

Book Review:

Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World by Phra Brahmagunabhon (P.A.Payuttho)

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1. General Introduction

1.1 Significance of the Book

The book “**Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World**” is of great importance for the Buddhists and any persons interested in the Buddhism, especially the students of the history of Buddhism. It provides a lot of information not only about Thai Buddhism and situations of Buddhism in many countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia etc., but also Buddhism in the modern world and in the western world. Having studied the book, besides knowing and understanding the ups and downs of Buddhism in many countries, we can realize the instability, unendurability and insubstantiality of Buddhist situation, which is constantly changing according to causes and conditions, both internal and external. When we know the impermanence of Buddhist situation from this book, we not only should establish ourselves in heedfulness, but also have to prevent and rectify the causes of decline and Bring about the causes of growth and prosperity of Buddhism. Therefore, it is so inspiring to me to review this book.

1.2 Significance of the Author

The most Venerable **Phra Brahmagunabhon (P.A.Payuttho)** is widely acknowledged as Thailand’s foremost Buddhist scholar. He was born in 1939 in Suphanburi Province, Thailand. He became a novice at the age of 13, and while still a novice completed the highest grade of Pali examination, an achievement for which he was honored with ordination as a monk under the Royal Patronage in 1961.

After completing a degree in Buddhist studies from Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University and a Higher Certificate in Education in 1962 and 1963 respectively, he acted as Deputy Secretary-General of the Buddhist University and lectured extensively in Thailand and overseas, including time spent at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard University and Swarthmore College in the U.S.A.

His literary achievements in Thailand are tremendous, the most notable to date being the work of Buddhadhamma, a comprehensive treatment of the whole of the Buddha's teachings, and many of his lectures on social, scientific and educational studies from a Buddhist perspective have been printed. For his work in these fields, he has been honoured with Honorary Doctorates in Buddhist Studies (from Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, 1982) ; in Philosophy (from Thammasat University, 1986, and Mahidol University, 1995) ; in Education (from Silpakorn University, 1988; Kasetsart University, 1987; Srinakharinwirot University, 1990; Ramkhamhaeng University, 1994, and Prince of Songkhla University, 1995) ; and in Linguistics (from Chulalongkorn University, 1988; Mahidol University, 1989).

The author is one of Thailand's most well-known Buddhist scholars. His writings cover not only traditional Buddhist subjects but also Buddhist perspectives on modern academic themes. He was the recipient of the 1994 UNESCO prize for Peace Education.

At present, he is known by name of **Phra Brahmagunabhorn** and spends his time between Nakhon Pathom province and Chachoengsao province in Central Thailand.

2. SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

In the contents, there are 4 parts and 16 chapters including appendix namely:

Part I : Thai Buddhism: The Overall Picture

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Chapter 2 : Thai Buddhism

Part II : The Spread and Development of Buddhism

Chapter 3 : Early Development of Buddhism

Chapter 4 : Indian Buddhism in Later Centuries

Chapter 5 : Northern Buddhism in its Good and Hard Times

Part I II : Buddhism in the Modern World

Chapter 6 : The Revival of Buddhism in India

Chapter 7 : From Ceylonese to Sri Lankan Buddhism

Chapter 8 : The Buddhist Revival in Burma

Chapter 9 : A Doubtful fate of Laotian and Cambodian Buddhism

Chapter 10: The Unconcluded Story of the Vietnamese Buddhist Struggles

Chapter 11: A Glimpse of Buddhist Development in China and Korea

Chapter 12: Buddhism in Modern Japan

Chapter 13: Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand

Part I V: Buddhism in the Western World

Chapter 14: The Scholarly Beginnings of Western Buddhism

Chapter 15: Buddhism Gains from Public Interest

Chapter 16: Buddhism and the West: Subsequent to a Friendly Encounter

Appendix: Notes on Thai Buddhist Temples in the United States

The main essences of each chapter are summarized below:

Part I : Thai Buddhism: The Overall Picture

Chapter 1 : Introduction

In the first chapter of this book, the author introduces the biography and significance of Lord Buddha and the basic teachings of Buddhism. This chapter leads as to know and understand the main ideas of Buddhism which contained the statements known as the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Middle Way*, Buddha proclaimed these stalwarts in his first sermon at the Deer Park near Benares in the first year of his ministry. The Four Noble Truths are : (1) the Suffering (2) the Origin of Suffering (3) the Extinction of Suffering (4) the Extinction of Suffering. The fourth truth is called the *Noble Eightfold Path*, as it consists of eight factors, namely : (1) Right view or Right Understanding (2) Right Thought (3)

Right Speech (4) Right Action (5) Right Livelihood (6) Right Effort (7) Right Mindfulness and (8) Right Concentration.

