Before we go about in detail the expansion of Buddhism in South East Asia, let’s throw some light on the historical background of the expansion of Buddhism during and after Buddha’s time.

During the time of the Buddha Buddhism flourished in several important places in India. Dr. Nalinaksa Dutt mentions:

During the life time of the Buddha, the religion spread all over the central belt of India from Kajangala and Campa on the east to Veranja and Avanti on the west, and from Rajagriha and Varanasi to Kausambi, Sravasti and Saketa on the north, as also to the various tribes inhabiting the Himalayan foothills.

Dr. A.C. Banerjee also writes:

Buddhism during Buddha’s life time was not confined to the limits of Majjimadesa. It travelled outside its boundary. It had thus a rapid progress. Towards the east it has spread to Kanjangala, to the west of Veranja close to Mathura and to the north to the land of the Kuru.

Here is the list of the names of several places where in the time of the Buddha Buddhism prevailed.

1. Kasi
2. Rajgrha
3. Gaya and Uruvela
4. Nalanda
5. Kosala
6. Savatthi
7. Kapilavastu
8. Vaisali
9. Kusinara or Kusinagara and Pava
10. Kausambi
11. Avanti
Sixteen Arhats

After Sariputra and Maudgalyana passed into nirvana 150000 Arhats, having the ability to abandon existence at will, followed them into nirvana. Although there were more than eighteen thousand Arhats still living, the Buddha knew that most of these Arhats would wish to follow him into nirvana. Concerned for the Sangha’s welfare, the Buddha requested that sixteen Great Arhats remain in the world and watch over the Dharma as long as beings were capable of benefiting from the teachings. The names of these Sixteen Arhats were:

1. Ayusman Angaja
2. Ayusman Ajita
3. Ayusman Vanavasin
4. Ayusman Mahakalika
5. Ayusman Vajriputra
6. Ayusman Sribhadra
7. Ayusman Kanakavatsa
8. Ayusman Kanakabharadvaja
9. Ayusman Bakula
10. Ayusman Rahula
11. Ayusman Cudapanthaka
12. Ayusman Pindola Bharadvaja
13. Ayusman Panthaka
14. Ayusman Nagasena
15. Ayusman Gopaka
16. Ayusman Abheda

The First Council

Although the Buddha charged the Sixteen Arhats with protecting the vitality of the Dharma for future generations, he appointed Mahakasypa to care for the Sangha after he was gone. Just after the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha, Subhadra who became a monk in his old age, openly told other monks in Kusinagara: “Do not grieve, do not lament. We are happily rid of the Great Sramana. We used to be annoyed by being told: ‘This beseems you, this beseems you not.’ But now we shall be able to do what we like, and what we do not like, we shall not have to do.” On hearing his speech Mahakasyapa, the chief disciple of the Buddha felt sorry and was anxious about the discipline in the Sangha. That is why he gave a proposal that a council of five hundred arhats should meet to rehearse the teachings of the Buddha. He proposed it in order to establish a canon of the Dhamma and of the discipline of the Sangha. Following was the details of the Convocation (Sanghayana)
Ajatasatru in his early days was hostile towards Buddhism but later on he patronised it and gave his full support. Mahakasyapa and Ananda died in the reign of Ajatasatru. Before his death Ananda converted five hundred hermits who were brahmanas. Their leader was Madhyantia, who at the request of Ananda, went to Kashmir to introduce Buddhism there. After Ajatasatru, several kings like Ubayibhadda, Anuruddha, Munda and Nagadasaka ascended the throne of Magadha and they ruled simultaneously for fifty years. But we do not hear anything about the progress of Buddhism in the reigns of these kings who were neither religious nor made any contribution to its propagation. With the death of Nagadasaka, Sisunaga, his minister too the throne and Vaisali was his capital. After him Kalasoka, his son became king. He was the king of Magadha for about twenty-eight years. It was during his reign the Second Buddhist Council was held at Vaisali.

The Second Buddhist Council

Initiator: Revata, Yasa & Sabbakami
Place: Vaisali
Patron: Kalasoka
No. of Participating Arhats: 700
Issue making agenda: 10 Unvinayic Acts
Result: Schism in the Old Tradition of Sthaviravada (Sthaviravada and Mahasanghika)
Time: 100 years after the parinirvana of Lord Buddha

One hundred years after the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha, the second Council was held in Vaisali in order to examine and to suppress the practices of ten Unvinayic Acts of a group of the Vajjian or Vesalian Monks. The conclusion of the council was that the ten rules followed by the Vajjian monks were unlawful and were not permissible.

