

HOW A FOREIGNER INVENTED 'BUDDHENDOM' IN BURMESE: FROM *THA-THA-NA* TO *BOK-DA' BA-THA*

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It is thought that the concept 'Christianity' (*Christianismos*) appeared long after it was confessed as a religion. The concept does not appear in New Testament writings, and it was not until the times of Christian thinkers of the late first and early second centuries that it was first used. The earliest known reference to it is by Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch (died c. AD 110), in his *Letter to the Magnesians*, as a Christian parallel to the concept of 'Judaism' (*Ioudaïsmos*). The concept of *Ioudaïsmos* had been first used by Paul in his Letter to the Galatians (1: 13) to characterize the Jewish way of faith and life, and the term Christianity is therefore 'a rather late Christian neologism used to contrast the beliefs and way of life of Christians with that of both Jews of the synagogue and sectarian Jewish Christians (i.e., Christians who wanted to retain the Mosaic Law)' (Benz 1980).

The use of concepts like 'Christianity' implies a degree of self-consciousness that it is but one possible faith among competing 'isms'. During my stay in

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Burma, I encountered several Burmese who argued that, prior to colonization, there was no Burmese term for 'Buddhism' equivalent to our term 'Christianity', and that it was the Baptist American missionary Judson who was putatively responsible for the introduction of the now popularly used term 'Buddha language/culture' (*bok-da' ba-tha*) into the Burmese language. I have not been able to substantiate whether this is true—indeed, I doubt that a single person could be held responsible for this. However, the fact remains that we are here less concerned with historical fact than with Burmese constructions of Buddhism in their own language. Certainly, it is beyond doubt that over the last century a new term has come to be much used by the Burmese themselves in reference to Buddhism. In this essay I will briefly describe the significance of this new terminology, which has not hitherto been described in Burmese dictionaries nor in the Western literature on Burmese Buddhism.

1. '*Buddhism*' Created by the Foreigner

Burma has been in contact with the West since at least the fifteenth century; adventurers, missionaries, traders, foreign sailors, colonial civil servants, and finally tourists have all had their impact. This was predated, of course, by contact with the peoples populating present-day China, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. But Burmese Buddhist traditions were challenged in a unique manner by the British conquest of Burma, which began in 1824 with the annexation of Lower Burma and ended with the annexation of the rest of the country by 1886. During the nineteenth century missionaries and colonial civil servants exercised considerable influence on Burmese life. What kinds of attitudes and categories have Burmese Buddhists evolved to make sense of the new world-order pertaining today?

The Burmese language has for many centuries included two Pali loanwords in reference to the Buddha's teachings.

1. *Bok-da' da-ma'* (Pali *buddha dhamma*) or simply *ta-ya'* — Buddhist truth.¹ These terms mean the individual truths of the collectivity of cosmological and natural laws—the true laws of conditional relations which the Buddha sought to explain. 'Insight meditation' (Burmese *wi' pat-tha-na*, P. *vipassanā*) is commonly referred to as 'applying oneself to the *da-ma'*' (*ta-ya'* "a" *htok thi*).
2. *Bok-da' tha-tha-na* (P. *buddha sāsana*)—Buddhist teachings. This term means the Buddha's explanations of the many truths (*da-ma'*) in the form of his instructions, their embodiment in the scriptures, their transmission over time by the

1. The Burmese equivalent of Pali *dhamma* occurs as either *da-ma'* or *ta-ya'* in different compound words, representing the Pali and Sanskrit root of the term respectively. The terms overlap, but the latter additionally covers a sense of conventional law and justice.

monastic community, and their realization in personal experience. The body of the Buddha's teachings (*tha-tha-na*) is said to be constituted by as many as eighty-four thousand Buddhist truths (*da-ma'*).

Though the pronunciation may vary in Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the above two terms, being drawn from the Pali language and actually used in the Buddhist scriptures, are intelligible across different Buddhist communities. But during my stay in Burma, I encountered several Burmese who alleged that *bok-da' ba-tha* (P. *buddha bhāsā*), a third term, had come to the Burmese language relatively recently.² There are two important points to note about this term. First, although a compound made up of two individual Pali loanwords meaning 'Buddha' (*bok-da'*) and 'speech, language, especially vernacular, dialect, subject' (*ba-tha*),³ the compound word is not to be found in the Buddhist scriptures or in the commentaries. For this reason it is not intelligible in all the different Buddhist communities. Secondly, it should be noted that this term is today popularly used by the Burmese with reference to their own Buddhism and Buddhism in general. It would appear that this development, namely of adopting an 'unscriptural' reference to Buddhism unintelligible to other Buddhist communities, is something Burma has in common with at least one term for Buddhism in the Sinhalese language.⁴