Chapter 2 : Thai Buddhism

In the second chapter, the Most Ven. P.A. Payutto presents Buddhism in present-day Thailand. In this chapter, we can know the influences of Buddhism on Thai life and culture. The author explains the Buddha's teachings and Buddhist literatures such as the Jātaka tales inspiring Thai literatures and most of Thai art forms, especially mural paintings which cover the interior walls of most temples. Pali and Sanskrit are recognized as classical languages. A large number of Thai words, especially those used in royal language and written languages are derived from Pali and Sanskrit. Scholar's writing textbooks usually turn to use Pali and Sanskrit roots for modern technical vocabulary.

Part II : The Spread and Development of Buddhism

Chapter 3 : Early Development of Buddhism

The third chapter begins with a description of early Buddhism and Buddhism of the southern school. In this chapter, the author provides a lot of information about the development of Buddhism in Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos, especially the origin of Mahayana Buddhism.

Chapter 4 : Indian Buddhism in Later Centuries

The fourth chapter focuses on a case study of *Indian Buddhism in Later Centuries*. The author gives a lot of information about Indian Buddhism such as Buddhism under the great kings of India, Buddhism of the northern school, the decline of Indian Buddhism, Indian Buddhism in China and Tibet, the rise of Hinduism and the Hinduization of Buddhism, the rise and fall of Srivijaya and Champa, *especially the disappearance of Buddhism from India*.

Chapter 5 : Northern Buddhism in its Good and Hard Times

In the fifth chapter, the author explain why Buddhism had disappeared from India in the 18th Buddhist century while elsewhere it expanded its influence as Theravada Buddhism in northern countries and as Mahayana Buddhism in northern countries. The chapter, we also knowledge a lot of information about the emergence of Chinese and Korean Buddhism and the ups and downs of Japanese Buddhism, especially the official history of Buddhism in Japan and the Sects of Buddhism in Japan.

Part I II : Buddhism in the Modern World

Chapter 6 : The Revival of Buddhism in India

In this chapter, the author to explains how Buddhism revival in India. Having read this chapter, we know the general view of the Buddhist situations, western scholars, the Buddhist revival and Ceylonese and Indian contributions, especially we will appreciate the biography of Anāgārika Dharmapāla, a young Buddhist of Ceylon, who was the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society and D.R. Ambedkar who led half a million followers in a formal declaration of adherence to Buddhism.

Chapter 7 : From Ceylonese to Sri Lankan Buddhism

The seventh chapter deals with Ceylonese Buddhism out of the Colonial period. Having studied this chapter, we gain a lot of information about Ceylonese Buddhist scholars such as Professor G.P. Malalasekera, the compiler of *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Ven. W. Rahula, author of *What the Buddha taught* and *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* and Aggamahāpandita A.P. Buddhaddatta, author of *Concise Pali Dictionary, English-Pali Dictionary* etc. Besides, we can know that Sri Lanka gave birth to another great international Buddhist organization, that is, the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) in 1950 (B.E2493). Professor G.P. Malalasekera who initiated the idea was elected the first president of the organization.

Chapter 8 : The Buddhist Revival in Burma

Having gone through this chapter, we can know and understand the Buddhist revival in Burma, especially U Nu's great contribution to Buddhist revival in Burma in the organization of the Sixth Buddhist Council in Rangoon in 1954-1961. Besides we can get information about the study of the Abhidhamma and meditation practice in Burma. The tradition of Abhidhamma studies still continues and all are encouraged to sit for government examinations in the Abhidhamma. And the Burmese method of insight meditation (Vipassanā) has spread to Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Chapter 9 : A Doubtful fate of Laotian and Cambodian Buddhism

The author started this chapter with the explanation of how the Laotian Buddhism takes a new turn and the break-up of Cambodia and Cambodian Buddhism. Having analyzed this chapter, we can know the Buddhist history and situation in Laos and Cambodia. Both countries have also shared the same Buddhist traditions with Thailand, since the beginning of their modern history.

