

NOTES ON BUDDHISM

In this paper, Pāli words indicate Theravāda views, whereas Sanskrit (usually Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit) words denote Mahāyāna and related Vajrayāna views (see section I.D. below). When spelled differently, these Pāli and Sanskrit words are distinguished by the slash mark, e.g., Dhamma/Dharma.

I. DEFINITION OF BUDDHISM

- A. Conception: Buddhism is essentially a way of life: the realization of human freedom in perfect existence through a mode of conduct integrated with a method of thought, as first attained, taught, and exemplified by the Buddha.
- Avoid Western-oriented conceptions of Buddhism as a "philosophy" or a "religion" which are misleading. However, "philosophical", "religious", and other adjectives may be used in describing Buddhist principles and practices.
- B. Names: Buddhism is called "Buddha Sāsana" (the Buddha's way of life systematized) in Pāli by the Theravāda tradition in Southeast Asia; "Fo-chiao" (the Buddha's teaching) in Chinese and therefrom "Pulgyo" in Korean, "Bukkyō" in Japanese, "Phật-Giáo" in Vietnamese, etc. by the Mahāyāna tradition in East Asia; and "Chö's" (the doctrine) in Tibetan by the Vajrayāna tradition in Tibetan cultural areas.
- For accuracy and rapport, use Asian names of Buddhism in Asia whenever possible.
- C. Traditions: Three main Buddhist traditions began in India but developed elsewhere:
1. Theravāda (Teaching of the Theras or senior monks) is the surviving form of early Buddhism. It prevails in Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Laos, Thailand, and some communities in India, Malaya-Singapore, and Nepal. The Theravāda uses Pāli, written in various scripts, as the basic textual language.
 2. Mahāyāna (Expansive Way, Means, Career or the Greater Method of attaining Enlightenment) was formerly influential in Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Thailand, and possibly Laos. It prevails in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Việt-Nam, and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. The Mahāyāna uses Sanskrit (usually Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit) and Chinese as the basic textual languages.

3. Vajrayāna (Vajra or symbolized-Wisdom Way, Means, Career, or Method of attaining Enlightenment) has doctrinal affiliations with the Mahāyāna. It prevails in Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal, Sikkim, and Tibet. The Vajrayāna uses Sanskrit (usually Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit) and Tibetan as the basic textual languages.

Avoid Western conceptions of "Northern Buddhism" and "Southern Buddhism" which are erroneous.

Forget Mahāyānist condescending and Western academic references to the Hīnayāna (Exclusive Way, Means, Career or the Lesser Method of attaining Enlightenment) since they require use in the proper historical context and are currently represented by Theravādins when identified with themselves.

4. Differences in principles and practices between the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna are a matter of degree and relationship rather than being absolute distinctions. The Theravāda believes that it adheres to, and preserves, the original formulation of the Teaching of the Buddha (in Pāli: Dhamma) and thus regards the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna as peculiar deviations. The Mahāyāna asserts that it expounds the meaning of the Teaching of the Buddha (in Sanskrit: Dharma) and thus develops what is Buddhistically latent in the Theravāda. The Vajrayāna holds that it exemplifies and fulfills the Mahāyāna exposition of the Teaching of the Buddha in special practices. Actually, much of the apparent differences between Buddhist traditional movements, as well as between their schools, are due to the ethnocentric factors of various countries: their particular social conditions, cultural expressions, and national interests.

In most circumstances, do not be concerned about doctrinal differences between various Buddhist movements or schools, but instead note their particular ethnic characteristics and national interests.

- D. Components: Three valued components of Buddhism fundamentally orient all Buddhist beliefs and practices. They are called "Ti-ratana" in Pāli by the Theravāda tradition and "Tri-ratna" in Sanskrit by the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions, both literally meaning "Three Treasures, Jewels, Gems, etc." which are interrelatedly:

1. The Buddha (the Enlightened One) ["the Lord Buddha" is a Westernized expression] who first conceived, taught, and exemplified the Dhamma/Dharma.

2. The Dhamma/Dharma (the Teaching of the Buddha) ["the Law of the Buddha" is an awkward translation] which was subsequently taught as doctrine and expounded by his followers who together came to comprise the Saṅgha.
3. The Saṅgha (the Buddhist Order) ["the Buddhist Church" or "the Buddhist Clergy" is a misleading Christianized translation] as a monastic organization supported by the Buddhist laity.

The Ti-ratana/Tri-ratna is expressed symbolically in many rituals as the prime requisite act of veneration in all Buddhist schools and sects.

Refer to the Ti-ratana/Tri-ratna (the Buddha, the Dhamma/Dharma, the Saṅgha) in speaking or writing about Buddhist affairs when desired to indicate knowledge of, and respect for, Buddhism.

II. BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP

- A. The Buddha: Siddhattha Gotama/Siddhārtha Gautama was born in the Lumbinī grove near Kapilavatthu/Kapilavastu (near present Rummindei in Nepal), capital of the oligarchic republic (gaṇa, saṅgha: cf. Greek city-state polis) of the Sākya/Sākyā people, as son of their elected chief or presiding officer (rājā/rāja; not hereditary "king" in this case and hence Siddhattha/Siddhārtha was a "prince" only later in legend); attained Enlightenment (boḍhi) at Bodhi-gayā (or Buddha-gayā, near present Gayā) and thus became a buddha (one who is enlightened, or the historic Buddha according to his followers); delivered his first teaching in the Deer Park at Sarnāth (near present Vārānasī or Banaras); taught many men and women from all walks of life; rendered political advice; and at 80 years passed away (mahā-parinibbāna/parinirvāṇa) at Kusi-nārā/Kuṣinagarā (present Mathā Kunwār near Kasia).

The Buddha's dates are still problematical: The Theravādins in Burma, Ceylon, and India date him 624-544 B.C. and those in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand one year later, 623-543 B.C.; hence their Buddha Jayanti (2500 years of Buddhism celebration) was held in May 1956 and May 1957 respectively. The Mahāyānists and Western scholars date the Buddha differently: ca. 566-486 (now the preferred date), 563-483, or 558-478 B.C.

The Buddha as a universal Teacher is believed by his followers to have historically realized human freedom in perfect existence and then shown the way for others to follow. When viewing the Buddha as a universal Ideal, his followers, especially those who are influenced by

animism, sometimes attribute to him supra-human characteristics and powers and thus tend to deify him in folk belief and practice.

Veneration of the Buddha may be made at any time, informally or ceremoniously, by an individual or a group led by a recognized leader (preferably a member of the Saṅgha). Folk-deifications of the historic Buddha have developed into traditional Buddha-cults which are sometimes condoned or aided by the Saṅgha for the sake of the pious laity. [Annual commemorations of the Buddha are described below in section V.C.1.]

Regard the Buddha as a great Teacher of humanity (how to perfect human nature) to many peoples and not as a religious power or deity.

- B. Saṅgha leaders: As the Buddhist Order, the Saṅgha consists of monks (bhikkhus/bhikṣus, not "priests"), nuns (bhikkhunīs/bhikṣunīs), and disciples (sāvakas/śrāvakas) who are male novices (sāmaṇeras/śrāmaṇeras) and female novices (sāmaṇerīs/śrāmaṇerīs). In a wider sense and often in modern lay usage, the Saṅgha may also include male lay devotees (upāsikas/upāsakas, "brothers") and female lay devotees (upāsikās/upāsikās, "sisters"; now the status of nuns in Theravāda areas).

Leaders of a Buddhist monastic order, organization, or monastery are customarily chosen by its members for their seniority in rank based upon years of membership and examinations passed, their knowledge and exemplification of the Dhamma/Dharma, their administrative experience and ability, and frequently their rapport with government officials as well as with lay followers and other Saṅgha leaders.

Saṅgha leaders exercise several roles in society: they administer the Saṅgha and teach the Dhamma/Dharma to all interested as traditionally expected of them; they advise their governments, local or national, on policy and program matters in public interest; and they conduct educational and social welfare work for the needy.

Regard members of the Saṅgha in a Buddhist country or community as traditionally venerated leaders of Buddhism and not as "holy men." Hence a monk or nun should be addressed as "The Venerable..." (or "The Reverend..." for a Buddhist minister in Japan) and not "Your/His Worship" or "Your/His Reverence." A Saṅgharājā in a Theravāda country may be addressed as "Your/His Eminence the Saṅgharājā of..." and the Dalai Lama of Tibet as "Your/His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet" (not "the God-King of Tibet"). Incidentally, the word lāma denotes a respected rank in

Tibetan Buddhism, which is a developed form of the Vajrayāna tradition and should not be called "Lama-ism."

Differences in rank for monks in the Theravāda Saṅgha are indicated by title only and not by clothing, which is a cotton robe in three parts (lower garment, upper garment, folded cloak over the left shoulder) dyed saffron by vegetable dyes (shades may vary according to the dyes used in different localities in Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Laos, Thailand, and elsewhere). On the other hand, differences in rank for monks in the Mahāyāna Saṅgha are indicated by both title and variously colored vestments (usually of brocade) worn over a yellow robe (Chinese and Vietnamese, occasionally Korean custom) or a black robe (Japanese custom). The color of the routine monastic garment is ordinarily grey for Mahāyāna novices and often monks (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese custom). Any slight variation in Mahāyāna robe styles is usually due to ethnic characteristics but may also signify differences between Mahāyāna sects within a country (as in Japan). In the Vajrayāna Saṅgha, certain Buddhist sects distinguish themselves by both the color and the form of their monastic clothing.

- C. Lay leaders: These men, women, and youth are chosen by members of their organizations for their Buddhist personal qualities, their administrative experience and ability, their political, economic, and social status, and their contacts with governmental and financial leaders as well as rapport with the Saṅgha.

