

Cultural Exchanges between Thailand and Sri Lanka



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The growth and development of Buddhism in the Southeast Asia region was the result of a dynamic process with South Asia. Sri Lanka due to its strategic position in the Indian Ocean was a centre of trade and maritime activity at least from the 6th century A. C. (McCrindle, 1897, p. 371). The kingdoms in the region were partners in an international cultural exchange, in the context of the constant intellectual and cultural traffic within South and South East Asia.

Sri Lankan monks and nuns had visited many countries - China, Tibet, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, for example - as teachers and propagators of Buddhism and Buddhist culture. The least known among these events was the Cambodian royal mission, which formally introduced Buddhism to Laos (1353-1373 A. C.), and included three Sri Lankan monks as chief advisors, one of whom became the first Sangharaja of Laos (Goonatilake, H. 2000).

Buddhism was the medium through which the dissemination of culture took place. The Southeast Asian monks studied Pali, the language in which the Tripitaka was written down in Sri Lanka in the 1st century B. C. These monks were inspired by the Buddhist sculpture, architecture, literature and painting in Sri Lanka, and created their own forms of art with a local flavour. Among the Southeast Asian countries, Thailand appears to have had the most intense and continuous cultural interchange with Sri Lanka.

Earliest cultural exchange: Kingdom of Dvaravati

The Theravada Buddhism appears to have flourished in the lower Menam valley, which covered the present-day central Thailand from the 6th century to about the 12th century. Archeological remains show that the Dvaravati kingdom was established in the 6th or 7th c. with Nakorn Pathom ("First City") or Phra Pathom as the capital. The inhabitants of Dvaravati were Mon people.

There is a great deal of evidence from the region to show that Sri Lankan Buddhism and culture reached Dvaravati. Anuradhapura had reached its zenith by 7th and 8th centuries as a centre of Buddhist culture for Buddhist travellers on the sea route as well as on the land route to Southeast Asia and East Asia up to China, who stopped over in Anuradhapura, facilitated mainly by Sri Lanka's position in the Indian Ocean. The three monastic centers, Mahavihara, Abhayagiri and Jetavana flourished during this time. Sri Lankan monks and nuns played a significant role in the propagation of Buddhism in the region.

Bronze Buddha statues found at Dvaravati were identified by several scholars to have been inspired from Sri Lanka. The most common paryankasana pose (one leg superimposed upon the other) of the Dvaravati seated Buddha images was the one most commonly found in Sri Lanka. (Dupont, P., 1959, pp. 239). The images of the Buddha seated on nagas with seven hoods, the dhyana mudra and the paryankasana of these images which depict a certain fusion of Amaravati and Gupta characteristics took place in Sri Lanka before being introduced into Dvaravati (Dupont, P., 1959, p. 259).

Griswold concluded that Buddha images brought from Sri Lanka must have played a crucial role in the formation of various schools in Thailand during that time (Griswold, 1966, p. 37), and that the 5th century Buddha image from Khorat which is one such example had guided some of the local artists (Griswold, 1966, p. 55. For a detailed discussion and comparison with Buddha images of Sri Lanka, see Sirisena, 1978, pp. 151). Boisselier also argued that these earliest South East Asian Buddha images such as those found in Dvaravati were not directly inspired by Amaravati, but by Anuradhapura, which had itself been strongly influenced by Amaravati (Boisselier, 1963).

Another indication of the existence of close relations between Thailand and Sri Lanka during the Dvaravati period was a discovery of an old Mon inscription of Tham Narai (Narai cave) or the Khao Wong cave in Saraburi province, dated 12th c. BE (550-650 A.C.) which mentions, "kamun anuradhapurakoak" (town people from Anuradhapura) (Charuk Nai Prathet Thai, Inscriptions in Thailand, Vol. 2 p. 45). This is certainly a reference to a group of people from Anuradhapura who settled as a community in Dvaravati.

Anuradhapura referred to here is undoubtedly the Anuradhapura of Sri Lanka for two reasons. Firstly, Anuradhapura had been a major metropolitan city from very early time, the largest city, south of Indraprastha (modern Delhi) since the 9th century B.C., according to recent carbon dated archeology (Deraniyagala, S. U., 1992). Secondly, there was no other city by this name during that time.

The close relations between Dvaravati and Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka was further collaborated when three verses in Noen Sa Bua inscription of Prachinburi, about 100 km to the east of Bangkok, were identified by Mendis Rohanadeera as verses from the Pali work Thelakatahagatha, written in Sri Lanka (Rohanadeera, 1987). These verses written in old Khmer and dated 761 A.C., may have been known to the author of this inscription either through a resident of Dvaravati who visited Sri Lanka or a Sri Lankan who was living in Dvaravati.

There is further evidence from this period to show that there were close relations between Thailand and Sri Lanka.

The fragments of a platform and columns among ruined buildings discovered at P'ong Tuk, 10 miles along the road to Kanburi in the province of Ratpuri (Rajapuri), dated not later than 6th century, bear a resemblance to those found at Anuradhapura (Coedes, 1928, pp 195-209, Le May, 2000, pp. 16). This site has been established as Buddhist by the discovery of several images of the Buddha in bronze or bluish limestone in P'ong Tuk.

Inanimate Ambassadors from Sri Lanka: Buddha images

By the 13th century, Sri Lanka had become the acknowledged "holy land" in the contemporary Buddhist world, and it was considered a demonstration of prowess of rulers of Southeast Asia to possess a Buddha image made in Sri Lanka. The Jinakalamali and the Sihinga Buddharupanidana refer to a mission sent by Sukhothai King Rocaraja to Sri Lanka in the second half of the thirteenth century A.C., jointly with the king of Siridhammanagara (present day Nakhon Si Thammarat), requesting the king of Sri Lanka to send a famous image to Sukhothai. The king who ruled in Sri Lanka at that time was Parakramabahu II of Dambadeniya (A. C. 1236-1271).

