

Marketing Thailand & SEAsia for a Mythical Ramayana instead of Historical Buddhist Sites

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Sri Lanka tourist authorities promote Ramayana

- Sri Lanka tourist authorities promote Ramayana in Thailand instead of Buddhist sites
- This is a gross travesty

Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia & Laos culture shaped by Sri Lankan Buddhism

- Over 90% of the populations in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia & Laos profess Theravada Buddhism, introduced by Sinhala monks during the period 11th -15th centuries.
- Their cultures & civilizations were shaped by Sinhala Buddhist culture and civilization.

Our Buddhist sites highly venerated by them

- Thai & other tourists can be attracted mainly by promoting Sri Lankan Buddhist sites that have historical connections with Thai & other Southeast Asian countries.
- Anuradhapura, Sacred Tooth Relic (considered the most sacred), Samantakuta, Mahiyangana, Dimulagala, Gadaladeniya, Lankatilaka & the rest of 16 sacred sites have inspired their devotion for centuries.

Ramayana: popular art form

- The Ramayana story was hardly known in Sri Lanka except among the educated and those who studied Sanskrit.
- But it is very popular in Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Ramayana: popular art form

- In Thailand, it is considered a national epic which was partly written by King Rama I in 18th century. The most dominant theme of dance dramas and shadow plays, puppetry in these countries up to now is the Rama-Ravana story.
- There are an annual Ramayana theatre festivals in these countries to which dance dramas from Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and India are presented.

Today Hindu elements remain only in royal ceremonies

- How did Ramayana spread in these countries?
- Hinduism was the first religion to spread in these countries through Indian traders who settled down there.
- Then came Mahayana Buddhism from India which was practised by the royalty, court officials and the elite classes.
- It is Sinhalese Buddhism that was embraced by the masses, and remain so to this day.

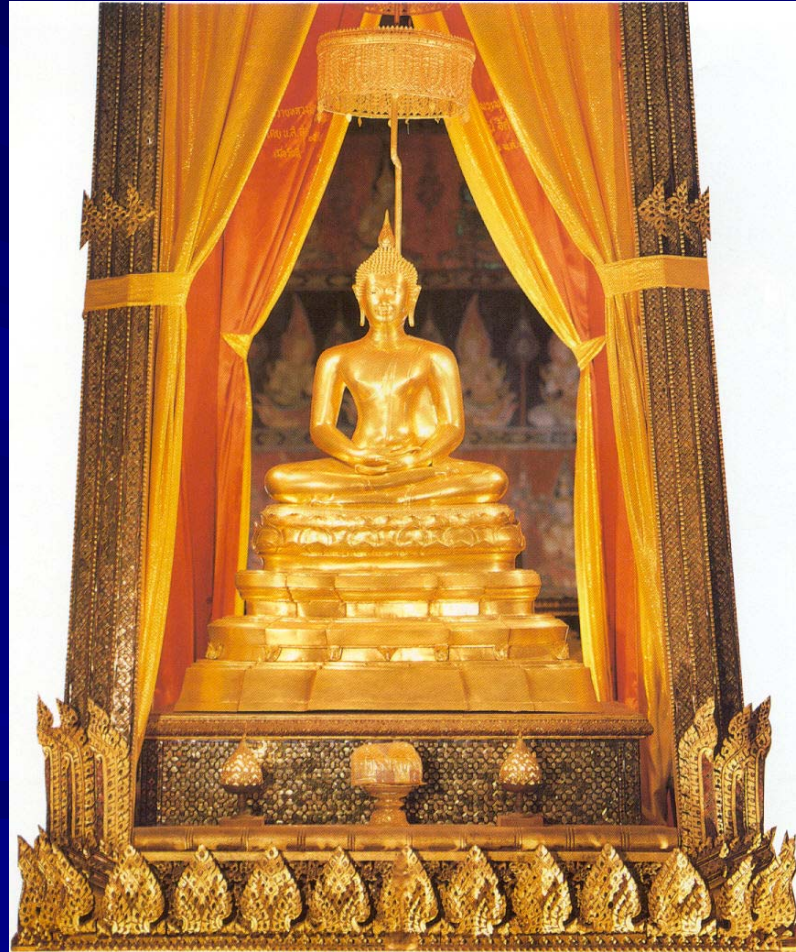
Sinhala monks introduce Buddhism first to Nakhon Si Thammarat in Thailand – 13th C