Such lay leaders have several roles in a Buddhist society: they organize and help administer lay support of the Saṅgha as traditionally expected of them; they serve their community or country as Buddhist citizens; and they aid or direct Buddhist educational and social welfare activities.

Approach, assist, and judge Buddhist lay leaders upon the same basis as one would respected civic-minded leaders in a non-Buddhist society.

III. BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

- A. Thought and conduct: Buddhist principles and practices together comprise the Dhamma/Dharma (the Teaching of the Buddha) and are interdependent. This means that right thought is expressed in, and evidenced by, right conduct and that right conduct fulfills, and is guided by, right thought: both fuse into the human realization and experience of right being. He who correctly knows, rightly does, and truly is (human).

In case of differences observed between Buddhist principles and practices, note especially the motivation of the act committed.

- B. Buddhist doctrines, traditionally taught by the Saṅgha, serve as the norm for, but are frequently reinterpreted and modified by, lay Buddhist beliefs which are often influenced by non-Buddhist notions. For example: The general Asian folk belief in "spirits" or "deities" has nearly negated the Buddhist conception of "no abiding soul or self" (anatta/anātman) in popular Buddhist thought; The prevalent Asian folk belief in rewards and retribution functioning naturally in human affairs has developed into a "merit-making" system operative in popular Buddhist ethics (rather displacing the altruistic Buddhist practice of dāna or giving and doing benefit freely for the sake of others without expecting compensation); The Hindu formulated moral conception of Karma (all actions incur consequences) continues to prevail in the popular Buddhist doctrine of Kamma/Karma. In Buddhist studies, Western textual researchers interested in norms and field anthropologists interested in deviations tend to polarize their understanding of Buddhist thought into scholarly and popular accounts.

In Buddhist affairs, consider both scholarly and popular aspects, or the whole spectrum, of Buddhist doctrines.

- C. The Dhamma/Dharma teaches that all life as experienced and analyzed is unsatisfactory and imperfect (dukkha/duḥkha) ["suffering" is an inadequate translation] because all existence, animate and inanimate, is:
- a. changing and not permanent (anicca/anitya), hence birth and death are regarded as complementary "great changes" and not as absolutes;
 - b. relational and not independent (anatta/anātman), hence no "soul" or isolated self abides; and
 - c. conditioned by many factors and not free (dukkha/duḥkha), hence the human potential is not yet fully realized.

Furthermore, if man fails to comprehend (not think correctly) these three features or facts of life and thereby fails to act wisely (not do rightly), he will compound and not fundamentally solve his existential predicament (not be truly human, existing perfectly and freely).

Therefore, the Buddhist solution is proffered to all sentient beings in four phases of complementary thought and action, called the Four Noble Principles (Cattāri-ariya-

saccāni/Catvāri-ārya-satyāni) [here "principles" for sacca/satya has a twofold epistemological-metaphysical meaning. "Four Noble Truths" is an inadequate translation because when practiced, these principles are epistemologically recognized as "the real truth" and metaphysically realized as "the true reality"]. They are:

1. The First Principle (Dukkha-sacca/Duḥkha-satya): the present reality and the recognition that all existence is changing, relational, and multi-conditioned as noted above;
2. The Second Principle (Samudaya-sacca/satya): the present reality and the analysis of such state of all existence being due to many causal factors (paṭicca-sam-uppāda/pratītya-sam-utpāda, multiple, interdependent formation) which themselves are changing, relational, and multi-conditioned;
3. The Third Principle (Nirodha-sacca/satya): the present reality and the realization that these causal factors can be eliminated (nirodha) epistemologically and metaphysically by Enlightenment (bodhi) and thereby human freedom in perfect existence (nibbāna/nirvāṇa) can be attained and experienced; and
4. The Fourth Principle (Magga-sacca/Mārga-satya): the present reality and the practice of the way to recognize, analyze, and realize the actual and ultimate nature of existence as stated above.

This proffered Buddhist way of life is essentially the integration and manifestation of right thought and right conduct in right human existence, thus constituting the Right Path or the one and only Middle Way which is no mere compromise, or dialectic of opposites, or proposal for a neutralism which ignores the exigent problems of life and does nothing about them. The more important principles and practices of the Buddhist way of life are:

- a. The Eightfold Path is an amplification of the Middle Way stressed by the Theravāda but known also in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions: i. Right understanding, ii. Right thought, iii. Right speech, iv. Right action, v. Right livelihood, vi. Right effort, vii. Right mindfulness, and viii. Right concentration.
- b. The Threefold Training provides instruction and guidance for those who strive toward Enlightenment and is administered similarly by the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions: i. Training in virtuous conduct (sīla/sīla) which

enables higher morality; ii. Training in meditative concentration (samādhi) which enables higher thought; and iii. Training in transcendent comprehension and understanding (paññā/prajñā) which enables higher insight.

