Religious Contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand from the Pre-Colonial Period to the Colonial Period

Piyanart Bunnag
Religious Contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand from the Pre-Colonial Period to the Colonial Period

Piyanart Bunnag

Abstract

Religious contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand began during the pre-colonial period in the late thirteenth century up until the colonial period in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries as each country conducted its relationship with the other on a reciprocal basis. Sri Lanka, as the first giver of Theravada Buddhism to Thailand, had a cultural influence on Thailand in terms of Buddhism. However, Thailand was able to harmoniously integrate Sri Lanka’s influences with traditional Thai culture. Later on, Thailand had a chance "to repay her debt" to Sri Lanka by reviving the declining Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the 18th century and the colonial period.
Religious Contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand from the Pre-Colonial Period to the Colonial Period

The contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand began during the pre-colonial period in the late thirteenth century when Sukhothai, one of the first Thai kingdoms, accepted Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism as the state religion. Such religious contact continued until the colonial period in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries as each country conducted its relationship with the other on a reciprocal basis. This study will limit itself to 3 topics:

1. The acceptance of Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism as a state religion
2. The establishment of the Siam Nikaya in Sri Lanka
3. The religious contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand during the colonial period

The Acceptance of the Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism as a State Religion

Legends and historical evidence attest to the presence of Buddhism before and about the beginning of the Christian Era. It is quite likely that Buddhism was in this area of Southeast Asia before a definite differentiation between Mahayana and Theravada as two vehicles of Buddhism was apparent. Buddhism entered the geographical areas of Southern and Central Thailand and gained acceptance by the Mons and Khmers between the first and seventh centuries. At that time the area was already strongly influenced by animism and was affected by Hinduism. Superimposed on a more deeply rooted and pervasive animism, both Buddhism and Hinduism coexisted as intermingling streams for several centuries.
Before the entrance of Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism, Sukhothai, the Thai kingdom (1249-1463) already had various beliefs: Animism, Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. Ramkamhaeng, the third king of Sukhothai (1279-1300), accepted Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism from the beginning as the state religion. He invited Sinhalese-trained monks from Nakorn Sri Thammarat, Sukhothai's vassal state, to Sukhothai to teach and propagate religion because of the prestige of the well-disciplined, trained monks from the Lanka School of Theravada. At that time, the center of the more orthodox school of Buddhism shifted from India to Sri Lanka because of the deterioration of Buddhism and the Sangha in India. The monastic authority was redefined on solid institutional and doctrinal grounds, while the laity continued to worship relics and observed the laymen's Vinaya found in the Sigalovada Sutta. Nakorn Sri Thammarat was the first place in Thailand that accepted the ordination, learning and practice according the Lanka School of Theravada Buddhism.

The Sinhalese-trained monks or bhikkhus in Sukhothai preached from the same throne which Ramkamhaeng used to administer the affairs of state on other days. This symbolized the de facto union of "church" and "state" that was certainly a factor in persuading some people to accept the favored religion. Furthermore, Ramkamhaeng made contact with Sri Lanka in order to invite the Sinhalese monks to reside, preach and teach in the Sukhothai kingdom. He built a Forest Monastery just west of the capital for the monks from Sri Lanka and those from Nakorn Sri Thammarat. These monks were called the arannavasi or forest dwellers. However, at that time, there were two groups of monks in Sukhothai kingdom: the arannavasi practiced the Dhamma austerely in distant temples or wats as aforementioned. The gamavasi or town dwellers followed the Mon tradition in studying the scriptures, preaching and undertaking social and administrative duties. Each group was headed by a senior monk who had been elected by the Council of the Elders but had been appointed by the king.

King Lithai (1347-1368 or 1374), grandson of King Ramkamhaeng, was such a devout Buddhist that he was known as Pra...
Mahadhammaraja I or “King of the Law”. He was not only conversant with the Vedic and Sanskrit traditions but studied the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma too. His great work, the Traibhumikatha, has been widely accepted up to the present as a main source for Thai literature, Buddhist philosophy, art, folklore and history. His aim was to make Buddhism intelligible to the people through this book. He enlisted the help of scholarly monks and consulted the available commentaries for the compilation of this cosmological treatise.

In order to propagate Theravada Buddhism in his realm more effectively, King Lithai established a school for monks in his palace compound. He had such deep faith in Buddhism that he wanted to be ordained. He invited monks from Nakorn Pan, the Mon city, who had been ordained in the Mahavihara of Sri Lanka to come to Sukhothai in 1361. King Lithai built Wat Pa Mamuang, “Mango Grove Monastery” at Sukhothai for Phra Mahasami Sangharaja, from Nakorn Pan. Afterwards King Lithai was ordained by Phra Mahasami and resided at Wat Pa Mamuang during his monkhood.

