CHAPTER 5

THERAVADA AND MAHAYANA STATUS:
A CASE STUDY IN THAILAND
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5.1. THE INFLUENCE OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM IN THAILAND

Looking back on our history, we see clearly the close relationship between Buddhism and the Thai nation. The history of the Thai nation is also the history of Buddhism. Buddhism flourished in Siam, now called Thailand, from a very early period, about the first or second century A.D. \(^1\) if not earlier. The Thai nation originated over 2,000 years ago. Buddhism is proved by archaeological findings at Pong Tuk and Nakon Pathom, a place 30 km away from Bangkok. From the archaeological findings at Nakon Pathom, such as the Dhamma Cakra\(^2\) (wheel of Law), the Buddha footprints and seals, as well as inscriptions in Pali language, it is clear that the first form of Buddhism introduced into Thailand was Theravada (the Doctrine of the Elders) Buddhism. It was taken from India to Nakon Pathom of Suvarnabhumi\(^3\) by the two Theras - Sona and Uttara at the injunction of emperor Asoka. Since Asoka was ruling in third century B.C., it can be reasonably argued that Buddhism first appeared in Thailand during the third century B.C.
To a somewhat later period belongs the large number of ruined sanctuaries and some fine sculptures which indicate the strong influence of the Gupta period. These have been referred to the Dvaravati school. Dvaravati was a flourishing kingdom at the time of Yuan Chwang, i.e. the first half of the seventh century A.D. \(^4\).

Theravada Buddhism was reestablished in the Siam area under Burmese rule in the seventeenth century after the Buddha \(^5\) (eleventh century A.D.), before the Thais came to power. Ever since the establishment of the Thai government at Ayuthaya at the beginning of the twentieth century after the Buddha (Middle of the fourteenth century A.D.), Thailand has been a Buddhist land.

At the time that Ayuthaya became the capital, the ruler sent a mission to Sri Lanka to bring back a learned Bhikkhu who was a master of the Tripitaka and qualified to give the Theravada ordination to the Bhikkhus of Thailand step by step the Theravada temples increased in number and the ancient Hindu temples were adapted to Buddhist uses. The remnants of Mahayana Buddhism were converted to Theravada, and the fame of the Thai Buddhists spread throughout the Buddhist world. Three centuries after the founding of Ayuthaya as the capital of Thailand, in 2294 B.E. (A.D. 1750). When the king of Sri Lanka wished to revive Buddhism in his land, he invited the Bhikkhus from this land for higher ordination. Since that time Siamese ordination has been in use in Sri Lanka to the present time.
Theravada Buddhism is still the state religion of Thailand. Under the constitution, the king, as a symbol of the nation, although protection of all religions, must be a Buddhist. The total population of Thailand is 60 million. Out of this number, 93.4 percent are Buddhists. Theravada has had a deep influence in the Thai arts, traditions, learning and the character of the people. It has modelled their manner of thinking and acting. In short, it has become an integral part of Thai life. The charm that has caused Thailand to be called the Land of Smiles undoubtedly comes from the influence of Buddhism over her people. Realising this facts, the Thai rulers have taken the responsibility for the protection and promotion of Buddhism.

The rulers of Thailand have encouraged and supported Buddhism by building and maintaining monasteries, by providing the monks with material necessities and facilities for performing religious duties, by patronizing their educational activities such as the Buddhist councils for revising the Tripitaka and having the scriptures translated into Thai, and reforming the Sangha and appointing able supreme Patriarchs to govern the order.

The Department of Religious Affairs has been established in the Ministry of Education to achieve close cooperation between the order and the Government and to provide a channel through which the Sangha can communicate with government authorities and through which the State can promote the well being of the Sangha.
Also, four Buddhist holidays are recognized by the Government as national holidays, such as the Magha Puja Day, the Visakha Puja Day, the Asalha Puja Day and the Khao Pansa Day. Nearly all state and public ceremonies are blessed by the participation and chanting of senior members of the order. The people also invite monks to chant the Sutras and protective formulae for their blessing and protection in all household rites such as housewarmings, birthday celebrations and weddings, and especially to conduct funeral rites and memorial services for the benefit of the deceased. Even lustral or consecrated water is used at most of the auspicious ceremonies. Other forms of animistic and Brahmanic beliefs can also be seen mingled with these popular Buddhist practices, which in a real sense should not be observed by the Theravada Buddhist.

