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# "Norms Engineering and HerStory"the Contemporary Revival of Ancient Buddhist Skilful Means: How Telling HerStory Enables the Buddhist Prime Directive

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"Can you call a different world into being by telling the right story?"[1] This topic is not a new one to Buddhism. Mainstream contemporary examples highlight the enormous impact and influence of stories in popular social media on the global stage. Behaviour is intentionally changed through changing ideas. Interventions are taken and norms engineered, impacting leadership and the direction of global society.

1 National Public Radio podcast "The Other Real World" https://www.npr.org/2018/03/16/593869717/podcast-the-other-real-world (accessed 16 March 2018)

What does this mean with regards to bhikkhunīs and the awakening of women in Buddhism? What does it mean with regards to the capabilities or disabilities of women in Buddhism and for Buddhism's full ability to embody and accomplish its prime, core directive of awakening, ending suffering and offering benefit and happiness—liberation for individuals and for all?

Early Buddhism, as evidenced by the ancient canonical Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda texts, recognised and effectively utilised the enormous power of telling stories using words and imagery through all means of ancient social media: visual, oral, epigraphical, and textual.

These stories speak powerfully to the highest potential of humanity. They speak specifically to the possibilities of human women, of these women as awakened teachers and leaders in early Buddhist society, and of Buddhism's prime directive in human culture.

The ways these stories were told was originally brilliantly enabling, but became progressively sublimated or disabled over time. They are now gradually and powerfully being unpacked and turned towards enablement once again in a global revival and spread of Early Buddhism's most excellent expedient means.

This paper aims to shine clear awareness and bring intentionality to this topic with regards to past and present Buddhist practices of telling HerStory, specifically the moralisation and valorisation of full bhikkhunī ordination; and excellence in training, teaching and leadership of women in Buddhism.

Key ancient examples, together with contemporary 21st century examples of HH the 17th Karmapa, Dhammadharini's HerStory Initiative, the Bhikkhuni Vibhanga Project, and the Global Bhikkhuni Awards in Taiwan will be considered, together with counter-examples.

"Can you call a different world into being by telling the right story?" This question is being contemplated and acted upon at national and global levels from corporate offices to grade school class rooms. Contemporary examples in mainstream mass media have brought to awareness and highlight the effective power of stories, and of examples. The fabrication or spinning of stories, catch phrases and images is being used in highly influential and effective ways, reviving old ideological and behavioural norms and creating new ones, for good or for ill. Nazi'ism is revived, school shooters proliferate in the United States, and heroes too are inspired and emboldened.

This topic, of the effective power of stories and of the conscious engineering of norms is not a new one to Buddhism. Early Buddhism, as apparent in the ancient canonical Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan texts, recognised and effectively utilised the enormous power of telling stories using words and imagery through all means of ancient social media.

First came the power of lived examples, with the Buddha and the arahant *theras* and *therīs*, the ācariyas, both male and female, walking far and wide throughout the countries of the ancient Indian subcontinent, seen and heard *live*. One of the prime meanings of ācariya is "to teach <u>by example</u>." The emphasis was on "seeing and knowing" for oneself: ñāṇa-ðassana.

Then came emphasis on the sharing of **the word**, the teaching stories originally spoken and then shared and successively passed on orally. The Canonical Dhamma of both the Suttas and the Vinaya are all embedded in *evocative* stories.

With the development and spread of written language, inscriptions together with visual works of art come into being and were proliferated by Buddhists in mass, soon joined by formal genres of Buddhist performance art in story-telling the "heroic biographies" of the Buddha and early Buddhist saints of the Pali-text apadāna and Sanskrit avadāna genres.

These performance stories focussed in on *how* buddhas—awakened ones—whether the Samma Sambuddha or the sāvaka buddhas, come into being, calling for the actors and reciters to embody the stages of the Path, and for the watchers and listeners to *empathise*, with the effective aim that they themselves will also emulate and thus experience the stages of the Path for themselves.