- c. Training rules (not "commandments") for members of the Saṅgha are self-imposed, but their infraction will incur disciplinary action (expulsion for breaking the initial four rules) by the Saṅgha in assembly. They also serve as the norm or guidances for good behavior for the Buddhist laity. The number of these rules varies: traditionally 227 for the Theravāda Saṅgha, about 256 for the Mahāyāna Saṅgha, the first ten for any Saṅgha or monastery, a somewhat similar ten for the laity; all of which the initial five are regarded the most important: i. Abstinence from destroying life (needlessly), ii. Abstinence from stealing, iii. Abstinence from sexually immoral conduct (chastity for the Saṅgha, non-adultery for the laity), iv. Abstinence from lying, and v. Abstinence from the use of intoxicants.
- d. The Four Sublime States (Four Brahma-vihāras) are known in the Mahāyāna tradition but are observed especially in the Theravāda tradition in three ways: i. as virtues to be exemplified (sīla/śīla), ii. as objects of meditation (samādhi), and iii. as states of mind or being (paññā/prajñā). They are: 1. Loving-kindness or benevolence (mettā/maitrī), 2. Compassion (karuṇā), 3. Joyous sympathy or gladness in the well-being of others (muditā/mudita), and 4. Equanimity (upekkhā/upekṣā).
- e. The Six Perfections (Six Pāramitās) are requisites of the Bodhisattva (a potential Buddha who exemplifies perfect wisdom for the sake of others), emphasized by the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions but known also in the Theravāda tradition: i. Giving freely (dāna-pāramitā), ii. Virtuous conduct (sīla/śīla-pāramitā), iii. Forbearance or tolerance (khanti/kṣānti-pāramitā), iv. Energy or perseverance (virīya/vīrya-pāramitā), v. Meditative concentration (dhyāna-pāramitā, cf. samādhi), and vi. Transcendent comprehension and understanding (paññā/prajñā-pāramitā).

- D. Literature: According to Saṅgha custom, Buddhist doctrines are transmitted orally: for example, recitative ceremonies such as the Pāṭimokkha are held on alternate Uposatha (new moon and full moon) days in Thailand;

scholarship tests such as the Tipiṭakadhara Grade examinations are conducted annually in Burma; oral instruction is stressed by the Chinese Ch'an and Japanese Zen Schools of the Mahāyāna; and scholastic debates in which argumentation is enhanced by ready quotation from relevant texts are held in Vajrayāna monasteries.

Thus, Buddhist doctrines have been formulated into texts which authoritatively expound correct principles and historically narrate proper practices for guidance of the Saṅgha and interest to the laity. Collections of such texts traditionally comprise the canonical literature of the main school movements.

1. the Tipiṭaka (consisting of the Vinaya Piṭaka which states the 227 disciplinary rules, the Sutta Piṭaka which relates the Buddha's teachings and activities, and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka which expounds the teachings, to which are added numerous commentaries) of the Theravāda movement is in Pāli in slightly varying editions: in Burmese, Cambodian, Lao, Môn, Shan, Sinhalese, and Thai scripts and translations (except for the Lao, Môn, and Shan texts).
2. the Tripiṭaka (consisting of the Sūtra Piṭaka, the Vinaya Piṭaka, and the Abhidharma Piṭaka, to which are added numerous commentaries) of the Sarvāstivāda, Mahāsāṅghika, and other Schools is in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit partly extant in North Indian and Central Asian manuscripts and of the Mahāyāna movement is in various editions of Chinese translations and therefrom into Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese translations and commentaries.
3. the Tibetan Canon (consisting of the Kanjur [cf. the Sūtra and Vinaya Piṭakas] and the Tanjur [commentaries and ceremonial regulations]) of the Vajrayāna movement is in Tibetan (mostly translations from now lost Tripiṭaka texts) in various limited editions and therefrom into Mongolian and Manchu translations.

Much of modern Buddhist literature is written by, and intended for, the Buddhist laity and others interested in Buddhism. It consists of scholarly treatises, popular expositions, textbooks, periodicals, pamphlets, and similar materials in many Asian and some Western languages (principally English as an intra-Asian and international medium).

Note that traditional accounts of the Dhamma/Dharma (the Teaching of the Buddha) can have contemporary meaning when properly presented to, and understood by, non-Buddhists. This observation encourages Asian

Buddhists in their belief that Buddhist principles are "ever-contemporaneous" and that the Buddhist way of life can be universally meaningful and practiced.

IV. BUDDHIST ORGANIZATION

- A. Saṅgha origin: The Buddhist Saṅgha preserves the name and organization of the saṅgha (oligarchic republic) of the Sākya/Sākya people of the Buddha's time. In the political saṅgha, the president or head (saṅgha-rājā/rāja) was elected by its members in a general assembly. Similarly in the Buddhist Saṅgha, the chief or presiding officer (Saṅgha-rājā/rāja) or the head of a monastery is elected by a general meeting of its members. Legislation is enacted in full assemblies, customarily passed unanimously, and carried out by appointed officers and committees.

