buddhism has long been supported as the official religion by Thai and neighboring Buddhist kingdoms, as is widely known. Numerous Buddhist temples, buildings, writings, artwork, music, and other material and intangible cultural expressions were produced and incorporated into customs and culture.

It appears that Buddhism's influence extends beyond southeast Asia. According to Yung Dong (2005: 368-369), Buddhism has served as a cultural bridge in Asia since antiquity. In the West, it has evolved from an area of scholarly study to a source of motivation for many individuals seeking to lead meaningful lives in our century. Buddhism spread primarily as a component of Asian cultural heritage in the West, but it spread as a live spiritual tradition and philosophy in Asia. In many areas of cultural interest, including philosophy, religion, spiritual practice, the arts and literature, psychology, and psychotherapy, it provided a wealth of inspiration and posed a challenge.

Often referred to as the "holy land" of Buddhism, pilgrims would travel to India to find inspiration and "study at the source," as it were, particularly at prestigious universities like Nalanda. From China to Java and Sumatra, some of those pilgrims such as the Chinese Buddhists Xuanzang and Yijing (eighth century C.E.) have left behind detailed records of their journeys as well as Buddhist doctrines and practices. The Dhamma has spread from the Himalayan peaks to the coasts of the "Land of the Rising Sun," and from the plains of Central Asia to the rain forest of Java, thanks to these events, which have strengthened

Buddhism's position as an inter-Asian cultural connector and an excellent cultural factor that transcends state borders, political interests, and conflicts.

Because the national character of the Buddhist Saṅgha and the global character of Buddhist teachings have happily blended, local traditions have been able to fully express themselves in the Dhamma. One of the most significant characteristics of Buddhism in connection to different cultures is this, which should be emphasized. Instead of stifling cultural values, it developed the qualities that encouraged the gifted individuals in each environment to express themselves. Literature, music, dancing, theater, printing, painting, architecture, and other forms of art are all considered forms of culture. (Yung Dong, 2005: 368-369)

According to Simon Blackburn, the word “culture” means “The way of life of a people, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, sciences, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity. Cultural features of forms of life are learned but are often too pervasive to be readily noticed from within”. (Simon Blackburn, 2008) Culture changes and is transmitted in a methodical manner. There are two primary categories of culture (Asst. Prof. Chawiwan Suwannapha, B.E. 2559): 1. Material Culture, which included buildings, homes, weapons, equipment, numerous conveniences, and other technology created and produced by people are all considered to be part of material culture. 2. Non-Material Culture, which refers to Ideologies, values, ideas, language, religious beliefs, customs, political ideologies, laws, behaviors, and ways of living that are intangible and invisible are all considered to be part of non-material culture.

Buddhism served as the Cultural Mediator in Thailand. From ancient times, before Thailand was formally unified as a nation, to the present century, Buddhist culture in all its forms has been fostered by the patronage of monarchs. All of this merit was attributed to the previous monarchs. Even now, Thai Buddhists continue to honor and laud them.

Buddhism, Buddhist Kings, and Thai Culture Today

The monarchy and religious institutions are intimately associated. In the past, monks were trusted to advise the king. It is evident that when Buddhism was in decline, the king was the one who purified the religion, backed the Sangha Council, and made reforms till it was pure and has since flourished and expanded to the present day. (Siam Saenkhat, B.E. 2549: 94)

Buddhism was present, and Thai culture was always evolving. The culture of today is greatly influenced by the monarchs of the past. Buddhist-based culture comes in a variety of material and non-material forms. Temples, pagodas, stupas, artwork, sculptures, sacred sites, artifacts, and so on are a few examples. These material civilizations were created by former Buddhist kings. Buddhist rituals and traditions, such as Kathina, Phapa, Loykathong, Merit Making, Paying Homage to monks, showing respect for parents and instructors, and so forth,

are examples of non-material culture that can be observed in Thailand today. Buddhist philosophy and beliefs, like the Law of Kamma, the cycle of rebirth and death, and Buddhist morality and ethics, are also present. Thai culture might have been extremely different now if Buddhist kings had not supported them.