King Rocaraja who received this Buddha image known as Phra Buddha Sihinga has been identified by several scholars as King Rama Khamheng of Sukhothai who extended his territory up to the Malay Peninsula. The fame of the Buddha image spread so far and wide that a number of princes in various kingdoms in Thailand went to war in order to possess this image. This is an indication of the respect Sinhalese Buddhism commanded in Thailand at that time, especially among its rulers. Today, there are three statues, all claimed to be the original, one at Chiang Mai, one at Nakhon Si Thammarat and the other in the National Museum in Bangkok. This can only be explained as replicas made to highlight the assumed Sinhala origins.

Cultural exchanges between Sri Lanka and Nakhon Si Thammarat

The existence of close relations between Sri Lanka and Nakhon Si Thammarat is testified by further evidence. Parakramabahu II (1236-1270 A. C.) sent two missions to foreign lands to obtain monks with a view to re-organizing the sangha in Sri Lanka, one to the Cola kingdom and the other to Tambarattha. The mission to Tambarattha was sent with numerous religious and royal gifts to the king of Tambarattha to invite a reputed monk named Dhammakitti from Tambarattha where many Mahatheras lived (Culavamsa, 84, 9-16). The 14th century Sinhala work Pujavaliya mentions that Parakramabahu's mission was sent to a place called Tamalingamu. The Hatthavanagalla-vihara-vamsa refers to an invader called Candrabhanu from Tambalinga, who raided Sri Lanka during Parakramabahu II's reign. Coedes, (1948, p. 72), Sylvain Levi (EA, II, pp. 26-27) and Paranavitana (1944, pp. 17-25) identified Tambralinga with Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Sirima Wickremasinghe has traced the evidence for cultural exchange between Sri Lanka and Nakhon Si Thammarat to the 12th century (Wickremasinghe, 1959 pp. 55) She has cited a slab inscription of Sundaramahadevi, wife of king Vikramabahu I (1111-1132 A.C.) found at the royal palace of Polonnaruwa, refers to Tambarattha. The first two lines of the inscription (Epigraphia Zeylanica IV, pp. 67-72) begin with the praise of a prominent Sri Lankan monk, Ananda. She has pointed out, however, that due to the fragmentary nature of the inscription no conclusion could be reached to the extent of the contribution made by this monk to the development of Buddhism in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

A Sanskrit inscription of Chaiya (Jaiya) of 1230, as pointed out by Coedes, describes Candrabhanu who invaded Sri Lanka as the king of Tambralinga (Candrabhanuti Siridhammaraja). Sirisena has established that Candrabhanu, after failing to gain some relics from Sri Lanka by force, succeeded in getting them by peaceful

means in association with the ruler of Sukhodaya. (Sirisena, 1978, pp. 46, 88) Gunawardana has, however, argued that the identification of Tambarattha with the Ligor region is not a dependable one due to the confusion of the name Tamalingamu in Sinhala works and also due to the fact that there were many places that bore the name Tambarattha. (Gunawardana, R. A. L. H., 1979, pp. 266)

The existence of close relations between Sri Lanka and Nakhon Si Thammarat has been further substantiated by Dupont who traced the major influence on the school of sculpture in Chaiya in Nakhon Si Thammarat, which belonged to the period between 8th and 12th centuries, to the Sinhalese (Dupont 1942). A stupa dated to the 8th century and a number of Buddha images were discovered in the Chaiya region.

Arannavasi sect in Nakhon Si Thammarat

It appears that the arannavasi (forest dwelling) group of monks was introduced to Sukhothai by a Mahathera from Nakhon Si Thammarat during the reign of Rama Khamheng. An inscription of 1292 states that king Rama Khamheng founded an aranna monastery, and offered it to the Mahathera from Nakhon Si Thammarat, and the king, princes and princesses observed precepts during the vassa season, and that the kathin ceremony lasted a month (Griswold & Prasert, 1971).

It should be noted here that after the reforms of the sangha by Parakramabahu I (1153-1186 A.C.) under the leadership of arannavasi Dimbulagala Maha-Kasyapa, Sri Lanka (The arannavasi fraternity became very prominent in 12th and 13th centuries in Sri Lanka, and had its centre at Udumbaragiri or Dimbulagala in Tamankaduwa in Sri Lanka). Sri Lanka regained its reputation as the custodians of the true doctrine as well as the Vinaya or the discipline of the Theravada monastic order, and attracted monks from Southeast Asia. Chappata, the only novice in the delegation of Mon Burmese and Cambodian monks headed by Uttarajiva, the prelate of Burma received ordination, studied the Tripitaka and the commentaries in Sri Lanka for ten years under the Sri Lankan monks. On his return to Burma, Chappata under the patronage of the king, performed higher ordination on Burmese monks in the Sinhalese manner, and thus in 1181 the Sinhala sect of sangha was established in Burma, the first South East Asian country to formally do so.