Note that the Buddhist rules of organizational conduct are strikingly similar to modern Western parliamentary procedures.

- B. Saṅgha organizations may be distinguished as follows:
1. National Saṅghas identified with the function and exercise of political authority (cf. theocracy) as in pre-Communist Mongolia and Tibet.
 2. National Saṅghas supervised by their leaders and aided by governments as in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand today where the King is traditionally and constitutionally the Protector of the Buddha Sāsana (the Buddha's way of life systematized). In these countries, the organizational structure of the Saṅgha parallels the government political structure as provided in their national constitutions. A typical Theravāda Saṅgha hierarchy would include the Saṅgha-rājā (head of the Saṅgha), one or more Saṅghanāyakas (assistant heads), Mahātheras (important theras), Theras (senior bhikkhus), Bhikkhus (monks), and novices. Honorific titles are prefixed to given Buddhist names to signify further Saṅgha rank and accomplishments.
 3. Influential monastic groups within a country such as Burma and Ceylon are called Nikāyas and customarily receive government aid or special interest, and in East Asia they have identifying suffixes to their names (China and Chinese communities: -tsung; Japan: -shū; Korea: -jong; Việt-Nam: -tông) and receive little or no governmental assistance.

4. Important monasteries within a country in all areas where they have identifying affixes to their names, for example, Burma: -pongyi-kyaung, commonly misnamed "Pagoda" (cf. "church-spire" or "steeple" for monastery or church in Christianity!) in English; Cambodia, Laos: wat- and Việt-Nam: chùa-, commonly misnamed "Pagode" in French and thereby "Pagoda" in English; Ceylon: -vihāra, -saṅghārāma, "monastic residence" and not "temple" which is used to denote Hindu edifices; Chinese areas: -ssū, commonly called "temple"; Japan: -ji or -tera, often called "temple" to distinguish such from the Shintō -jinja, "shrine"; Korea: -sa, commonly called "temple"; Thailand: wat-, commonly misnamed "Pagoda" in English.

Avoid Western conceptions of "Church" and "Church-State" relationships which are generally inapplicable in Buddhist Asia.

In reporting, give the Asian name of Buddhist Saṅgha organizations (with their English equivalent name in parentheses) for purposes of proper identification.

- C. Buddhist lay organizations are precededented in the traditional community support of local monasteries and may be viewed historically in terms of customary Buddhist notions of monastic and public leadership, organization, and welfare services. But present conceptions of Buddhist lay societies are modern: their leadership qualifications and selection process, administrative structure, and program activities are quite similar to Western types of social groups, as for example, the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Burma, the Buddhist Association of Thailand, and the Japan Buddhist Federation.

Approach, assist, and judge Buddhist lay organizations upon the same basis as one would creditable civic-minded groups in non-Buddhist societies.

V. BUDDHIST CEREMONIES

- A. Functions: Buddhist ceremonies and rituals serve a variety of functions in a Buddhist society: they venerate the Buddha ideal; they exemplify the Dhamma/Dharma principles and practices; they regularize and maintain the Saṅgha monastic routine; they instruct and inspire the laity; and they present and enhance the cultural role of Buddhism. Furthermore, in Buddhist folk-cults their performance also symbolizes or effects a desired correlation between the processes of the cosmic-natural order and the conduct of the human-social order.

In most cases, non-Buddhists are welcome at Buddhist ceremonies.

B. Important Buddhist monastic ceremonies:

1. the Pabbajjā/Pravajya: initiation ceremony for novices following their period of probation (Pari-vāsa), followed by
2. the Upasampadā: ordination ceremony for monks and nuns in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna areas.
3. the Pavāraṇā: ceremony concluding the monastic residence or "retreat" during the monsoon rainy season (Vassa or Vassāvāsa), followed by
4. the Kāṭhina: annual ceremony in which the laity dedicate cotton cloth to the monks for the making of robes in Theravāda areas.
5. the Uposatha: periodic meetings at new moon and full moon to expound the Dhamma/Dharma, observe the Vinaya (disciplinary rules), and recite the Pāṭimokkha/Prātimokṣa text in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna areas.

In most cases, non-Buddhists as well as the Buddhist laity may observe all these ceremonies and participate in the Kāṭhina.

C. Other important Buddhist ceremonies, festivals, and customs notably involve the laity and especially concern the Buddha, the Dhamma/Dharma, and the Saṅgha separately or together as the Ti-ratana/Tri-ratna (the three valued components of Buddhism).