---

1 The ten Unvinayic Acts are: 1. The practice of carrying salt in a horn for use when needed. 2. The practice of taking food after mid-day. 3. The practice of going to a neighbouring village and taking a second meal there the same day, committing thereby the offence of overeating. 4. The observances of uposathas in different places within the same sima. 5. The practice of doing an ecclesiastical act and obtaining its sanction afterwards. 6. The practice of use of precedents as authority. 7. The practice of drinking milk-whey after meal. 8. The drinking of fermenting palm-juice which is not yet toddy. 9. The use of a borderless sheet to sit. 10. The acceptance of gold and silver.
Just after the Second Buddhist council some Vajjian monks did not want to remain in the Sangha of the Theravadins and they formed a new Sangha of 10000 monks known as the Mahasangikas. The second Buddhist council marked the first division to the Sangha. After some time these two sects were divided into several sects. The total number of sects existed at that time was eighteen. The orthodox sthaviravada sect was further subdivided into eleven sects known as Mahisasaka, Dharmaguptika, Sarvastivada, Kasyapiya, Haimavata, Sankrantika (Sautrantika) and Suttavada, Vatsiputiya, Sammitiya, Dharmottariya, Bhadrayaniya and Sannagarika or Channagarika. The Mahasanghikas were also divided into seven sects known as the Gokulika, Pannattivada (Prajnaptivada), Bahusrutiya, Cetiyavada (or Caityika), Ekvyavaharika, Purvasaila and Aparasaila.

The reign of Kalasoka was significant in the religious history of India. It was because of the Second Buddhist Council his reign was memorable in the history of Buddhism. The next important king who ascended the throne after Kalasoka was Nanda or Mahapadma or Mahapadmapati. He patronised Buddhism. After him Candragupta came to the throne of Magadha and he ruled for twenty four years. Then he was succeeded by his son Bindusara. Though he did not show any interest towards Buddhism yet the progress and development of Buddhism continued. At that time several sects shifted their centers to different places in India. Avanti was the centre of activities of the Theravadins. The Sarvastivadins went towards south and selected Mysore as their place. The Mahasanghikas established themselves in the Andhra country.

King Asoka

After Bindusara his son Asoka took the throne of the Maurya empire in the third century BC. He was one of the greatest figures in Indian history. Buddhism, upto the middle of the third century BC, flourished in the Middle country of the Buddhists, Andhra country and Ujjjeni and Mathura. But Buddhism, under king Asoka, flourished beyond its limit. After his Kalinga war he came under the influence of Buddhism and became a Buddhist. Previously Asoka was called a cruel Asoka or Chanda Asoka due to his depotic behaviour but the Kalinga war which took place in the ninth year after his coronation brought a complete change in his mind. It marked a turning point in his career. After his conversion to Buddhism he showed his great devotion to it and played a great role to propagate the teachings of the Buddha not only within the borders of his dingdom but also outside. He was only Indian king who made Buddhism an international religion.

King Asoka established his contact with Upagupta, the famous Buddhist monk of Mathura. The former told him that he was ready to give up his life, son, wife, palace, wealth and kingdom for the sake of the religion of the Buddha. He visited the holy places and built many stupas and pillars there. He took out the relics distributed after the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha and then re-distributed them with an idea that relic-tupas (relic stupas) could be erected in different places of India and abroad.

During Asoka’s time the third council was also held.
Place: Pataliputta
Leadership: Moggaliputta tissa Thera
Issue: Separation of orthodox doctrine and vinayas from the non-orthodox ones and heretical ones.
Patron: Asoka
Duration: nine months

After the conclusion of the council Moggaliputta Tissa under Asoka’s patronage sent religious missions to nine different countries for the introduction, development and spread of Buddhism. Here is given below the names of the monks and the countries of Moggaliputta Tissa’s mission:

- Madhyadina to Kasmir and Gandhar
- Mahadeva to Mahisamandala
- Raksita to Vanavasi
- Dharmaraksita to Aparanta
- Mahadharmaraksita to Yona countries
- Majjhima to Himavanta (Himalayan region)
- Sona and Uttara to Suvarnabhumi (Burma)
- Mahinda to Tamradvipa (Sri Lanka)

The session of the Third Buddhist Council and the sending of the religious missions to nine different countries by Moggaliputta Tissa after this council were the most important events in the history of Buddhism. This was for the first time in the history that the Buddhist monks went to foreign countries to propagate the teachings of the Buddha. India and the countries, belonging to the region now known as South and South-east Asia, were familiar with each other from the time of the Buddha. Several Jatakas refer to sea voyages of merchants from India to this region. The third Buddhist Council was an important landmark in the history of Buddhism. It produced important results in Ceylon, Burma and other places of south-east Asia.

**Expansion of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)**

According to the Mahavamsa, the Great Chronicle of the Theravadin tradition, in the time before the Parinirvana of the Buddha, Sri Lanka was inhabited only by the yaksas, nagas and other non-humans. The first human inhabitants of the island are said to have been seven hundred refugees from India who arrived in Sri Lanka on the very day of the Buddha’s Parinirvana. The Leader of the seven hundred (all of whom had been exiled because of their violent dispositions) was Vijaya, son of Sihabahu, King of the Vanga country (modern Bengal). Vijaya became the King and abandoned his violent behavior and ruled Lanka in peace and righteousness.