Thai Buddhists are grateful to have Buddhism as national religion, and the King as the religion patronage. Ever since the ancient time Thai culture of moral and ethical had evolved based on Buddha's teaching. Temples and monks play a significant role in teaching Dhamma and moral way of life to Thai people. However, at the moment, the capitalist monetary system is at play, undermining Thai society's positive culture and eradicating community power, unity, and kindness. In every way, society is evolving quickly these days. Because Thai society has been influenced by foreign cultures that have incorporated many aspects of traditional culture, particularly accepting Western culture, both good and bad, it has the characteristics of a "social cancer" a society without a compass, a position, and an ideology that makes it Thai. (Asst. Prof. Chawiwat Suwannapha, B.E. 2559)

This indicates that while the impact of Thai culture in 2024 is still there, it is waning due to several outside influences. According to the Buddha's teaching on the law of impermanence (aniccam), this is completely normal. As science and technology advanced, non-material culture gradually but steadily disappeared. The era of digital and artificial intelligence is arrived. Today, not even the King himself gives the religious issue enough or any attention at all. The older generation of Thai Buddhists, who once took pride in and confidence in the beauty of Thai culture, is no longer the same as the younger generation. They have a tendency to look for and adopt the foreign civilization's culture.

Fortunately, there are still remnants of thriving material civilizations from the past. The temples, pagodas, stupas, and other Buddhist landmarks and relics that were constructed under the patronage of previous kings are now popular tourist destinations. Some temples in Ayutthaya are being maintained as historic temples, including Wat Mahathat, Wat Yai Chai Mongkol, Wat Ratchaburana, Wat Phra Sri Sanphet, and Wat Chaiwatthanaram. Additionally, there are others across the nation. This indicates that Thai people continue to value their culture and the traditions that have been passed down to them over the years.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of historically significant events arranged chronologically according to Thai monarch historical periodization, Buddhism in Southeast Asia, and especially in Thailand, underwent a series of transmissions, adaptations, and mobilizations while maintaining distinctive cultural Buddhist features preserved by the patronage of various King reigns. This included the emergence of Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism.

With the help of numerous local kingdoms and dynasties, such as the Pagan and Mon Kingdoms in Myanmar, the Theravada Buddhist Kingdom in Thailand, the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom in Cambodia, the Mahayana and Hindu practices in the Khmer Empire that interacted with Theravada-dominant regions like Sri Lanka and Thailand, the Phra Ruang dynasties of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai, and the Mangrai dynasty of Lanna, Buddhism had grown to be a significant religious and cultural force in Southeast Asia.

Theravada Buddhism was promoted and institutionalized by kings and rulers throughout Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, under the royal patronage. Thailand has been a focal point of Theravada Buddhism, despite the ongoing regional differences in local cultural and historical contexts. Thai monarchs have long been important patrons of Buddhism, which has become closely entwined with state and royal power. Buddhism is frequently viewed as a religious and cultural force that promotes prosperity for Buddhism, including social norms, values, traditions, and artistic expressions in the form of religious figures, the construction and restoration of buildings and temples, religious Dhamma scripture and text, Tipitaka and Suttas, custom, ceremony, monastic and moral foundation for governance, and the revitalization of cultural practices.

Thai culture has changed from ancient times to the present. Recognizing the historical support of Buddhism by Buddhist kings is unavoidable. Beginning with the time of King Ashoka, who dispatched the elder monks Sona and Uttara to propagate Buddhism throughout Suvarnabhumi, and ending with the Thai kings of Rattanakosin Periods. These historical Buddhist kings made significant contributions to the material and intangible development of Buddhist culture in Thailand. Particularly when it comes to tangible culture, such Buddha statues, pagodas, stupas, and historic Thai temples. These items end up being among the Thai ancestors' most significant bequests. Thai culture, which was established by ancient Thai kings, is still well-known and a popular tourist destination. Temples, stupas, and customs are all examples of the exquisite Thai culture that should be preserved.

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