Thus we see Buddhism widely utilised all known forms of thencontemporary social media to spread it's stories—embedded in the stories, the inspiration, encouragement and aspiration to awakening, together with the effective Path to do so. These stories found in the ancient Buddhist canons powerfully speak to the highest potential of humanity. They speak specifically to the potentialities and possibilities of **living human women**, of these women as awakening and awakened teachers and leaders in early Buddhist society, and of Buddhism's prime directive to enable and provide such opportunities for both genders of all races, ethnicities and ages in human culture.

However, although the ways these stories are told was originally brilliantly enabling, they became progressively sublimated or disabled over time with changes in culture. To give the benefit of the doubt, we can say that these changes in culture were part of the environment/s in which Buddhist existed, and that during these periods, Buddhism continued to do it's best to adapt and to continue to offer the very best of opportunities for women in the Buddha's Path.

However, it seems that negative and debilitating ideas were culturally taken in and amalgamated into Buddhism, whether from Indian Brahmanism, Jainism or Dharmashastras, or from the local indigenous cultures in societies and cultures to and in which Buddhism spread, grew and adapted, both influencing and being influenced by those cultures. Buddhism did not only adapt to the cultures in which it was present, but has been and is an adaptive agent, engineering new norms.

Buddhism (as a corporate body) acted widely, and continues to act widely contemporarily, as an effective agent in spreading *both* enabling and debilitating ideas of womanhood and of women's roles (or non-roles) in householder life and monastic communities. Understanding Buddhism, and the way stories are told and examples are shared in Buddhism as active, effective, creative and transformative agents, can and should be seen in light of Buddhism's "Prime Directive."

#### If the Prime Directive of Buddhism is:

"To offer the very best inspiration, encouragement, examples and all expedient means of comprehensive support for practicing the Path of Awakening, and all means of support possible for valorising and expediting the sharing of that Path by those with knowledge and experience in it"—

we can use this definition as a measure to effectively and proactively gauge how Buddhism's contemporary institutional structures and cultures, and it's most excellent expedient means (*upāya-kosalla*) — including the "power of story" and the "power of example" which are active in engineering, creating and perpetuating norms—are being used.

Are they being wielded consciously, with full intentionality, to maximise the Buddhist "Prime Directive"?

#### HerStory - in Ancient Buddhism

HerStory is the history of women collectively and as individuals. We recognise the ways the history or herstory of women in Buddhism has been told (or not told) over time as powerful, **effective processes**.

It is said that one of the greatest ways to subjugate a population is to separate them from their history. And one of the most empowering and enabling of forces is connection or reconnection to that story.

Records of Early Buddhism show, in places where the tradition of women's history or herstory was strong, a super abundance of excellent women practitioners, leaders and teachers in Buddhism. A prime example of this one step removed in time and space from the old Indian Buddhist heartland and the canonical Therīgāthā and Therī-apadāna together with the Bhikkhunī Samyutta, might be the Pāli-text Dīpavamsa. The Dīpavamsa—the "Chronicle of the Island" or "Chronicle of the Lamp"—itself claims to have been authored and passed down from early Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and is thought to date from the Aśokan era to it's final form around the 4th century CE. It is a concentrated source of Buddhist women's herstory, of the lineage of the Bhikkhunīs from ancient times to the then-present, of outstanding and luminary women practitioners, teachers of Dhamma and Vinaya, leaders and exemplárs.