In the succeeding years too, arannavasi monks continued to remain popular in the region, particularly in Nakhon Si Thammarat when it became known as a Theravada centre. From about the 6th century A.C., Arannavasi or Vanavasi (dwelling in jungle areas, devoted chiefly to meditation) and Gramavasi (residing in towns and villages, engaged in cultural and educational activities) were known in Sri Lanka as distinctive groups. It is these same concepts that continued as Vidarsanadhura (engaged in meditation) and Granthadhura (engaged in writing of texts). By the time Sinhala sangha was established in Burma, the Arannavasins were even engaged in writing non-religious texts, a good example being Arannavasi Maha-Kasyapa who wrote *Balavabodhana*, a Sanskrit Grammar (Rahula, 1956, pp. 196).

It is this same practice of conferring the title of Sangharaja that spread to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. At the beginning, the head of the sangha in Sukhothai was known as "Poo Gru" ("Old Teacher"), and the two groups of monks, Vanavasi and Gramavasi had their own heads, the two groups were also known as "right wing" and "left wing" (Bannarui, 2000, p. 5). Rama Khamheng appointed the forest dwelling monk from Nakhon Si Thammarat, referred to above as the head of the sangha in Sukhothai. To bind this new symbiotic relationship, king being the head of economic and political affairs, the latter, of religious affairs, the king built a new monastery, which is known today as Wat Saphan Hin.

King Luthai (1347-1368) a learned Sri Lankan monk who was residing in Martaban in lower Burma, and conferred on him the title of Sangharaja at a monastery especially constructed for him.

Establishment of Sinhala sangha in Thailand

The Sinhalese sangha was established in Sukhothai during the reign of Lothai (1317-1347), son of Rama Khamheng. During this time, a Sinhala Mahathera, Udumbara Mahasami who belonged to the Arannavasi fraternity had arrived in Pegu (lower Burma). (He has been identified as Sangharaja Medhankara, the author of the *Lokappadipasara*). A monk from Sukhothai named Sumana went to Pegu with Anomadassi, another monk from Sukhothai, studied religious texts under Udumbara Mahasami, and received Upasampada. The king, on hearing of the arrival of the Udumbara Mahasami in Pegu, sent an envoy, requesting him to send a monk who would perform Upasampada and other ecclesiastical functions of the Sangha in Sukhothai. Udumbara Mahasami sent Sumana to Sukhothai for whom the king constructed a monastery called Wat Pa Mamuang (Mango Grove). Thus Sumana Thera established the Sinhala Sangha sect in Sukhothai.

The fame of Udumbara Mahasami spread to other parts of Thailand, and the king of Nabbisapura (Chiangmai) at that time, Kilana (1355-1385), the ninth king of Mengrai dynasty too requested Udumbara Mahasami to send a monk capable of performing all ecclesiastical acts to Chiangmai. Udumbara Mahasami sent Ananda Thera there, but the latter requested the king to get Mahathera Sumana to Chiangmai. The king built the Puppharama monastery (present day Wat Suan Dok in Chiang Mai for the Thera Sumana to stay and establish

the Arannavasi Sinhala sangha. The king also built Wat Phra Yun in Haripunjaya (modern Lamphun) for the Thera Sumana. The Mahathera Sumana's arrival in Chiangmai, not only led to the firm establishment of the Sinhala Upasampada, but also to the setting up of a large number of Buddhist monuments and sculpture in that region. This information given in the Jinakalamali is confirmed in the stone inscription in Pali and Thai at Wat Phra Yun in Haripunjaya and in another inscription found in Talavarama or Wat Pa Ten in Sukhodaya.

It is said that King Kilana caused the building of an artificial cave wat (Wat Umong) in Chiang Mai to house the visiting monks from Sri Lanka who were most probably forest dwelling monks. Wat Umong remains up to now, and is about 5 km outside the city of Chiang Mai.

The same episodes about the Thera Sumana are narrated in the Thai chronicle Mulasasana in greater detail. Sumana and Anomadassi sent back to Udumbaragiri Mahasami with eight more monks. The eight monks received re-ordination from Udumbaragiri Mahasami while Sumana and Anomadassi received the title of Mahatheras on completion of 10 years of monkhood. On return to Sukhodaya, Mahathera Anomadassi stayed at the Rattavana Mahavihara (Red Forest Monastery at Sajjanalaya (present day Sawankhalok), Mahathera Sumana went to Nibbisapura while Ananda stayed in the Mango Grove at Sukhodaya.

Thus the Sinhala sangha was well spread in northern Thailand with centers flourishing in Sukhothai, Nibbisapura (Chiang Mai), Sajjanalaya (present day Suwankhalok) and Haripunjaya (present day Lamphun).

It should be noted that three distinct sects of sangha developed in Thailand: I Sihalagana; Nagaravasigana with a lineage coming from Sona and Uttara and the Puppharamavasigana (Puppharama is the monastery where Sumana resided) with lineage beginning with Sumana ordained under Arannavasi Udumbaragiri. It is said that the Sihalagana performed ecclesiastical acts first, and the other sects participated in acts later. (For more details, see Nagara & Griswold, 1992, p. 320)

More inanimate ambassadors: Buddha relics, Bodhi trees and Buddha Footprints

There is also evidence from about the second half of the 14th century that Buddha relics, replicas of Buddha's Footprint, and seedlings and shoots of the sacred Bodhi tree, which were brought from Sri Lanka were accorded great veneration as objects of religious worship by the royalty in Thailand at the time. The Nagara Jum inscription, dated 1357 A.C., belonging to the reign of Luthai records that "Sri Ratanamahadhatu", an authentic relic of the Buddha, brought from Sri Lanka, was installed at Nagara Jum, and a branch of the sacred Bodhi tree was planted by the king in great celebration.