In Bangkok, the skyline is pierced by the spire of pagodas and stupas, especially those of Wat Arun (the Temple of Dawn) and the Golden Mount. "In the rice lands a traveler is seldom out of the sight of a Phra Chedi (Cetiya) or stupa towering above the village trees. In the less populous sections of the countries are sacred caves, 'footprints' of Buddha, and on many a steep and isolated hill a greying cetiya visible for miles around. Bronze and stone images of the Buddha are constantly found in unexpected places while digging the land for irrigation, road construction and other purposes. Buddhism thus has become rooted in the soil of Thailand both literally and metaphorically."
The influences of Theravada can be seen in all aspects of the Thai life and culture. In the home people keep for worship the Buddha images of various sizes on small altar-tables. While traveling, they wear small Buddha images around their necks as objects of veneration and recollection or as amulets for adornment and protection, when passing sacred places like the Royal Chapel of the Emerald Buddha, devout Buddhists never fail to pay respect to them. Many a times during the year they hold and attend festivals at the monastery. Occasionally they go on a pilgrimage to some favourite shrines located in a remote place. Monastery buildings such as the Uposatha hall the repository of Buddha images are usually the most beautiful and ornate building in the village. The Buddha's teachings and Buddhist literature such as the jataka tales have inspired Thai literature and most of the Thai art forms, especially mural paintings which cover the interior walls of most temples. Pali and Sanskrit are recognized as classical languages. A large number of Thai words, especially those used in royal language and written language are derived from Pali and Sanskrit. Scholars writing textbooks usually turn to Pali and Sanskrit roots for modern technical vocabulary.

Thai Kingship and Religious Reform

Human life is a dynamic process of change and development. Because religion is not an abstract entity but is inextricably linked to human life, it shares in this process. Individuals and societies are perpetually changing, and so their religious faith and its various expressions must be continually refashioned.
and adapted to ever new and different circumstances. Throughout human history such reformulations have been a universal and necessary feature of living religious faith and traditions. Together with other aspects of culture and like life itself, the forms of religion are characterized by birth and growth, death and decay, renewal and transformation. The reform of religion is not unrelated to the changes taking place in other spheres of human life and society. Indeed, religious reforms are frequently made in response to these changes. Shifts in political or economic patterns or in prevailing social customs, and new social conditions served impetus for religious reform that may come from within the religious system itself. In such cases the reforms made in the religious sector may affect other areas and necessitate changes being made there as well.

We have seen that it is concerned with one aspect of this interrelationship between religion and other dimensions of human life. It focuses on interaction between the religious and political sectors, especially on the role of political leaders in stimulating and fostering religious reforms. The Government gives the encouragement and support to the success of a particular religious reform. At the same time participation in religious affairs by Government leaders has frequently served to legitimate and strengthen the political power of those leaders.

This study focuses on events that took place in Thailand at the end of the eighteenth century. It was an usually difficult period in Thai history, during
which many important and significant changes, including major religious reforms, took place in Thai society\textsuperscript{10}.

One of the divisions of Thai society that was especially disrupted, hence in need of immediate attention and repair, was the religious sector. The Buddhist Sangha in particular needed extensive reform and purification. Monastic organization and discipline had never fully recovered from the havoc caused by the destruction of former capital, and the religious irregularities of former king's reign had contributed still further to the disorder and degeneracy of the monks. \textit{Rama I} recognized the seriousness of this decline and the negative affect that it was having on Thai society. Early in his reign he took steps to reform the Sangha and improve the quality of religious life generally. These actions were seen by the Thai people as demonstration of the \textit{King's} religious interest and concern and as proof of his own virtue and merit. Hence, they not only benefited the Buddhist community and the society as a whole but also contributed to the \textit{King's} personal quest for political legitimation\textsuperscript{11}.

The most important religious reformer in Thailand during the nineteenth century was Prince (later King) \textit{Mongkut}, a grandson of \textit{Rama I}. His reform, like those of his grandfather, were an attempt to reestablish in their pure and pristine forms the religious practices and beliefs which he believed to be part of the original Buddhist tradition\textsuperscript{12}.

\textit{King Mongkut} was a monk for twenty seven years and knew the doctrine well. Seeking to give monastic life its former strictness, he founded a
new movement within the order and called it the *Dhammayuttika sect* to distinguish it from the original Sangha, which was later called the *Mahanikaya* sect. Time went on and there have been movements. Changes and improvements in both sects so that at present the two sects do not differ substantially in any way from each other.