Myin' Hswei was a medical doctor who went to the Ma-ha-si Hsa-ya-daw, a famous meditation teacher, to seek for Buddhist answers to questions thrown up by his Western medical education.⁵ After noting that during the Ava Period (1765-1837) Burmese came into contact with foreigners such as Portuguese, Dutch, English, French and Indians, he writes:

2. The recent origins of the term *bok-da' ba-tha* were affirmed to me by, for example, the Director of Research at the Department of Religious Affairs, the Librarian of Rangoon University, and the chief researcher at the Ma-ha-si Tha-tha-na Yeik-tha.

3. In Burmese, *ba-tha* is also used to refer to subject-matter, religion and views in general. For example, Aw-ba-tha (1975) links *ba-tha* to the following categories: The Six Great Religions, The 101 Languages, and The Four Reasons for Taking Refuge in Teachings. The term *bok-da' ba-tha* has been translated into Pali as 'Buddhist teachings/views' (*bok-da' wa-da'*) by Hok Sein (1978).

4. Kitsiri Malalgoda (1972: 164) describes how Christian missionaries adopted terms such as *ādahali*, used by the Sinhalese for spirit worship, to refer to 'Christianity' and 'Buddhism' in the Sinhalese language; later these came to be used by the Sinhalese themselves in reference to Buddhism. He notes that '*Buddhagama* was the term that the missionaries used to refer to Buddhism; it was only later that it gained acceptance among the Buddhists themselves as a term of self-reference'.

5. Myin' Hswei drew his argument from a book (date and publisher unknown to me) entitled 'What is Buddhism?' (*Bok-da' ba-tha hso da ba le'*) by (A-nye-in-sa" a-yei" paing-min" U") Bo.

The term *bok-da' ba-tha* cannot be found in the Buddhist canon and the early religious and secular chronicles. It came into use only after foreigners came to Burma.... Although the term arose in the time of Bo-daw Min"ta-ya" [AD 1782-1819], it had not gone into current use until after there were no kings, when Burma was ruled by the English and from the time that Christians could readily missionize. (Myin' Hswei 1978: 4-5)

Myin' Hswei's view of the foreigners' influence on the Burmese term for Buddhism may be set out in several stages. First, early Burmese terminology for foreigners implied a contrast in religious tenets and values:

These foreigners the Burmese called white Indian (*ka-la"hp̄yū*) or dark Indian (*ka-la"me*), and the Europeans were also called 'the kind of people who wear hats' (*tho" hsaung lu-myo"*). Implied in these terms was that, as they believed that life was at an end at death in this life, their views were radically opposed to the 'right view' (*tha-ma deik-h̄i'*) which the Burmese people subscribed to. (ibid.)

The concept 'right-viewed' (*tha-ma deik-h̄i'*) was therefore previously used in Burma to refer both to those who followed the Buddha's teachings in the spirit, and by implication to all Burmese Buddhists, while 'wrong-viewed' (*meik-hsa deik-h̄i'*) was applied to those holding views contrary to the *da-ma'*, and by implication to all foreigners, especially non-Buddhists.

In the second phase of his argument Myin' Hswei proceeds to blame Judson, an American Baptist missionary who wrote the first comprehensive English-Burmese and Burmese-English dictionaries, for the introduction of this term *bok-da' ba-tha*:

Then the missionaries arrived, and among the best-known missionaries was Judson, who came to Burma in 1813. Towards the Amarapura period, during the reign of Bo-daw-min"ta-ya", missionaries such as Judson took offence at being called 'wrong-viewed', and in the attempt to stamp this out and to have Christianity also referred to as 'right-viewed' he referred to the Burmese as *bok-da' ba-tha* people. (ibid.)

Judson's 'ploy' proved successful. Today, English-Burmese dictionaries invariably translate the English word 'Buddhism' as *bok-da' ba-tha*.⁶ For convenience, if we use the term 'Buddhism' to mean (a) the spirit of the Buddha's teaching and (b) its transmission and realization, then the term 'Buddhendom'⁷ may be used to

6. Lane (1841) and Tet Toe (1975) do not include the term Buddhism, but Ba Han (1951) and Tun Nyein (1906) translate it with the new term *bok-da' ba-tha*.

7. By analogy to 'Christendom', which the *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1975) defined as 'that part of the world in which Christianity is the received religion', emphasizing the culturally received aspect of religion over its spirit and original teaching meanings. The term

mean the region and community (in a non-ordained cultural sense) where Buddhism is the received religion.