It was in this reign that Sukhothai had a religious relationship with the Lanna kingdom (present-day Chiengmai). King Kuena of Lanna sent his ambassador to ask for the senior Sinhalese-trained monk and the Buddhist relic from Sukhothai to be sent to Lanna. King Lithai did not hesitate to agree to this demand. This initiated the close relationship between the two kingdoms that partly saved Sukhothai from the intrusion of Ayutthaya, at least for some time.

During the Sukhothai period, Theravada Buddhism played an important role in Thai society both among the ruling class and the ruled class because Buddhism was the spiritual support of the public, and the temple was the center of society. The records of King Ramkamhaeng revealed that he instituted a clerical hierarchy headed by monks sent to Sri Lanka for further training under the prestigious Sinhalese monks. Legitimation for royal authority was based on a patrimonial and contractual concept, with the king serving as the chief Buddhist layman, setting an example for all through his piety, without any divine cultic
status. The concept of the “defender of the faith” established an image that was eminently popular with respect to spiritual status and access to the essentials of the teaching. “Democratic paternalism” of King Ramkamhaeng is much in evidence in his inscriptions, which like King Asoka’s, were designed for popular consumption and reveal a new kind of communalism far removed from the Hindu cultic divine king model.\textsuperscript{10} This is reflected in the statements as follows:

On days other than those on which the (Buddhist) precepts are recited, King Rama seats himself on this stone slab, and presiding over the assembly of nobles and dignitaries discusses with them the affairs of state....If commoner, noble, or chief falls ill, dies and disappears, his ancestral home, his clothes, his elephants, his rice granaries, his slaves, his family plantations are inherited in their entirely by his children. If commoners, nobles, or chiefs are in disagreement (the king) makes a thorough inquiry and then decides the affair for his subjects in accordance with equity; he does not connive as the thief or receiver of stolen goods. If he sees the rice of another he is not indignant....In the entrance to the gate (of the palace) a bell is hung up. If a subject of the realm has any trouble or any matter that distresses him within or torments his heart, and which he wishes to declare to his prince, there is no difficulty; he has only to ring the bell that is suspended there. Whenever King Rama hears this appeal he questions (the plaintiff) concerning his case (and decides it) according to the right.\textsuperscript{11}

In this way, King Ramkamhaeng could rule the kingdom peacefully and prosperously. Moreover, the Sangha helped him and his successors to socialize and acculturate the conquered people in the lands, annexed by the Sukhothai kingdom. In the Lanna kingdom, a kingdom contemporaneous with Sukhothai and Ayutthaya, King
Tilokaraj ascended to the throne with the help of the Theravada Sangha. He, therefore, wholeheartedly supported Buddhist activities. He propagated Theravada Buddhism in the lands he annexed. As a result, Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism was accepted widely in various cities of the Lanna kingdom such as Chiangsaen, Chiangtung and Payao.\textsuperscript{12}

When Ayutthaya, the second Thai kingdom, was founded in 1350, Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism was still accepted as the state religion. During King Indratiraj’s reign (1409-1424), Ayutthayan monks went to study the Dharma in Sri Lanka and were ordained in the Sinhalese tradition. Afterwards, they came back and established a new group of Sangha in Ayutthaya. In the reign of King Baromrajatiraj II (1424-1448), Phra Ramaysuen, the King’s eldest son and the heir to the throne, went to stay at Pitsanulok, the center of the administration of the northern provinces. Pitsanulok was the city where Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism was firmly established. Owing to this, Phra Ramaysuen was socialized to understand the religion and culture of the northern provinces in which Sukhothai was still an important city even though it was no longer the capital of the Thai kingdom. Later on, as King Baromtrailokanadh of Ayutthaya, he implemented the policy of merging Sukhothai into the Ayutthaya kingdom by making use of Theravada Buddhism which was the common belief of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya.\textsuperscript{13} In other words, he patronized and supported Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism as the Sukhothai kings had done. Furthermore, he was ordained in 1465 and stayed at Wat Chulamanee in Pitsanulok for eight months. His ordination was the incentive for a large number of Thai men to become monks for a certain period. His ordination as a monk indicated that he recognized the tradition of the Sukhothai kings, for he, himself, was of the Sukhothai royal family through his mother’s line. King Baromtrailokanadh, therefore, was accepted by the princes and people of the northern provinces, especially Sukhothai. This acceptance was useful for the successful unification of the Thai kingdom (Sukhothai and Ayutthaya) during his reign.\textsuperscript{14}