With respect to the *Sangha Mongkut* did not, as *Rama III* had feared, impose the *Dhammayut* discipline on the entire Sangha. Rather he seems to have walked a very narrow line, providing encouragement and facilitating his *Dhammayut* followers without going so far as to seem to be denigrating *Mahanikaya*. In so far as he was able Mongkut discouraged men from leaving the monkhood.¹³

A number of changes in traditional Thai religion also seem to have begun in *Chulalongkorn's* reign. The role of Court Brahmans in determining auspicious times for official events was muted and downgraded. A number of Brahmanistic and animistic ceremonies such as the Tonsure Ceremony, the Ciant Swing ceremony and the roasting of women after childbirth virtually disappeared. The First Plowing ceremony was retained, but more as spectacle than a basic national ritual. It is performed even at present, largely as a tourist attraction. Hence, many non-Buddhist religious elements were deeply eroded and Buddhism was upgraded as a result of *Dhammayut demythologizing*.¹⁴

The initial impact of Mongkut's reforms was felt most strongly by a relatively small group of religious and secular leaders drawn from the urban elite.
But subsequently the *Dhammayut Nikai* was made a part of the fabric of the national Thai Sangha (and spread to the Sanghas of Laos and Cambodia as well). Though Dhammayut monks form only a small part of the Thai Sangha, their influence has penetrated to the countryside. They are often found in "forest" temples located on the outskirts of provincial centers and rural villages where they follow their ascetic regime and carry out their exemplary role distinct from the village monks of the *Mahanikaya*\textsuperscript{15}.

Mongkut's reforms are of special interest to the students of Theravada Buddhism, for they suggest that there is no intrinsic opposition between a strongly orthodox Buddhism and various facets of modernization. These efforts have some influence on the aspirations and values of contemporary Thai\textsuperscript{16}.

**Buddhist Education in Thailand**

For over fifteen years the two Buddhist universities, *Mahamakuta* and *Mahachulalongkorn*, have been making strides toward modernizing their educational programmes. Of these two institutions, *Mahachulalongkorn* appears to have taken the lead in the effort to broaden its curriculum beyond the traditional courses in Pali, Thai and Buddhist doctrine and practice. Within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Welfare courses are offered in sociology, hygiene, economics, government and law as well as studies in art, archaeology, geography, history, and Southeast Asia\textsuperscript{17}. Such a broadening of the curriculum and expansion of the teaching staff to include teachers from government
universities and various professional services shows an effort to respond to the felt need of equipping Buddhist monks with a scope of knowledge more relevant to the contemporary world. As bid Abbot, deputy Secretary General of the university, points out that in the past Buddhist monks and laymen had an intimate rapport with each other because the milieu in which they lived was much the same. However, at present the widening gap between the life of the layman (especially in urban areas) and the Bhikkhu demands that monks receive a more broadly designed training. "It is not", asserts Big Abbot "that we are trying to secularize the Buddhist monk. Rather we are attempting to restore him to his traditional place as religious leader and guide of the people". In a sermon on the social responsibilities of the monk, he stated, "Besides their own peculiar duties toward the goal of self enlightenment, monks are bound with many social obligations to serve their community and to render reasonable services for the benefit of the layman's society". For this service they must be properly educated and trained.

Leaders of the two Buddhist institution in Thailand such as Big Abbot are not interested in accommodating Buddhism to the demands of a rapidly changing world, but they are decidedly concerned about its relevance to such a world. They are convinced that the Sangha can survive in the modern age only of its studies of the "Secular" disciplines. Otherwise, they feel, Buddhism will become irrelevant, part of Thailand's heritage rather than an involvement in a living present.
At present university provides religious instruction for over fifteen hundred students between the ages of six and twenty five. The University also sponsors a programme to encourage its graduates to take teaching positions in rural areas. Now there are over two hundred graduates serving in twenty three provinces.

The changes at the Buddhist University have not been made without criticism, nor have they always been successful. The ambitious educational revisions planned by Mahachulalongkorn with the help of the American professor Kurt Leidecker have not always been as effective as desired. Despite disclaimers and some vexing problems, however, the progress of monastic higher education is one of the important keys to a relevant and enlightened Buddhism in Thailand.

But now the religious renewal movement is pressing for an awareness of its social responsibility and for social service. Pressure is accordingly put on those monasteries which have long been devoted to the education of the populace, but today we called on to perform totally new, hitherto unknown activities. In this situation the traditional separation between a monk and a layman is slowly being modified.

Theravada in Thailand reached the modern period under warm support of the king and the people, without the interruption of colonial persecution or suppression. Side by side with the peoples, the monks came into encounter with Western Civilization. Hand in hand with the secular government
the monkhood started on modernization. Under king Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) the structure of the secular government was changed to adopt a new pattern and modern western system of public education was introduced. With the assistance of the king's ill brother, the monk prince Vajiranana Varorasa, who later became a supreme patriarch played an important role in public education. The task was assigned to the monks, a new form of ecclesiastical government was established, and a foundation was laid for the modernization of ecclesiastical education. Thailand was credited with the publication of the first complete set of the Pali canon, known as the Royal Siamese Tripiṭaka. A royal library was created for the preservation of Buddhist sacred books and rare scriptures. Two royal Buddhist academics, Mahamakut and Mahachulalongkorn were founded with a plan to function in due course as monk colleges or Universities providing for monks and novices advanced Buddhist studies along with modern higher education.