2. On Different 'Buddhisms'

How is this terminology differentiated? While not everyone would make a conscious distinction between the terms,⁸ many do. For example, an eminent monk meditation teacher indicated to me that 'Buddhism (*bok-da' tha-tha-na*) is the real teaching, but Buddhendom (*bok-da' ba-tha*) is about culture'.⁹ In other words, while the first represents the original teachings of the Buddha, the second represents the teachings of the Buddha as socially constituted (and distorted) by man.

Even those who do not make a conscious distinction between the two terms sometimes suggest a sense of difference by the way they use them. For example, the subtle differences in the connotations of these terms become clear from a description in the hagiography of the meditation teacher (U") Ba' Hkin. In an episode recounting his own life, Ko Lei" begins by contrasting 'Buddhendom [*bok-da' ba-tha*] handed down from mother and father' (*mi'yo" hpa-la bok-da' ba-tha*) with Buddhist teachings of the monks (*tha-tha-na*) as this was commonly understood in his youth.¹⁰

'Buddhendom' was first used by Spiro (1983: 5). Spiro translated *bok-da' tha-tha-na* as 'the doctrine of the Buddha', *bok-da' ba-tha* as 'the worship of the Buddha' (1970: 32), and *da-ma'* as 'the basic message of nibbanic Buddhism — suffering and release from suffering' (1970: 427), but he did not go into detail on the distinctions between these terms.

8. Many use the terms interchangeably without giving it another thought, and not everyone makes a clear distinction in use. It is interesting how the Le-di Hsa-ya-daw in some of his famous Burmese (not Pali) works often referred to Buddhism simply as *bok-da' ba-tha*, but also to a combination of both terms, namely *bok-da' ba-tha tha-tha-na* (Le-di Hsa-ya-daw 1965: 31; cf. 1979: 60).

9. That *bok-da' ba-tha* has to do with Buddhist culture is found in such expressions as 'according to the customs of *bok-da ba-tha win*' (Kei-la-tha 1976: *ka'*). Also, the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association) was known in Burmese as a combination of both terms for Buddhism, namely *a-myo" ba-tha tha-tha-na*, which translates as 'nationality/race', 'culture/language', and 'the teachings of the Buddha'.

10. These paragraphs taken from Ko Lei" 1980, given in full, would occupy great length, and are therefore paraphrased here — they are not complete translations.

I was born from Burmese Buddhist (*bok-da' ba-tha*) parents. I was educated between the ages of five and ten years old in a nunnery in Sa-gaing" and with the Kyan-hkin"chaung" Hsa-ya-daw.... At the age of six I had only a very basic understanding of Buddhendom (*bok-da' ba-tha yei'*), but I understood that monks and nuns were sons and daughters of the noble Buddha who had renounced the world and the society of man, and that they were in charge of scriptural learning, which is the Buddha's heritage. Although I understood that some practised the more noble meditation (*pa-di' bat*), these were very few and most practised scriptural learning... I learnt that those who practised were more special than ordinary people. Meditating [lit. 'sitting (and internalizing) the *ta-ya'*"], propagating the meditational objects (*ka-ma-htan'*), is not something everyone can do. Not all monks and nuns can meditate. Only those who have much meritorious accomplishment (*pa-ra-mi*) and want to achieve enlightenment (*neik-ban*) speedily can meditate.... It is not easy work. When young I always held that the practice of *ta-ya'* [*da-ma'*], which not all members of the monastic community and nuns who got into the society of the *tha-tha-na* (*tha-tha-na baung tho' yauk shi' bi*) could do, was not suitable for those who had not renounced the society of man.... (Ko Lei" 1980: 245-6)

This paragraph clearly contrasts the parentally-inherited 'Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha*) of the unordained with the monastically perpetuated 'Buddhism' (*bok-da tha-tha-na*) of the ordained. Ko Lei" proceeds with a description of his youth and what Buddhism then meant to the unordained. To the realm of 'Buddhendom' of the unordained belong organizing novitiation ceremonies, practising charity, taking the precepts at sabbath days, listening to the monk's preachings, visiting monasteries and pagodas, worshipping the monks, and reciting passages irrespective of whether one understands them or not. To the realm of proper 'Buddhism' of the ordained belong learning the Buddha's teachings, guarding and teaching them, living under high moral precepts, meditating, and having a detailed understanding of what one recites.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the years leading up to national independence and the sixth synod held in Rangoon, many Burmese began to query their inherited Buddhist customs, having formed the impression that these had become 'contaminated' by foreign views. Ko Lei" describes how he underwent something of an emotional crisis when he became aware of the disjunction between his 'modern' knowledge and his inherited Buddhism:

On reading the views of some sects which were said to be 'religious' ('the affairs of *ba-tha'*, *ba-tha-yei'*), I found that Buddhendom (*bok-da' ba-tha*) was mixed up with ideas about science, sociology, and economics. Only after being shaken up like that did I come to understand that I must get to know all about Buddhendom (*bok-da' ba-tha*) which I had inherited from my parents in the past, the Buddhendom (*bok-da' ba-tha*) I had accepted without paying any attention to it. I was overcome with surprise that this realisation should not have come before. I made a vow immediately to investigate.... (Ko Lei" 1980: 250)

It was almost as if, with the foreigner now in retreat from Burma, Ko Lei" was stimulated to meditate and to think about Buddhism. Ko Lei" found, while practising meditation (Buddhism in the true sense), that his Buddhist heritage was contaminated with foreign, and in particular Hindu, ideas. Though unordained, his autobiographical episodes further describe how he chose the 'true Buddhist' (*bok-da' tha-tha-na*) road of meditation which led to a realization of the essence of the Buddha's teachings (*ta-ya*"), not the 'Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha*) road of unquestioned acceptance of received Burmese culture, non-meditating laity, and worldly knowledge.

We have ended up with three terms for Buddhism: the universal truths of cause and effect which the Buddha sought to explain (*da-ma'*); the Buddha's instructions on these, their transmission over time in the scriptures and their study, the monastic community, and their personal intuitive realization (*bok-da' tha-tha-na*); and a term for 'culture' and 'convention', i.e. the appropriation of their meanings by humankind to manufacture an identity for their own instrumental purposes (*bok-da' ba-tha*). The latter term functions at two levels: on the one hand it is used as a term for 'Buddhism', to distinguish it from other 'foreign' religions, while on the other it is used as a term for 'man-made Buddhism', to distinguish it from the pure and original teachings of the Buddha. An eminent monk pupil of the Sun"lun" meditation teacher (Sun"lun" 1972: 45-6) makes these two distinctions for us when he writes: 'in this world there are four *ba-tha* — Buddhendom [*bok-da' ba-tha*], Christianity [*hka-rit-yan ba-tha*], Hinduism [*hin-du ba-tha*], and Islam [*ma-ha-mei-din ba-tha*].... But in reality there are as many *ba-tha* as there are people...each person has a *ba-tha*.'

3. Different 'Buddhists'

There is no simple equivalent to our term 'Buddhist' in the Burmese language. Minimally defined, a Buddhist is one who keeps the Five Precepts and believes in the Three Refuges, namely the Buddha, the monastic order and the *Dhamma*. There are many free-standing associations, but there is no Church or common ritual binding laity and clergy together in a single Buddhist community. Individuals may roam around as many different monasteries, pagodas and meditation centres as they please. The rituals of charity, taking the moral precepts, meditating, renouncing the world and going into the forest, and undergoing ordination, may all be carried out anywhere. In the absence of such binding rituals as baptism, communion or confession, one instrument with which to measure Buddhism is the language of classification. The following Burmese terms for 'Buddhist' have an oppositional character very similar to the terms for 'Buddhism'

considered above. If anything, they are even more nuanced, and there are more of them. Among others¹¹ there are:

1. 'Inside (a member of) Buddhism (*tha-tha-na*)' (*tha-tha-na win*). This category comprises the 'chosen ones', and is used for those Buddhists with a heightened and special involvement with the Buddhist teachers through ordination, the observance of high moral standards, and through meditation. Few if any Burmese Buddhists would dispute that ordained monks are 'members of the *tha-tha-na*' (*tha-tha-na win*) by virtue of their ordination according to the rules set down by the Buddha. Ordination of monks and novices 'enters them into the *tha-tha-na*' (*tha-tha-na baung tho' win thi*),¹² and, having left the 'society of man' (*lu baung hma' hwet thi*), they have become 'sons of the Buddha' (*hpa-ya" tha"daw*). It is this formal transition from the society of man to that of the *tha-tha-na* around which is built this enormously important Burmese tradition of novitiation.