King Baromtrailokanadh standardized the administration system in Thailand, installing the sakdina, the dignity mark that indicated the
amount of manpower and the social or bureaucratic ranking position of each person. The amount of sakdina represented the social status of an individual. The greater the amount of sakdina an individual possessed, revealed the superior position and the higher responsibility of that person. The sakdina was not used only for the layman but it was also used for the monks. It was a way of ranking and evaluating the knowledge of monks. In other words, grading the monk was according to his sakdina; for example, highly learned monks were given the grade 600.15

As a civil bureaucracy, this provided the long-lasting basis for the Thai administration up to modern times. Specialized departments were set up within the administration, with civilian officials. The Sangha was headed by a supreme patriarch, appointed by the king, who sat on the royal council. He coordinated the activities of the Sangha with the needs of the state in order to maintain an important means of communication between the royal court and outlying provinces.16 Although hereditary ascription, discriminatory laws and penalties remained an important integrative principle for bureaucratic position promotion, the system was quite open to individual achievement. That was because the access to the civilian bureaucracy and the religious hierarchy was based on free education provided by the monks. Additionally, all young men were expected to spend a part of their life as a monk, being taught skills and values necessary for official positions. Promotion in the bureaucratic hierarchy was based on moral prestige which would be acquired by adhering to the Buddhist precepts and by merit-making acts.17 That the Sangha taught skills and values, required for official positions, may explain the king’s strong interest in Sangha activities.18

It can be said that Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism thrived very well under the patronage of king Baromtrailokanadh. Later, Ayutthayan kings took the responsibility of subsidizing Buddhism, such as the construction and the restoration of the temples (or wats), the support of the Dharma and Vinaya study of the bhikkus and the designation of monks in a Sangha hierarchy position according to one’s knowledge,
capability and behavior. King Songtam (1610-1628), for example, was a Buddhist scholar himself. He patronized the editions of the Canon, constructed and repaired a large number of temples, enshrined the newly discovered Footprint of the Buddha at Saraburi. He himself was ordained before his ascent to the throne. King Narai (1656-1688), another good patron of Buddhism, did not want to let the Sangha become an asylum for “lazy people”. He, therefore, ordered that monks were required to study Pali and the scriptures. Moreover, official examinations were held from time to time after which inefficient monks were asked to leave the monkhood. ¹⁹

Buddhism came at the zenith of its prosperity in the eyes of Buddhist countries contemporaneous with Ayutthaya in the reign of King Baromakot. This led to the establishment of the Siam Nikaya that later became the oldest and the biggest Nikaya in Sri Lanka.

**The Establishment of the Siam Nikaya in Sri Lanka** ²¹

The first topic to be analysed in this paper concerns the contact between Sri Lanka and Thailand from the earliest time (13th century) which consisted of Sri Lanka solely passing on Buddhist Sinhalese culture to Thailand. Sinhalese influence in Thailand became mixed with older elements in Thai culture especially beliefs, literature, sculpture and architecture. From that time on, Theravada Buddhism and culture became stable and flourished in Thailand whereas Sri Lanka had to face several external threats and internal political conflicts that were instrumental in the decline of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Finally, in the eighteenth century, there was only one sovereign Sinhalese kingdom, the Kandyan Kingdom. ²² At that time, Buddhism in Sri Lanka was declining because of the lack of qualified monks in performing the Sangha’s activities. Moreover, there was no one who was qualified to perform the tonsure ceremony in order to continue the monkhood in Sri Lanka. Therefore, in 1750, King Kirti Sri Rajasingha of Kandy, the last independent kingdom of Sri Lanka, requested help from the Thai king to send some highly-ranked learned monks to restore the line of ordination in Sri Lanka. This request met with a very positive response
from King Baromakot of Ayutthaya owing to the long term cultural and religious interrelationship between both countries for over four centuries. This religious contact was partly supported by the Dutch with the objective of gaining political and commercial benefits both in Sri Lanka and Thailand. The Dutch prepared the ship for this mission and Batavia in Java, the Dutch East India Company headquarter, was used as the stopping place of the Sinhalese Ambassadors before entering Ayutthaya. In Ayutthaya, the Sinhalese Ambassadors were welcomed warmly and honourably by Thai nobles and the general public. They went to stay at the Dutch settlement, preparing themselves to pay homage to the king at the appointed time.