1. the Buddha: The Theravāda tradition commemorates his Birth, Enlightenment, and Demise or Parinibbāna together on the full moon day of certain lunar months (usually the 6th, but may differ according to the lunar calendar adopted) because it is traditionally believed that these three events occurred significantly on the same day (of different years). This commemoration is called Wesak or Vesak (from the Pāli word Vesākha-pūjā; cf. Sanskrit Vaiśākha-pūjā) and held in Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, India, Laos, Thailand, and Theravāda communities in Nepal, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. The day usually occurs in May.

The Mahāyāna tradition commemorates the Buddha differently: In China, the Birthday is celebrated traditionally on the 8th day of the Chinese 4th lunar month (e.g., 22 May 1961 A.D.) and called Fo-shêng-hui (the Buddha's Birth Ceremony) or Fo-shêng-jih

(the Buddha's Birth Day) or Kan-fo-hui (Bathing the Buddha Ceremony). In Japan, the Birthday is celebrated on April 8th (since 1901 A.D.; previously followed the Chinese-Japanese lunar calendar date) and called Hanamatsuri (Flower Festival; before 1901, traditionally called Bussho-e [cf. Chinese Fo-shêng-hui] or Kanbutsu-e [cf. Chinese Kan-fo-hui]).

The Vajrayāna tradition in Tibet, Mongolia, and elsewhere reportedly celebrates the Birthday on the 4th day of their 6th lunar month (usually occurring in July).

In the United States, Theravāda oriented groups such as The Washington Friends of Buddhism in Washington, D.C., celebrate Wesak or Vesak in May (the full moon day if possible). The Japanese oriented groups such as the Hōpa Honganji Mission of Hawaii (headquarters: 1727 Pali Highway, Honolulu) and the comparable Buddhist Churches of America (headquarters: 1710 Octavia Street, San Francisco) hold several celebrations:

Nirvana Day (commemorating the Buddha's Demise) on February 15th;

Hanamatsuri (Flower Festival commemorating the Buddha's Birth) on April 8th, not to be confused with

Buddha Day (commemorating Buddhism) on April 8th, officially adopted in Hawaii in 1963;

Bodhi Day (commemorating the Buddha's Enlightenment) on December 8th.

2. the Dhamma/Dharma is revered in various ways: by being memorized and transmitted orally, by the Sutta/Sūtra Piṭaka being remembered as what the Buddha taught and bequeathed to his followers, by the Vinaya Piṭaka being observed in the Saṅgha as its disciplinary rules or code of conduct (e.g., the Uposatha ceremony mentioned above in V.B.5.) and by special rituals for favored texts.

Note that Buddhist doctrinal literature is revered as principles to be practiced or exemplified in life and is not worshipped as a "bible" or "sacred, divine, revealed scripture."

3. the Saṅgha: Monks, nuns, and novices are traditionally honored as members of the Buddha's Saṅgha in various ways. They are given salutations of respect by the laity who raise both hands together to the

level of the forehead (Theravāda practice) or to the chin of a slightly bowed head (Mahāyāna practice)--the monastic members of the Saṅgha do not so greet each other but may indicate personal respect or deference for rank in subtle ways. They are given the primary seats of honor according to their recognized rank when attending public functions or private meetings, often taking precedence over political personages particularly in Theravāda countries. They are given offerings of food (hence the notion that "monks beg their food" is erroneous), cotton cloth for robes (e.g., the Kaṭhina ceremony mentioned above in section V.B.4.) and other bare necessities of monastic life by the laity according to the Buddhist principle of dāna. Dāna is the act of giving freely, based upon recognized need without expectation of gratitude or compensation; hence the common Buddhist folk belief that through such generous acts one acquires "merit" is an aberration of Buddhist ethics.

When meeting monks, nuns, and novices, the non-Buddhist as well as the Buddhist layman should not shake hands with them in Western fashion but instead indicate the respect due members of any religious order. The expression of good-will and sincerity of even poorly executed actions will be understood and appreciated more readily than the perfunctoriness of formalized conduct.

4. the Ti-ratana/Tri-ratna: The Buddha, the Dhamma/Dharma, and the Saṅgha are traditionally remembered and revered by all Buddhists by means of a threefold repetition of a phrase or gesture in ceremonies.

Furthermore, the most frequent performance by all Buddhists is the recitation of the Ti-saraṇa-gamana/Tri-śaraṇa-gamana thrice in Pāli, Sanskrit, or other languages. In this respect, Ti/Tri, meaning "Three", refers to the Ti-ratana/Tri-ratna; saraṇa/śaraṇa, literally meaning "protection, shelter, abode, refuge, chosen resort, etc.," connotes "that whereby one may transcend conditioned life and attain Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa" (experience freedom in perfect existence); gamana, meaning "strive for, find shelter in" (cf. gacchāmi as "go to"), implies "will undertake." Thus the following three declarations (given here in English translation) are repeated three times:

"To the Buddha, by whom I will transcend conditioned existence and attain Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa, I go;

"To the Dhamma/Dharma, by which I will transcend conditioned existence and attain Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa, I go;

"To the Saṅgha, by which I will transcend conditioned existence and attain Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa, I go."