With the end of the reign of king Chulalongkorn, things changed for the worse. The process of modernization continued on through the secular sector, but on the ecclesiastical side it was kept for only a short period of time and then waned. The monkhood was put in a losing position. Monks were retired from their role in public education, though most of the public schools were still housed in monastery compounds and the monks still collected donation for the building of these schools. Preliminary arrangements for modern higher Buddhist education were set aside and the plans were not undertaken. Without open suppression,
there was no urge or activity. The monks fell into inactivity and became attached to traditionalism. Being deprived of their deserved responsibility, they lived unemployed or underemployed and many of them developed the habit of idleness, living only on the rich inheritance of traditional popular support.

Concurrent with this phenomenon is the increase of interest in Buddhist teachings and practices especially in meditation, among modern Thai people, particularly among the intellectuals. While in this age of technological advances, the major part of the society indulges more and more in sensual pleasures and is devoted to material quest, increasingly many people become disillusioned and turn to the spiritual way. This has led to the appearance of new meditation centres and the growing number of the practitioners, the increase in the number and activities of Buddhist groups in colleges and universities and a new trend of ordination.

Earlier, the Buddhist monastic community was the major educational institution diligently serving the population at large in royal, urban, and rural settings. The life of monk-educator was held in high esteem, and it thus attracted creative and talented individuals. The Buddhist community also served the cause of national unity by vocally supporting righteous rulers among the polity at large. This support was reciprocated by royal patronage of the monastic community.

The monk’s educational activities were based on Buddha's injunction to the monks to go out into the world and teach Dhamma out of
sympathy for the world, out of concern for the welfare and happiness of society. In their teachings, monks would try to inspire laymen to become monks, or teach them how to achieve material success in this world and a pleasurable rebirth after death. In the Thai Buddhist communities, a young man often would spend a few years in a monastery as part of the process of growing up.

Thailand began to set up state-run schools following the Western model, creative ambitious individuals no longer looked to the monastery as a viable institution but rather to the missionary or state school which would lead to a career in either business or the civil service.

A consequence of Buddhist contact with other ideologies and a corollary of the search for proper practical expression of social concern is a renewed interest among Thai Buddhists in the Doctrinal basis for social concern and activity. This renewed interest is, in part, a response to the implicit and explicit challenges from the secular, Marxist, and Christian camps, which question whether there is in Buddhist doctrine even the theoretical possibility of social concern or social activity. These challenges have been taken seriously by the Buddhist ideology because of the dormant state of the Buddhist monastic community social activity. To ward off these challenges, it is necessary for Buddhist leaders to articulate clearly the doctrinal basis for social concern and social activity that is found in the Buddhist canon. This at least, they must do it to stay in competition for the hearts and minds of the people. A clear articulation of
the motivation for social activity will complement and facilitate the difficult task of ascertaining the proper ways of expressing social concern in the modern world.

Thai Government provides administrative facilities for the monks through the Minister of Education who is the in charge and controller to execute the Act. Under him is the Director-General of the Department of Religious Affairs, who is ex-officio Secretary-General of the monk Supreme Council and whose office serves the secretariat of the council. The Department of Religious affairs acts as a liaison office to achieve harmonious cooperation between the monks and the state. It is responsible for the care of monks and monasteries and the promotion of all religious projects, whether educational, propagative or social. It keeps record of the monastic property, oversees the ecclesiastical budget, provides financial support through the Government budget, assists the ecclesiastical officers with their administrative duties. It has a large printing plant for publishing Buddhist scriptures, textbooks and religious publications in general. Seeking to achieve the welfare and prosperity both of the monks and of the state, it has the duty to protect the religion and to foster Buddhist culture in Thailand by all suitable means.

5.2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MAHAYANA IN THAILAND

We know that Theravada Buddhism prevails in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, the literary basis of which is the texts of the Pali canon. By Mahayana we mean the form of Buddhism which
flourished in Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, China, Japan, Korea and Parts of Central Asia. Its literary basis is the voluminous texts of the Chinese and Tibetan sacred canons, the bulk of which are translations from Sanskrit originals.

