

Contemporary Buddhism in the Philippines

Gyana Ratna

1. Introduction

The Philippines is one of two countries in Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region with Roman Catholic majorities; the other being East Timor. The Philippines is separated into dioceses of which the Archdiocese of Manila is the main primacy. About 90% of Filipinos identify themselves as Christians, with 81% belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. 2% are composed of Protestant denominations and 11% either to the Philippine Independent Church, Iglesia ni Kristo, and others.

Approximately 5% of Filipinos are Muslims, and are locally known as "Moros", having been dubbed this by the Spanish due to their sharing Islam with the Moors of North Africa. They primarily settled in parts of Mindanao, Palawan, and the Sulu archipelago, but are now found in most urban areas of the country. Most lowland Muslim Filipinos practice Islam, although the practices of some Mindanao's highland Muslim populations reflect a mixture with Animism. There are also small populations of Buddhists, Bahá'í, Hindus, Sikhs, and animists, which, along with other non-Christians, non-Muslims and those with no religion, collectively comprise 2.5% of the population.

Buddhism in the Philippines gained a foothold with the rise of the Buddhist Indianized Srivijaya Empire centered in Sumatra in the 7th century and lasted until the 15th century. The Srivijaya Empire was one of the greatest empires in Asia and had helped spread Buddhism and the Sanskrit language throughout Southeast Asia and China. Several religious artifacts have been found dating from that period. Unfortunately, many ancient Hindu-Buddhist artifacts have been destroyed during the Spanish period but several still remain including a statue of a 4-pound gold statue of a goddess--believed to be either the Goddess of Wisdom or the Goddess of Compassion--found in Mindanao in 1917, which now sits in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and was dated from the period 1200s to early 1300s. Another gold artifact of Garuda, the phoenix of Vishnu, survived was found on Palawan and dates from the same period. The oldest

written document in the Philippines also dates from this period mainly in the "Laguna Copperplate."

2. Laguna Copperplate

Evidence of the extent of cultural influence from the Srivijaya Empire can be seen in the "Laguna Copper Plate", which is written in the Kavi (old Javanese) alphabet in a mixed vocabulary of Tagalog, Old Malay, and Sanskrit in the year 900AD.



Laguna Copper Plate

The transliteration is as follows:

Swasti Shaka warsatita 822 Waisaka masa di(ng) Jyotisa. Caturthi Krisnapaksa somawara sana tatkala Dayang Angkatan lawan dengan nya sanak barngaran si Bukah anak da dang Hwan Namwaran dibari waradana wi shuddhapattra ulih sang pamegat senapati di Tundun barja(di) dang Hwan Nayaka tuhan Pailah Jayadewa. Di krama dang Hwan Namwaran dengan dang kayastha shuddha nu diparlappas hutang da walenda Kati 1 Suwarna 8 dihadapan dang Huwan Nayaka tuhan Puliran Kasumuran. dang Hwan Nayaka tuhan Pailah barjadi ganashakti. Dang Hwan Nayaka tuhan Binwangan barjadi bishruta tathapi sadana sanak kapawaris ulih sang pamegat dewata [ba]rjadi sang pamegat Medang dari bhaktinda diparhulun sang pamegat. Ya makanya sadanya anak cucu dang Hwan Namwaran shuddha ya kapawaris dihutang da dang Hwan Namwaran di sang pamegat Dewata. Ini grang syat syapanta ha pashkat ding ari kamudyan ada grang urang baruvara welung lappas hutang da dang Hwa

English Translation

"Long Live! Year of Saka 822, month of Vesak, according to Jyotisha. The fourth day of the waning moon, Monday. On this occasion, Lady *Angkatan*, and her brother whose name is *Bukah*, the children of the Honorable *Namwaran*, were awarded a document of

complete pardon from the Commander in Chief of *Tundun* [modern day *Tondo* in Manila], represented by the Lord Minister of *Pailah* [*Paila, Bulacan*], *Jayadewa*. By this order, through the scribe, the Honorable *Namwaran* has been forgiven of all and is released from his debts and arrears of 1 *Katī* and 8 *Suwarna* before the Honorable Lord Minister of *Puliran* [*Pulilan, Pampanga* or *Pulilan, Angat, Bulacan*], *Kasumuran*, by the authority of the Lord Minister of *Pailah*. Because of his faithful service as a subject of the Chief, the Honorable and widely renowned Lord Minister of *Binwangan* [*Binwagan, Pampanga*] recognized all the living relatives of *Namwaran* who were claimed by the Chief of *Dewata*, represented by the Chief of *Medang*. Yes, therefore the living descendants of the Honorable *Namwaran* are forgiven, indeed, of any and all debts of the Honorable *Namwaran* to the Chief of *Dewata*. This, in any case, shall declare to whomever henceforth that on some future day should there be a man who claims that no release from the debt of the Honorable..."