VI. SOCIETAL ROLE OF BUDDHISM

The societal role of Buddhism is varied and may be described in several ways.

- A. Historically considered, Buddhism prevails as the traditional way of life and thought in Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Laos, Thailand, Việt-Nam, and Buddhist communities in India, Indonesia, Malaya-Singapore, and Nepal. But it is being modified by secular influences and relatively new conditions in those countries and particularly in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan.
1. In these areas, Buddhist political and organizational leaders often refer to the past role of Buddhism in the development of their societies and identify Buddhist accomplishments with the national cultural heritage in their appeals for popular support.
 2. On the other hand, the societal role of Buddhism in the Communist countries of China, North Korea, Outer Mongolia, Soviet Russia, Tibet, and North Việt-Nam is being exploited politically, economically, culturally, and ideologically and is therefore subject to eventual destruction.
 3. The future role of Buddhism in Asian and world society is being envisaged and anticipated by Buddhists in Asia and elsewhere who must formulate it in contemporary terms to meet particular circumstances and requirements in various countries.
- B. Topically considered, the primary role of Buddhism in a Buddhist society is to help all beings attain Enlightenment and realize Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa. Since this endeavor normally includes concern for the public good, the Saṅgha and Buddhist lay organizations often conduct educational, cultural, and social welfare activities. Asian governments tend to assist and value these Buddhist activities as a traditional means for implementing their public welfare programs.

When Buddhist educational, cultural, and social welfare activities are being assisted and judged, some

consideration of the Buddhist motive for such activities should be made lest a wholly materialistic emphasis be conducive to the Marxist-Communist misinterpretation and exploitation of Buddhism as "a social welfare movement preparatory to scientific socialism."

1. The Buddhist cultural arts still contribute to Asian achievements in architecture, handicrafts, literature, and sculpture but significantly less now to the dance, drama, music, and painting with the advent of Western art forms. As in the past, Buddhist art continues to express national ideals as well as Buddhist concepts and to be patronized and used by some Asian governments to enhance the cultural prestige of their regimes.

Note that royal patronage of the Buddhist cultural arts has long been a customary practice and therefore present-day governmental support is also deemed proper for political purposes.

2. The Buddhist role in economic affairs is less influential today than in pre-modern times when monasteries sometimes served as public granaries and banks and Buddhist architectural projects constituted large-scale public work programs. The material support of the Saṅgha, traditionally given by the Buddhist laity and also by the government in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand where Buddhism is "the State religion", is generally justified by Buddhists in the belief that the well-being of the Saṅgha and the people are interdependent and reciprocal: when the Saṅgha is properly cared for, the people will prosper.

Note that current criticism of the Saṅgha as an "unproductive labor force" in modern Asian economies is often a partial and biased view which may serve Marxist attacks on religious institutions.

3. The ideological role of Buddhist ideas and ideals, concepts and way of thought, is varied in Asian societies. This role is essentially one of proffering advice or guidances, of exemplifying recommended ways of thought and conduct, and of formulating humanitarian values and goals. Thus, moderation and right thought (correct understanding and proper motivation) are considered essential to virtuous conduct in society; tolerance and gladness in the well-being of others are to guide race relations; material possessions are to be valued when rightfully acquired and used for the benefit of others; work is to be neither ignored nor pursued for itself but respected and under-

taken in terms of human values; education is to be regarded basically as the cultivation of knowledge and skills for the development of humanity in man; justice is the ideal and the proof of right knowledge fulfilled in right action; social welfare is the concern of everyone as expressed by the ideal of the Bodhisattva (a potential Buddha who exemplifies perfect wisdom for the sake of others).

In short, Buddhist ideology stresses that solving problems of human and related existences is the sole responsibility of man and can be undertaken by his right understanding of all essential factors of a situation, knowing what corrective measures to apply, and then acting wisely.

4. The role of Buddhism in military matters is often misunderstood and sometimes misused. In past instances of national defense against foreign attack, such as Ceylon vs. India, Korea vs. Japan, Japan vs. Mongolia, and Tibet vs. China, the Saṅgha has supported national armies by material assistance (supplies, facilities, personnel) or by encouraging popular expressions of patriotism ("Defend this land of the Buddha"). In modern times, as in the case of Thailand, Buddhist monastic and lay leaders have condoned the use of physical force as the last resort when restraint of aggression or violence is necessary for the common human good. Sometimes, however, as in the case of Japan formerly under totalitarian rule or China now under Communist rule, governments have misappropriated Buddhist resources for militant purposes and enjoined Buddhists "to kill others for patriotic reasons."

Note that Buddhism characteristically abhors war and violence as selfish, ignorant actions and urges all men to seek and observe universal peace. But also note that there is no real doctrinal basis for the assertion sometimes made by Western critics and Asian pacifists that Buddhists will not resist unwarranted attacks by military action. According to Buddhism, wrong conduct should not be tolerated if it will seriously injure other living beings.