In Thailand, Mahayana Buddhist missionaries from Northern India gradually spread to Sumatra from the beginning of the 11th century A.D. and from there on the faith spread to Java and Cambodia. The Srivijaya kingdom with its capital in Sumatra rose to power in about 757 A.D., which included the whole of the Malay peninsula and archipelago. Part of south Thailand (from Surasthani downwards) also came under the rule of the Srivijaya kings. Being Mahayanist, the rulers of Srivijaya gave much encouragement and support to the propagation of Mahayana Buddhism. Even today in South Thailand we have many evidences of the existence of Mahayana Buddhism and this is further corroborated by archaeological findings such as Stupas or Chaityas and images including votive tablets of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas (Phra Phim). These findings are similar to those which have been discovered in Java and Sumatra. The Chaitya in Chaiya (Jaya) and Nakorn Sri Thammaraj (Nagara Sri Dhammaraja), both in South Thailand clearly indicate Mahayana influence.

On the basis of the above facts it can be conjectured that Mahayana Buddhism in Thailand flourished for about five centuries along with Theravada Buddhism. H.H. Prince Dhani Nivat has observed that "it (Mahayana) spread to the South of India, and over the Indian ocean to the South-east archipelago which became the empire of Srivijaya (7th to 12th
century). The latter was probably instrumental in spreading Buddhism in Sumatra up to the South-East peninsula of Asia and across the China sea to the mainland of Asia, where Kambuja the ancient Khmer empire, stood. It was enthusiastically embraced by her influential sovereign *Suruavarman (1002-1050 A.D.)*\(^23\). From these points Mahayana spread into the central valley of South-East Asia, those of the *Menam Chaophya* and the *Meknong*\(^24\). It is significant that Buddhist relics found in Northern Thailand bear a striking Theravada influence, whereas those found in the South clearly show their Mahayana connections dating back to Srivijaya days.

After struggling hard for a long time the Thais were able to establish their independent state at *Sukhothai (Sukhodaya)* in North Thailand in about *1257 A.D.*\(^25\). It was during the period of their southward movement that the Thais came into contact with that form of Buddhism as was practiced in Myanmar under the royal patronage of King *Aniruddha*. While in their original home in China, the Thais quite naturally could have been the followers of Mahayana Buddhism, as the latter sect had spread to China as early as the beginning of the Christian era.

In their southward drive the Thais came in contact with the Khmers\(^26\), the erstwhile power, and became acquainted with the Mahayana Buddhism as adopted and practiced by them. The Thai script, based on the Khmer script, which in turn, was derived from India, was invented by *King Ram Kamhaeng* of *Sukhothai* during this period.
The origin and development of Mahayana idea and practices, but the vast and varied theoretical formulations as found in the scholastic literature of the Mahayana, the immense mythological and cultic speculations, the ritualistic intricacies deriving their ingredients from varied levels of culture and many other components by which the Mahayana is characterized to the fact that it is not a single or homogenous system. Mahayana, in Thailand, generally is believed that Mahayanism is characterised by (1) the conception of Bodhisattava, (2) the practice of Paramitas, (3) the development of Bodhicitta, (4) the ten stages of spiritual progress, (5) two of the three kaya conceptions: Rupa, Kaya and Dhammakaya.

Mahayana that had spread to south is also called the Southern School of Buddhism. The other, the Mahasanghikas, later developed into the Mahayana. The Mahayanists call the Theravada or Hinayana, meaning the lesser vehicle of salvation in contrast to their own Mahayana - the greater vehicle. But Southern School prefers to be known as the Theravada, the "Teaching of the Elders", which is a more accurate and nonprejudicial term.

The Mahayana defied Buddha. His attributes led to the creation of "metaphysical Buddhas and celestial Bodhisattvas, actively willing and able to save, innumerable demons and deities as objects of worship, with their attendant idolatry, sacradotalism, both of these departures Buddha had condemned." In Mahayana the three jewels became Panna, Upaya and Bodhisattava i.e. the spiritualised forms of Buddha Dhamma and Sangha. When transferred to store
or canvas Panna became a female deity, Upaya and a male deity and Bodhisattava also a male deity.

The fundamental principles of Mahayana, are the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Dependent Origination, the Law of Kamma, Nibbana, and the like remain the focal points of the same Theravada. The spirit of non-violence, tolerance, liberality and friendliness are also retained. The Mahayana has made free and varied interpretations of the Doctrine and the Discipline under differing circumstances, it turned the original scriptures into Sanskrit incorporating in them later texts by later teachers. It continued to divide into many new sects and subsects. Thai Mahayanists believe in salvation through faith and devotion. And the emphasis of the Mahayana is on compassion, the key virtue of the Bodhisattvas, the ideal persons who vow to save all beings and work for the good of suffering beings. Moreover, the Mahayana takes much interest in philosophical speculation and ritualism.