King Baromakot received this Sinhalese group with hospitality. They had a chance to visit various important religious places not only in Ayutthaya but also in nearby provinces such as the Footprint of the Buddha in Saraburi and Wat Pamok in Anthong. They participated in various religious ceremonies, arranged specially for this occasion such as the ordination rite, the Kathina ceremony (a religious ceremony for offering the annual robes to the monks) and the royal ritual procession by water for the religious purpose. When the Sinhalese Ambassadors paid homage to King Baromakot officially, they gave him King Kirti Sri Rajasingha’s letter requesting religious support. The King was very pleased and willing to give support to ensure the continued survival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. He decided to send a group of Thai monks, headed by Phra Maha Thera Upali, Phra Ariyamuni, famous for his knowledge of Phra Dharma Vinaya, and Phra Mahanama, famous in the practice of Vipasana Karmatan, together with Pali manuscripts, to go to Sri Lanka along with the Sinhalese Ambassadors in order to fulfil this religious mission.

This group of Thai monks, Thai Ambassadors and Sinhalese Ambassadors left Ayutthaya for Sri Lanka in 1751 on a newly built Thai ship, given by King Baromakot. However, the ship was buffeted by great waves and water entered the leaking ship. It finally ran aground in Nakorn Sri Tammarat. King Baromakot then ordered these persons back to Ayutthaya. However, some Sinhalese Ambassadors who had
gone with the Dutch ship were able to return to Kandy later. During that time, King Baromakot was plagued by many troublesome events which occurred so frequently that he could not arrange to send off Phra Maha Thera Upali and his party to Kandy again. For example, a royal Thai ship, carrying elephants and goods to South India, was wrecked and many people died. Four other royal Thai ships that anchored at the Chao Phya river mouth were wrecked by a storm; and Chao Phraya Chamnanboriraksa, the King's favorite noble who had an important role in this mission died. These events made the king deeply sad, and he could not do anything to fulfill the request of Kandy. Finally, a Dutch ship commander offered to bring the Thai priests to Kandy safely. The king agreed to that offer.

The Thai priests and ambassadors arrived in Kandy in May 1752. The Thai priests were welcomed with gratification and great respect by the King, his followers and the Kandyan people as a whole. Phra Maha Thera Upali prepared to perform the ordination ceremony for the Sinhalese. In order to present an example, he first ordained a novice, one of his followers. Afterwards, he presided over the ordination ceremony that the Thai priests arranged for the Sinhalese according to King Kirti Sri Rajasingha's invitation. This ordination represented the very important and auspicious restoration of Buddhism in Sri Lanka after a hundred years of Buddhist decline. The success came mainly from the role of the Thai Sangha which was commented upon by one Sinhalese scholar who called the process: "Thailand repays her debt to Sri Lanka." However, it indicates also that Thailand was taking the lead in the propagation and preservation of Theravada Buddhism. The shift from Sri Lanka to Thailand had taken place after Thailand's acceptance of Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka about five hundred years earlier.

The first Thai delegation of monks under Phra Maha Thera Upali remained in Kandy for three years, until 1758. During that time they ordained seven hundred monks and three thousand novices. At the same time they taught and propagated Phra Dharma Vinaya, Katikavata, important Buddhist ritual ceremonies, meditation practice
and the Pali language to the Kandyan people. Furthermore, the Buddhist scriptures which they brought to Sri Lanka were of great value in Buddhist education to the Buddhists in this country because of the lack of scripture there. Therefore, this first Thai delegation of monks was recognized as the founder of the Siam Nikaya or Upali Order that later became the largest and most prestigious Order in Sri Lanka. In 1755, the second Thai delegation of monks, under Phra Visuddhacaraya and Phra Varananamuni, went to Sri Lanka in order to replace the first group. This was according to King Baromakot’s promise to the Sinhalese that the first Thai delegation of monks would be in Kandy for three years, and that after that the second group would take its place until the Sinhalese monks had ten years in the monkhood and could ordain their people themselves. The mission of Thai monks would then come to an end. However, Phra Upali, together with nine monks and two novices in the first group, died in Kandy while the second group was only half-way to Kandy. The Sinhalese constructed a caitya (stupa) on the top of a mountain in Kandy to enshrine the relics of Phra Upali. There were only seven monks who could return home safely. It indicated that several Thai monks and novices had to sacrifice their lives in order to fulfil their mission of restoring Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The second Thai delegation of monks performed the same task as the first group did. They ordained three hundred Sinhalese monks and a large number of Sinhalese novices. This group stayed in Kandy for four years and came back to Ayutthaya in 1758, the year that King Baromakot died. Thus, it was that in Sri Lanka, the Sangha-raja Saranangkara, the Sinhalese highest ranking monk elder, could ordain the Sinhalese monks and novices by himself from 1764 onwards. It shows that King Baromakot’s strong intention of restoring Buddhism in Sri Lanka was realized in practice.