5. The Buddhist role in political affairs is more traditional, active, and varied than is often realized. In the development of Buddhist societies in South and Southeast Asia, Buddhism and political authority were correlated in prosperity and adversity: approval of the king by the Saṅgha ensured his public support and induced social stability, and the well-being of the Buddha Sāsana (the Buddha's way of life systematized)

depended upon the king and nobility as well as the common people and required political recognition. A similar situation prevailed elsewhere in Buddhist Central Asia until the advent of Islam, in Mongolia and Tibet where the Saṅgha became identified with political authority until the advent of Communism, and in China, Japan, Korea, and Việt-Nam except in periods and areas where Confucian or other beliefs predominated.

Former Buddhist contributions to political authority in Asian societies included notable expressions of political thought, proffered principles of political-social conduct, personnel assistance by monks in effecting court and village administration and diplomatic missions between countries, and a cultural arts enhancement of the symbolic status of kingship. Through such means the king was customarily assured political stability and the people were provided social welfare and educational services.

Today, Buddhist influence in political affairs continues in various ways according to the particular country and circumstance. For example, the Saṅgha in effect may assist governmental welfare programs through its educational and public welfare activities (monks rendering personal, family, and occupational guidances and monasteries serving as orphanages, old age homes, refugee centers, schools, etc., especially in the rural areas of Theravāda countries) or may represent and express public interests in supporting or criticizing government policies and programs (as currently in Burma, Ceylon, and Việt-Nam). Buddhist political thought, based upon the Dhamma/Dharma principles and historic practices and expressed in traditional texts and modern popular expositions, is studied and interpreted for governmental guidance in nearly all Buddhist countries or for the formulation of new, non-Western political ideologies in Burma, Ceylon, and, before 1945, Japan. In addition, Buddhist lay leaders often serve as members of government, national or local, and consciously apply their Buddhist principles in political conduct and exert Buddhist organizational influence in policy decisions and administrative measures.

Note that there is no doctrinal basis, historical tradition, or social custom for the assertion, sometimes made by non-Buddhist observers, that "Buddhism is an other-worldly religion and therefore apolitical in doctrine and practice", that "the Buddhist Church is separate from the State", that "Buddhist leaders are unconcerned about

politics", etc. Instead, note that Buddhist Saṅgha and lay leaders have customarily been concerned about the origin and establishment, purpose and functions, exercise and administration, evaluation and change of political authority in both principle and practice.

6. The social role of Buddhism in Asian society has long been appreciated by Buddhist peoples and their governments. Many Buddhist texts and textual passages extol the Bodhisattva ideal that the Saṅgha and laity should help all others, remind the king or political authority that sovereignty is a public charge, and counsel the householder on proper Buddhist life. Numerous examples of Buddhist monastic activities for needy people illustrate histories of social welfare in many Asian countries, the most recent notable case being that of the Union Burma Social Service (Parahita) Sangha Association. In recent times, Buddhist lay groups, with Saṅgha advice and cooperation, have characteristically performed educational and social welfare services in all Buddhist countries and communities in response to recognized public needs and thus help implement other private and governmental welfare programs.

Note that criticisms of Buddhism being "other-worldly" and therefore "unsocial-minded", as occasionally voiced by Confucianists, Shintōists, and others with rival, vested interests, are not justified according to Buddhist doctrine and traditional practice.

- C. Current trends in Buddhist affairs may be viewed with respect to the formulation, preparation, and conduct of the Buddhist role in Asian societies. They are summarized here as follows:

1. The Buddhist role is being conditioned by factors relatively new in Buddhist and Asian experience, which are similarly affecting other systems of belief and practice in the world. These factors are notably the unprecedented scientific thought and technological developments, increasing secularism and marked societal change, military and ideological threats, new political and economic measures, and other features of the contemporary world.

Hence Buddhist leaders are endeavoring to comprehend and surmount these conditioning factors.

2. The Buddhist role is expanding in several ways: geographically beyond Asia to an extent not previously

possible due to world communications facilities; functionally beyond the customary scope of Buddhist practices due to the new duties and requirements of Buddhist leadership; and doctrinally beyond the traditional views of Buddhist texts due to the impact of the new factors mentioned above.

Hence Buddhist leaders are endeavoring to become more internationally minded.

3. The Buddhist role is continuing the traditional function of the Dhamma/Dharma (the Teaching of the Buddha) and the Sangha (the Buddhist Order) in society in modified ways due to the new requirements imposed by the new conditions mentioned above.

Hence Buddhist leaders are endeavoring to determine and prepare for a modified traditional, or relatively new, role.

4. The Buddhist role is interrelated with other organizational and institutional roles in society due to their being subject to the same or similar conditions and interacting, directly or indirectly, in striving for their respective goals.

Hence Buddhist leaders are endeavoring to understand and develop their proper place in an increasingly complex society.

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