After Vijaya’s reign Panduvasudeva from South India ruled Sri Lanka. After him three kings namely, Abhaya, Pandukabhaya, and Mitasiva established the Simhala Dynasty,
named after the Simhala (Lion) clan. The island they ruled became known as Simhala: the people who inhabited the island became known as Simhali and their language as Sinhalese. Between 236 and 276 years after the Buddha’s parinirvana, Devanampiyatissa came to the throne; it was he who welcome Asoka’s son Mahinda and supported the establishment of the Dharma in Sri Lanka.

In this way, Buddhism was introduced to Ceylon by the therī Mahinda in third century BC or 236 BE or 250 BC in the reign of Devanampiyatissa. The Mahavamsa records that Devanampitissa sent a large shipment of priceless gems as gift to the Dharma King Asoka, and Asoka responded with gifts of friendship to the Sri Lankan king. Soon afterwards, Asoka either sent or supported sending bhikkhus out to propagate the Dharma in lands beyond the boundaries of Magadha. Among these bhikkhus was his son, the great Thera Mahinda who traveled to Sri Lanka from Vedisa, accompanied by five disciples, Mahinda’s Nephew Sumana and the lay disciple Bhanduka. The Mahavamsa records that Mahinda and his disciples traveled to Sri Lanka through the air, landing at Missaka Mountain (modern Mahintale). King Devanampiyatissa was out hunting a stag, and came upon the shaven headed bhiksus and at first mistook them for supernatural beings. Finally convinced that the bhikkhus were indeed human, the king took refuge in the Dharma along with five hundred of his attendants. With great respect, he welcome the bhikkhus into Anuradhapura, his capital city, and invited them to teach Dharma to him and his subjects.

A great multitude assembled to hear the teachings, and eight thousand people attained the first stage of liberation. When the Queen Anula and her five hundred attendants requested ordination, Mahinda, unable to ordain women, sent to Pataliputra for his sister, the bhikkhuni Sanghamitta. At Mahinda’s request Sanghamitta brought with her to Sri Lanka a branch of Bodhi tree and the king planted it in the garden of Mahamegha.

The king had a great monastic complex of buildings, gardens, and ponds built in this area (Anuradhapura), which became known as the Mahavihara, the great dwelling place of the Sangha. The Mahavihara, the seat of Theravāda Buddhism, played an important role in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The king also built a vihara on Mt. Missaka for the Sangha’s observance of the rainy season retreat (varsavasa). He also constructed Cetiyaūpabāṭa vihara there. In the first year of the Dharma in Sri Lanka, King Devanampiyatissa performed twelve great actions on behalf of the Sangha. The king continued his good works for the rest of his life.

Asoka’s daughter Sanghamitta ordained Queen Anula and her five hundred attendents, and her brother Mahinda ordained Aritta, Devanampiyatissa’s son, together with his five hundred followers. Both Anula and Aritta, as well as Aritta’s fifty-five brothers, became Arhats, and the Sanghas of bhikkhus and bhikkhnis were firmly established.

At the king’s invitation, Mahinda led the recital of the Dhamma (Suttas) and Vinaya, and Arittha spoke on the sources of the Vinaya. In the Theravadin tradition, this is known as the Fourth council (not to be confused with the fourth council held by Kaniska in India), the assembly that established the roots of the Sangha in Sri Lanka.

---

2 Lanka or Sri Lanka, has also been known in India as Tamrapani, Simhaladvipa and Ceylon.
3 In Anuradhapura he constructed the Mahavihara, Cetiyaūpabāṭa Vihara and the Thuparama; he planted the Bodhi tree, erected a beautiful stone pillar, enshrined the collarbone relic, and built the Issarasamana vihara, Tissa pool, the Pathama Thupa. The Vessagiri Vihara and the first two bhikkhuni viharas, Upasika Vihara and Hatthalhaka Vihara.
King Devanampiyatissa reigned forty years. After his death his younger brother Uttiya became king. In the eighth year of Uttiya’s reign the great Arhat Mahinda passed away at the Cetiya-pabbata Vihara during the rainy season retreat. The place where Mahinda was cremated was named Isihumangana, the Courtyard of the Sage.

Mahinda’s sister, Sanghamitta passed away a year later at the age of fifty-nine. After the reign of Uttiya who ruled for ten years, Mahasiva and Suratissa, his brothers ruled the country. Then this dynasty was interrupted for twenty two years when Sena and Guttaka, sons of Damila (Tamil) horse-merchant, usurped the throne.

