

Exploring Theravāda Studies:

Intellectual Trends and the Future of a Field of Study

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**An Embarrassment of Categories:
Theravada, Hinayana, Mahayana, and other Old Friends**

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Categories simplify the complex. They reduce shifting multi-dimensional processes to flat and stable surfaces. They iron over ambiguities, uncertainties, tensions, and contradictions. They seem to explain when they do not, and lull us into assuming that the questions have been answered when they have not even been formulated.

In this paper I examine Theravada as a category in Buddhist studies (or, from a broader viewpoint, religious studies), and call for a careful appraisal of the term. Is Theravada an agreed and straightforward cognitive entity? Has it been a component of the self-consciousness of the societies that, since the nineteenth century, have been labelled Theravadin? Has Theravada functioned as an historical or social agent? Is it an identifiable institution, an ideal, or an imaginaire? Is there one Theravada, or are there multiple Theravadas? If the latter is the case, are they multiple in terms of time, geography, ethnicity, or of a complex of factors?

The term Theravada proves elusive in the historical record (texts and inscriptions from the classical to late pre-modern periods). It is not a primary emic term, a term of self-reference, and our scholarship can only benefit from closer attention to the terms used by local sanghas themselves to express their identities. Categories do not exist in isolation, and we need to reappraise the related terms Hinayana and Mahayana. Were they social or religious realities? Or were they straw men, emblems of the Other?

I propose that there are many Theravadas, that the term has multiple referents, and that it is not an agreed cognitive entity. As a label of convenience for a collection of autonomous histories, literatures, and practices, 'Theravada' should be used sparingly. If knowledge is to advance we should avoid imposing familiar categories onto what is as yet inadequately understood.

Recent Theravada Contributions to Buddhist Ethics

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Theravada studies has often been at the forefront of scholarship on Buddhist Ethics and, at critical junctures, has pointed the way forward. My paper will explore the considerable developments in Theravada ethics in the last decade or so, and how they have stimulated the entire field of Buddhist ethics.

The insights and challenges of anthropologists of Theravada Buddhism beginning thirty and forty years ago, through the work of Melford Spiro, Richard Gombrich, Gananath Obeyesekere, Stanley Tambiah, and others, while often controversial, left an enduring impact on how to approach questions of theory and practice in Buddhist studies as a whole framed through particular Theravada lenses. More recently, scholars of the Theravada have made advances in how we can explore narrative ethics (Hallisey, Hansen), engage in close comparative ethical work (Silber), frame metaethical questions (Keown, Hallisey), refine our understanding of emotions and moral psychology, and consider the Vinaya as a source of moral reflection.

Textual work has matured considerably in recent years, with scholars looking at more vernacular writing and noncanonical, yet widely attested, sources. A valuable turn toward the regional has developed, participating in a larger pattern in Asian studies to regionalize and specialize. At the same time, we are called by Steven Collins' work on the "Pali Imaginaire" to discern the contours of a cultural episteme that might be analogous, or should be set alongside of, other cosmopolitan formations in Southern Asia. Here lies an opportunity to consider the development of ethics in the contexts of broader civilizational values, both shared with and distinct from, other religious and cultural traditions.

The explosion of work in the area of "engaged Buddhism" in the last dozen years has witnessed its share of Theravada contributions, particularly in the areas of economic ethics, the environmental crisis, the position of women, and human rights. Important critical work on Buddhism modernisms has also surfaced (Seneviratne, Dharmapala, Tambiah, etc.) and deepened our appreciation of the challenges modernity brings to traditional moral ideals.

My paper appraises these significant developments, discusses important lacunae remaining, and offers directions for further work.

**The Practical Life of a Novice:
Locating a Middle Way between Precept and Practice
in the Study of Theravada Buddhism**

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A number of important works on the Theravada tradition have postulated (either explicitly or implicitly) a dichotomy between precept and practice. Some scholars of the Theravada, for example, have used the Pali disciplinary texts as a lens through which to judge the behavior of Buddhist monastics, either arguing that monastic life has been quite conservative through the ages or that modern monastic life has departed quite sharply from its ancient ideal set forth by the Buddha. For many such scholars, the textual depictions of monastic life represents not necessarily an ideal but rather an actual historical account of the way in which monks lived and practiced.

Other scholars have more recently begun to question this approach. For some, the privileging of the Buddhist texts over other forms of evidence (such as archaeological and epigraphical data) is problematic as it mistakes the ideal for the real, precept for practice. Rather than turning to how monastic life is ideally portrayed in the texts (which are treated with suspicion), these scholars have argued for the need to focus on the practice of real Buddhists, past and present.