In contrast, the term 'outside the *tha-tha-na*' (*tha-tha-na pa'*) is used to refer to the time and place where there is no dispensation of Buddhist teachings, i.e., before the advent of a Buddha and at the end of a dispensation when the teachings are no longer realizable by man (MAA 1980) and the Three Refuges (*Bok-da'*, *Da-ma'*, and *Than-ga*) are no longer accessible.¹³ Ko Lei" (1980: 5-6) describes foreigners coming from 'outside' 'into' the *tha-tha-na* at Ba' Hkin's meditation centre as follows:

There were many people like me who one would have thought had nothing to do with meditation. One could find Hindus.... I sat in meditation with a Baboo, wearing a dhoti. I listened to the *ta-ya"* with a Baboo Indian lady, covered in a sari from top to toe. I also took the *ta-ya"* with an American girl dressed in a gown. I discussed the *ta-ya"* with English, Americans and Germans who were in trousers. I also met teachers of science...professors...doctors.... And I saw wives

11. The Ven. Saddhatissa suggested to me that 'disciple' or *upasāka* (*u'pai-tha-ka*) is the appropriate Pali term for Buddhist, but this is not used in Burmese as much as the terms listed in this article.

12. The idea of movement is inherent, in that it is common to say, for example, 'after entering into the holy *tha-tha-na* the monks...' (*tha-tha-na-daw tho' win yauck pi" ya'han" tha-ma-nei pyu' thu do' thi...*) (BTNA 1981: 43). The term *ba-tha thwin" thi* 'to initiate or introduce into any particular religion' is used for Christianity and Islam (Judson 1953). The same term is used for Hindu initiation into caste: *zat thwin" thi* 'to make enter into a caste', also referred to as 'enter into a *ba-tha*' (*ba-tha thwin" thi*) (ibid.).

13. This sense of the term 'outside Buddhism' is included, for example, in *Magganga Dipani* by Le-di Hsa-ya-daw (1965: 228), which should be compared with its Burmese original. Judson (1953) defined this term as meaning 'destitute of any system of religion; to be without (not belonging to) any particular system of religion', or more simply 'heathen'. Dr Hkin Nyo pointed out to me that no monk would use this for the unordained because it would sound too much like an insult.

of ambassadors meditate.... I saw with my own eyes in amazement the variety of people who, though coming from outside Buddhism (*tha-tha-na i a-pa' hma'*), took refuge into Buddhism (*tha-tha-na a-dwin" tho'*) because of the qualities of *ta-ya"* this centre has.

2. 'Inheritor of Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na mwei*). This category is explicitly reserved as a title¹⁴ for sponsors of the monastic ordination ceremony who have provided the eight monk requisites. It implies that an individual is nearer to the *tha-tha-na* than 'ordinary' laymen who have never sponsored an ordination. The story goes that Asoka (emperor of India and model Buddhist king), coming back from fighting a war, one day invited a novice to receive alms. The novice then unexpectedly took his seat on the king's throne; he considered himself superior to the king, with no need to pay his respects. The king asked him, 'What is your teaching (*da-ma'*)?', to which the novice replied, 'All effects arise from appropriate causes' (*yei da-ma' hei-tok-pa' ba-wa*). The king, having fought a war which had claimed the lives of many, regretted his deeds. He became a Buddhist and wanted to repair what he had done wrong by building hospitals, bridges and roads, and by planting trees. He also constructed 84,000 wells, 84,000 reservoirs, irrigation canals and dams, and 84,000 pagodas. With these works he thought himself to be an 'inheritor of the Buddhist religious realm' (*tha-tha-na mwei*), but when he asked Mauk-ga-li'pok-ta'teik-tha, this monk told him that he was merely a 'master of charity' (*da-na' shin*) as yet, and that it required the ordination of his sons to allow him to become an 'inheritor of the Buddhist religious realm' (Wi'thu'da 1982: 9-12; see also Mu'nein-da 1982: 562). Anyone offering other types of charity is merely referred to as a 'lord of charity' (*da-na' shin*).

3 and 4. 'Associate of Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na hnwe*)¹⁵ and 'those carrying out duties for Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na wun-dan"*). These terms refer to Buddhists who are not 'inside *tha-tha-na*' but who are, or consider themselves to be more than ordinary unordained Buddhists. They include hermits, devotees, nuns, trustees etc. or 'those carrying out duties for the *tha-tha-na*' (*tha-tha-na wun-dan"*).

5. 'Inside (a member of) Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha win*). This category is the widest and least specific of all. Aw-ba-tha (1975: 394) summed up considered opinion when he said that 'one is only a true *bok-da' ba-tha win* if complete in the following five beliefs: (a) belief in the Buddha; (b) the *da-ma'*; (c) the monastic

14. There are many other similar 'titles' which have not been considered here (e.g. *ya-han" da-gal'ma'*, and *shin da-ga*). Somewhat different titles are reserved for pagoda builders (*hpa-ya" da-ga*) and builders of monasteries (*kyaung" da-ga*). The terms *da-gal'ma'* refer specifically to those who look after the Four Requisites of the monks (food, robes, shelter and medicine).