**Dutthagamani and Vattagamini**

Elara and thirty-one other Damila rulers were eventually overthrown by Dutthagamini, who united all of Lanka under one rule. Dutthagamini vigorously supported the Sangha’s expansion. He built next to Mahavihara the nine storied Lohapasada inland with coral and precious jewels. Similarily he constructed many viharas and Buddhist monuments like Maricavatti vihara, Mahathupa etc. Mahathupa was completed by Dutthagamini’s son and successor Saddhatissa. It is known today as Ruvanveli Dagaba. Saddhatissa ruled from 80-62 BC and was followed by four other Sinhalese kings. In 44 CE Vattagamani came to the throne.

A few months later, however the Damilas of South India once again invaded and drove Vattagamani from the throne. Sri Lanka was then ruled by a succession of five Damila kings. After fourteen years Vattagamani, supported by the royal ministers and the Sangha, overcame the last Damila ruler and restored Simhali rule to Sri Lanka in 29 BC.

The Saddhamma samgaha relates that fifty seven years after the founding of the Great Thupa, Vattagamani abhaya built great vihara of Abhayagiri and near it a magnificent stupa; later enlarged to a height of 105 meters, the Abhayagiri stupa is the largest in all of Sri Lanka. Vattagamani then donated the Abhayagiri Monastery to the Thera Mahatissa, who had supported him throughout fourteen years of exile. However this instigated a long standing rivalry between the conservative bhikkhus of the Mahavihara and the bhikkhus of the Abhayagiri Vihara, who were from the outset more open to new insights and developments.

From this rivalry two factions emerged within the Theravadin tradition - the Mahaviharavasins and the Abhayagirivisins (Dharmaruci sect). Soon after the Mahaviharavasins expelled the Abhayagirivisins from their community arousing the king’s displeasure. New subschools arose within the Abhayagirivisins; in the fourth century, one of these new schools moved into the Jetavana monastery recently founded in Anuradhapura, from which they became known as Jetavaniyas. Eventually the Mahaviharavasins, who maintained close relationships with the Sri Lankan rulers prevailed and the Abhayagirivisins ceased to exist as a distinct school.

During the reign of King Vattagamini, the sacred tripitaka texts were transcribed in its own script. So new script known as Sinhalese Script was developed for the first time for that purpose. This was a quite difficult job. According to Dipavamsa, in this way, it was ensured that the Sangha would endure for five thousand years. The earth quaked at the completion of this work, and many wonders manifested in the world. In the Theravadin tradition, this assembly is known as the Fifth Council.
In the fifth century, during the reign of King Mahanama, three Indian scholars - Buddhaghosa, Buddhadatta and Dharma - travelled to Sri Lanka in search of the ancient commentaries (Atthakatha). Buddhaghosa wrote Visuddhimagga, Samantapasadika an extensive commentary on the Vinayapitaka (Atthakatha) and the Kankavitaraṇi, a commentary on the Patimokkha as well as commentaries on each of the five Nikayas of the Suttapitaka. He also composed Athasalini, Sammoha vinodani, Pancappakarana atthakatha.

Buddhadatta is highly regarded for his work in translating and systematizing the Abhidharma; he may also have been responsible for preparing the Uttaravinicchaya, a compendium of Vinaya.

Dharmapala completed the great work of editing and translating the ancient commentaries into Pali; specially, he prepared the Paramatthadipani, a commentary on the Thera and therigathas as well as commentaries on other books of the Khuddaka Nikaya. He also composed at least six subcommentaries, three of which appear to be lost today.

**Theravada Buddhism becomes the State Religion**

Sri Lanka attracted masters from all Buddhist traditions, and all flourished briefly on the island around the third and fourth centuries. In the third century, the Mahayana teachings found a receptive audience among the bhikkhus of the Abhayagiri school, and the Vajrayana, based on the Prajnaparamita and Tantra teachings, took root in the eight and ninth centuries. But all traditions depended on royal support for survival; most Sinhalese kings favored the Theravadin tradition as upheld by the more conservative Mahavihara bhikkhus.

When communication with the mainland weakened, traditions unable to generate local support could not survive. The Vajrayana tradition was strong for a time but disappeared after King Vijayabahu revived Theravada as the state religion in the eleventh century. The Abhayagiri school persisted the longest; it was finally absorbed into the Mahavihara tradition in the twelfth century. Since that time, the island of Sri Lanka has been exclusively Theravadin.

The eleventh century ushered in a series of foreign invasions that seriously weakened Sinhalese rule as well as the Sangha. Hindu Tamils, Portuguese, Dutch, and English occupied the island in turn, with adverse effects on the study and practice of Buddhism. Three times the Vinaya lineage had to be revitalized by bhikkhus from other Theravadin countries. A new period of revival began under British rule during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, supported by Western interest in the Buddhist teachings. Today the Theravadin tradition continues strongly in Sri Lanka, upholding a tradition more than two thousand years old.