While the categories of “precept” and “practice” have been helpful to our critical understanding of monastic culture, they have sometimes been treated as reified, mutually-exclusive, concepts. When we turn to the practical life of Buddhist monastics, however, we find that precept and practice are more fluid categories between which monastics move during their lives.

Turning to recent conversations with monks and lay people, this paper will contend that there are a plurality of voices that speak about what is and is not acceptable monastic behavior. Indeed, this paper will posit that far from being based on “monolithic” canonical prescriptions, ideas about what constitutes proper “monkness” (Sinhala: *mahanakama*) are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated through dynamic relationships that exist between the *saṅgha* and the laity. While the canonical prescriptions inform the ideas about how monastics should behave, the prescriptions are oftentimes dependent upon the different contexts in which the laity and the monastics interact. Through presenting an array of lay attitudes

Panel 2: Buddhist Identities: What Are Monks, Novices and Nuns?

toward Buddhist novices, I, like Ananda Abeysekara and Pradeep Jeganathan, will make the case for moving away from such categories as “precept” and “practice,” and more toward an awareness and appreciation of how issues surrounding the ideas of appropriate monastic behavior are situational and context-dependent.

**Truth over Convention:
The Female Ordination Debate in Contemporary Theravada Thailand**

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The issue of women's full participation in Buddhist societies, such as Thailand, has been closely related to the issue of how women are regarded in Buddhism with respect to the sanghas. Two main issues concerning the sanghas are relevant here: first, whether the bhikkhuni sangha should be (re)established; and second, what should be the nature of the relationship between the male and the female orders. In Thailand, the bhikkhuni sangha was never established, and the Thai Theravada establishment have utilized the technical, the historical and the legal reasons, not to (re)establish the female monk order in contemporary society. This reluctance is both indicative of and has served as legitimation for regarding women as unequal and inferior to men in the general society.

This paper demonstrates that the Buddha's initial reluctance and his final decision to establish the bhikkhuni sangha, together with the fact that he seemed to subordinate the bhikkhuni order under the bhikkhu order, should not be regarded as a mere compromise with his already existing monk order, but rather should be understood as a confirmation of the universality of Buddhist truth over truth of convention, as convention would have rejected female ordination. This confirmation of universal Buddhist truth indicates that when truth of convention comes into conflict with Buddhist truth, the latter is to overrule the former. As the Buddha finally decided to allow female ordination, he was respecting the rights of women to religious practice through ordination. This principle of Truth over convention should serve as guideline for considering the issue of the re-establishment of bhikkhuni order in contemporary Theravada Thailand.

**Contemporary Position of Buddhist Nuns in Burma:
The Politics of *Sāsana-pyu***

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There has been a growing interest in the study of Buddhist nuns and many articles have been published in the last 20 years on the representation of women in the Buddhist scriptures as well as on their spiritual journeys and experiences. However, there is still a shortage of ethnographic monographs that provide substantial information on the actual life, gender relations and position of Buddhist nuns in the monastic community and the politics of wider society. On the other hand, the study of Buddhist nuns has been influenced by a kind of moral feminism of feminist theologians in the Judaeo-Christian tradition to promote gender equality and raise awareness for the status disparity in the church. It seems to me that such a view has hindered rather than promote the understanding of Asian women's experiences in Buddhist societies. Mohanty (2003) & Shohat (2001) have criticised the 'first world feminists' for representing 'other' women as 'passive victims' of global patriarchy. Perhaps the social and moral significance attributed to the individual in the West has allowed them to overlook collaborative features in the monastic community where the collective aspiration for *Sāsana-pyu* (dissemination of the Buddhist *Sāsana*) has helped monastics to overcome divisive individual and gender traits. For example, Buddhist nuns in Burma have traditionally formed partnership with other nuns in their quest for education and have worked closely with the monks in their pragmatic strategy for survival.

In 1996, ten Sri Lankan nuns became officially ordained as *Bhikkhunīs* in Sarnath, India, reviving their ancient lineage after years of work by international Buddhist women and practitioners. However, some Buddhist nuns in the Theravada tradition such as the Burmese *thilāshin* have rejected ordination for communal unity. They have sided with the traditionalist stance of the Burmese Sangha in accepting the official view that once the *Bhikkhunī* lineage has gone extinct, its revival is non-negotiable. Their position reaffirms an adherence to their historical legacy and a total merging of their interests with that of the monastic authority of the monks quite contrary to their counterparts in neighbouring countries of Sri Lanka and Thailand. In this example, these nuns have maintained their status by positioning themselves in the institutional hierarchy as a non-threatening and conservative force, and subsequently making themselves indispensable as an active segment of the monastic community.