The Sinhalese were deeply impressed by the mission of the Thai Sangha for the establishment of the Siam Nikaya in Sri Lanka, especially the religious role of Phra Maha thera Upali and his followers. They acknowledged the great importance of this event by referring to it in different types of records, both contemporary records and official documents as follows:

30
1. Syanwavarananava, written by Elleypola, the Sinhalese Ambassador to Ayutthaya;

2. Record of Villabhakaytara, the Sinhalese Ambassador to Ayutthaya who came back to Kandy together with the first delegation of Thai monks and the Thai ambassadors from Ayutthaya;

3. Documents written by persons who came with the Sinhalese ambassadors to Ayutthaya. The documents are kept at the National Archives of Sri Lanka;

4. Kusalakriyami Sandesaya (Kirti Sri Caritaya), written by Villabhakaytara’s grandson.

On the Thai side only one contemporary document has been found, namely “Voyage of Phra Upali to Lanka Dhavipa” written by one of the Ayutthayan ambassadors. However, the classic Thai document on this subject was “The Establishment of the Siamwongse Order of Monks in Lanka Dhavipa”. Even though this book was written later in the Bangkok (Ratanakosin) Period, Somdet Kromphraya Damrongrajanubhuap, the author, composed this book by consulting primary and secondary sources of Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Netherlands and Britain. The author said in his work that he wrote this book with fairness and without bias. This book was the pioneering work on this topic and remains one of the most reliable documents on the Thai side.

**The Religious Contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand during the Colonial Period**

After Phra Visuddhacaraya, Phra Varananamuni and their followers left Kandy for Ayutthaya, no contact between Sri Lanka and Thailand was recorded in either Sri Lanka or Thai documents. There was only one event recorded in the royal chronicles of Ayutthaya and that was the expulsion of Prince Dheppipit, one of King Baromakot’s sons, as a monk to “Lanka Dhavipa” instead of being punished for rebelling against King Akkatat, the last king of Ayutthaya. The story of the contact between Sri Lanka and Thailand from the period before the
fall of the Ayutthaya Kingdom in 1767 to the reign of King Rama I of the Early Bangkok Period is in Somded Kromphraya Damrongrajanubhuap’s book, entitled “Ruang Praditsathan Phra Sangha Siamwongse nai Lanka Dhavipa” or “The Establishment of the Siamwongse Order of Monks in Lanka Dhavipa” as follows:

...In the reign of King Suriyamarintr before the fall of the Ayutthaya kingdom, there was no war for several years. During that time, the Dutch ships frequently made trading voyages between Lanka and Thailand. The Sinhalese monks had just been ordained by the bhikkus of the Siam Nikaya. I understand that there must have been religious contact between the people of those two countries. However, the said contact might not be so important that it should be recorded in the historical records. After the Burmese sacked Ayutthaya, I believe that there was no contact between those two countries throughout the reign of King Taksin of the Dhonburi Period and the reign of King Rama I of the Early Ratanakosin Period, because of Thailand’s wars with Burma. The contact with Lanka appeared again in the historical records from the reign of King Rama II onwards.31

It can be concluded that there was no official contact between Sri Lanka and Thailand from the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 until the end of King Rama I’s reign. This was because Thailand was occupied by the wars with Burma several times even after regaining her independence. Moreover, Thailand with her new capital cities, Dhonburi (1767-1782) and Bangkok (1782-present) respectively, had to formulate state-building and restoration of the kingdom.

One way of restoring the kingdom and nation was to restore the Sangha which had suffered severely during the years of war because of the lack of support. For example, King Taksin, the only king of the Dhonburi Period, rewrote the Traibhumikatha, a Buddhist text, because
new parts had been added during previous centuries. He also sent monks into the provinces to reform the Sangha. King Rama I, the first king of the Bangkok Period, during the first two years of his reign, issued ten Royal Decrees, of which seven had the aim of clearing the Sangha of moral depravity. Furthermore, laymen were appointed to judge monastic crimes. In 1788, King Rama I ordered that a Council of Elders be summoned to revise and to standardize the Pali Canon, from manuscripts collected in different parts of the country, with missing sections procured from Sri Lanka. After the meetings of the Ninth Buddhist Council, the Council’s edition of the Traipitok (Traipitaka) was compiled by two hundred and fifty monks, together with learned laymen. Then it was written down on bundles of palm leaves. King Rama I financed this “Great Gilt Edition of the Traipitaka” or “Traipitaka Chabab Thongyai” (in the Thai Language). Additionally, a dictionary of Pali terms used in the Pitaka and the Sangitivamsa were also published in this reign.32