**Expansion of Buddhism in Burma or Myanmar (Suvarna Bhumi)**

Buddhism in Burma (or Myanmar) is predominantly of the Theravada tradition or the southern school. About 89% of Burmese practice Buddhism. It is the most religious Buddhist country in terms of proportion of monks in the population and proportion of income spent on religion.[2] Adherents are most likely found among the dominant ethnic Bamar (or Burmans), Shan, Rakhine (Arakanese), Mon, Karen, and Chinese who are well integrated into Burmese society. Among
ethnic Bamar, Theravada Buddhism is practised often in conjunction with nat worship. Monks, collectively known as the Sangha are venerated members of Burmese society.

The importance of Buddhism in the history of Burma is evident from a landscape dominated by pagodas which is why the country is often called "the land of pagodas." The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon is steeped in myth and legend, and represents the people's faith who have worshipped there for generations. Every village in Burma has a pagoda and a monastery, the traditional places for worship and education.

In recent years Burma or Myanmar has attained special eminence in the Buddhist world. Between 1954 and 1956, the country hosted the Sixth Great Buddhist Council and it has also been the source from which several of the foremost systems of Vipassana meditation have spread to the rest of the world.

The source of information for history of Myanmar is the Śāsanavamsa. The Śāsanavamsa is a chronicle written in Pāli by a bhikkhu Pañnāsāmi, for the fifth Buddhist Council held in Mandalay in 1867.

The history of Buddhism in Burma may be traced back to the time of Buddha when Tapussa and Bhallika from Yangon brought from the Buddha eight hairs to be enshrined in Swedagaon Caitya.

There is a tradition in Burma, as there is in Sri Lanka, that the Buddha himself visited the country.

The earliest historical record of the spread of Buddhism into the present day Burma is the account of the Ceylonese chronicles like Mahavamsa according to which King Asoka sent a mission consisting of Theras Sona and Uttara into Suvannabhumi to disseminate the Buddhist religion.

This country can be indentified as the country of the Mons. But the Mons do not appear to have been finally converted to Buddhism until several centuries after Asoka, having previously adopted Hindu cults of Indian origin side by side with Buddhism. Pyu and Arakan were the earliest Burmese states to be influenced by north Indian culture and became adherents of the Hindu Visnu cult and of Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism.

The Pyu state was conquered in 832 by a Tibeto Burmese Nan Chao. The real Burmese or Mranma (called Myamma today), who were related to the Pyu, had already penetrated into Irrawaddy plain where they were said to have founded their capital Pagan in 849. Although they still followed their old animist tribal religion, they soon came under the influence of tantric Buddhism which the Pyu had adopted.

The introduction of Theravada in the Burmese state by King Anuruddha or Anawrahta (1044-77) was the crucial turning-point in Burma's religious history. Burmese chronicles report that Anuruddha was converted by a Mon monk called Shin Arhan.

The kingdom of the dynasty of Pagan was destroyed by the invasion of the Mongols from China under Kubilai Khan in 1287. In the years that followed, during which the country disintegrated into small states, the Shan tribes which linguistically and ethnically belong to the Thai peoples settled in large areas of Burma, while the Mons regained their independence in the south. Pegu now became their capital. Their great king Dhammaceti (1472-92) introduced
an important reform in the Buddhist Sangha. A long sequence of bloody wars between Burma and Thailand started in the 16th century and severely unsettled both countries.

In 1752 the Burmese king Alaungpaya (1752-60) rose as a cruel monarch and was responsible for the downfall of the Burmese empire, by giving in to the British rulers.

One of the most remarkable Burmese kings of the last dynasty was Bodawpaya (1781-1819) who improved the administration of the country with the help of a general census and the imposition of higher taxes.

In 1826, after the first Anglo-Burmese war, Burma had to cede Arakan and Tenasserim and in 1852, after the second war, all of lower Burma was handed over. The Kingdom now limited to upper Burma, experienced another cultural flowering under its penultimate ruler, Mindon (1853-78). He convened the Fifth Buddhist council in 1871 to carry out a revision of the holy scriptures. When the texts had been verified by this assembly, they were engraved on 729 marble tablets and erected within the precincts of the Kuthodaw pagoda in Mandalay. These and other reforms made Mandalay at this time the spiritual centre of Theravada Buddhism.

After the third Anglo-Burmese war, upper Burma was in 1885, incorporated in the British India Empire.

The Kingdom of Burma had to a large extent cut itself off from the outside world. Since Burma was administered as a province of India, a great many Indians from all parts of the sub-continent poured into the country. Many of the inexperienced Burmese peasants found themselves tenant farmers of Indian rentiers.

The identification of the Burmese with their hereditary religion was still strengthened by the fact that the British conquerors and Indian immigrants belonged to other religions (Christianity, Hinduism and Islam). It is therefore not surprising that the saying ‘To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist’ is a very good description of an essential feature of Burmese efforts to preserve national self-determination. This was the reason why from the beginning, Buddhist revival movements and Burmese independence movements were closely linked. In 1906 the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) was founded in Rangoon.