An inscription which was found in the Asokarama monastery precincts states that it was built in 1399 by Queen Chulalakana, wife of Mahadharmaraja III and daughter of Luthai to enshrine authentic mahathat (mahadhatu) brought from Sri Lanka (Gosling, 1998, p. 229). These Buddha relics were enshrined in Sri Lankan style of ceti (cedi) all over Thailand.

The Samantakutaparabata inscription (1902 or 1912 B.E. = 1359 or 1369 A.C.) of Luthai, found at Sukhothai, records the establishment of several Footprints of the Buddha with 108 auspicious marks on the soles of the feet. Luthai recorded that his artisans made exact copies of the Buddha's Footprint on the Mt. Samantakuta in Sri Lanka. The same name was given to the peak of a mountain to commemorate Mt Samantakuta in Sri Lanka (Griswold & Prasert, "Studies 11.1: The Epigraphy of Mahadhmaaraja I of Sukhodaya" *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61.1, 1973).

Another Pali language inscription written in Thai characters found at Wat Vangna in Bangkok dated B. E. 1970 (1426-27 A. C.) refers to a foot print of the Buddha.

Title of Sangharaja conferred on Sri Lankan monk

King Luthai (1347-1368) became a great patron of the Sihala Sangha in Sukhothai, and made Sukhothai a centre of Theravada Buddhist activities in Thailand. While he was viceroy of Si Satchanalai, he wrote one of the most remarkable Thai literary works, the Trai Phum (Three Worlds), a description of the universe according to Buddhist cosmology.

Several inscriptions from the second half of the 14th century (Griswold and Prasert, 1968, 1969, 1971, 1978) give evidence of direct religious contact between the king of Sukhothai and Sri Lankan monks. Two inscriptions, in Thai and Khmer, found at Sukhothai, dated 1361 A.C. were installed by king Luthai, especially composed to commemorate the arrival of a learned monk from Sri Lanka who was residing at the time in Martaban in lower Burma. Luthai's ministers and family travelled halfway to Martaban to receive the Sri Lankan monk and a group of Sinhala sect of monks accompanying him. The king conferred the title of Sangharaja on the learned monk, and offered him the monastery of the Mango Grove. The king studied under him, and at the end of the vassa season, the king received ordination from the Sangharaja. In these inscriptions that give great details of these events, the Sangharaja is referred to as the Buddha. The Khmer inscription contains more information than the Siamese one, and gives details of the elaborate arrangements made by the king of Sukhothai in honour the learned Sri Lankan monk. An inscription written in Pali by the Sangharaja himself, confirms the information given by the above two inscriptions.

Thai Royal Visitor in Sri Lanka

Sri Sraddha (Si Satha), a nephew of king Rama Khamheng visited Sri Lanka some time before 1347. In the two inscriptions written by Sri Sraddha himself found in Sukhothai, he says, he was a Theravada Buddhist monk by the name of Mahathera Sri Sraddharajaculamuni Srirattanalankadipa Mahasami, and stayed in Sri Lanka at Gampola and Mahiyangana for ten years. It is assumed that he stayed for ten years to become a Mahathera, since according to Sinhalese tradition, a monk becomes a Mahathera only after ten years. 'Mahasami' is a title, which Sri Lanka kings conferred on monks who were re-ordained there.

The inscriptions mention that Sri Sraddha also restored the Mahathupa (built 2nd century B.C.) and the Mahavihara of Anuradhapura, which were falling into ruin. He also states that he restored the Mahiyangana Cetiya (built in commemoration of the claimed visit by the Buddha to Sri Lanka) on the bank of the river Mavalikaganga (Mahaveli) in which the Buddha relics Kesadhathu (Hair relic), Givadhathu (collar-bone relic) and the Paribhogadhathu (objects used by the Buddha) were enshrined. The two great relics of the Buddha, the Kesadhathu and the Givadhathu, which he mentions, he took back to Sukhothai, may have been obtained at Mahiyangana. Sri Sraddha also visited the Footprint of the Buddha on the Mount Samantakuta.

We cite here a passage from the inscriptions, referring to the Tooth Relic procession Sri Sraddha witnessed, "... went to a forest dwellers [monastery] outside the city of Kambalai (Gampola) where the inhabitants of Sihala had decorated with flags, banners, lamps, incense and garlands ... with a numerous escort of honour, following the Mahatheras, Theras and Anutheras, a troop of Theras who observed dhutangasilas (ascetic practices) ... Then came counselors, royal ministers, upasakas and upasikas. Mahadantadhathu (Buddha's Tooth Relic) [was taken in a] pavilion. Sri Sraddha Mahasami offered himself as a gift ... The relic performed miracles for three months."

The above festival witnessed by Sri Sraddha, according to Paranavitana was a public exposition of the Buddha's Tooth Relic in Gampola, which became the seat of the Sinhalese royalty in 1341, and the forest monastery was the place where the Sangharaja Dhammakitti resided before the building of the Gadaladeni Vihara.

Sinhala Craftsmen in Sukhothai

When Sri Sraddha left Sri Lanka for Sukhothai, he took along with him, according to the inscriptions, a group of Sinhalese craftsmen, and settled them in five villages in Sukhothai.

On his return, Sri Sraddha built in Sukhothai, over a thousand Cetiya, planted 300 Srimahabodhi shoots, taken from the Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura, some from branches, and some from seeds. He also founded a Footprint of the Buddha.