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In this paper, I also argue that the religious position of Buddhist nuns has to be examined within the socio-political context in which they are placed. In the recent policy of the Burmese Government to missionise and promote Buddhism, the Burmese *thilāshin* have become increasingly incorporated as important members of the monastic community, referred to as the “harbinger of the state’s new approach towards the Buddhist *Sāsana*.” (Tin Maung Maung Than 1993: 19) In the state organisation of the Burmese monastic community originally drawn up under the Socialist government of U Ne Win in the early 1980s, I hope to clarify where the Buddhist nuns stand in relation to the monks in its tiered surveillance system. I also note how a communal code of practice traditionally adhered to by the nuns in a local community has come to provide a national framework in *Thilāshin Kyinwut (Moral Code for Buddhist Nuns)* for all the nuns in Burma. Moreover, as a result of the state policy to disseminate the *Sāsana*, a specific type of Buddhist nuns: virgin nuns primarily engaged in scriptural studies, has come to be recognised as valued members of the monastic community, who are summoned alongside the monks to perform official duties for the state as religious functionaries.

Theravada Buddhism and Money: The Myanmar's Paradigm

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Burmese Buddhist Culture presents naturally similarities with other Buddhist Cultures of Southeast Asia (common history, rituals, festivals, etc). However field experiences suggest that, within the context of a Military State getting more and more actively involved with religious activities, the austere face of traditional Theravada Buddhism in Burma is progressively changing.

From 1980 onwards, and especially after 1989, the Burmese Military became directly involved with religion. Many events traditionally left to the sole initiative of the religious associations are now organized by the State on behalf of the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* Council. They aim to offer vast quantities of dry rations (rice, cooking oil, iodised salt, gram, etc) and cash to the *Sangha*, monastic schools and pagodas. Moreover collects are also organized nationwide in the name of Buddhism. Consequently huge sums of money are officially offered to the religion in order to finance the perpetuation and propagation of the *Sasana*.

The circulation of this cash, originating from a combination of individual believers, religious associations and State funds or machinery, involves the whole society and has a direct impact on the economy of the Union. The paper examines how this money is collected and re-injected into the economic circuit. It follows its utilization in different sectors (construction, services) and looks into its repercussions on polity, monks' behaviour confronted with money and business dealings, and perception of *Sangha* by the faithful.

Text, Lineage and Tradition: The Struggle for Norms and Religious Legitimacy under King Bodawphaya (1782-1819)

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From a historian's point of view, there is hardly a field in Burmese studies as challenging as the underdeveloped area of the history of Buddhism. The field is unevenly split, research has been discontinuous and scholars keep on handling outdated books. As for the state of research, notable studies are found among what epigraphists and art historians had to say about Buddhism in Pagan and anthropologists' research on the relations between the Sangha and the State. If otherwise there has been a lot of myth-building around the status of Buddhism in Burmese culture, the writing of the social and political history of Buddhism has often been an exercise in paraphrasing the much revered *Sasanavamsa*, written in 1861 by a Burmese monk for his Sinhalese colleagues to boast his Buddhist credentials (later translated into English!).

In the writing of Burmese history in general, the representation of Buddhism has barely emancipated itself from the general outline of what Theravada Buddhists themselves want to make us believe on their pure lineage. A term such as 'purification' of the Sangha for example has been used again and again by historians without any attempt of critical questioning its ins and outs.

There is a gap between what 'official' monastic history tells us and the revelations that alternate sources may convey. In the case study presented here, the struggle for norms and religious legitimacy in King Bodawphaya's reign, this comes out strongly in the contrasting information contained in the royal orders and the amended monastic record as given in the *Sasanalinkaya Satam* (1831, not translated into English!).

Further in-depth study that takes into account a more complex intellectual environment than is generally hypothesized could hopefully move research on Theravada Buddhism in Burma away from its monolithic representation that suits piety but is detrimental to scholarly research.

**Representing and Invoking a Theravada Buddhist Past:
“History Paintings” at the Dambulla Cave Temple in Sri Lanka**

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Visual culture remains underutilized in the field of Theravada Buddhism which largely consists of textual and more recently, also anthropological studies. In order to enlarge upon these traditional approaches, I propose to look at the “history paintings” at the Dambulla monastic cave temple in Sri Lanka. I will examine the significance of pictorial representations of a Theravada Buddhist past and question how Buddhist patronage has been interpreted in Theravada studies.