Another important aspect of Mahayana Buddhism which began to come to Thailand in the 11th century, it had become a common practice in northwest India, where China influence had been strong for some time, to make images of the Bodhisattvas, and Lord Avalokitesvara a new development, for Buddhists had never before represented the Buddha in human form. The creation of images as objects of worship contributed to the development of temples for the religious ceremonies built around them and the same time, furthered the development of painting sculpture music and crafts. Today, in
Thailand there are many Mahayana temples, especially in Chinese area. The monks have reformed the religious ceremonies through ritual of Theravada's monks. Also Bodhisattava's sculpture is found in many parts of Thailand.

The vows that are practiced by Mahayanist are:\n
1. To save all beings (from difficulties),
2. To destroy all evil passions,
3. To learn the Truth and teach others
4. To lead all beings towards Buddhahood.

The objects of worship in Thai Mahayana are in general the same in all the temples. Temples dedicated to *Maitreya, Sakyamuni, Amitabha, and Avalokitesvara* are the most common. Mahayanist believe that *Sakyamuni* was the seventh Buddha to appear in this world\(^3\). Buddhists believed that in the distant future Sakyamuni's successor, Maitreya, would appear in the world and convert the sentient beings.

Mahayana Buddhist thought included not only this world of ours but many other worlds besides. The Mahayanist universe consist of many distinct worlds like our solar system, in each of which they imagined a Buddha converting the beings of his own particular world. Typical of these Buddhas of other worlds are *Akshobhya and Bhaishajyaguru* in the East and Amitabha in the West. Ever since the scriptures describing these worlds called pure lands or pure Realms, by the Chinese had been translated into Chinese, the Buddhas of
those lands were objects of devotion in the Chinese Buddhist community, but the
worship of Amitabha flourished most and still continues to flourish to this day.

**The Trikaya Doctrine**

According to Mahayana, the three bodies or personalities of Buddhas:

1) **Nirmanakaya.**
2) **Sambhogakaya.**
3) **Dhammakaya.**

The Buddha is not merely a human being but a Reality itself. This Reality, being not only wisdom but compassion, for the purpose of preaching the Dhamma to all beings he assumes innumerable forms. These forms, of which Gautama Buddha is the best known to us other forms are all identical with Reality and hence, they themselves are wholly transcendental. Human birth and death are nothing but appearances.

To the Nirmanakaya belong all those Buddha who like the historical Buddha Gautama, appear in the world in physical shape. They are called Nirmara, 'manifest beings', because of their gross nature. According to another interpretation Nirmara means '(magical) creation' and expresses that in the Mahayana the Earthly Buddhas are considered meditative projections of the transcendent Buddhas. The same is meant by the Lankavatarasutta when it speaks of them as 'the body consisting of thought' (Manomayakaya).

As persons of flesh and blood the Nirmanakaya Buddhas are as much subject to the misery of aging, illness and death as the ordinary beings of the world.
From these however, they are distinguished but thirty two bodily characteristics and some supernatural abilities, among these, the Divine Eye and the Divine Hearing, by which they can perceive what is hidden.

Sambhogakaya, Body of Bliss which has never been satisfactorily interpreted, the Mahayana summarizes the Transcendent Buddhas. Transcendent means that they cannot be perceived by the senses, but only experienced spiritually. As this presupposes that the salvation seeker has developed the necessary mental powers they are not visible to the ordinary worldling, but only to the advanced Bodhisattava who beholds them with his spiritual eye as radiating beings.

By far the most popular Transcendent Buddha is Amitabha *(He of Immeasurable Radiance)* who is also called Amitayas *(He of Immeasurable Life span)* and in East Asia Amida. In past life he is said to have taken forty six vows by which he bound himself to lead all beings who once would remember him as a Buddha, to rebirth in the *Pure Land* Sukhavati. Other highly venerated Transcendent Buddhas are Vairocana *(The Sun-like One)*, Aksobhya *(The Unshakable)*, Ratnasambava *(The Jewel-born)*, Amoghasiddhi *(He of Unfailing Magical Power)* and Vairasattava *(whose Nature is the Vajra)* or Vajradhara *(Bearer of the Vajra)*. The Suttas mention a great number of Transcendent Buddhas, the Saddharmapundarika alone enumerates twenty three. Theoretically they are as numerous as 'grains of sand on the banks of the Ganges'.

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Dhammakaya is the self-centred immanent as well as transcendent truth or reality of all beings and appearances the indestructible, timeless absolute, the one essence in and behind all that was, is and will be. It is the bearer and the object of enlightenment or Buddhahood.

The Mahayanic texts differentiate whether the Dhammakaya in the respective passage designates.

1) The essence of the worldly being or
2) that of the Buddhas.