Vesak is the Buddhist name of the month — though now it's shortened to a single day--which celebrates Buddha's birthday and enlightenment. *Vesak* or *Vesakha* (in Pali) is the holiest month in the Buddhist calendar and is usually the time when debts are forgiven and festivals held. *Swasti* is also a very traditional Sanskrit-Buddhist greeting (similar to the modern Thai, *sawatdee*). The Laguna copper plate therefore indicates that the areas mentioned — Pampanga, Manila, and Bulacan — had already adopted Buddhism.

In the 9th century, Butuan (in Mindanao, southern Philippines) and Ma-i (Mindoro, central Philippines) began extensive trading with the Buddhist Kingdom of Champa (modern-day Vietnam).

In 1001 AD, the Buddhist ruler of Butuan (P'u-tuan in the Sung Dynasty records), *Sari Bata Shaja*, made the first tributary mission to China and this was followed by the rulers of Basilan (in southern Philippines), Mindoro, and *Pangasinan* (northern Philippines) two hundred years later. However, according to the Sung Shih (宋史) the official History of the Sung Dynasty, Butuan made regular tributary missions to China since 1001 AD, and that it's rulers usually arrived at the same time as the rulers of Tibet, Champa (Vietnam), and the Mongols.

In 1279 AD, some Chinese historians now speculate that the last Song Emperor, Bing Di, may have managed to escape across the sea with Grand Admiral Zhang Shijie to Taiwan or to Luzon (traditional Chinese: 呂宋國; pinyin: Lusòng Guó) because of the similarity of a few Chinese and Tagalog place names. However, official Chinese sources state that Emperor Bing died during the Mongol Conquest of southern China and most Chinese-sounding place names can be traced to Malaysia and Indonesia.

3. Spanish Colonial Period

With the advent of Spanish colonialism in the 16th century, the Philippines became a closed colony and cultural contacts with other Southeast Asian countries were closed. In 1481, the Spanish Inquisition commenced with the permission of Pope Sixtus IV and all non-Catholics within the Spanish empire were to be expelled or to be "put to the question" (tortured until they renounced their previous faith). With the refunding of Manila in 1571, the Philippines became subject to Spanish law and the Archbishop of New Galicia (Mexico) became the Grand Inquisitor of the Faithful in Mexico and the Philippines. In 1595, the newly appointed Archbishop of Manila became the Inquisitor-General of the Spanish East Indies (the Philippines, Guam, and Micronesia) and until 1898; the Spanish Inquisition was active against Protestants, Buddhists, and Muslims. As was the case in Latin America and Africa, forced conversions were not uncommon and any attempt not to submit to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church was seen as both rebellion against the Pope and sedition against the Spanish King, which was punishable by death.

Buddhist practices, festivals and iconography had to be converted and adopted to Catholicism if they were to survive Spanish persecution. A good example of this is the *san Nicolas* biscuit of Pampanga that has its roots in Buddhism. Syncretism (the blending indigenous religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism and indigenous folk religions) became necessary. The distinguishing feature of the San Nicolas was the blessing and distribution of bread. The story is that when San Nicolas was ill, he envisioned that, the Virgin advised him to eat a small piece of bread dipped in water; he had followed her advised, later he recovered. Thereon he started distributing blessed bread to the sick. After his demise, his conferees continued his practice by blessing and portioning bread on his feast day. In the Philippines, it became prevalent in parishes evangelized and administered by Augustinians and the Recollects (from recollection meaning awareness of the presence of God in one's soul). Their patron saint was San Nicolas de Tolentino.

This can be seen instantly with statues of the Virgin Mary, including the depiction of the halo, hand poses, and rainbow-arches, look almost identical to statues of Tara especially in *Binondo* and other areas.

Buddhist art and literature would have been destroyed during this time and Buddhism along with all non-Roman Catholic religions were illegal to practice including privately. This helps to explain why Buddhism virtually disappeared outwardly during the 400 years of Spanish rule and why syncretism (the blending indigenous religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism and indigenous folk religions) became necessary.



The popular Pampangan Christian biscuit "san Nicholas"
in Angeles City, in dung Pampanga, Philippines

This can be seen instantly with statues of the Virgin Mary, including the depiction of the halo, hand poses, and rainbow-arches, look almost identical to statues of Tara/Guanyin especially in Binondo and other areas. There is also speculation that certain rituals preformed during fiestas for the Santo Nino (Holy Child) stems back to an earlier devotion to the Child Buddha, which was popular among farmers during the Srivijaya period and venerated during the monsoon season.