Chapter 10 : The Unconcluded Story of the Vietnamese Buddhist Struggles

In this chapter, the author presents the crisis of Buddhism in Vietnam such as the persecution of Vietnamese Buddhists, the reorganization of Vietnamese Buddhists, the politicization of Vietnamese Buddhism, a new crisis and the new policy of the Vatican and the changed attitude of the Catholics etc. The author's presentation, let us know obviously the story of Vietnamese Buddhism, especially Buddhist crisis in Vietnam.

Chapter 11 : A Glimpse of Buddhist Development in China and Korea

The eleventh chapter focuses on a case study of Buddhism in China and Korea. This chapter provides a lot of information about a short-lived Buddhist reform in China and the reform of Korean Buddhism, especially the

situation of Buddhism in Korea, which is inclined to Theravada Buddhism during recent year. Besides sending Korean monks to study in Theravada countries, the Korean Sangha welcomes Theravada ordination in its own country.

Chapter 12 : Buddhism in Modern Japan

In this chapter, the author not only presents the of persecution and the modernization of traditional Buddhism but also describes the emergence of the new religions. From his description of Buddhism in Japan *the persecution under Meiji Restoration could not destroy Buddhism, though its status was much affected. Moreover, the persecution did not last long and Buddhism shortly began to recover its strength.* Besides we can know the new movements or the so-called New Religions. They have been a development to fill the gap left by the traditional teachings.

Chapter 13 : Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand

Having gone through this chapter, we can know and understand a lot of information about Buddhism in contemporary Thailand such as the beginning of a separation in the period of modernization, a widening gap between the traditional Sangha and modern intellectuals, the inadequacy of both the traditional and the modern Thai leadership ; and the monks' invaluable social role under the modernization without development circumstances, some efforts to fill the gap and to restore the monks' worthy roles, some developments outside the Sangha and the undefined direction of Thai Buddhism etc.

Part I V : Buddhism in the Western World

Chapter 14 : The Scholarly Beginnings of Western Buddhism

In the fourteenth chapter, the author not only describes how Buddhism came to the West but also presents the works of English scholars. From the author's explanation, besides knowing the devoted efforts of German scholars and German Buddhists, we can recognize other European contributions and Americans who work for the Buddhist cause such as Colonel H.S. Olcott, who

went to Ceylon in 1880, established the Theosophical Society, and worked for the revival of Buddhism, Buddhist culture and education in that country etc.

Chapter 15 : The Buddhism from Gains Public Interest

Having studied the fifteenth chapter, besides understanding the academic and practical Buddhism making great strides abreast and Buddhist studies and meditation in American Universities, we can know Buddhism and Science and the contributions of Asian Buddhists such as the Venerable Narada Mahathera, the Venerable Walpola Rahula, K.N.Jayatilleke, Mahasi Sayadow, U Tittila, U Narada and Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, especially the contemporary Asian Buddhist scholar best known to the West was probably Dr. D.T. Suzuki, Zen's chief exponent in English.

Chapter 16 : Buddhism and the West: Subsequent to a Friendly Encounter

In the sixteenth chapter, the author not only describes Buddhist activities in and for the West and the western Buddhism into the 80's but also presents the western Buddhism and the Buddhist revival in Asia. We can know and understand Buddhism and the West in the eyes of western scholars such as **Albert Einstein**, the great scientist of the atomic age, says : "*The religion in the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description*". And he further says "*If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.*" **Schopenhauer**, the German philosopher, says : "*If I am to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth I should be obliged to concede to Buddhism the pre-eminence over the rest.*" etc.