15. This expression occurs sometimes with *bok-da' ba-tha* instead of *tha-tha-na*; for example, in Hi'tei-thi (1981: 31) there is reference to *bok-da' ba-tha nwe win hi'tei-thi thu-daw-zin*.

order; (d) the teachings about good and bad action; and (e) the good and bad consequences that flow from it'.

This fifth term is of recent origin and is not intelligible in other Buddhist communities.¹⁶ It is often found all in one reference with 'Burmese' such as in 'Burmese Buddhist' (*ba-ma bok-da' ba-tha*) and in such mundane references as 'Buddhists and the Problem of Spirit Worship'.¹⁷ Most English-Burmese dictionaries actually use this term to translate the English word 'Buddhist'. First, when used in contradistinction to members of other religions, it refers to Buddhists in the all-inclusive sense, including those 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*) as well as 'associates of Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na hnwe*), (e.g. the ordinary laity practising the elementary Buddhism described by Ko Lei" above).¹⁸ Secondly, it may also be used to distinguish between different Buddhists. For example, it may be used in one sentence along with 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*), in which case its meaning is restricted to the unordained who are in that grey area of being neither 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*) nor 'heretical' (*tha-tha-na pa' lu*).¹⁹ However, rarely if ever is this new term 'inside Buddhendom' used to refer to an exclusive group of monks, though it may be if the group includes some unordained persons.

These five terms are by no means clear-cut and are subject to debate amongst Buddhists. They operate according to what Sahlins (1985: xi) has called both 'prescriptive' as well as 'performative' criteria; i.e., by means of inherited conventions such as the ordination ceremony applied to monks and nuns, and by means of action, as applicable to hermits (renunciation) and meditators (meditation).

The 'prescribed' (publicly unambiguous by virtue of tradition and text) sense of 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*) as 'ordained' is essentially reserved for

16. Hok Sein (1978) translated the term *bok-da' ba-tha win* into Pali as 'one holding Buddhist views' (*bok-da' wa-di*).

17. This is the title of a book (*Bok-da' ba-tha win-mya" hnin' nat ko" gwe hmu' pyat-tha-na*) by U" Hla' Thein" Htut (date and publisher unknown to me) on a question of particular concern to the unordained, but hardly of relevance to monks.

18. A booklet available from the Department of Religious Affairs (Kan Nyun' 1982) is entitled *What Every Person Inside Bok-da' Ba-tha Should Know*. The same term *bok-da' ba-tha win* is used in Kan Min" (1949: 21).

19. A wide range of references suggest that *bok-da' ba-tha win* is often used with specific reference to Buddhist laity in general (of course it is also sometimes used for all Buddhists, including monks). Wi'thu'da uses a wide sample of these terms in his book. He writes, 'according to cultural customs inside Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha win tho' i da-lei' hton"zan a-ya'*) (1982: *ka'*). He also writes about 'Burmese Buddhists' (*bok-da' ba-tha myan-ma lu-myo"*) (ibid.: 171, 176), and about 'every Buddhist householder' (*bok-da' ba-tha win ein daung zu' daing"*). The Ma-ha-si (BTNA 1981: 40) preached to *bok-da' ba-tha win* on the meaning of the *ka-htein*. All these use our 'inside Buddhendom' notion, and definitely refer to the laity.

males. Nuns' ordination is not considered 'orthodox' in that it is not performed by at least four members belonging to a lineage which goes all the way back to the Buddha; nuns cannot prove such continuous lineage from the female monks in the days of the Buddha, and therefore their ordination ceremony cannot be publicly recognized. But I knew several nuns who — when I posed the question — argued that their ordination, shaven heads and robes entitled them to the status of 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*),²⁰ but this was disputed by many of my monk contacts.

But there are also 'performative' criteria by means of which many claim to be 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*). The simple act of renunciation into the forest is interpreted by some Buddhists as meaning that hermits are 'inside Buddhism' by virtue of their complete renunciation from the world and their living in the forest, despite the fact that no ordination has taken place.²¹ Also, the practice of *wi'pat-tha-na* meditation by the unordained may sometimes be interpreted as a criterion of whether he belongs to the 'inside Buddhism' category or not. This question was asked in Than" Maung (1979: 33): ' "Is *wi'pat-tha-na* outside Buddhism (*tha-tha-na pa*)?" ' The answer is "No". "What teachings (*ta-ya*)" exist outside Buddhism (*tha-tha-na*)?" Answer: "Charity, morality, and concentration *ta-ya*." ' In other words, this type of meditation is unique to Buddhism and is 'inside Buddhism'.