Inscriptions provide information on how the architecture, as well as craftsmen from Gampola contributed to the Sukhodaya Buddhist architecture. He enshrined the two great relics in the already existing Mahathat stupa (Sthupa of great relics, Pali: Mahadhathu), which still remains to be the main piece of architecture in Sukhothai. He got the Sri Lankan craftsmen to add the stucco motifs to the Mahathat stupa's four Khmer style towers. These stucco motifs of makaras (mythological crocodile-like creatures) spewing rosettes upward towards a central kala (demon) were based on designs used at Gampola at the time. The bare outlines of the stuccos, which provided the model for the Mahathat, can still be seen on Gampola's Lankatilake temple, which was built in 1342. The king of Sri Lanka during this time was Buvanekabahu IV (1341-51).

According to Gosling, on Sri Sraddha's return to Sukhothai, there was "overwhelming adoption of Sinhalese styles... with a multitude of Sinhalese-style sthupas" (Gosling 1998, p. 121, p 123)

The new Sinhalese influence did not, however, alter the basic design of the Mahathat tower at the center of the city of Sukhothai, but the stucco motifs transformed the old Khmer towers.

Examples of Sinhalese influence predating this period have also been identified. The Chedi Si Hong relief, composed of crouching elephants suggests Sinhalese prototypes much earlier than the fourteenth century. The elephants supporting kneeling lions, and separated by standing devatas (minor Buddhist deities) holding auspicious flowerpots is a theme found in early Sinhalese sculptural reliefs (Gosling, Ibid, p.123). Other examples identified to have been early Sinhalese influence are two small bell-shaped sthupas, constructed of laterite – Wat Ton Makham and Wat Chedi Si Hong, the latter faced with stucco reliefs. Another indication of early Sinhala influence, which Griswold suggested in 1967, was that Mahathat lotus bud sthupa was a copy of a (hypothetical) reliquary casket in which Buddhist relics were carried from Sri Lanka to Sukhothai (Griswold, 1967, p. 121)

Most of what is seen today at Sukhothai is designated as the "early" architectural period, which began after Sri Sraddha's return from Sri Lanka around 1345 (Gosling, Ibid, p125). Phra Si Ratana Mahathat was built to house relics. Nine sacred elements of the sthupa were installed, a bodhi tree was planted and a vihan (vihara) was built. The sthupa was surrounded by engravings of the five hundred Jatakas. Among Sri Sraddha's building activities, were the renovation of the mahavihan, paving the floor with brick, and the installing of Buddha images that were collected from around the countryside in the mahavihan after stuccoing.

The large bell-shaped sthupas that began to be built in large numbers in the middle of the fourteenth century have been directly traced to Sinhalese prototypes. Gosling points out that the bell-shaped sthupas and the standing elephants emerging from niches found in Sukhothai have been inspired by the Gampola Lankatilake temple and Gadaladeniya temple (two sites visited by Sri Sraddha). The sthupa at Wat Chang Rop has been shown to be the most closely resembling the bell-shaped elephant-supported sthupa at Gampola. The Wat Chang Lom sthupa with stuccoed images of standing elephants emerging from niches has followed the design of Sthupa at Wat Chang Rop. Among the other large bell-shaped sthupas are those found at Wat Sa Si, Wat Sangkhawat and Wat Mum Lanka..

A conclusion made by Gosling after the study of Sukhothai architecture is noteworthy here. Gosling argued, "In spite of the overwhelming abundance of Sinhalese influence that changed the very nature of Sukhothai's

religious and architectural landscape in the mid-fourteenth century, ...Tai themselves must be considered not as mere recipients of foreign ideas... but as seekers, progenitors and determiners of the artistic traditions that would emerge and flourish...[as evidenced from] those basic post-and lintel and pyramidal forms would persist throughout the Sukhothai period" (Gosling, Ibid, pp.240).

Relations during the Ayutthaya period

In the middle of the 14th century, the political centre of Thailand changed from Sukhothai to the kingdom of Ayutthaya. Ayutthaya began to flourish as a Buddhist centre under royal patronage, which encouraged religious and cultural ties with Sri Lanka.kings

According to the Jinakalamali, 25 monks from Chiangmai and 8 monks from Cambodia went to Sri Lanka in 1423, learnt the Tripitaka from Vanaratana Mahathera and received upasampada. These monks, together with 6 Mon monks from Ramanna country received upasampada at a ceremony held on the river Kalyani in 1424 from a chapter of 20 Sinhalese Mahatheras headed by Vanaratana Mahathera. After the ordination ceremony, the South East Asian monks made pilgrimage to the Tooth Relic in Kandy, the Buddha's Footprint on the Samantakuta, and the sixteen sacred shrines of Sri Lanka. They returned to Ayutthaya with precious relics, accompanied by the two senior monks named Vikramabahu and Uttamapanna. On return, they held the upasampada ceremony in Ayutthaya where Mahathera Silavisuddhi, the tutor of the chief queen of Boromaraja II (1424-48), and another Thera named Saddhammakovidha received upasampada.

It was during the reign of Parakramabahu VI (1412-1467) of Kotte, that the above-mentioned team visited Sri Lanka, and the Mahathera Vanaratana was Sangharaja and the head of the monastic institution of Keragala.

Was King Tilokaraja's general a Sri Lankan?

It was observed above that the monastery Siharam or Mahabodhi Arama (Wat Cet Yod) in Chiangmai was so named because King Tilokaraja (1448-88) planted a seedling, brought from the sacred Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura. He also convened a Council for the revision of the Tripitaka. It is also mentioned that by the order of the king, the king's general named Sihagotta (Sinhala clan) rebuilt the shrine called Rajakuta in Chiangmai, and deposited a sacred relic, brought from Sri Lanka. It is likely from his name that this minister was a Sinhalese, and therefore he was assigned to do that task.