Although inspired by John Holt’s notion of a “visual liturgy” in *The Religious World of Kirti Sri* (1996), I diversify his approach of using paintings for the study of Theravada Buddhism by looking at another genre, “history paintings.” In the Late Kandyan period (1796-1815), such a genre, based on the historical chronicle *Mahavamsa*, emerged on the walls of the Dambulla cave temple. Scholars such as Steven Kemper and Jonathan Walters have examined how the text of the *Mahavamsa* has been used to invoke the past; yet, they do not consider the possibility that paintings of it may have also been used for the same purpose. These pictorial narratives from the *Mahavamsa*—the arrival of prince Vijaya, the advent of Buddhism, and the infamous battle between the Kings Dutthagamini and Ellara—found at the Dambulla cave temple, amount to not only Sri Lankan history but to a Theravada Buddhist past.

In this paper, I argue that by invoking a Theravada Buddhist past, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1796-1815) used these “history paintings” as a method of legitimization and national unification during the advent of British colonialism. By looking at Sri Vikrama’s claim to a shared Theravada Buddhist past, I also propose to examine the socio-religious identity of a Theravadin society in the Late Kandyan period. Through these “history paintings,” which possibly have been misattributed by John Holt to Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-82), I also challenge the colonial bias against Sri Vikrama, which still persists today among scholars. By reexamining his complex image, I question the tendency in scholarship to focus on mythologized Buddhist patrons to the exclusion of vilified patrons.

**Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893)
and the Archaeology of Buddhist Sites in India**

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The paper highlights developments in archaeology, which had a bearing on the study of Theravada Buddhism in 19th century India, with special emphasis on the works of Alexander Cunningham. The first section assesses the contribution of Cunningham who came to India in 1836 as Lieutenant Cunningham, one of the aides-de-camp to the incoming Governor-General Lord Auckland. At the age of twenty, Cunningham published a note on the coins recovered from Manikyala stupa in Rawalpindi district. The stupa had been excavated in 1830 by Ventura, the Italian-French general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and formed part of a complex with 14 smaller structures, 15 monasteries and many isolated massive stonewalls.

Cunningham argued that any enquirer into the study of Buddhism should retrace the steps of the Chinese travellers Faxian and Xuanzang, which intertwined the campaigns of Alexander the Great in 4th century BC. As a result, his surveys extended mainly across north India in modern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, though his search for Pundravardhana took him briefly to Bengal in 1879-1880 and led to the discovery of the site of Mahasthangarh. In 1854, in his study titled *The Bhilsa Topes*, Cunningham described the Buddha as ‘a great social reformer who dared to preach the perfect equality of all mankind, and the consequent abolition of caste, in spite of the menaces of the most powerful and arrogant priesthood in the world’ (p. 33). This supposed antagonism between Buddhism and Hinduism as articulated by Cunningham would be one of the themes re-examined in the paper on the basis of subsequent archaeological inputs.

During his tenure as Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (1871-1885), Cunningham maintained close interaction with scholars working on early Buddhist texts and these studies in turn influenced his archaeological agenda. More importantly many of Cunningham’s conclusions continue to be repeated and it is worth investigating how these were arrived at in the first place. Two of his conclusions are significant: one, the role of ethnology in an understanding of religious practices and second, the degenerate nature of Buddhism after 7th century AD.

The second section of the paper discusses Cunningham’s contribution within the wider canvas of archaeology of religion. It presents an overview of more recent works, which

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have incorporated archaeology into the study of Theravada Buddhism with an emphasis on the themes that have received scholarly attention. Another aspect of the discussion relates to developments in archaeological methods and techniques and the extent to which these have contributed to the change in perspective, since later archaeologists have subsequently reworked many of the sites excavated by Cunningham. The ultimate objective is to make a case for the incorporation of archaeology in teaching and research on Buddhism, an aspect that the author feels is underutilized.

The Spread of Buddhism in Southeast Asia: Insights from Lao Archaeology

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Although Buddhism as practiced in Laos has been partially approached from the ethnological angle, it has never been studied in a historical perspective: scholars on Southeast Asia have merely perpetuated the literary tradition according to which it was a Cambodian mission that had introduced the religion in the Lao territory in the mid-fourteenth century. While philological analysis today allows one to undermine the credibility of this tradition, it is also possible to provide some preliminary answers to the question concerning the diffusion of Buddhism in the central Mekong valley on the basis of recent archeological findings. These new materials show the very great diversity of ancient religious practices, and also reveal distinctive geographical and chronological frameworks, of which exact delimitations will be the historian's primary task.