On the Kandyan side, the monks split up into various factions including both conscientious monks and lapsed ones. Moreover, the country had to face the expansion of influence of the Netherlands and Britain respectively. After a long fight with the West in order to maintain her independence, Kandy finally became Britain’s colony in the early 19th century. That meant the last kingdom of Sri Lanka which patronized Buddhism could no longer do her duty as a great supporter of Buddhism not only in Sri Lanka but also in the South Asian region as a whole.

However, there was informal contact between Sinhalese monks and Thai elites, both lay Buddhists and monks in 1809, the last year of King Rama I of the Bangkok Period. One Sinhalese monk, Phra Valitr and two Sinhalese novices, Ratanapala and Hidhaya who came from Kandy to Nakorn Sri Thammarat, asked Chao Phraya Nakorn (Pat), governor of Nakorn Sri Thammarat, to arrange a trip to Bangkok for them. Arriving in Bangkok, King Rama I ordered that they be lodged at the royal temples. Phra Valitr and Ratanapala stayed with Somdet Phra
Sangharaja (Suk) at Wat Mahadhat while Hidhaya stayed with Somdet Phra Vannarat at Wat Phra Jetupon. King Rama I regularly gave them food and other necessities for living. In the reign of King Rama II (1890-1824), those two novices when they reached the age of entrance into the monkhood wanted to be ordained. King Ramall then subsidized them as his “royal nagas” (monks-to-be), ordained them in Wat Phra Sriratanasasadaram (or the Temple of the Emerald Buddha) and also gave each of them together with Phra Valitr, three tamleung (Thai money) per month as a cost of living allowance.

During this reign and in King Rama III’s reign (1824-1851), there were exchanges of priestly envoys and messages between Sri Lanka and Thailand. In the reign of King Rama V (1851-1868) or King Mongkut, the King sent priestly envoys, headed by Phra Anomasirimuni, the delegation being composed of ten monks and six officials, to Sri Lanka in 1852. The main purpose of this group was to ordain Sinhalese men who wanted to be ordained onto the Thammayut Order (or Nikaya) which promoted a stricter observance of the Vinaya rules and was founded by the King himself while he was in the monkhood before his ascending to the throne. King Mongkut allowed Phra Anomasirimuni and his followers to stay in Sri Lanka longer in order to fulfil their religious mission. However, this delegation of monks came back to Bangkok in 1853 and only succeeded in sending back the Sinhalese scripture to Sri Lanka and allotting the objects given by the Thai king to the senior bhikkus of Sri Lanka. They did not perform any ordinations because Phra Anomasirimuni was tired of the disunity and jealousy among the Sinhalese, both priests and lay Buddhists. From that time on, King Mongkut did not send any delegations of monks to Sri Lanka.

In the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) or King Chulalongkorn, some Sinhalese monks wanted to be reordained into the Thammayut nikaya. King Chulalongkorn was willing to fulfil their objective for the sake of Buddhist support and propagation as he said “Thailand is only independent country which has Theravada Buddhism
as the state religion and still uses Pali as the religious language. Therefore, it is our task to support Buddhism by means of propagating the pure Buddhist teaching to all countries whose citizens are still Buddhists but where there are no patrons to fulfil their religious objective.\textsuperscript{33}

King Chulalongkorn ordered Somdet Phra Maha Samanachao Krom Phraya Vajiranavvarorasasa, his half-brother and head of the Thammayut nikaya to take charge of realizing the King’s objective of religious support. Somdet Phra Maha Samanachao Krom Phraya Vajiranavvarorasasa therefore accepted to be patron of the Sinhalese monks’ reordination into the Thammayut nikaya. Consequently, a large number of Sinhalese monks came to Bangkok in order to be reordained into the Thammayut nikaya and to learn Phra Dharma Vinaya at Wat Bovornnives. However, the Thai supporters of Sinhalese Buddhism had to be cautious in their support because there was no unity among Sinhalese monks. For example, Phra Sirisumon asked to be reordained into the Thammayut nikaya while another Sinhalese monk, Phra Subhuti, sent a letter containing accusations against Phra Sirisumon to Thai supporters of Sinhalese Buddhism.