“Sihinga Buddha” (Sinhala Buddha): Cultural heritage of Thailand

- After Chandrabhanu invaded Sri Lanka to obtain a miraculous Buddha image & failed, the effort succeeded through a delegation sent by Rama Khamheng, the 1st King of Sukhothai, the 1st capital of Thailand.
- The image was gifted in 13th C by Parakramabahu II of Dambadeniya. It was known as “Sihinga Buddha” (Sinhala Buddha) & rulers of kingdoms fought wars to obtain it because its possession gave them the right to rule.

Sihinga Buddha (13th C): Bangkok Museum



Upasampada from Dimbulagala monk

- Rulers of all kingdoms in Thailand, i.e. Sukhothai, Chiangmai, Lamphun & Suwankhalok requested Sri Lankan monk Udumbara [Dimbulagala] Mahasami (Sangharaja Medhankara) who was then in lower Burma to send monks to perform.
- Udumbara Mahasami sent Thai monks who had received *upasampada* from him.

***“Sihala Sangha”* in Thailand**

- Thus Udumbara Mahasami’s Thai disciples established the *Sihala Sangha* (Sinhala Sangha) sect in the entire Northern Thailand.

Thai King receives *upasampada* from SL Sangharaja

- King Luthai (1347-1368) received with great celebrations, the Sinhalese Sangharaja Medhankara & Sinhala monks arriving from lower Burma.
- King studied under him & at the end of *vassa*, received temporary ordination.

The Buddha's Footprint

- The Samantakutaparabata inscription (1359 or 1369 CE) of King Luthai records that his artisans made several copies of the Buddha's Footprint from Sri Lanka.
- A mountain in Thailand was given the name Samantakuta.
- Many copies of “Buddhapad” [Buddha footprints] all over Thailand.

Sacred footprint



Thai Prince Monk in Sri Lanka

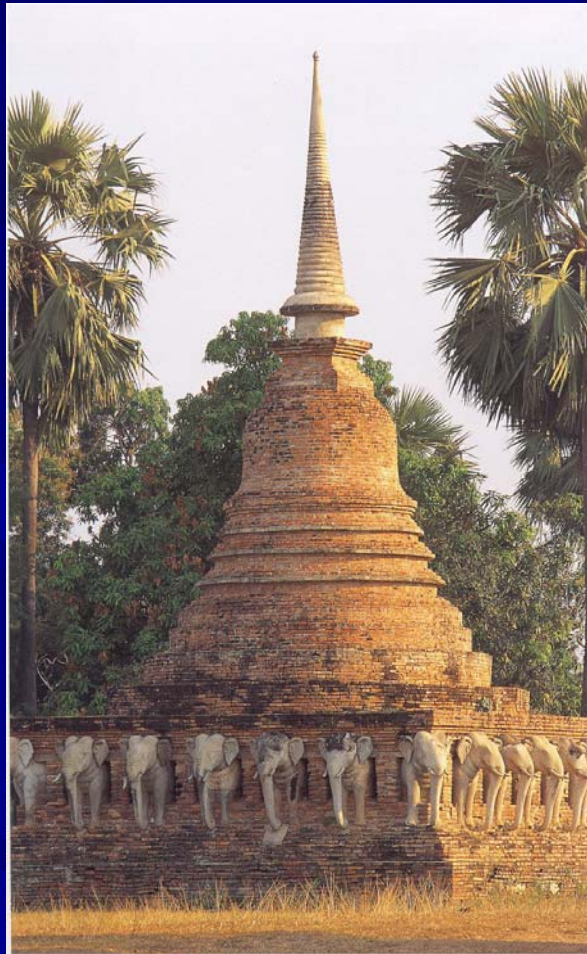
- Sri Sraddha (Si Satha), a nephew of king Rama Khamheng visited Sri Lanka in 1347 and stayed at Gampola and Mahiyangana for 10 years.
- He received the 'Mahasami' title & also visited Samantakuta & repaired Ruwan Weli Seya, Mahavihara & Mahiyangana Cetiya.
- He also took back a Kesadhatu and a Givadhathu to Sukhothai.
- He also took a group of Sinhalese craftsmen from Gampola, and settled them in five villages in Sukhothai.