Appendix : Notes on Thai Buddhist Temples in the United States

In the last chapter of this book, the author introduces Thai Buddhist temples in the United States. There were in 1978 five Thai Buddhist temples functioning in different parts of the United States namely : (1) Wat Thai of Los Angeles (2) Wat Thai of Washington, D.C. (3) Vajiradhammapadip Temple, New York (4) Wat Buddhawararam, Denver and (5) Wat Dhammaram, Chicago. At present, there are not only the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in The U.S.A. but also 51 Thai Buddhist temples in the United States that send their representatives to attend the annual meeting of the Council.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE BOOK

Having gone through this book, we can know and understand a lot of information about Buddhism . Thus, there are four main objectives as stated below:

- 3.1 To analyze Thai Buddhism, especially the influence of Buddhism toward social, arts, literature and political changes in Thai societies.
- 3.2 To study the spread and development of Buddhism in India, Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, especially the disappearance of Buddhism from India.
- 3.3 To describe the importance of Buddhism in modern world, especially the revival and reform of Buddhism in India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, China, Korea and Japan.
- 3.4 To present the situation of Buddhism in the western world such as the scholarly beginning of western Buddhism, Buddhist studies and mediation in American universities and Buddhist activities in and for the west, etc.

4. THE BENEFITS OF THE BOOK

It can be said that this work gives us a lot of information about Buddhism in the world, especially Thai Buddhism chapter by chapter. As a result of the study, the following benefits and outcomes can be obtained:

- 4.1 To know not only Thai Buddhism and the spread and development of Buddhism but also Buddhism in the modern world, especially information about Buddhism in the western world.
- 4.2 To have knowledge of the revival of Buddhism in India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia, especially knowing the polarization of Vietnamese Buddhism and new crisis and the new policy of the Vatican and the changed attitude of the Catholics.
- 4.3 Besides understanding how Buddhism came to the west, the works of English scholars and the devoted efforts of German scholars and German Buddhists, to have knowledge of western Buddhism, the Buddhist revival in Asia and Buddhism in the eyes of western scholars.

5. ADMIRATION OF THE AUTHOR & BOOK

Phra Brahmagunabhon (P.A.Payuttho) displayed his ability to process and analyzed Buddhist data appropriately because he not only has profound understanding of Buddhism, but also has experiences of teaching and researching the history of Buddhism for a long time. The book of *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist world* is considered as a research work of outstanding academic value and is published for the benefit of the public. It will provide meaningful information to those concerned with Thai Buddhism, the spread and development of Buddhism, Buddhism in the modern world and Buddhism in the western world. For all these reasons, the author's work has profound advantages and impacts on the study of Buddhism, so we should express our sincere admiration to the writer for his effort in making this book a worthwhile and meaningful endeavor.

6. AGREEMENT WITH THE AUTHOR & SUGGESTION

After I have read this book, I may appreciate the writer who has devoted his time writing this beneficial book for the Buddhist and any persons interested in Buddhism. There are many Buddhist scholars in the world, though very few are interested in writing good books in the field of Buddhism, one of them is

the author of this book. And I agree with the matter that were put inside the book. The author tried to describe and analyze Thai Buddhism and Buddhism in the world, especially the spread and development of Buddhism and general survey of Buddhism Situations.

However, this book was written twenty years ago. Nowadays, some situation of Buddhism in the world have changed. Thus, a lot of information about Buddhism should be updated, such as corporation between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists in order to exchange ideas and techniques for propagating Buddhism and International Buddhist Conference Working as One : Buddhist Unity and Cooperation, held at Bangkok, Thailand, etc.

On the other hand, the information about the situations of Buddhism in Tibet and Bangladesh, especially the persecution of Tibetan Buddhists and the life and work of Most Venerable Dalai Lama, should be written in this book for the benefit of the Buddhist and any person interested in Buddhism.

7. Conclusion

The book **“Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World”**, that was written by **Phra Brahmagunabhon (P.A.Payuttho)** who is a Thai scholar monk, is considered as a research work of outstanding academic values and is published for the benefit of the public. The main purpose of this work is not only to analyze Thai Buddhism, especially the influence of the Buddhism toward social, arts, literature and political changes in Thai societies, but also to study the spread and development of Buddhism in India, Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, especially the disappearance of Buddhism from India. Besides giving us a lot of information about Buddhism in the world, especially general survey of the Buddhist situations, chapter by chapter, this book helps the students to be able the study profound Buddhism. Thus, it can be considered a beneficial and very good book for the Buddhists as well as anyone interested in Buddhism.