## The Pāli-text Dīpavamsa—the "Chronicle of the Island" or "Chronicle of the Lamp"—

The Dīpavamsa relates the bhikkhunī masters' teaching lineage from India to Sri Lanka thus: XVIII 9-10 speaks of Khemā and Uppalavannā; Pātācārā, Dhammadinnā, Sobhitā, Isidāsikā, Visākhā, Sonā and Sābalā, wise Sanghadāsī and Nanda, as "quardians of the Dhamma" and "well-versed in the Vinaya." These (bhikkhunīs) who well knew the Vinaya and the paths (of sanctification), (lived) in Jambudvipa. XVIII 11-13 tells of Therī Sanghamittā, wise Uttarā, Hemā and Pasādapālā, Aggimittā, Dāsikā, Pheggu, Pābbatā, and Mattā, Mālā, and Dhammadāsiyā, the eleven bhikkhunis who came from Jambudvipa (India) and taught the Vinaya Pitaka in Anuradhapura, also teaching the five Collections (of the Sutta Pitaka) and the Seven Treatises (of the Abhidhamma). XVIII 14-16 then relates the Sri Lanka bhikkhunīs own lineage of luminary teachers, with special emphasis on Vinaya teachers: Sadhammanandi and Somā, also Giriddhi, Dāsikā, and Dhammā are *Dhammapālā*—"guardians of the Dhamma" and Vinaya visāradā—"well-versed in the Vinaya." Mahilā who kept the Dhutanga precepts, and Sobhanā, Dhammatāpasā, highly wise Nāramittā who was "well-versed in the Vinaya." Sātā, "versed in the exhortations of the Theris," Kālī and Uttarā, these Bhikkhunīs received the upasampadā ordination on the island of Lanka." Verses 17-46 continue the exposition of these bhikkhunīs illustrious tradition, with more than ten verses lauding the ongoing lineage of those bhikkhunīs who were outstanding Vinaya teachers (Vinaya visāradā (vv 15, 16), Saddhammavinaye ratā (vv 18, 23, 43) Vinaya tāvāca (vv 27, 31, 33, 38), Aggāvinayavādī (30), and Vinayadharā (vv 42, 45). Eighteen verses laud those who were of great wisdom—mahāpaññā (vv 16, 40, 41), "confident, knowledgeable and skilled" - visāradā (vv 35, 40) widely learned - bahussutā (vv 22, 44, 46) and panditā (vv 35, 40), "holders of the sutta tradition"—sutadharā (v 44), "teachers of the Doctrine of Discernment"— Vibhajjavādī (vv 42, 45), "unexcelled teachers of the Dhamma" – Dhammakathikamuttamā (v 30) and "teachers of the five Nikāyas of the Sutta Pitaka and Seven Treatises on Abhidhamma" — Nikāye pañcavācesum sattappakaraṇānica (vv 20, 34) and masters of the passed down teachings of the Theris' - Theriyovāda (v 16) "illuminating the Sangha" - Sanghasobhanā (v 42). Five more verses reveal bhikkhunīs known for extraordinary knowledge and the six powers: Abhiññātā (vv 17, 21, 42), chaļabhiññā (v 26) and mahiddhikā (v 26). Further verses speak of bhikkhunīs of great renown in the Sāsana — Sāsane vissutā (37), those known as "guardians of the Sāsana - Sāsana pālakā (v 45), and those who are "leaders of the Island" - Dīpanayā (v 41). Last but not least, seven verses record those bhikkhunis who had the very special role of Saddhammavamsakovidā (17, 21, 29, 31, 36, 39, 42), those "possessed of right wisdom who were the bearers and transmitters of the lineage and traditions of the Saddhamma."

Although a different image than found in the Pāli-text Sutta Piţaka, chronologically earlier inscriptions and the also earlier *Dīpavaṃsa* which highlighted bhikkhunīs as attained and authorized teachers of the Dhamma, the Samantapāsādikā Vinaya Commentary attributed to Acariya Buddhaghosa roughly 1000 years after the Buddha, and still considered highly orthodox by many contemporary Theravada monastics, taking a (not-isolated) misogynist turn, "devotes a lengthly passage running to about seven pages to emphasize the subordinate status of the [bhikkhunīs]...and the need for [bhikkhunīs] to constantly depend on the advice of [bhikkhus]." 74 (74. Samantapāsādikā, Vol. IV, pp. 792-900). "The passage reflects a situation in which learned [bhikkhunīs] were claiming to know the dhamma as proficiently as the [bhikkhus]...The response of the [bhikkhus] to this challenge was presented in the form of the general proposition that women are inherently inferior in their intellectual abilities and, consequently, have no other alternative but to be dependent on the bhikkhus." "Iti bhagavā aññassa kammassa okāsam adatvā nirantaram bhikkhunīnam santike gamanameva paññāpesi. Kasmā? Mandapaññattā mātugāmassa. Mandapañno hi mātugāmo." "It may be rendered into English as follows: 'Why did the Blessed One decree that nuns should constantly go to monks [for guidance] without allowing them an opportunity for any other mode of action? It was on consideration of the lack of wisdom among females. Females lack wisdom." Gunawardena "Subtle Silks" (23-24). The Pāli manda means "dull, stupid, lazy, ignorant, of slow grasp." PTS Pāli-English Dictionary (1183)