Burma was part of the British empire until it was granted independence in 1948 when U Nu became the first Prime Minister. In the period of U Nu after 1947, Sixth Buddhist council was held from 1954 to 1956 in an artificial cave (Mahapasanaguha) beside the ‘World Peace’ pagoda in Rangoon. Monks from all Theravada Buddhist countries gathered to carry out a thorough revision of the canonical texts. U Nu’s attempts to develop a form of “Buddhist Socialism” with Buddhist as the state religion ultimately failed when General Ne Win led a coup in 1962 from which time onwards the country has been ruled by a military junta (SLORC). The regime is not hostile to Buddhism, which remains strong, and eighty-five percent of the populations are Theravada Buddhists. However, Buddhist pro-democracy advocates, such as Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, have been placed under house arrest and human rights abuses are commonplace. The country presently remains isolated from the international community.
The original inhabitants of Thailand were the Mons; their cultural centres were at Lvo or Lopburi and further south at Dvaravati, in what is now central Thailand. Then Hinduism also flourished in Dvaravati.

In the reign of King Suryavarman of Angkor (A.D. 1010-50) the plains of central Siam came under Cambodian domination, which lasted in full force for over two centuries and in attenuated form for about a century more. It was at that time that the Thais slowly moved from their home in southern China into most parts of present-day Thailand (Siam), Laos and the Shan hills of eastern Burma. Their descendants are the Siamese (central Thai), the Thai Yüan (northern Thai) and the Lao and the Shan peoples. All these groups gradually accepted Theravada Buddhism, most probably under the influence of the earlier Mon inhabitants of the country where they settled.

In about 1260, the kingdom of Sukhotai freed itself from Khmer overlordship. King Rama Khamheng (c. 1275-1317) made Theravada the official religion in document in the Thai script, which was developed from Khmer writing.

The grandson of Rama Khamheng, Lu Thai (acceded as viceroy c. 1340, as king 1347), invited monks famous from their learning and austerity from Ceylon (some of them coming through lower Burma) to strengthen the purity of the Thai Sangha. The successive visits of Sinhalese monks not only gave a great fillip to learning in Pali literature both sacred and secular, but also gave Buddhism in Sukhotai a church organization or government on the Sinhalese model.

The heritage of Sukhotai was taken over by the Thai kingdom of Ayudhya, which existed from 1350 until 1767. During that time Cambodia became a dependency of the Thai kings, but the Thais themselves were deeply influenced by Khmer culture. A good deal of the customs and ritual later labelled ‘court Brahminism’ probably dates back to the reign of King Trilok (1442-87), who re-organized his kingdom’s administration on the model of Angkor.

Other kings of Ayudhya also concerned themselves with affairs of the Sangha. Songdharm (1610-28) was interested in safeguarding the purity of the canon and made a royal edition of the tripitaka; he also built near Saraburi a shrine to the footprints of the Buddha which still draws pilgrims both monk and lay.

In the reign of Maha Dhammaraja II (1733-58) Buddhist culture seems to have flowered in Ayudhya, producing a bloom the fame of which reached Ceylon. The Sinhalese king Kirti Sri sent three missions to Ayudhya in about 1750 to bring Siamese monks to his kingdom to give ordination to Ceylonese monks. Of these three missions only the last was successful. It was warmly received by the king, who sent a delegation of monks to Ceylon under Phra Upali. The monks remained in Ceylon for three years and in 1753 ordained monks who formed the nucleus of the sect known as the Siyam Nikaya.

In 1767 the city and the kingdom of Ayudhya were destroyed by Burmese invaders, but King Taksin (1767-82) restored Thailand’s independence. He made Thonburi, on the Menam river, his new capital city. He was, however, dethroned by the first king of the present Chakri dynasty, Rama I (1782-1809) who moved the capital across the river to Bangkok. Both these rulers initiated reforms of the Sangha and they caused a collection of the
scriptures to be made. Rama I also issued regulations for rituals in order to ensure that such practice did not contravene Buddhist tenets.

The greatest reformer of Thai Buddhism was, however, **King Rama IV** or **Mongkut** (1851-68) who had been a bhikkhu (monk) for 27 years before he became the king of Siam. When he was still a monk, he started a reformist group in the Sangha which was called **Dhammayuttika-Nikaya** and followed a stricter discipline than the majority of the Sangha, which called Mahanikaya. When Mongkut became king, the Mahanikaya was also subjected to a thorough reform. After that, state and religion in Thailand became even more closely associated than before, and attempts have been made to justify government policy by Buddhist principles, e.g. when the Supreme Patriarch made an allocution to explain Siam’s entry into the First World War in 1917.