The culture of the Mon people, discovered and studied in Thailand since the early twentieth century, originally appeared to have left very few traces in Laos. Recent research shows, however, a very important settlement of this people in the Vientiane Plain during the first millennium, as well as the establishment of a developed form of Buddhism. It seems, though, that the latter did not endure, even though some remains show a link between the Mon and the Lao civilizations.

Archeological relics (monuments, statuary) - while failing to prove the historical relationship between Khmer and Lao religious traditions - have revealed the existence of Buddhist cults in Southern Laos at the pre-Angkorian period, and may shed new light on the relationships between the initial forms of Khmer and Mon Buddhism.

Studies on epigraphic sources recently carried out throughout Laos have considerably developed our perception of the diffusion of Buddhism in the Lao environment. This process is closely linked with a political and ideological change that occurred from the mid-fifteenth century in the Mekong riparian *muangs* in contact with the Lan Na civilization. The diffusion goes with the emergence and the recognition of the Lan Xang kingdom at the regional level, and certainly constitutes one of the crucial driving forces of its economic development. The evidence shows, however, that the settlement of Buddhist communities was limited to the main communication routes. Some regions in Laos - in particular the North-East that borders

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Vietnam and China - were converted to Buddhism at a late stage and to a superficial degree: they appear to constitute the outer limits of the expansion of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

**A Modern Trend of Study of Buddhism in Thailand:
King Mongkut and Dhammayuttikanikaya**

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This paper will examine King Mongkut's attempt to develop an interpretation of Buddhism consistent with Western science and learning. This attempt marked the beginning of a fundamental epistemological shift in doctrinal Thai Buddhism. The theoretical shift, which continues to have significant religious implications today, involved the rejection of the layered or hierarchical notion of truth which underlay traditional Buddhist teachings and its replacement with the notion of a single, universal, and all encompassing truth.

Although Theravada Buddhism has been the national religion of Thailand since the Sukhothai period in the thirteenth centuries the popular understanding of traditional Theravada Buddhism was often clouded by the mythological and popular overlay mixed with magical beliefs, superstition and mixture of Brahmanistic rites. These aspects of Thai Buddhism became problematic for many Buddhists when they were exposed to Western science, ideology and authentic Buddhism. King Mongkut found all these were practiced in the wrong way conjoined with delusion and far away from the true teachings of Buddha. He referred this kind of belief as '*Acinnakappika*' meaning the type of Buddhism traditionally inherited without openness, without light and no further explanations were given.

King Mongkut viewed that the authentic Buddhism has a unique principle of a single, universal and all encompassing truth. Rejecting the superstitious beliefs that had attached themselves to Buddhism in the course of centuries, he preached Buddhism in its pure form based on Pali Canon instead of Commentaries. He showed that Buddhism, if properly understood, contains nothing that is contrary to common sense or in conflict with science and it is primarily a moral system thoroughly suited to modern needs. Commenting on King Mongkut's critique, Jasse Caswell, an American Presbyterian missionary observed that King Mongkut totally demythologized Buddhism that included a rejection of 'everything in religion which claims a supernatural origin' (Bradley 1966:39). Reformation made by King Mongkut resulted in improving monastic discipline in an effort to bring it closer to the *vinaya*, and he also deconstructed and reinterpreted many traditional Thai Buddhist teachings. This new trend of practice formed the nucleus of a new, stricter group of Thai Buddhism named Dhammayuttika meaning 'those adhering to the doctrine.'

Panel 6: Facing Modernity: Trends in Thai Buddhism

King Mongkut's legacies continue to have significant religious implications to the present day. Following King Mongkut's emphasis on returning to the original teaching of the Buddha Prince Vajiranyanavaroṣa, his son and the founder of the Thai Buddhist education system repeatedly states that he hopes others will make further explorations in the direct study of the Pali Canon as a source for spiritual guidance, and that the commentaries are to be accepted only when they are in line with the Canon. Referring to such implications today many scholars write that popularizing the notion of advancing knowledge in Buddhism rather than simply elaborating on inherited tradition was the necessary condition for the twentieth century scholarly contributions of Phra Dhammapitaka (Payutto) and innovative doctrinal interpretations of Buddhadasa (Thanissaro 1997; Swerer 1999:202). In addition, King Mongkut's emphasis on meditation set up a strong tradition of deep meditation practice which led to the establishment of the Thai forest tradition later led by renowned meditation masters like Venerable Phra Ajarn Mun. This kind of modern trend of exploring Theravada Buddhism initiated by King Mongkut were considered a daring innovation in Thailand and it led to initiate a group of 'progressive' Buddhist monks who are always seeking to learn and who dare to do new things to uphold the correctness and purity of Buddhism. This also led to the modern development of the Thai Buddhist education system including the establishment of present Buddhist universities.