—f57 "Coming Into Our Own": Perspectives of a Bhikkhunī Preceptor', Tathālokā, IABS Conference paper (2017)

One has to search far and wide to find similar sources to the *Dīpavamsa* outside the canonical texts of early Indian Buddhism, but such a search is highly fruitful. As evidenced by inscriptions from the Indian sub-continent, we can understanding that women teachers and pupils had their own ordination lineages (i.e., inscriptions at Kanheri Caves), the highest words of respect were used for eminent women teachers (i.e., *bbadanta*), that women became Tipitaka Masters (ex: Buddhamitrā Bhikkhunī), and that women played active roles in the development of Buddhism as evidenced in it's main, lasting, memorial projects—the creation of stupas and pagodas—in which they themselves, together with the support of their families and communities, made enormous contributions of half, near-half or more-than-half of the marshalled resources for these massive and enduring projects.

It is also through inscriptions, together with written records, that we know bhikkhunīs studied within and were recipients of offerings at the great monastic universities of India, both kings and queens financially supporting them, building and endowing the structures to enable their studies and practice.

The only thing comparable found *outside of India*, other than the numerous inscriptions of royal endowments made over centuries to the Bhikkhunī Sangha in Sri Lanka, is the native Chinese *Biqiunizhuan* 比丘尼傳 (*Lives of the Bhikkhunīs*). However, this too is a relatively "early" text in the life of the *Bhikkhunī Sāsana* in China.

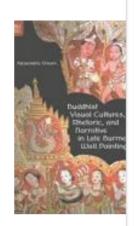
Other key valorising texts from the Indian traditions, such as the *Therīgāthā*, although mentioned in Chinese canonical texts, were either not translated into Chinese or not preserved in Chinese. The names by which these texts were recording brings to light the emergence of a double standard. For the bhikkhus' awakening verses in the *Theragāthā* 諸上座所說偈, *thera* is translated as 上座—the "high seated," while the equal in feminine Indic-language *Therīgāthā*, *therī* (literally a female *thera*), is offered no such reverential equivalent honorific, but only translated as *bhikkhunī* 比丘尼 in the parallel *Sayings of the Bhikkhunī*s 比丘尼所說 text title, rather than in parallel language as *Verses of the 'High-Seated' Women* 諸上座尼所說偈 or *Verses of the Women Elders*. This is significant.

However, parallels to the Pāli-text *Bhikkhunī Samyutta* were translated into Chinese, and the Chinese parallels to the *Aggatherī-vatthu* contain even greater numbers of outstanding and exemplary bhikkhunīs in their lists of foremost leading bhikkhunī disciples of the Buddha than do the Pāli texts. It is important to note that both the Pāli and the Chinese canonical texts also contain records of the outstanding *upāsikās*—leading women householder disciples of the Buddha.

Tibetan texts, in a way, illustrate a similar mystery. They also record knowledge of the existence of a Sanskrit-language *Therīgāthā* (in Sanskrit, *Sthāvirigāthā*, Tibetan: *gnas brtan ma'i təhigə su bcað pa*); but again, the text was either never translated into Tibetan, or not preserved. However, the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivāða Vinaya*, contains a rich goldmine of the bhikkhunīs' stories, just beginning to be fruitfully mined, as in Venerable Damchö Diane Finnegan's "For the Sake of Women Too."

# "Norms Engineering and HerStory" Analysing Visual Narrative

Buddhist
Visual
Cultures,
Rhetoric,
and
Narrative
in Late
Burmese
Wall
Paintings

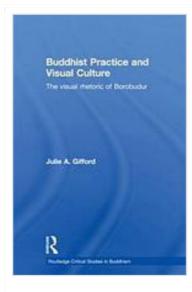


Book by Alexandra Green

Step into a Burmese temple built between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries and you are surrounded by a riot of color and imagery. ... Google Books

Originally published: 2018

Author: Alexandra Green



#### Buddhist practice and visual culture: the visual rhetoric of Borobudur

Author: <u>Julie Gifford</u>

Publisher: New York : Routledge, 2011.