There is further evidence to show that King Tilokaraja had a special association with Sri Lanka as reflected in the Atthasalini-atthayojana, written by the Thai monk Nanakitti from Chiang Mai. In this text, the author says that the Panasarama monastery, where he wrote the book, was built by a king of great fame and merit bearing the epithet of Lanka. Saddhatissa believes that this may be the same king Tilokaraja who is conjectured to have built the Panasarama monastery (Saddhatissa, 1974, p. 222, note 13).

The study of Pali and writing of Thai historical and religious books

A major cultural exchange generated by Thai-Sri Lanka relations was the study of Pali by Thai monks, the language of the Tripitaka, and the composition of Thai histories in Pali and Thai. It should be noted here that the study of Pali and the writing of chronicles in Burma was also inspired by Sri Lankan monks, the first chronicle being Mahasammatahvamsa, written in 1520, directly modelled after the Mahavamsa (Hla Pe, 1985, pp. 52). Prince Damrong remarked that Sri Lankan monks were considered teachers and they showed the way of writing history after the manner of the Mahawongse. (Prince Damrong, 1919, I, pp. 1-66). Not only was the Mahavamsa held as the model for writing histories, and therefore, was widely used in the Southeast Asia region, but a unique contribution came from the region with a new version of the Mahavamsa, known as the Extended Mahavamsa. This text which has incorporated a 10th century commentary was written in Cambodian characters, and in our view, is probably a work of a Thai monk, and not of a Cambodian.

At the beginning, the Thais used the Sinhalese characters to write Pali, and later the Cambodian script (Jayawickrama, 1978, p. viii). The Thai script, which was introduced in 1283, was utilized for secular works and translations only. It was only in the reign of Chulalongkorn (Rama V 1868-1911) that the entire Tripitaka was published in Thai characters (Saddhatissa, 1974, p. 214).

The famous Pali work Saddhammasangaha, a history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, was composed by a Thai monk from monastery Ayutthaya who returned to Ayutthaya after studying under the Mahathera Dhammakitti Mahasami of Gadaladeni and receiving upasampada under the name of Dhammakitti. Mahathera Dhammakitti Mahasami was the Sangharaja in Sri Lanka at that time, and was also the author of several Pali works. On return to Ayuthia, Thai Mahathera Dhammakitti stayed at Lankarama, a monastery built by Boromaraja (Paramaraja) (1370-1388). Naming the

monastery after Sri Lanka indicates the religious recognition of Sri Lanka in Thailand during this time. The king of Sri Lanka during this period was Buvanekabahu V (1372-1408).

Wat Siharam or Wat Mahabodharam (present day Wat Cedi Cet Yod) in Chiang Mai became the first centre of Pali studies in Thailand. We noted above that the Wat Siharam or Wat Mahabodharam was so called because King Tilokaraja (1448-1488 A. C.) had a Bodhi branch brought from Sri Lanka planted there in 1455. The Bodhi tree stands up to now. In 1477, the Eighth Buddhist Council (Tripitaka Sanghayana) was convened here with Mahathera Dhammadinna as Chairman of monks and with the King as the Chairman of the lay committee. This council gave rise to a great revival of Pali literature and learning in Northern Thailand. It is noteworthy that almost all original Pali texts that emerged in Thailand were written in this region.

Monk Bodhiransi of Chiang Mai, the first abbot of Wat Siharam or Wat Mahabodharam composed the *Camadevivamsa*, which was a history of Haripunjaya. He also composed the *Pra Buddha Sihinga* or *Sihingaputtharupaniidhana* (Notton, tr. 1933) which records the story of the arrival of the Sinhala Buddha image of Sri Lanka to Nakhon Si Thammarat at the invitation of the rulers of Sukhothai and Nakhon Si Thammarat, and the high esteem it was held in all the kingdoms of Thailand.

A number of authors appear to have flourished in the city of Navapura (or Paramenda which means god Indra who is regarded as the protector of Buddhism in Thailand)), another name for Chiang Mai. Thera Nanakitti wrote a series of grammatical exegeses of Buddhaghosa's commentaries. The *Atthayojana* of the *Samanatapasadika* was written by him in 1492 or 1493. He wrote the *Ganthidipani*, a glossary to the *Patimokkha*, and the *Kaccayanarupadipani*, a commentary on the famous 13th century grammar, the *Rupasiddhi*[\[1\]](#).

Nanakitti's most famous composition was *Atthasalini-atthayojana*, a treatise on Buddhaghosa's *Atthasalini* (Pannasekhara, 1849). This was written in 1495 while living in a monastery called *Panasarama* in Chiang Mai.

The *Sammohavinodani-atthayojana* (ed. Pannasekhara, 1852) was also written by Nanakitti in 1495, as has been convincingly concluded by Saddhatissa (*Saddhatissa*, Ibid, p. 214)

Monk Ratanapanna wrote in 1516, the *Jinakalamali*, while living in the *Rattavanarama* in Chiang Mai. This is one of the most important historical works written in Thailand. The *Vajirasaratthasangaha*, a summary of the Buddha's teachings was also written by Ratanapanna. The *Mulasasana* was the last work of Ratanapanna. This is a Pali translation of a chronicle written in Thai dealing with the origins of Buddhism in Thailand.

Sirimangala is the next most prolific Pali scholar in Thailand. *Vessantaradipani* is a treatise on the *Vessantarajataka* written by him in 1517. *Cakkavaladipani* is another treatise written by him to explain Buddhist cosmology. Another cosmological treatise written by him is *Lokadipani* which is based on the account of the beginnings of life and the world as given in the *Aggannasutta* in the *Digha Nikaya*. The *Mangalattadipani* written in 1524 is the best known work of *Sirimangala*. This work has been described as the most extensive exposition of the *Mangala Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata*, so far written in the Pali language. This book is used as a standard text for Pali examinations in Thailand and Cambodia. According to the colophon, it was written during the reign of the king who was the nephew of the king who possesses the epithet 'Lanka'.