4. American Colonial Period

With Revolution of 1896 against Spain and later with the coming of the American colonial regime in 1898, religious freedom was instituted. Mahayana and Zen Buddhist temples began to be built in the 1920s and 30s. Davao, due to the large number of Japanese residents, and Cebu, due to the large number of Chinese settlers had the largest Buddhist populations in the Philippines. After World War II, most Japanese were expatriated to Japan and the Chinese and Chinese-Filipinos became the predominant



Lon Wa Buddhist Temple, Davao (Est. 1989)

Buddhist ethnic group. In the 1960s, Vietnamese refugees arrived and established a temple in Palawan. At the same time, Japanese Buddhist temples and organizations began to re-emerge such as Soka Gakkai International.

The Lon Wa Buddhist Temple is the biggest Buddhist temple in Mindanao. It is located in the northern suburbs of Davao City, along J. P. Cabaguio Avenue. Features include Italian marble slabs, a magnificent Buddha, gold Kuan Yin, carved wood ornamentation depicting the life of Buddha, carp-filled lily ponds, and high-ceilinged halls.



Kuan Yin Statue inside Lon Wa Buddhist Temple in Davao



Phu Shian Temple
25 Beverly Hills Lahug, Cebu 6000 Philippines (Estd. 1989)

Chinese Buddhism in Cebu



SGI Philippines HQ



Holy Buddhist Temple, Manila (Nunneries),
150 N. Domingo St, Cubao, Quezon City



Koyasan Shingon Buddhist Shrine at Lily Hill,
(Goddess of Peace Shrine)
Clark Field, Pampanga, (Estd. 2003)



Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Palawan
PO Box 100- 5300 Palawan, Philippines



Buddha Image inside Vietnamese Temple



Avalokiteswara Image in Vietnamese Temple

5. Buddhism Today in Philippines

Today, Buddhists account for about 1-3% of the Philippine population. Currently, only the Mahayana (including Zen and Nichiren) and Vajrayana (Tibetan Buddhism) are present in the Philippines. Theravada Buddhism is now confined with nationals from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, as well as Cambodia and Laos.

5.1. UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTION NO. A/54/115

Adopted at the 79th plenary meeting, on 15 December 1999, without a vote, on the basis of draft resolution A/54/L.59 and Add 1, sponsored by: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus, Greece, Grenada, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and United States of America

International recognition of the Day of Vesak at the United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations Offices

The General Assembly,

Acknowledging the hope expressed by the International Buddhist Conference, held in Sri Lanka in November 1998, that the Day of Vesak, the Day of Full Moon in the month of May each year, be recognized international and, in particular, at the United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices,

Recognizing that the Day of the Full Moon in the Month of May each year is the day most sacred to Buddhists, who commemorate on that day the birth of the Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away,

Considering that international recognition at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices would constitute acknowledgement of the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made for over two and a half millennia and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity,

Resolves that, without cost to the United Nations, appropriate arrangements shall be made for international observances of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters

and other United Nations offices, in consultation with the relevant United Nations offices and with permanent missions that also wish to be consulted

5.2. PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION NO. 24

Declaring the Full Moon Day of May Every Year as VESAK DAY

WHEREAS, Article III, Section 5 of the Philippine Constitution declares that "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall be allowed."

WHEREAS, there are about 1,000,000 Buddhists and non-Buddhists nationwide who value, respect and follow the universal teaching of Buddha.

WHEREAS, Vesak Day is the Day of Birth, enlightenment and passing away of the wise teacher, Gautama Buddha, who live more than 2,500 years ago.

WHEREAS, the message of peace, unity compassion and non-violence espoused by Gautama Buddha has influenced and inspired billions of people in the world.

WHEREAS, this day is celebrated every year in the United Nations by virtue of the UN Resolution A/RES/54/115 titled "(Annual) International Recognition of the Day of Vesak at the United Nations" with the support of 80 nations including the Philippines, Spain, Indonesia, Russia, USA, among others.

WHEREAS, the Philippines joins the rest of the world in celebrating the Vesak Day along with its teachings and universal message.

WHEREAS, every year during Vesak, Buddhist associations and institutions will engage in merit-making activities like medical outreach programs, blood donations, cultural exchange programs with guests visiting from different countries and other activities by Buddha's message of compassion, peace and love.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO, President of the Republic of the Philippines, by virtue of the powers vested in me by law, do hereby declare the full moon day of May every year as "VESAK DAY". I call upon all residents, regardless of race or creed, and the private and public sector to extend their full support to the observation of the "Vesak Day" and to undertake activities in accordance with the Spirit of the

Proclamation. The Universal Wisdom Foundation, together with other Buddhist institutions, is hereby tasked to be the lead implementing organization in carrying out such activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Republic of the Philippines to be affixed.