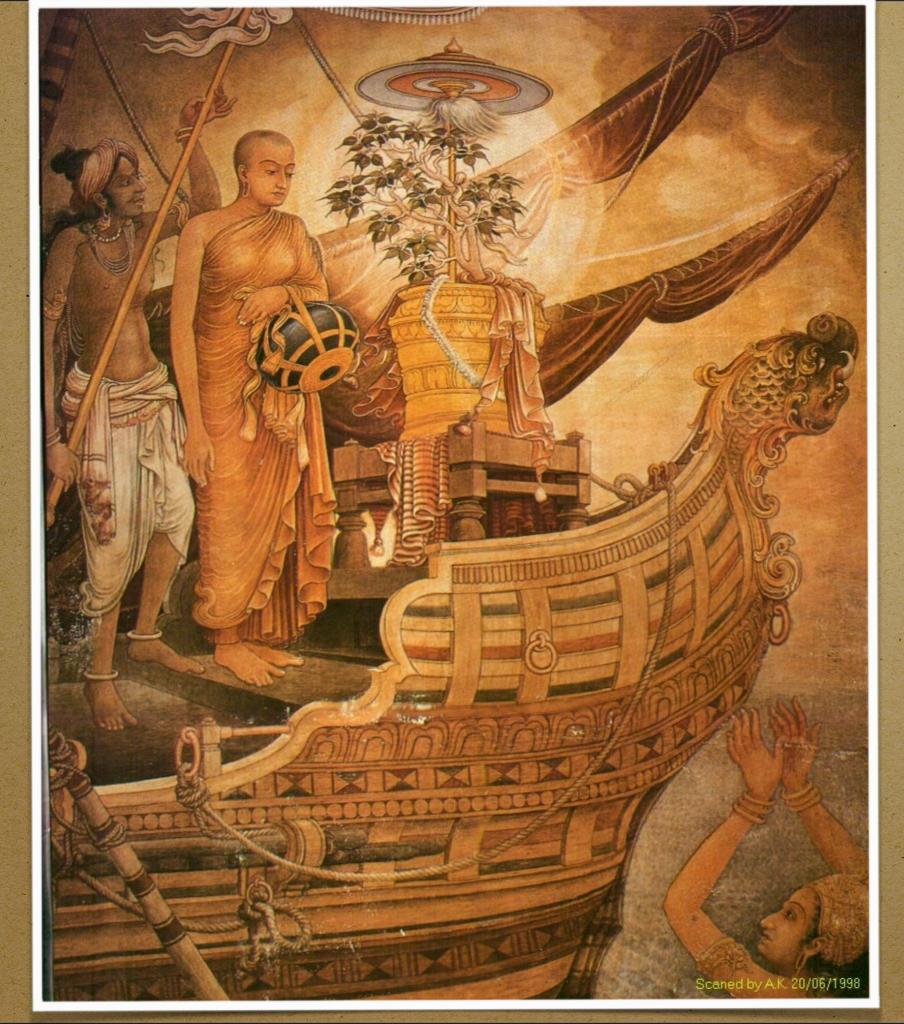
Series: Routledge critical studies in Buddhism.

English View all editions and formats

Summary: This is the first study to provide an overall interpretation of the Buddhist monument Borobudur in Indonesia.

Including both the narrative reliefs and the Buddha images, the book opens up a wealth of information on Mahayana Buddhist religious ideas and practices that could have informed Borobudur and it convincingly interprets Borobudur within that context. Presenting new material, the book contributes immensely to a new and better understanding of the significance of the Borobudur for the field of Buddhist and Religious Studies. Read less

Examples of two recent scholarly works on Buddhist visual narrative cultures and rhetoric from 2018 and 2011.



Aśokan daughter bhikkhunī arahant Sanghamittā Therī arriving from India to Sri Lanka on the December full moon with bhikkhunī entourage and southern branch sapling of the Jāya Śri Mahā Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya, her arriving ship met by Sri Lanka King Devanampiyatissa, 3rd century BCE.