In sum, the criterion of ordination helps to distinguish between 'core' and 'peripheral' Buddhists; it puts monks 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*), and it relegates lay meditators, nuns, and hermits to the grey, contested areas where the

20. In *Tha-tha-na-yei*" (1980: 162, 163), on the question of the registration of all nuns, the term 'nun' is quite explicitly prefixed with *bok-da' ba-tha*, not *bok-da' tha-tha-na*, thus stressing that they are nuns by local Buddhist custom but not according to the formal procedures of the monastic community. On the other hand, I have encountered several nuns claiming that they are *tha-tha-na win*. One (from Le-di Daik, Mon-ywa) also claimed that the sponsors of the nun ordination ceremony should, like the sponsors of the novice and monk ordination ceremony, also be referred to as 'honourable mother' (*me-daw* — also applied to the mother of royalty) and 'noble father' (*hka-me-daw* — also applied to the father of royalty). She also claimed that nuns are 'daughters of the Buddha', just as monks and novices are 'sons of the Buddha'. Such use of language was suggested to be inappropriate by my monk informant. This particular nun also denied that unordained *wi'pat-tha-na* meditators are *tha-tha-na win*, because 'they have no Pali name and have no shaven heads'. Meeting some nuns in Moulmein, I found that monks had criticized nuns for using a monk's begging bowl on their alms round instead of their customary nun's tray. I interpret this dispute as underlying the disagreements about language referred to here.

21. For example, the question of whether a hermit should be considered 'inside the *tha-tha-na*' was discussed in detail in Ya-zein-da (1937: 65, 67). This can be compared with the members of a charity association who were considered 'members of the lineage of Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha nwe-win*) (Hi'tei-thi 1981: 31). The Ma-ha-si noted that Indonesia had no monasteries which could be considered 'members of the Buddha *tha-tha-na*' (*bok-da' tha-tha-na win hpon"gyi" kyaung*) (Thi-la-nan-da 1979: 136).

category 'inside Buddhism' shades off into 'associate of Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na hnwe*), 'member of Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha win*), and finally heretics and 'wrong-viewed' (*meik-hsa deik-hti*). Yet if the criterion of core membership becomes religious action rather than ordination, then unordained meditators or hermits may claim the core area for themselves and push out of the contest those monks who are merely ordained but not spiritually active.

I have on occasion overheard unordained meditators speak of themselves as 'monks of the ultimate truth' (*pa-ra-mat-ha' beik-hku'*) or even 'human monk' (*lu hpon"gyi"*). Since the term 'inside Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha-win*) is so diluted a reference with no status attached to it, many meditators prefer — in the conviction that they are enacting the Buddha's teachings in meditation — to use the category 'inside Buddhism' (*tha-tha-na win*) to describe their status as core Buddhists, equivalent in status to ordained monks. But the use of such language in public is controversial, as is their appropriation of the sacred vocabulary usually applied only to ordained monks.²²

4. *Conclusion*

In the context of prolonged interaction with non-Buddhist foreigners, the Burmese have adopted new terms for Buddhism and Buddhist. These function at two levels. At one level they refer to 'Buddhism' and 'Buddhist' in contradistinction to foreign 'wrong-viewed' religions and their adherents. But at another level the same terms help to discriminate Buddhendom as a cultural and parentally 'man-made' received religion, including its exponents, as distinct from a purer Buddhism (in the sense of *tha-tha-na*), which is monastically transmitted from the time of the Buddha in all its purity through ordination, scriptural learning, moral discipline, and meditative action.

In conclusion, I wish to make three points linked to this discussion about the terminology. First, many who have described Theravada Southeast Asian Buddhism assume 'Buddhism' and 'Buddhist' to hold true as phenomena across different communities. For example, Spiro (1970: 16) held the opinion with reference to Burmese Buddhism that the 'Burmese garb differs from its Thai or Sinhalese garb in only minor ways'. Yet we have noted how the English terms 'Buddhism' and 'Buddhist' collapse important distinctions in the Burmese

22. I have overheard conversations where unordained meditators used the following vocabulary normally reserved for monks: 'partaking of alms-food' (*hsun"za" de*) rather than 'eating' (*sa" de*); and 'I have partaken enough alms' (*pyi' zon ba bi*), rather than 'I am full' (*taw ba bi*). Even terms of address were drawn from the sacred vocabulary by some: 'yes, your honourable' (*tin ba*) instead of 'yes' (*hok ke'*); and 'your holiness's disciple' (*da-byi'daw*) instead of 'I' (*kyun-daw*).