DONE in the City of Manila, this 29th day of March, in the year of our Lord, two thousand and one.

Executive Secretary President:

Signed: RENATO S. DE VILLA

By the President:

Signed: GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO

5.3. Vesak Day Celebrations

Every year in the full moon day of May, the Universal Wisdom Foundation joins the world in celebrating the Vesak Day. VESAK DAY marks the Birth, Enlightenment and Passing Away of the wise teacher, Gautama Buddha. In 1999, the United Nations, with the support of 80 member nations including the Philippines, approved Resolution No. A/54/115 titled "An International Recognition of the Vesak". This called for the annual observance and celebration of the Day of Vesak in all United Nations Headquarters worldwide. In the same spirit, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo on March 29, 2001, through the initiative of the Universal Wisdom Foundation, signed Proclamation No. 24 declaring the full moon day of May every year as Vesak Day in the Philippines.

5.4. Blood-letting Donation with the Philippine National Red Cross

To celebrate Vesak Day each year, the foundation works with the Philippine National Red Cross on a campaign to encourage people to donate blood as a sign of compassion. This activity is held in three to four shopping malls simultaneously. Mall shoppers are also given the chance to perform Buddha-bathing and to receive free Buddhist books. This program aims to educate the people on the principles of Buddhism and to promote ideas of compassion and loving-kindness

5.5. Vesak Day Commemorative Stamp



The Universal Wisdom Foundation was the proponent of the Vesak Day Commemorative Stamp issued by the Philippine Postal Corporation. The unveiling of the Vesak Day Stamp and First Day Cover was held during the May 2002 Vesak Day Program at the United Nations Information Center (Manila).

5.6. Slogan Cancellor

The Vesak Day Slogan Canceller was launched by the Philippine Postal Corporation in the 2003 Vesak Day Program at the United Nations Information Center (Manila). The Canceller was used from May 16, 2003- June 15, 2003 in 24 major post offices nationwide (Philippines). This means that all mails (local and international) sent through these 24 post offices had the Vesak Day canceller stamped on them. The purpose of this is to make more people aware of Buddhism.

6. Influence on Language

However, the linguistic influence left its most lasting marks on every Philippine language throughout the archipelago with the following Buddhist and Hindu concepts directly from the original Sanskrit. About 25% of the words in the Tagalog language and



Philippines Tibetan Nyingma Palyul Buddhist Center
700 Piña Avenue, Sta. Mesa, Manila (Estd 1992)



Buddha Image inside Tibetan Temple



IBPS, 656 P. Ocampo St. Malate,
Manila, Philippines, (Etd. 1989)



Ven. Sumangala with UWF Founder in Buddhist Library, Manila
2/F, 700 Aurora Blvd., Corner Gilmore Ave.
New Manila, Quezon City (Estd. 1989)

many other Philippine languages are Sanskrit terms, such as: *agama* (Tausug for religion), *suarga* (Tausug for heaven, *suyurga* in archaic Tagalog), *moksa* (archaic Tagalog for death), *sampratyaya* (archaic Tagalog for trust or conviction), *bala* (archaic Tagalog for force or energy), *sudi* (Ilocano for luster), *tan-ok* (Ilocano for exalt), *dukha* (old Tagalog for suffering), *guro* (Tagalog for "teacher") and *budhi* (old Tagalog for "knowledge"). *Guru* (teacher) and many more are still used in everyday speech. *Dukha* now means poor, while *budhi* (*bodhi* in Sanskrit) is now another word for conscience or thought. These terms are found in various Hindu and Buddhist *suttas* (*su-tras*) and sayings.

Other non-religious terms used in modern Filipino (Tagalog) that derive from Sanskrit are: *mukha* (face), *patola* (cucumber), *basa* (to read), *lasuna* (onion), *naga* (snake), *garuda* (eagle or any large birds), *kalapati* (from Sanskrit *parapati* meaning dove), *laksa* (10,000), *puri* (honor), and *galang* (praise)

7. Hindu-Buddhism in Philippine Folklore

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two epics that originated in India. Ramayana portrays the battle between good and evil. Rama, with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana, represent the eventual victory of good over evil, represented by Ravana, the ten-headed demon king. Rama is helped by his devotee, Hanuman and the army of monkeys under the command of the monkey king Sugriva. The Ramayana became one of the most widely known epics throughout South East Asia and all Thai kings of the current dynasty assume the name "Rama" upon ascending the throne.