Kelaniya Rāja Mahā Vihāra
Temple painting, Sri Lanka
(image credit: http://
www.buddhistedu.org/en/
images/stories/Vanhoa/
sanghamittal.jpg).



Aśokan daughter bhikkhunī arahant **Saṅghamittā Therī** arriving from India to Sri Lanka on the December full moon with bhikkhunī entourage and southern branch sapling of the Jāya Śri Mahā Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya, her arriving ship met by Sri Lanka King Devanampiyatissa, 3rd century BCE.

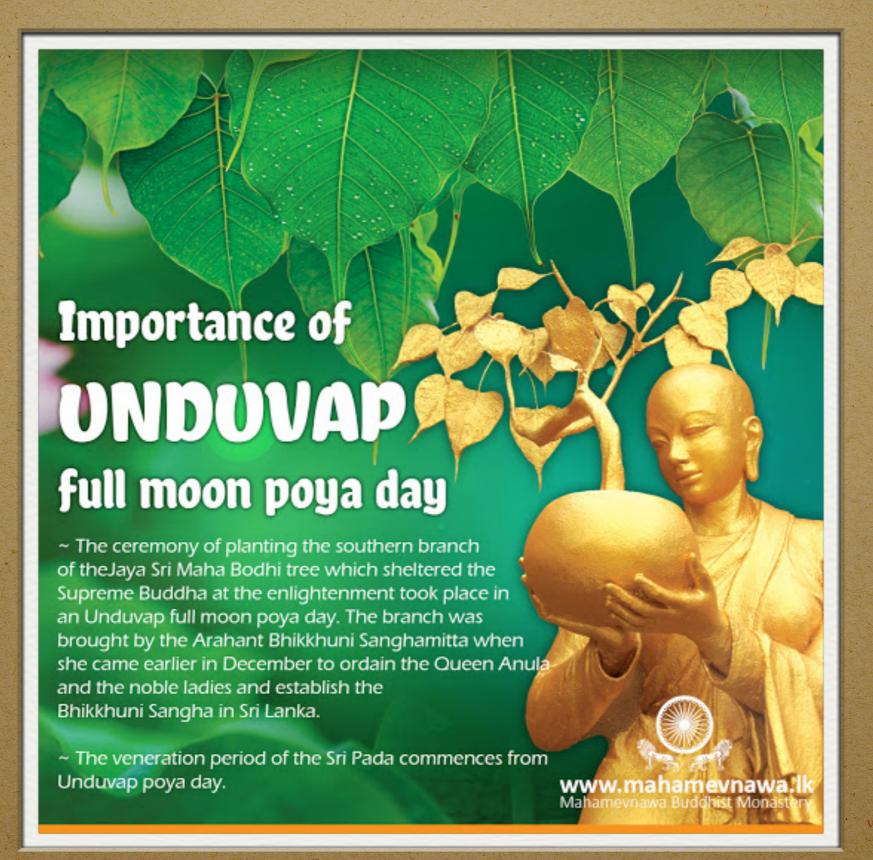
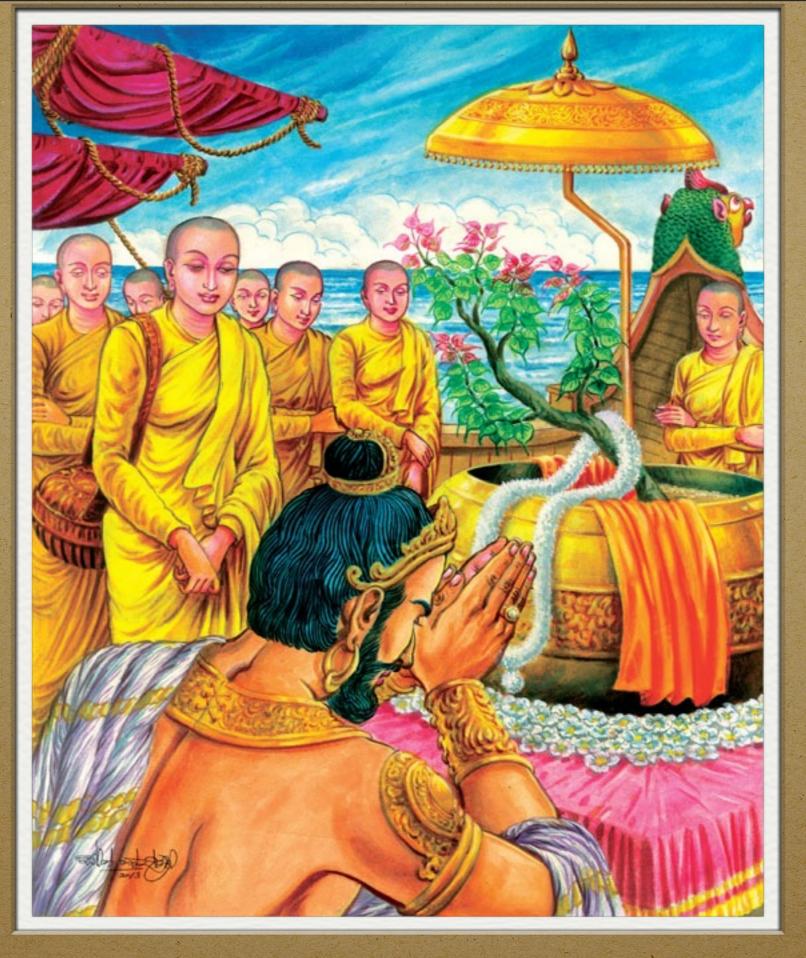