**Expansion of Buddhism in Laos**

The earliest traces of Buddhist influence in Laos date back to the 12th century, but it was only with the creation of the kingdom of Laos around 1350 that Theravada became the official religion. The man who accomplished this coalescence of several small states into one kingdom, Fa Ngum, is said to have been brought up at the Angkor court and to have married the daughter of King Jayavarman Paramesvara (1327-1353). The detail of the story is: Around the 14th century, one of the king’s wives was seduced by his son Phi Fa, heir apparent to the throne. For his sin, Phi Fa was banished. He and his son Fa Ngum journeyed south and took up residence in the Khmer royal court at Angkor. There, Fa Ngum studied under a Theravadin monk, gained favor of the Khmer king and eventually married one of his daughters. In about 1350, the king of Angkor provided Fa Ngum with an army so that he could reassert control over his father’s lost inheritance. It is said that Jayavarman, in whose time Cambodia had come under the influence of Siamese monks, exhorted his son-in-law to rule his kingdom according to Buddhist principles, and sent to him a party of monks bearing the Pali scriptures and a Ceylonese statue of the Buddha, called the Luang Prabang. This statue was installed at Fa Ngum’s residence at Muong Swa, which is now called Luang Prabang after this image. Theravada has remained the religion of the Lao people ever since.

When the Communist took over in Laos in 1975, the Sangha lost its traditional influence. It seems, however, that at least some of the monasteries are still allowed to exist, though under various restrictions. The aged Supreme Patriarch of Laos fled across the Mekong river into Thailand in 1979; soon afterwards the government declared a new policy under which the Sangha is expected to provide support and validation for the new political order.

**Expansion of Buddhism in Cambodia**

Cambodia - an area of seventy thousand square miles in the Mekong valley - has a sparse population of which the Khmers make up seventy percent. Ethnically related to the Mons of Burma and Siam, the Khmers were the makers of Cambodian history.
The story of Cambodia for the nine centuries prior to the abandonment of Angkor in 1431 has been reconstructed by the patient labours of French scholars and archaeologists. The Khmers themselves had no tradition of historiography and left no chronicles like those of Ceylon or Burma. The events of the six centuries when Angkor was capital of Cambodia are however, amply documented by the large number of stone inscriptions found there.

Together with Burma and Thailand, Cambodia is part of that large area of Southeast Asia in which Indian cultural influence was the sociologically dominant and formative force. The states within this bloc have been described by coedes as ‘Hinduized States’. Their ancient kings bore Sanskrit names; their government and administration followed the norms of Hindu polity and Brahminical jurisprudence. In these states Brahminism and Mahayana Buddhism appear to have flourished, but later on Theravada Buddhism became predominant.

Much of the considerable resources of Cambodia in its heyday was spent in glorifying and maintaining so called devaraja (‘divine king’) cult in which the ruler was identified with the god. Large sums were used for temple building, for maintaining enormous numbers of attendants for rituals, for elaborate ceremonial and the upkeep of seminaries and places of religious learning. Most of these elements of Cambodian civilization were derived from Hindu India. According to one theory the devaraja cult was introduced by Jayavarman II early in the 9th century.

Several of the kings of Angkor professed Mahayana Buddhism in its Indian form. In the inscriptions left by these Angkor kings the Buddha is often invoked along with brahminical deities. The Angkor pantheon was a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist deities and deified persons, exemplified by the Devaraja. The temples which enshrined these religious beliefs are breathtaking. The most famous are Phra Viham, Angkor Wat, and the Bayon. But the drain on the country’s resources caused by building and maintaining these and numerous other temples was eventually diastrous. The last of them were built at the close of the 14th century. All the state’s resources both human and material had been channelled to this end, and the resultant social injustice gave rise to two serious revolts during the ‘classic’ period of Angkor. Cambodia was ripe for the egalitarian teaching of Theravada Buddhism.

The date of the beginning of Cambodia’s conversion to Theravada Buddhism is not known, although it is first documented by an inscription in a private temple conjecturally dated A.D. 1230 in the reign of Indravarman II. The religion’s progress in the country is obscure, but once introduced it appears to have made vigorous headway among the common folk of Cambodia. King Jayavarman Paramesvara came to throne in 1327, embraced the new religion and Sanskrit was replaced by Pali as the language of religious rituals and sacred texts.

It has been assumed by many that Siamese monks were the pioneers of Theravada in Cambodia, although this cannot be verified. Later on, there were close connection between Buddhists of both countries and in 1864, the Dhammayuttika Nikaya was introduced from Siam as a reformist group within the Sangha. A hierarchy was instituted in the Sangha after the model of Siam.

When the Khmer Rouge too over in 1975, traditional Khmer Buddhism was completely destroyed and most monks were murdered. It was only after the Vietnamese invasion in 1979 that religious life was allowed again and a few monasteries were reopened.
EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM IN INDONESIA

Before the arrival of Brahmanism and Buddhism, people believed that nature had supernatural power. Trees and stones were worshipped as sacred object where beings with supernatural power reside.