The Philippines has a Maranao version of the Mahabharata called the "Maharadia Lawana" or also known as "Darangan". "Lam-Ang" is the version among Ilocanos. The

"Hud-Hud" of the Ifugaos is also derived from the Ramayana. "Ibalon" is Bicolano version. Versions from the different ethnic groups of the Philippines exist.

8. Concluding Remarks

With the above explanation it makes it clear that although Buddhism had once influenced Philippines cultures and way of life of the people it was completely destroyed by Spanish rulers and strong Christian influence, during the period. Hopefully, Chinese, Tibetan and Theravada influence in recent period is also remarkable. However, not many Buddhist institutes were established in Philippines Island but economical power and organizational activities of Fo Guan Shan of Taiwan and Soka Gakkai of Japan played a vital roles in the development of Buddhism and culture in contemporary society of Philippines. Moreover, recently the present President *GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO* followed the constitution of the country and declared that the Full Moon Day of May every year as VESAK DAY, which will be a milestone for the country's history of Buddhism.

Notes and Reference :

1. Almario, Virgilio S. ed. 2001. UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino. Pasig City.
2. Ereccion del Pueblos-Bulacan, 1764-1890. Paper creating the barrios Casay, Lawang, Tigbi and Bayabas into new town named Norzagaray, apart from Angat. Bundle no.45, Legajo no.129.
3. Francisco, Juan R. 1995. "Tenth Century Trade/Settlement Area In South East Asia: Epigraphic and Language Evidence in the Philippines," National Museum Papers: Vol.4, No.2: 10-35.
4. Jocano, Landa F. 1998. Filipino Prehistory. Quezon City.
5. Kuang-Jen Chang, "A Comparative study of trade ceramics as grave goods in Pila, Laguna and Calatagan, Batangas, SW Luzon, the Philippines," presented at Congress International, European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, 11th International Conference, Bougon, France, 2006.
6. Postma, Antoon. 1992. "The Laguna Copperplate Inscription," Philippine Studies 40: 183-203.
7. Scott, William Henry, Pre-Hispanic Source Materials (For the Study of Philippine History), New Day Press, Quezon City, 1984.
8. Tiongson, Jaime F. The Laguna Copperplate Inscription and the Route to Paracale in "Heritage and Vigilance: The Pila Historical Society Foundation Inc. Programs for the Study and Preservation of National Historical Landmarks and Treasures," presented at Seminar on Philippine Town and Cities: Reflections of the Past, Lessons for the Future, Pasig City, 2006.
9. Tiongson, Jaime F. 2004. The Paracale Gold Route. Unpublished Manuscript. Cited in Santiago, Luciano P. R. 2005. "Pomp, Pageantry and Gold: The Eight Spanish Villas in the Philippines (1565-1887)," Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society: 33: 57-75.
10. Alejandro R Roces, "Guadalupe's San Nicolas," Mabuhay, 1991, 38-41
11. Valdes, Cynthia O. "Archaeology in the Philippines, the National Museum and an

Emergent Filipino Nation," Wilhelm G. Solheim II Foundation for Philippine Archaeology, Inc. 25 Feb 2004.

12. "2000 Census: ADDITIONAL THREE PERSONS PER MINUTE". National Statistics Office. Archived from the original on 2007-04-09. Retrieved on 2008-01-09.

執筆者紹介

- 青木 馨 (客員所員 同朋大学大学院非常勤講師)
 脊古 真哉 (客員所員 同朋大学非常勤講師)
 武田 龍 (客員所員)
 青木 忠夫 (客員研究員)
 伊奈 潔 (特別研究員)
 中村 薫 (同朋大学大学院教授)
 飯田 真宏 (特別研究員)
 市野 智行 (同朋大学大学院博士前期課程)
 高橋 良政 (日本大学教授)
 小島 恵昭 (研究所所長 同朋大学大学院教授)
 池田 勇諦 (同朋大学名誉教授)
 小山 正文 (研究所顧問)
 金龍 静 (本願寺史料研究所副所長)
 田代 俊孝 (同朋大学大学院教授 研究科長)
 安藤 弥 (所員 同朋大学講師)
 Gyana Ratna (客員所員 愛知学院大学非常勤講師)

同朋大学佛教文化研究所紀要 第二十八号

平成二十一年三月二十五日 印刷

平成二十一年三月三十一日 発行

編集 名古屋市中村区稲葉地町七―一
 同朋大学佛教文化研究所

所長 小島 恵昭

電話 〇五二―四一―一三七三

発行所 同朋大学佛教文化研究所
 印刷所 株式会社 一誠社