Image courtesy of Mahamevnawa Sri Lanka www.mahamevnawa.ll

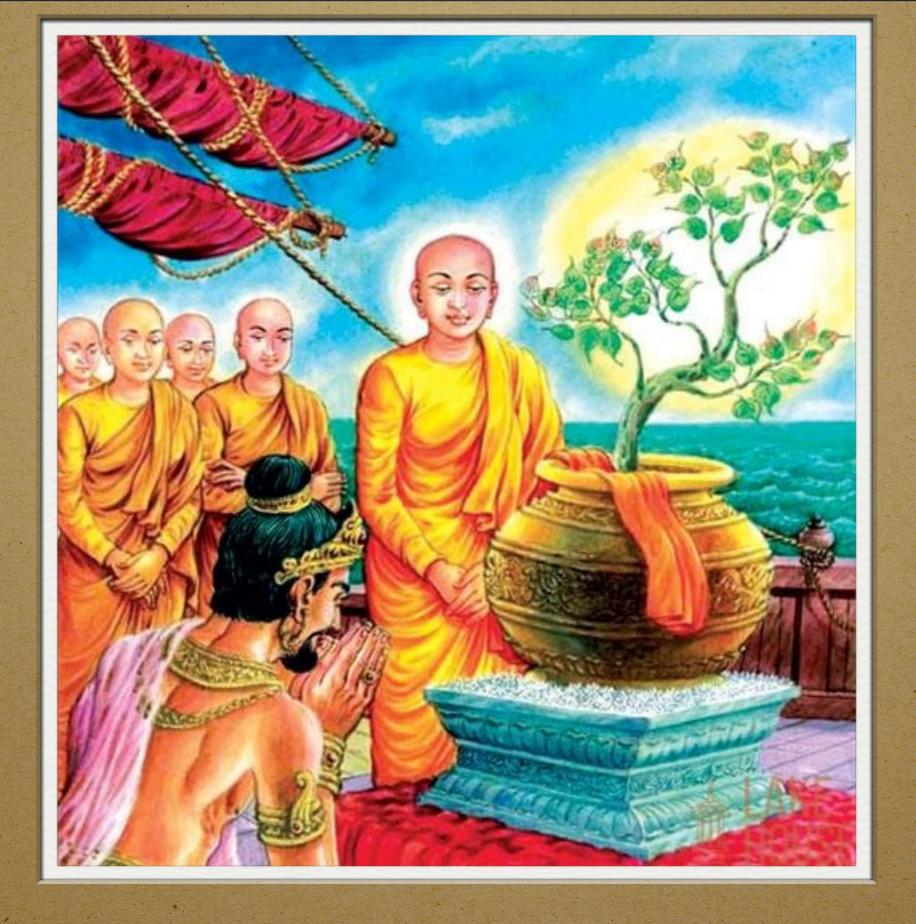


Aśokan daughter bhikkhunī arahant Saṅghamittā Therī arriving from India to Sri Lanka on the December full moon with sapling of the southern branch of the Jāya Śri Mahā Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya, 3rd century BCE.