**Monk, Medium, and Mo Tham:
Supernaturalism and Popular Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand**

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What is Thai Theravada Buddhism? How has it been conceptualized and characterized by scholars and specialists since 1960s? How do Thai Buddhists view their own religiosity as Thai culture and society have undergone radical changes in the past few decades? What are relationships between Theravada Buddhism and supernaturalism? Is Thai Buddhism a syncretic or practical religion? Is it a religion in crisis as claimed by many scholars and social critics?

In this paper I will discuss issues pertinent to the studies of Thai Theravada Buddhism by using ethnographic cases of magical monks, spirit mediums, and mo thams in Northeast Thailand. I argue that to understand contemporary Thai Buddhism and its complex relationships to ongoing sociocultural changes, one must take it as a cultural system where religious and traditional worldview have a continued negotiation with modernity. The focal point to understand Buddhism-modernity complexities in contemporary Thailand is the emergence and persistence of their agents, such as monks, mediums, and mo thams.

The Importance of Pali-Chinese Comparison in the Study of Pali Suttas

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The tradition that calls itself Theravada (Sanskrit: Sthaviravada) "the Teaching of the Elders" is actually the Tamrasatiya sub-school of the Vibhajjavada (Skt. Vibhajyavada), "the Distinctionist Teaching"; and the Vibhajjavada is, in its turn, a derivative of the Sthavira or "Elder" branch of early Buddhism – the other main branch being the Mahasanghika. Thus, the tradition that has preserved the Pali canon is only one of the early Buddhist schools, traditionally numbering eighteen, that made up the so-called "Hinayana".

It is widely assumed that the Pali canon, in particular its Sutta-pitaka, can be taken as representing early Buddhism. In fact, however, the Pali Sutta-pitaka is no more representative of early Buddhism than are the corresponding collections of the other schools produced by the schisms that began about a century after the Buddha's death. The Sutta-pitakas of those other schools – the Sarvastivada, Dharmaguptaka, and others – are not entirely inaccessible. Although the Indic source texts have been largely lost, there exists a complete Chinese translation of each of the four agamas (corresponding to the Pali nikayas). These translations are valuable resources for the study of early Buddhism. In studies of the Theravada doctrinal tradition within early Buddhism, historical depth can be gained only if one considers the Pali suttas alongside their counterparts from other schools, as preserved in Chinese.

In this paper, I first present briefly historical and textual background on the early Buddhist schools. Then I give two examples of how useful and effective Pali-Chinese sutta comparison can be in advancing the study of the Theravada sutta tradition. The first example is a sutta in the Pali Anguttara-nikaya (AN 10.208) and its counterpart in the Chinese Madhyama-agama (MA 15); the second is the Satipatthana-sutta in its Pali version (MN 10) and two corresponding Chinese versions (MA 98 and EA 12.1). These two examples illustrate well the value of consulting the Chinese counterpart of a Pali sutta for critical/historical study of doctrine within the field of Theravada Studies.

Abbreviations:

AN = Anguttara-nikaya

EA = Ekottara-agama

MA = Madhyama-agama

MN = Majjhima-nikaya

Producing Theravada Doctrines: Early Buddhism and Scholarly Constructions of Buddhist Texts and Practices

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The study of Theravada Buddhism has traditionally consisted of the study of the Theravada canon and its commentaries. In recent decades, we have begun to shift away from these classical approaches in a way that brings the study of Theravada Buddhism into the larger worlds of South and Southeast Asia and also engaging the broader questions found in the comparative study of religion. We have seen new studies of traditional texts that locate those texts in larger geopolitical historical contexts; new studies of visual media; examinations of monastic culture; analyses of political ramifications of Theravada Buddhism; new intersections between anthropology and Theravada Buddhism; and a number of other ways of studying Theravada Buddhism. Scholars of Theravada Buddhism have been opening up new avenues for critical examinations of traditional questions as well as asking different questions of the field.

These new studies have at least one dimension in common; namely, the insistence that Theravada Buddhism stands in complex relationships to a variety of religious traditions as well as localized histories. We have also learned to speak in plurals, recognizing that Theravada Buddhism is not a singular entity, but multiple and multifaceted. These studies that strive for a post-colonial approach lead us to a fundamental question. The central question I explore in this paper is whether the traditional dichotomy between text and practice is appropriate for future studies of Theravada Buddhism. By drawing on scholarship, both traditional and contemporary, on the chronic question of “early Buddhism,” I will look at the assumptions between text and practice with regard to the relationships between the Pali canon and the category of doctrine within studies of the Theravada tradition.