There are several more texts written during the same period. Among them are the *Sankhyapakasaka*, written by *Nanavilasa*, and the *Visuddhimaggadipani* by *Uttarama*.

Sotabbamalini is a text written in the 18th century to describe the advantages of listening to the dhamma. It is said that this book was taken by the team of monks headed by Upali Thera when they went to re-establish the *Upasampada* ordination in Sri Lanka. Saddhatissa has drawn our attention to an original story in the text that illustrates the contemporary regard that Thailand showed towards Sri Lanka as the centre of the dhamma (*Saddhatissa*, 1974, p. 219).

The monk Brahma Rajapanna at Sirijanalaya in the Mahadhamma-raja-pabbata monastery wrote the Ratanabimbavangsa, the history of the Emerald Buddha (Notton, tr. 1912).

The best-known historical chronicle in Thailand is the Sangitivamsa, composed by Bhadanta Vanaratana Vimaladhamma (Somdej Phra Vanarat) during the reign of Rama I in 1789. This deals with the history of Buddhist Councils, the first three held in India, the next four in Sri Lanka, and the last two in Thailand. The eighth was the one convened by king Tilokaraja in 1475, which was referred to above. The last one was held under Rama I in 1788.

Thai Monks re-establish Sinhala Sangha back in Sri Lanka

The Sinhala sect of Buddhism continued to flourish in Thailand during the reign of Emperor Tilakapanattu (1495-1525), with a large number of educational and religious institutions with learned scholars. Immediately after this period, i.e. from the second half of the sixteenth century, Buddhism suffered a setback due to destruction caused by the Burmese invasions, and later, with the arrival of the Western powers.

It was only after Maha Tammaraja II or popularly known as king Boromokot ascended the throne of Ayutthaya in 1733, that Ayutthaya began to re-establish itself as an important centre of Buddhism. (Ayutthaya had become a major trading centre having residents from far away as Japan). This was the time when, subsequent to European colonization of Sri Lanka's coastal region, the Buddhist Sangha had declined to its lowest ebb in Sri Lanka, and the Sri Lankan king Sri Wickrama Rajasingha was looking for a place where the Sangha existed in a pure condition in order to get assistance to purify the Sangha in Sri Lanka. At the request of his ministers and monk, Saranankara, the king sent two missions to Thailand to secure monks for an ordination ceremony. The first mission faced shipwreck. In response to the second mission, the Thai king did not send monks since the Sri Lanka king had died by then.

The next Sri Lankan king Kirti Sri Rajasingha sent a mission to king Boromokot, requesting him to send Thai monks to purify the Sangha in Sri Lanka. The mission of five Sinhala ambassadors arrived in Ayutthia on 8 July 1751. The ambassadors who were received with great honour, had an audience with the Thai king, as well as with the Sangharaja. They also participated in religious festivals, such as kathina, and visited important Buddhist shrines. The Thai mission to Sri Lanka included 20 Mahatheras headed by Upali Maha Thera and 8 Samaneras (novices). The King bade farewell to the envoys who left Ayutthia on 6 or 7 November 1751 in a grand procession carrying a golden Buddha image, Dhamma books and a royal message written in Pali and various kinds of gifts to the king of Sri Lanka. From the Siam harbour, the Thai envoys, together with the leader of the Sri Lankan mission left in a Thai ship, while the Sri Lankan ambassadors left in the same Dutch ship in which they arrived in Siam. The Siamese ship met with an accident in Ligor, and the envoys went back to Ayutthia at the request of king Boromkot. They returned to Ayutthia on 21 June 1752.

Another Thai ship was arranged by the king, and the mission left Ayutthia on 15 December 1752, and included 18 Thai monks, headed by Upali Maha Thera and 7 Samaneras. The mission composed of a total number of 74, including 5 ambassadors, an officer in charge of gifts, 2 language translators, 4 physicians (including 2 masseurs), 5 musicians, clerks, cooks, soldiers, and servants. They arrived in Kandy on 12 July 1753. The king of Sri Lanka welcomed the Thai Mahatheras in great reverence, and took them in a grand procession to Malwatta Vihara where they resided. On the full moon day of 20 July 1753, six Sinhalese monks, including the scholar monk Ven. Welivita Saranankara, the initiator of the event, and the abbots of Malwatta Vihara and Asgiri Vihara received upasampada from the Thai monks. The Thai monk Upali Mahathera acted as their Upajjhaya (preceptor), while Brahmajoti Mahathera and Mahapunna Mahathera served as Kammavaca (ecclesiastical guide).

This marked the establishment of the Siyam or Siyamopali sect in Sri Lanka, which continues to be the most prominent up to the present day.

After the upasampada ceremony, the Thai monks worshipped the Tooth Relic in Kandy at a special exposition. Thereafter, they went round the country on pilgrimage to worship the Buddha's Footprint at Samantakuta, and the most important sixteen shrines such as the Sri Maha Bodhi and Mahaceti.