The Dhammakaya is also called reality (Dhammata) core of reality (Dhammadhatu), thusness (Tathata), thusness of existence (Bhutatathata), essential body (Svabhavakaya), emptiness (Sunyata) and base-consciousness (Alayavijnana). The clearer the Dhammakaya is recognizable in a being the higher is this beings rank in the spiritual hierarchy.

When the Dhammakaya is looked upon as the inward nature of the Buddhas, it is styled Buddaness (Buddhata), Buddha nature (Buddha svabhava) and matrix of the Perfect ones (Tathagatagarbha).

The Dhammakaya is that one of the Three Bodies which all Buddhas have in common\textsuperscript{34}.

While think about the Vinaya of Mahayana Buddhism, it is like a vast ocean where all kinds of living beings are allowed to thrive in a most generous manner almost verging on a chaos. The study of the Thai Vinaya derives its importance from the fact that the Theravada monks are very strict
more than the Mahayana monks. In the main Mahayana vinaya we get the earlier monastic discipline according to the Pratimoksa code with such modifications as were necessary to realise the higher ideals for which Mahayana stood. Chinese people in Thailand, they contain the life and ideal of a Bodhisattava, ordained or lay, rules for leading daily monastic life, developing Bodhicitta, practicing paramitas, forming Pranidhanas and the like. Besides there are a few other people who throw much light on this aspect of Buddhism in China.

One of the Mahayana monks was very famous for his Vipassanadhura. Thai-Chinese people respected him in Bangkok and they had constructed Mongkornkamalavas\textsuperscript{35} monastery. Rama V gave him a position to train Mahayana's monks at the monastery.

Today the large monastic group of Mahayana at Sadhupradit is working in Bangkok (Bodhimangunaram) and the monastery is supported by the king, Chinese monks, Dhammanat Chinprapan, Dhammanand Prapan and Chindhammarat and Monk Prajit are in administration and are working as secretaries. The biggest monastic Mahayana is found in the South of Asia. Rama V supported and offered awards to Chinese monks of Mahayana who live in Thailand. Today Mahayana monks are seen in Bangkok. In the reign of king Mongkut a certain Mahayana monk, who knew Dhamma and vinaya well was friend of Rama V. He lived at Wat Upairajabamrung (Samphanthavong) in Bangkok. Rama V gave him award for his religious work in Thailand. He looked
after Wat of Mahayana in Bangkok. The monasteries of Mahayana are found at *Upairajabamrung, Lokanugrah, Chaiyapum, Mongkolsamakom* in Bangkok and *Thavavararam in Kanchanaburi* Province.

**Rama V (King of Thailand)** supported Mahayana Chinese monk whose name was *Suheng*. He spreaded the philosophy of Bodhisattava Avalokitesvara and Amitabha. Holy person *Kuan Yin (Kuan im)* was Queen of compassion, whose work is enormous for Mahayana in Thailand. People of Thailand think that she was Bodhisattava, full of compassion, the *Kuan Yin's theory* was if you do good you will be free from sufferings\(^{36}\).

Basically Mahayana grew out of out the Buddha's teaching that each individual carries within himself the potential for Buddhahood. Thai Mahayanists believe that they can seek salvation through the intervention of other superior beings called Bodhisattvas. There are both small and large monasteries in Thailand. The small monasteries are usually poor in resources and manpower are transmitted by the resident monk to a disciple whom he has trained very much in accordance with his own inclination. They are appropriately known as hereditary monasteries since the disciples in turn transmit the monastery to their disciples for generation after generation.

The Mahayana monk who is in charge of the monastery is chosen by the community of that monastery from anywhere for Mahayana monastery, and any properly qualified monk may be admitted if he has come for the purpose of practicing the Buddhist faith. The resident and other leading monks assign
their respective duties to the members of the community, manage the affairs of
the monastery and guide the daily religious life of the monastery.

Thai-Chinese peoples are classified according to their principal
activities as contemplation monasteries, study or doctrinal monasteries devoted
to a particular sect and disciplinary monasteries devoted principally to the study
of monastic disciplines. The Thai Chinese worshiped because they believe that
Sakyamuni possessed a mysterious power to confer blessings and ward off
misfortunes. But that alone would not have enabled Buddhism to push aside
traditional. Their faiths capture the heads of the masses rapidly as it did.
Buddhism, though its points of contact with the traditional religions, it shook the
spirit of the Thai-Chinese people with great force. But Thai people believed that
chiefly due to the doctrine of rebirth based on good and bad deeds, running like
a thread through past, present and future.

In the latter half of the fourth century, the famous historian Fleng
Yuan stated in his record of the Latter Han that Buddhism preaches; "Although
man dies, which pure Buddhist won't believe, his spirit does not perish, but takes
on a new form".