When King Chulalongkorn made his first royal visit to Europe in 1897, on the way home, he visited Sri Lanka according to the request of the Sinhalese monks so that it may be an “auspicious sign to Sinhalese Buddhists in general.”\textsuperscript{34} He was welcomed in the most honorable manner by Sinhalese monks and lay Buddhists. For example, after his visit to Wat Paramanandhavihra, the prayer hall-cum-library was built in commemoration of that occasion. Phra Sanghatissa, the abbot of this temple later wrote to King Chulalongkorn, asking permission for the King’s name to be used as the name of the building. Moreover, Sinhalese monks and lay Buddhists requested the King to establish the Thammayut nikaya in Sri Lanka and for it to be under the religious jurisdiction of Thailand because of the good religious contacts between the two countries which had existed for centuries. Furthermore, the Sinhalese, thus, came to appreciate that King Chulalongkorn gave generous religious patronage to Sinhalese
Buddhists. For example, he gave the Tripumikata to academic institutions for scholarly purposes, such as the monks’ school, namely “Vittayothaipaivena.” He also subsidized the study of Phra Dharma Vinaya and the restoration of the Phra Chedi at Anuradhapura. The Sinhalese monks, therefore, expected that King Chulalongkorn could revive Buddhism in their country. As for King chulalongkorn, the first Thai King who visited Sri Lanka, he observed that Buddhism there had to compete with Christianity. However, there was no unity in the Sangha circles of Sri Lanka. Some monks were not interested in teaching or propagating Buddhism. Consequently, King Chulalongkorn had the firm intention to rehabilitate the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka.

After arriving back in Thailand, King Chulalongkorn sent all religious information to the Mahatherasamagama (Assembly of Elders), the highest authority of the Thai Sangha, in order to consider the two requests of the Sinhalese Buddhists: first, to be under the governance of the Thai Sangha; second, to establish the Thammayut nikaya of Thailand in Sri Lanka. King Chulalongkorn, the patron of Buddhism in Thailand, would go along with the resolution of the Mahatherasamagama. After careful consideration, the Mahatherasamagama resolved that Thailand should not establish the Thammayut nikaya in Sri Lanka but that the Thai king and the Mahatherasamagama would subsidize the ordination of the Sinhalese in Bangkok, together with all necessities for living during their study of Buddhism in Thailand. Furthermore, the Mahatherasamagama proposed that Thailand should not govern the Sinhalese Sangha and Buddhists because Sinhalese and Thais belonged to different nation-states. That meant that they should not interfere with the internal activities of each other’s country. King Chulalongkorn recognized and abided by this resolution. He sent his answer to the Sinhalese Sangha, saying that he could not respond to the said two requests because.

“....I am a layman, having a duty to defend the country, govern the people with righteousness, and support religion. I can do these duties only in my own country. Another reason is that all the arrangements concerning Phra Dharma Vinaya are the duty of the Sangha; it is not mine, the layman”.
The King reinforced his answer by giving the examples of Buddhist kings in ancient times noting that all of them had the duty to protect Buddhism only, while the administration of the Sangha was the duty of the Elders of Phra Thera directly. However, the King consoled the Sinhalese bhikkus by saying:

"...I would like to ask all of the bhikkus not to be stubborn and prejudiced, wishing that all of you have the spirit of unity and the contentment to maintain and propagate our Lord Buddha’s immortal teachings to last eternally for the sake of the peaceful happiness of all Buddhists both laymen and priests...." 36

However, the King and Mahatherasamagama of Thaialnd still supported the Sinhalese monks to as great an extent as possible under limitations of the suitability and the non-interference in Sri Lanka such as giving support to the study of Phra Dharma Vinaya and the daily practice of the Sinhalese monks according to their requests.

Concerning the British, who governed Sri Lanka at that time, Thai documents, available at present do not reveal any opinions of the British concerning this issue. It might be that the British realized that the request to be under Thai Buddhist authority was the movement of only some Sinhalese, not all of them. Another point was that Thailand revealed her sincerity and principle by choosing not to interfere with the Buddhist activities in Sri Lanka.

Another important event that partly reflected the religious contact between Sri Lanka and Thailand during King Chulalongkorn’s reign was that Senior Colonel Prince Prisadang Jumsai went to be ordained in Sri Lanka in 1890. 37 He was the first Thai Prince who was ordained in that country. His monk name was “Phra Jinavorawongse.” He played a great role in the Sangha activities and the education of the youth of Sri Lanka. During his first year of ordination, he prepared a meeting of the Sinhalese monks to send a letter of request to King Chulalongkorn to permit Thai priests to go to Sri Lanka in order to reordain the Sinhalese monks. As a result, King Chulalongkorn gave
this duty to Somdet Phra Maha Samanachao Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa to do everything that was possible and suitable in his eyes as mentioned above. During 1905-1910 while Phra Jinavorawongse was the abbot of Dipaduttarama and Sanghanayok of Colombo, he tried to urge the Sinhalese monks to keep their temples in a clean and orderly condition and to establish museums and libraries in each temple. He began to realize these activities at Dipaduttarama first.