Gadaladeniya style stucco makara torana in Sukhothai



Gadaladeniya style elephants on bell shaped stupas, Sukhothai

Wat Sorasak,
Sukothai



Lankarama in Ayutthaya, Thailand

- A Thai monk from Ayutthaya studied and received *upasampada* under the Sangharaja at Gadaladeni during Buvanekabahu V (1372-1408).
- This Thai Mahathera Dhammakitti Mahasami, on return to Ayutthaya, stayed at the city's Lankarama [Lanka monastery], built by Boromaraja (Paramaraja) (1370-1388).
- He composed the text *Saddhammasangaha*, a history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Wat Sihalaram (Sinhala Aramaya)

- Wat Sihalaram in Chiangmai became the 1st centre of Pali studies in Thailand.
- Wat Sihalaram was so called because King Tilokaraja (1448-1488 A. C.) planted a Bodhi branch brought from Sri Lanka.
- A general named Sihalagotta [“Sinhala gothra”, so possibly a Sinhalese], by the order of the king, rebuilt the shrine called Rajakuta & deposited a relic from Sri Lanka.

Wat Sihalararam (Sinhala Aramaya)



Hundreds of Lanka style bell stupas in Ayutthya

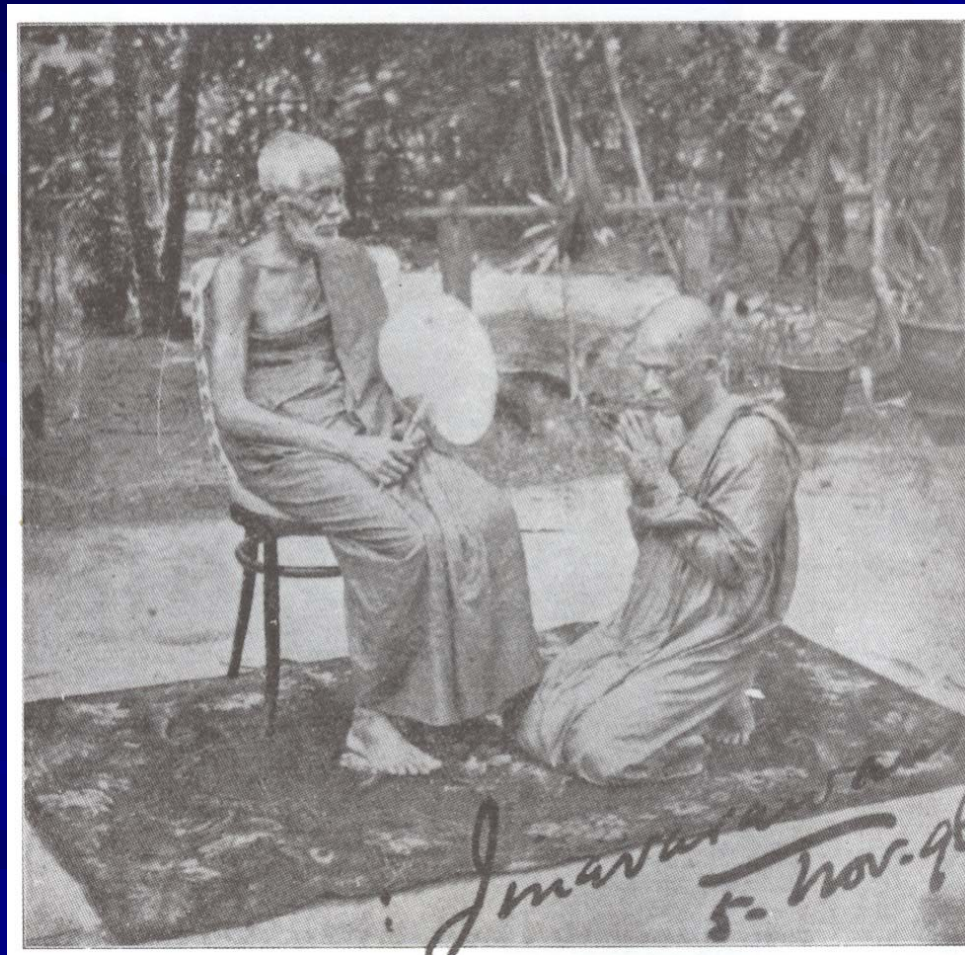


Wat Phra Si Samphet, Ayutthaya

Most recent religious bonds with Thailand

- In 1753, with the introduction of *upasampada* from Thailand began the Buddhist revival.
- Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya in Bangkok in 1893 modeled after Vidyodaya (1873) and Vidyalandkara (1875) pirivenas.
- Thai Prince Prisdong was ordained in Sri Lanka as Ven. Jinavaravamsa and became active in the Sri Lanka Buddhist educational movement.

Ven. Subhuti & Prince Prisdang



Borobudur in Java, Indonesia: Sinhala Style Stupa



Myanmar

- 12th C murals depicting scenes from the *Mahavamsa*, four abodes of Sinhala monks in the 13th C and 260 large monuments influenced by Sinhalese reflect close connections.
- Sacred Tooth Relic was the most revered. Hairs sent by kings & queens were made into brooms & used in the Temple of the Tooth.
- Replicas were taken & several temples, built.



Dutugemunu's Elephant Kandula in
12th C Myanmar painting

King Elara's Justice Bell In 12th C Myanmar painting



Worship of