**Anthropology and the Buddhological Imagination:
Reconstructing the Invisible Life of Texts**

Guillaume Rozenberg

Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

Since the 1960s, anthropological studies have significantly broadened our knowledge and understanding of Theravāda Buddhism. Yet, the ways anthropology may specifically contribute to the work of the main disciplines constituting the domain of classical Western buddhology -philology, archaeology, history-, if often alluded to, have rarely been fully reflected upon. Anthropology indeed does not only have its uses to shed light on the principles that govern discourses and practices in a contemporary Buddhist society. It also provides new avenues to re-examine the contents of the early textual sources of Buddhism. Such a proposition, whereas it has nothing original in itself, remains yet to be adequately unfolded. It has not been taken and applied literally, it has not been envisaged in its radicality, so that its heuristic potential has not been used in its full effectiveness. The question thus still deserves to be asked: how anthropology may contribute to the buddhological imagination?

With a view to delineating a possible answer, the paper first suggests that the function assigned to anthropology within Theravāda Studies has depended on how texts have been approached. An account is then given of a research trajectory concerning the relationship between the practice of vegetarianism and spiritual accomplishment in Theravāda Buddhism. The research trajectory, leading from the study of the debate over this relationship in the contemporary Burmese society to the reading of early doctrinal texts, shows how by inspiring oneself from anthropological descriptions and analysis the student of Buddhism may get means for a rereading of early sources. The example of vegetarianism also shows to which extent Western representations of Buddhism have affected the anthropologists' perception of contemporary reality. This eventually leads to formulate a somewhat radical proposition concerning the way anthropology may most productively contribute to the buddhological imagination.

**Is the 'Study' of Buddhism Possible for a Thai Theravada Monk??
Some Observations from the Last 50 Years**

Louis Gabaude

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From the standard point of view of a Thai Theravada monk, to 'study' Buddhism can only mean 'to study the textual tradition (pariyatti) and/or the practice (patipatti), always in the hope of achieving realisation (pativedha). To 'study' Buddhism as any other branch of knowledge, just for the sake of knowledge, cannot be the purpose of a monk and it has been decried even by so called progressive monks like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

However, we cannot but notice that western studies of Buddhism have been instrumental in changing the world view of such monks as, precisely, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu himself. Moreover, in recent years, due to the evolution of Buddhist universities and to more monks having read western scholarly works on Buddhism or on religion, we witness a trend towards a distanced if not objective study of Buddhism or of Buddhist traditions which does not seem to have realisation (pativedha) as a prime result but could be better seen as mere history, philosophy, or sociology.

The paper would/will analyse some contemporary case studies (dissertations or books) and reflect on the implications, the meaning and the possibility of distancing towards one's own tradition, within Theravada Buddhism.

**Buddhist Studies in Sri Lanka:
Present Trends and Future Possibilities**

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Sri Lanka has been a leading Theravada country from the arrival of the tradition in the 3rd century B.C. from India. It is recorded in the chronicles that the Canon with its commentaries was brought by the Venerable Mahinda who introduced the religion to the Country. From this early period, there emerged a tradition of learning this valuable literature. Literary evidence testify to the fact that there were commentaries written in the local language from a very early period. Subsequently at the turn of the Christian era the Canon was committed to writing and that marked a long and unbroken tradition of Buddhist academic activities in the Island up till today.

The beginning of the modern Buddhist studies goes back to the 18th century when the great Sangha leader called Velivita Saranankara Sangharaja resurrected the traditional learning that had almost disappeared by this time. Toward the end of the 19th century two learned monks belonging to this tradition started Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Pirivenas (monastic education centers) that became shining examples of Buddhist and oriental learning by the middle of the 20th century. As a mark of recognition of these two great centers they were elevated to university status towards the end of the 1950s.

Today in Sri Lanka there are four universities within the national university system that have departments for Pali and Buddhist studies. In addition, there are two universities specializing in Buddhist studies. While postgraduate studies are done in these departments there is an institute solely for postgraduate studies in the field of Buddhist studies.