vernacular. These distinctions are between the truths as they *are* (*da-ma'* or *ta-ya'*), as they were truthfully *taught* by the Buddha and *transmitted* or *realized* by the monastic community (*tha-tha-na*), and as they were distorted into a conventional attribute of a community of people irrespective of its inherent purity (*ba-tha*). 'Buddhists' come in different classes according to their relative distance from true knowledge. Proof of continuity of lineage through ordination makes one a 'member of Buddhism', direct support of this by making ordination possible makes one an 'inheritor of Buddhism', playing a general supportive role by taking initiatives beyond the Five Precepts of the unordained makes one an 'associate of Buddhism', and, finally, doing the minimum duties within Buddhism by keeping the Five Precepts makes one 'inside Buddhendom' (*bok-da'ba-tha-win*). The disputes that arise over whether the nuns, meditators, and hermits are 'inside Buddhism' or merely 'associates of Buddhism'/'inside Buddhendom', may be considered unnecessary by many of the more enlightened Burmese Buddhists, since all this dispute is about 'Buddhendom', about conventional language. However, the unavoidable choice of any one of these terms in Burmese commits the speaker/writer to this sense of hierarchy. English, not having evolved as a language spoken by a Buddhist community, is blind to these subtle distinctions in the vernaculars spoken by Buddhist communities.

Secondly, one consequence of mapping the Buddhist terrain in terms of our English categories is that what may *appear* to be an important change in Buddhism, is not in fact as important as all that. It has been remarked in much of the literature on 'modern Buddhism' across Theravada Southeast Asia that a process of 'laicization' has taken place, whereby the layman has come to play a central role in Buddhism. Considering the way some unordained meditators have a tendency to mark in language their status as 'core' Buddhists by using monastic language and by classifying themselves as monks as described above, one would be better off suggesting the reverse, namely that there has been a 'monasticization' of the unordained. The emphasis contemporary meditators put on being part of the *tha-tha-na* does not suggest the radical displacement of old roles by new roles and old institutions by new ones (even the terminology of meditation centres has largely been derived from the monastic terminology). The centrality of the monkhood (and the monastery) has not been challenged in the ideal and, by aspiring to a Buddhism of the monastery, the meditator in fact perpetuates an old order of Buddhism.

If the above two points are pertinent to the problematics of translatability between English and the vernacular, the third point I wish to make pertains to the problematics of the translatability between Pali and the vernacular, a problem which I have dubbed elsewhere the 'Pali trap' (Houtman 1990). For example, Pali *sappāya* according to Rhys Davids (Rhys Davids and Stede 1979) means 'suitable' or 'beneficial', yet this loanword into Burmese has come to mean something entirely different, namely 'lustrate a Buddha image or monk with water' and 'inspire to worship' (with reference to a pagoda or monk). In most prominent works on Buddhism in Thailand and Burma, Pali loanwords are routinely treated

in their more familiar Pali rather than their more elusive vernacular meanings. For example, both Spiro (1970) and Tambiah (1970, 1984) have treated most Pali loanwords in the vernacular as Pali rather than *vernacular* words. This is evident, too, in the way the terms are transcribed in Pali rather than the vernacular. We have already noted how, though made up of Pali loanwords, the Burmese term for Buddhendom has no established precedent in the scriptures. Furthermore, it is doubtful that even terms such as *tha-tha-na*, the way it is used in Burmese, correspond in all contexts to what we reconstruct as being the scriptural/commentarial 'Pali' meanings.

A native Burmese speaker suggested to me that in Burmese vernacular the term *tha-tha-na* is used in two ways: in its standard 'Buddhist' way (i.e. Pali *sāsana*) which is intelligible without the need for further explanation across Buddhist communities, and in a Burmese way. The first includes all the standard definitions noted above. Examples of the second might be when the term 'this insults the *tha-tha-na*' (*tha-tha-na saw ka" de*) is used for Muslims who hang out a woman's dress on the monastery fence in Moulmein, which has happened in recent years and which has greatly angered Burmese Buddhists. This sense of *tha-tha-na* has been overtaken by the Burmese cultural distinction between ordained and unordained, and between male and female. If such an expression and its underlying idea have no precedent in the scriptures, then this latter meaning serves as an example of 'Buddhendom' (*bok-da' ba-tha*), best understood in its Burmese historical and contemporary context.

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