King Boromkot was so far-sighted, that he had planned to send three missions of Thai monks to Sri Lanka within a period of ten years, so that those monks who received upasampada could confer upasampada on others. The team of Thai monks headed by Upali Mahatheras worked hard towards this end. They performed, not only all ecclesiastical acts such as vassa, kathina and sima (demarcation of boundaries of Uposatha hall) ceremonies, but also made every effort to ensure that the Sri Lankan monks learnt the performance of these acts. They traveled a great deal around the country, and performed the sima ceremonies at many Sri Lankan monasteries, so that the Sri Lankan monks could perform the ecclesiastical acts in different regions. The two Thai Mahatheras, Mahanama and Brahmassara were entrusted with 24 Sri Lankan monks for training in Vidarsana meditation. Thus they made a firm footing for the re-establishment of the Sangha.

A Second Religious Mission to Sri Lanka

King Boromkot sent a second mission of 22 monks headed by Visuddhacari Mahathera and Varagnanamuni Mahathera, and 20 Samaneras, 3 lay ambassadors, along with 97 Dhamma books that the monks in Sri Lanka had wanted. The purpose of the second mission that left Ayutthaya at the end of October 1755 was to make the new team of monks continue the activities of the first team of monks, and allow the first team to return to

Thailand. Visuddhacari Mahathera was a Vidarsanadhura (meditation expert), while the other was a Granthadhura (textual expert).

King Kirti Sri Rajasingha was a foreigner, a Hindu by birth, brought in at the request of the Sinhalese. But, his contribution to Buddhism, and especially the vital role he played in re-establishing the Sangha was well acknowledged. Yet, in the context of the national renaissance that occurred during this time, there was a desire on the part of the prominent monks and the aristocratic chiefs to put on the throne, a Buddhist by birth. In spite of the king's deep interest in Buddhism, the king continued the Hindu practice of applying holy ash on his forehead. The leading monks and the chiefs, therefore, requested the Thai monks to get a prince from Thailand.

The Phongsavadan, the Thai chronicle records that a prince named Krom Muvan Tep Pipith or Deva Pipith who was involved in a conspiracy against the ruling king of Thailand was banished to Sri Lanka in 1759, while the others involved were put in prison. The Sinhala work, Sasanavatimavarnana describes that the chiefs of the Sinhala court conspired to kill the king, the queen and their son, and install the Thai Prince on the throne. The conspiracy failed.

The year 1764 marked the fruition of the far-sighted plan of king Boromokot (he died in 1758), and the dedication of the Thai monks on one side, and the hard work of the Ven. Welivita Saranankara and the royal patronage of king Kirti Sri Rajasingha for the common Buddhist cause. In November 1764, the Sinhala monks performed the upasampada ceremony by themselves.

Close Cultural Ties in the 19th Century

Significant ties between Sri Lanka and Thailand appear next in the latter part of the 19th century. About forty Sinhala scholar monks were establishing a global network of Buddhist scholarship from Japan in the East to the U. S. in the West. The scholar monk Waskaduwe Subhuti was in correspondence with Buddhist scholars around the world. Many Westerners learnt Pali and Buddhism under him. Those events set into motion, the worldwide rebirth of Buddhism, later carried to fruition by the Sinhalese nationalist Anagarika Dharmapala.

Ven. Subhuti corresponded and exchanged books and gifts with several members of the royal household of king Chulalongkorn (Rama V) from 1877 for a period of 19 years. He even dedicated one of his books to king Chulalongkorn.

It is interesting to note that Ven. Subhuti wrote in June 1883 in Pali to Ven. Vajiranavarorasa of Wat Bonivet of Bangkok, the younger brother of king Chulalongkorn, for which he received a reply in Pali. It was Ven. Vajiranavarorasa who established the Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya in Bangkok in 1893. In parenthesis, it should be noted that, as part of the Buddhist renaissance in Sri Lanka, which led to the global Buddhist movement, two centers of Buddhist learning were established in 1873 (Vidyodaya) and in 1875 (Vidyalankara).

Ven. Subhuti wrote to Prince Bhanurangsi, on 23 November 1885, the King's younger brother, bemoaning colonial actions by the British in Burma, saying, "Although we have no kings here [Sri Lanka], we have always recognized the kings of Burma and Siam as our kings" (Guruge 1984). Around this time, Ven. Subhuti also received Prince Sonapandit, another younger brother of the king, and later Prince Sawadesophon, and Prince Pridong. He had an audience with His Majesty Chulalongkorn who visited Sri Lanka in April 1897. He played host to many pilgrims and distinguished visitors from Thailand.

Prince Prisdong, the Siamese Ambassador to the United Kingdom a grandson of king Rama III had visited Ven. Subhuti in Sri Lanka, and was in correspondence with him for several years. On Nov 1, 1896, Prince Prisdong was ordained in Sri Lanka as Ven. Jinavaravamsa. The Prince Priest, as he was known, studied under Ven. Subhuti. He later moved to Ratna Cedi, at Dipaduttarama in Colombo (popularly known as Thai temple) which was supposedly designed by him. He founded the Association for the Promotion of Free Education. He remained in the forefront of the Sri Lanka Buddhist educational movement, and also gave much assistance to the Ven. Subhuti in his international networking pursuits until he returned to Thailand in 1911.

In the late 19th century, Sinhalese monks and lay persons in close partnership with those in Thailand, took the initiative in introducing Buddhism to the Western world, and in the 20th century, Sri Lanka and Thailand together built organizations such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists to forge solidarity among all Buddhists – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana.

Conclusion

Thailand and Sri Lanka have had, ever since Thailand's emergence, a fruitful and warm relationship in many spheres; in religion, art, literature and architecture, mutually inspiring and influencing each other. As we approach the 250 anniversary of Upali Thera's visit to Sri Lanka, these links would be recalled and strengthened.

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