After that, Phra Jinavorawongse founded a school for homeless boys, teaching the Sinhalese and English languages at Dharmasala free of charge. The money that subsidized this activity came from the money donated to worship Buddha on the occasion of Buddhist days and from the money donated by the foreigners who visited the temple. Additionally, he invited Sir Henry A Blake, the British Governor of Sri Lanka to visit and observe the said teaching activity. Phra Jinavorawongse explained to Sir Blake about the educational system in which the temple was used as a school. This method relieved the government’s burden concerning education and social welfare. The British governor agreed with this idea, and, therefore, convinced other people especially Buddhists in Sri Lanka to join in this beneficial and charitable activity by proclaiming that “Anyone who supports such education, that one loves the country.” From that time on, this school grew very quickly under the subsidization of a large and increasing number of supporters, including the students. This school was later named “Prince College.” Furthermore, Phra Jinavorawongse founded a school for homeless girls, called “the Kotahana Girls Free School”, teaching both Sinhalese and English, like “Prince College”, and also domestic science. Phra Jinavorawongse invited Lady Blake, the British Governor’s wife, to open this school. He pointed out to Lady Blake the necessity of the educational arrangement for the homeless girls. Lady Blake was interested in this type of school and she gave some support to the school. Many newspapers in Sri Lanka helped advertise this educational activity. As a result, this girls’ school began to thrive as quickly as “Prince College”.
Phra Jinavorawongse was praised highly among the Sinhalese owing to his wholehearted support both in Buddhism and education for the Sinhalese even though he was not Sinhalese. He was recognized as 'the Prince Priest' who made great contributions to Buddhism and education for the Sri Lanka people.\(^{38}\) It has been said that "His stay in Sri Lanka is the most valuable event for the development of Buddhism\(^{39}\). So it may not be an exaggeration to say that Prince Prisadang or Phra Jinavorawongse had a major role in the fostering of spiritual contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

In conclusion, the contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand that began during the late thirteenth century went on continuously until the colonial period in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Sri Lanka, as the first giver of Theravada Buddhism to Thailand, had a cultural influence concerning many aspects of Buddhism on Thailand, especially the educational system of the Sangha; the Sangha organization; faith and belief in stupa construction to house the Buddha's relics, in the planting of the Bodhi Tree, in the Buddha's Footprint and Phra Sriarayamettrai (Maitreya); works of art especially in architecture and sculpture; language and literature. However, Thailand did not accept religious and cultural influences from Sri Lanka without discrimination. She was able to harmoniously integrate Sri Lanka's influences with traditional Thai culture, so that the result became the Thai Buddhist culture which has lasted until today. Moreover, Thailand had a chance "to repay her debt" to Sri Lanka by reviving the declining Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the 18\(^{th}\) century and the colonial period.
Notes

1 Piyanart (Nikrodha) Bunnag, History and Civilization of Sri Lanka from the Ancient Period to the Pre-Colonial Period and the Cultural Contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2534) (Thai language)


9 Prachumsilacharuek Pak ti I, (Bangkok: Secretariat Office to the Cabinet Press, 2521) p. 94. (Thai Language)


14 Piyanart Bunnag, The Relationship between Pitsanulok and Ayutthaya, presented at the academic seminar, Pibulsongram teachers’ College, Pitsanulok, 27 January, 2522. (Thai language)


21 Further detail in Somdet Kromphraya Damrongrajanubhap, Ruang Praditsathan Phra Sangha Siamwongse Nai Lankadhavipa, (Bangkok : Kansasana) (Thai Language)


23 Further detail in K.W. Goonewardene, , Ayutthia : the Twilight Years and its Triangular Relations with the V.O.C. and Sri Lanka, presented at the International Conference on Thai Studies, New Delhi, India, 1980.

24 Somdet Kromphraya Damrongrajanubhap, Ruang Praditsathan........., pp. 118-130.
25 Ibid., pp. 149-150.


35 Thai National Archive, Documents in the reign of King Rama V, Ministry of Education, File no. 8, the translation of the draft of the royal answer to the monks. *Rueng Nangsuephralankatangntangn* (Thai language) English translation by Piyanart Bunnag.

36 Ibid.