Thuparama
in 12th C
Myanmar
painting



King' marriages with Sri Lankan princesses

- From 12th C, Myanmar kings married Sri Lanka princesses.
- In 13th C, Myanmar King's "most favoured" queen & a Minister were Sri Lankan.

**Cambodia: Sinhala style stupa
(1181-1215) in Phra Khan, Angkor,
Cambodia**



Main Cambodian temples associated with Sinhalese monks

- Wat Lanka was where Sinhala monks taught the Pali *Tripitaka* to Cambodian monks.
- Several other main temples were built in memory of Sinhala monks who taught there.

Sri Lankan monks introduce Buddhism to Laos

- King of Cambodia sent three of his advisors to Laos to introduce Buddhism there.
- He also sent his proudest possession, a miraculous Buddha image, gifted to him by a Sri Lankan king.
- It became the palladium of Laos & the capital city was named after the image as Luang Prabang.
- The chief Sinhalese monk became the first Sangharaja there.

Prabang Buddha Image



Lanka Bodhi Vihara – the 1st vihara in Laos

- The Sri Lankan monks also planted a Bodhi sapling from Sri Lanka and the vihara built there was named Wat Po Lanka (Lanka Bodhi Vihara).

Current culture & civilization in SE Asia were shaped mainly by Sri Lankan Buddhism

- Sinhala Bhikkhus introduced the Theravada form of ordination into these countries, taught Pali in Sinhala script then.
- Sinhala monks guided SE Asia monks in the writing of history with *Mahavamsa* as the model.
- Sinhala Bhikkhus also introduced Sinhala forms of sculpture, architecture, literature and painting, and thus helped found a new civilization in these countries.

Conclusion

- Thais, Burmese, Cambodians, Laotians, Southern Vietnamese & the Chinese in Southern Kunmin province, consider our sacred sites, e.g. Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Temple of the Tooth, Samantakuta & other sites as belonging to their cultural heritage.
- The *Mahavamsa* episode is so entrenched into their consciousness that the Burmese believe Dutugemunu is their hero.
- If we wish to market Sri Lanka for Southeast tourists, it should be the ancient Buddhist sites, not a fictional Ramayana.

■ Thank you!