Traditionally Sri Lanka is known for textual studies. Since the Pali canonical texts were committed to writing in the 1st century B.C. there has been a rich textual tradition in the Country. As a result, studies in Pali language also has been quite advanced in Sri Lanka. The monastic education centers train young members of the Sangha in Pali and Buddhist studies. At present both traditional and modern studies in these areas go hand-in-hand. With changes in the education system and the changes in attitudes the number of students who enter into these academic fields has been decreasing gradually. Although still a large number of Buddhist monks choose these subjects the number of lay students who opt for such studies is

not as many as it used to be. In particular, Pali studies have suffered as a result of changes in the general school education system.

The quality of postgraduate result can be improved if the students are capable of using English or any other European language at least for reference purposes. This deficiency is widely seen and as a result, the quality of overall postgraduate research remains somewhat to be desired. Developing linguistic ability in both traditional Buddhist source languages as well as modern languages remains a challenge for higher studies in Buddhism in Sri Lanka

The field of comparative and analytical Buddhist studies has been a strong area in Sri Lanka Buddhist scholarship. In particular, starting from K.N. Tayatilleke, the late professor of Philosophy at the University of Peradeniya, there has been a number scholars who would approach Buddhism with a Western philosophical background. Studying Buddhist philosophical themes using analytical tools has been a preferred area of many able scholars. Today, however, this area too remains somewhat less active mainly due to linguistic deficiencies affecting the graduate students.

In addition to the expositions of the traditional themes of Buddhism a good number of young scholars seem to have been attracted by social studies of Buddhism. While such studies remain often confined to Sinhala language medium there is a growing body of literature devoted to studying Buddhism from sociological and anthropological view points. These new developments suggest that contemporary studies in Buddhism in Sri Lanka are in the process of rapidly moving from traditional textual and exegetical studies to more analytical and critical areas.

**Theravada Philosophy 101:
Teaching the Abhidhamma in Thailand from 1569 to the Present**

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The “higher teachings” (Abhidhamma) of Buddhism have been a central part of the various curricula of Theravada schooling in Thailand for over four centuries. The manner in which they are taught has changed dramatically. This paper looks at several Abhidhamma “textbooks” from a palm-leaf manuscript composed in Northern Thailand in 1569 to modern printed textbooks published in Bangkok to trace these vicissitudes. All of these sources have remained unexamined by scholars even though they form the primary source for study of the Abhidhamma by monastics and laity in Thailand.

By exposing these neglected sources we can see that from the 16th to the 19th centuries the individual word commentaries and grammatical explanation in the vernacular were the central concern of monastic teachers. In more recent times greater attention has been paid to textual parallels. Moreover, the recent textbooks attempt to present an integral, sequential and “original” Pali text versus a more idiosyncratic series of explanations drawn from a wide array of canonical and commentarial sources. Pedagogical techniques have seen significant changes as well as the literal translation and memorization of Abhidhamma passages has become primary. Finally, the institutional context in which these texts are taught has changed. There has been a recent rise in “Abhidhamma Centers” in Thailand even though the subject of the Abhidhamma has remained marginal in state sponsored monastic examinations. All of these changes will be presented for discussion and analysis. In general this paper calls for a focus on the ways in which Theravada texts are taught in different contexts over time using a wide array of textual mediums and pedagogical methods.

**The Role of the Abhidhamma in the Field of Theravada Studies:
A Perspective from Burma / Myanmar**

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This paper is intended as a contribution to an important but understudied area—the Abhidhamma (P. Fundamental Law, Higher Philosophy)—within Theravada Studies. (Here, Theravada studies refers to the "academic study" of things Theravada, rather than Theravada studies as carried out in, for example, monastic contexts.) Although some scholarly work on the Abhidhamma is currently emerging in Theravada studies, a large amount of material remains to be explored, particularly in terms of the Burmese case. Indeed, Burma has been an international center of Abhidhamma studies in the Theravada world of South and Southeast Asia, with many tracing that role to the 15th century.

As an exploration in the kind of Abhidhamma activity that has developed in Burma, the paper discusses a collection of Abhidhamma sermons preached by a Burmese monk, Janakabhivamsa, in 1973. Janakabhivamsa's sermons focus on the Patthana (P. for Conditional relations), the division of Abhidhamma that has become known, in Burma, as a "front-line fortress" for the Sasana (P. for Dispensation). The reasons for this epithet have to do with Burmese beliefs about the decline of the Sasana, as well as about the abilities that people have to attain Arahant-ship (spiritual and moral perfection) through comprehension of the Patthana. The paper discusses these beliefs in light of Janakabhivamsa's sermons.

The paper concludes by reflecting on the wide historical and cultural emphasis on the Abhidhamma in Burma. Just how distinctive remains to be seen, as more research is conducted, and as more discussions are pursued about the regional and transregional life of the Abhidhamma across and within various Theravada contexts.