Thai-Chinese people who had only vague ideas about life and
death to be told that the present is a result of the good and evil deeds of a former
birth and that the good or evil deeds of this life or invisible force Kamma-
pregnant with the good or ill fortune for tomorrow and determining future rebirth.
When they believed that the soul of predecessor gone to Sukhavati, they do "Kongtek-Rite" for helping the soul of predecessor. It is a religious ritual of Thai-Chinese people. Today at Ladpraw area of Thailand, there are images of Avalokitesvara and the major monasteries of Kuan-Yin in that part, frequently are found the images of the goddess of Meray in the Thai-Chinese home in Thailand. Believers are particularly numerous among the wives and mothers who pray to Kuan-Yin for recovery from illness, for the protection of their children, and for the gift of good children.

The traditions relating to Bodhisattava, those who are becoming Buddhas, are manifold. One destined to be a Buddha must finally be born as a man, so the Bodhisattava does not remain for long in the heavens of delight.

The Bodhisattava who stirs the imagination and holds the greatest promises for the Thai villagers is Maitreya, the next Buddha who will arrive to bring salvation to the world. Maitreya is revered by all Buddhist sects as saviour, and his name signifies love toward all beings.

According to Mahayana, it is believed that the Buddha himself elected Maitreya as his successor and that Maitreya now resides in the Tusita Heaven (Dusit in Thai), the heaven of contented beings, from where he watches over and promotes the interests of Buddhism. He awaits the time when he will appear on the earth as Maitreya Buddha.

Maitreya lives in heaven. He is interested in the present order of things as well as in the future, and his descent into the world from heaven is
imagined to bring collective salvation and benefits to those who will be fortunate to see him at that time in the status of human being.

However, it is not the countries of Theravada Buddhism but in those in which the Mahayana form prevails in that the concept and cult of the *Bodhisattava* has been greatly elaborated. There Bodhisattavas are found. The most glorious of whom are Manjusri, Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani. They are imagined to be permanently in the celestial worlds in benevolent relationship with humanity. Mahayana Buddhism, it would seem, has systematically incorporated the existing gods into its pantheon and transformed them into benevolent mediators and future Buddhas who will not necessarily descend to earth as human Buddhas.

These Mahayanist developments are echoed in the so called Theravada (Hinayana) countries, which have at various times been fertilized by Mahayana influences. We have already noted that Thai Kings were elevated to the status of *Bodhisattava*.

**The Distinct Teachings and Features of Mahayana Buddhism**

An understanding of the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism naturally presupposes a thorough familiarity with Buddhism in its original form and probably also in its theravada form. We must picture to ourselves the frequent and thorough discussions of all Buddhist teachings and basic concepts in Thai monasteries, for these gave rise to the formation of Mahayana. These discussions included clarification of the original words of the Buddha which were
saturated through and through with his experience and their textual formulation in confrontation with the other Thai religions, as view points become more fixed, different systems of teachings arose, each with novel concepts and clarifications. Practically all the basic notions proved multifaceted, and consequently, a number of schools or sects developed in Thai-Buddhism, some of which became what is now known as Mahayana.

Here it must be suffice rather to mention some of the more significant and typical ideas of Mahayana. First of all it is a development of Buddhalogy, which led to a monastic identification of Buddha with the universe and the self and to a recognition of the Buddha as the principle of absolute reality.

The absolute Buddha, identical with the universe through his apparitional body, is manifest in many forms. A whole pantheon of Buddhas and Bodhisattava enriched the various folk mythologies and cults. An inclination toward polytheism could be seen in the religious practices. But at a more profound level, Buddhalogy imbued the essence of the Mahayanists religion with a cosmic trait. And more significant for religious practice was Bodhisattava ideal developed by the Mahayana schools. The Bodhisattava ideal became the epitome of Mahayana ethics. A few Mahayanist Bodhisattavas were adopted as central figures of cult worship and rank with the Buddha himself. The figure of the Bodhisattava Avalokistesvara (Thai-Chinese Kuan-Yin)\(^40\), usually depicted as feminine has become a religious land mark of East Asia. This highly personified
Bodhisattava of wisdom and mercy, like the figure of the Buddha himself forms a unifying link between the many sects of Mahayana Buddhism.

In its outward appearance Mahayana differs considerably from Theravada. Earlier, western scholars went far as to consider them two different religions, or to regard Mahayana as a degenerate form of Buddhism. Both views were mistaken. The ultimate unity of all forms of Buddhism remains intact even when conceptual difference which are more than anything else constitutes the essence of Buddhism. Moreover the numerous leaders of Mahayana in all countries of East Asia show by their estimable qualities that Mahayana is not a degenerated form.
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