Buddhism had very little hold on the people of the island of Java at the beginning of the 5th century AD. Fa-hien, who visited this island (c.414 AD), observes that while other forms of religion particularly Brahmanism, flourished in this island. “Buddhism in it is not worth mentioning.” But, thanks to the missionary zeal of Gunavarman (an Indian monk), Buddhism was not only introduced but obtained a stronghold on the island in less than a quarter of a century after Fa-hien’s visit.

Buddhism was also introduced early in the island of Sumatra particularly in the kingdom of Sri-vijaya, which is usually identified with Palembang. It appears from some inscriptions found in this region that the King who ruled Sri-vijaya in the year 683-684 AD was a Buddhist. The famous Chinese traveller, I-tsing, who visited India in the last quarter of the seventh century AD says that the king of Sri vijaya, as well as the rulers of neighboring states favored Buddhism, and that Sri vijaya was a very important centre of Buddhist learning in the islands of souther Asia. The Buddhist priests in Sri vijaya numbered more than a thousand and they studied all the subjects oas in Madhyadesa (India). I-tsing spent some time in Sri-vijaya in order to study Buddhist scriptures and he has left a very interesting account of the popularity of Buddhism in the islands of the Southern Sea, consisting of more than ten countries. He gives a list of these ten countries and states that “Buddhism is embraced in all these and other smaller islands, and mostly the system of Hinayana is adopted except in Malaya (Sri vijaya) where there were a few who belong to the Mahayana.”

The importance of Indonesia as a great centre of Buddhism from the seventh till the eleventh century AD is also proved by other facts. Dharmapala, a famous professor of Nalanda University, visited Suvarnadvipa, which was a general designation of Indonesia, in the seventh century A.D. The famous monk and scholar Atisa Dipankara (11th century AD), who became the head of Vikramasila University and inaugurated the second period of Buddhism in Tibet, went in his early life to Suvarnadvipa in order to study Buddhism under the guidance of its High priest Dharmakirti. A strong impetus to the Mahayana was given by the Sailendra dynasty, who ruled over the Malay Peninsula and a large part of Indonesia during the eight and ninth century. The Sailendra kings were great patrons of this form of Buddhism and erected monumental structures like Borobudur, Kalasan and Mendut in Java. It appears from epigraphic records that one of the Sailendra kings had a guru (preceptor) from the Gauda country (Bengal). There is hardly any doubt that the Pala kings of Bengal and the Chola rulers of the South exercised great influence upon Java in religious matters during the Sailendra period. The Sailendra kings established monasteries at Nalanda and Nagapattinam and the Pala and the Chola emperors granted villages for their maintenance. Under the influence of the Sailendras, Mahayana flourished in Java and Sumatra for a long period. But the influence of Bengal seems also to have been responsible for the introduction of Tantric Buddhism both in Java and Sumatra.

During the rule of the Majapahit kingdom between 13th to 15th century, Buddhism and Hinduism coexisted peacefully. After the fall of Majapahit, Islam was brought to Indonesia by
traders from Gujarat India. The influence of Buddhism started to decrease substantially after that, and was mainly confined to the areas of Eastern Java and Bali.

In 1934, Venerable Narada Thera, a famous missionary monk from Sri Lanka, visited Indonesia for the first time as part of his journey to spread the Dhamma in Southeast Asia. This opportunity was used by a few local Buddhists to revive Buddhism in Indonesia. A Bodhi tree planting ceremony was held in front of Borobudur on 10th March 1934 under the blessing of Narada Thera, and some Upasakas were ordained as monks.

In about 1955, Buddhism started to make a comeback in Indonesia when a monk called Ashin Jinarakkhita started a tour across various regions in Indonesia to spread the Dharma. Since that time there has been a revival of Theravada Buddhism in Indonesia led by indigenous monks trained in Thailand, although the Mahayana tradition is still well represented.

Buddhism is one of five religious recognized by the Indonesian government, besides Islam, Catholic, Protestant and Hinduism. According to a census conducted in 1990, the majority of the population is Moslem (around 87%). About 1.8 million people (which was slightly more than 1% of the population) are Buddhists. The breakdown of followers of different religions in Indonesia is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>% of Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.buddhanet.net

Provinces with relatively high percentage of Buddhists are Jakarta, Riau, North Sumatra, and West Borneo. The majority of Buddhists now practice the Theravada tradition. Two of the large Buddhist monasteries are located in North Jakarta (Sunter) and West Java (Pacet).
References
Websie: www.buddhanet.net
Geiger, Wilhelm (tr.) - *The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1986
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Burma
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Thailand
http://www.google.com.np/search?q=Bhumibol
बापट, पी. वी. - 'बौद्ध धर्म के २५०० वर्ष नई दिल्ली: प्रकाशन विभाग, सूचना और प्रसारण मन्त्रालय, १९८८'
शास्त्री, स्वामी झारिकालास - 'नीरवभ्य: बाराणसी: बौद्ध आकर ग्रंथमाला, १५४५'

16