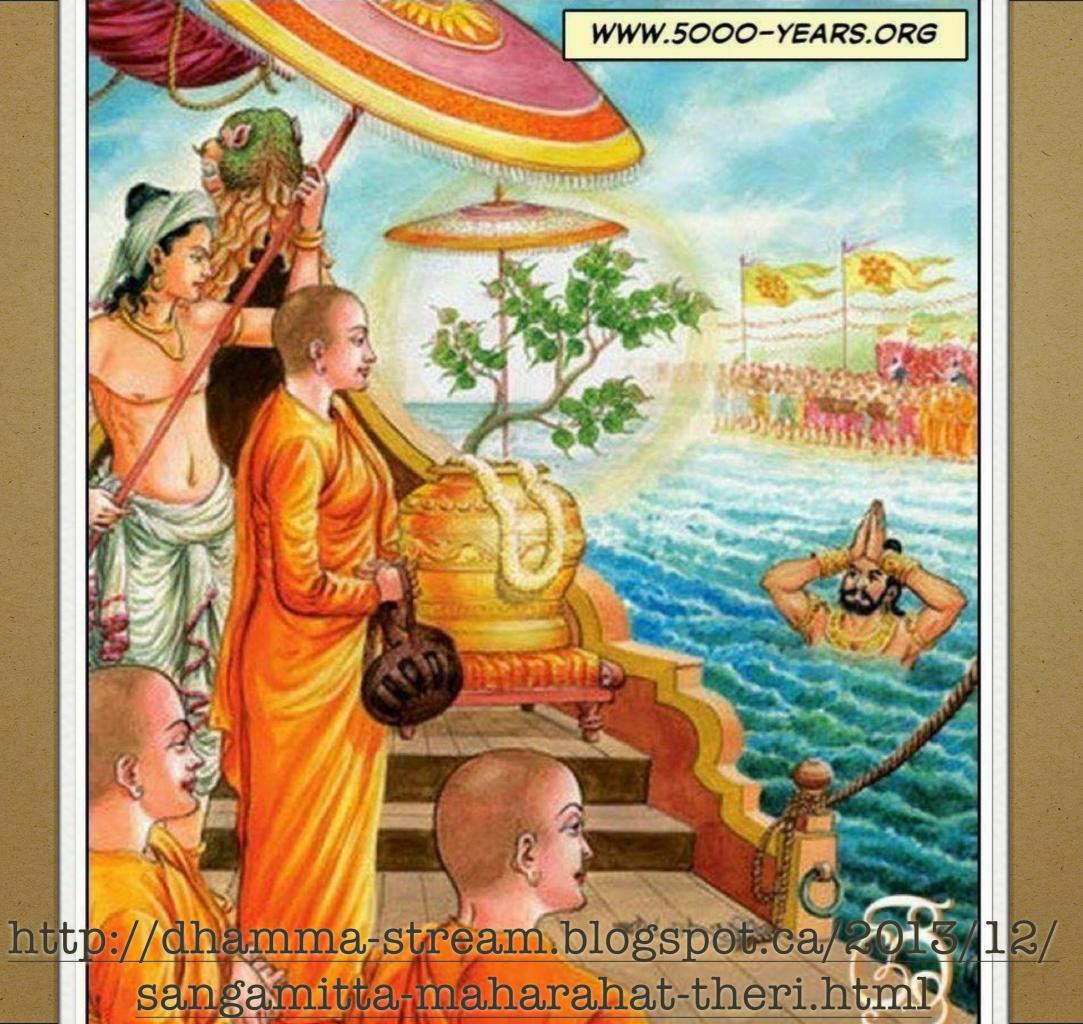
(image credit: http://www.budusarana/k/budusarana/2007/12/23/z\_pic350-eng.jpg)



http://www.budusarana.lk/budusarana/2013/12/16/z\_pic350.jpg

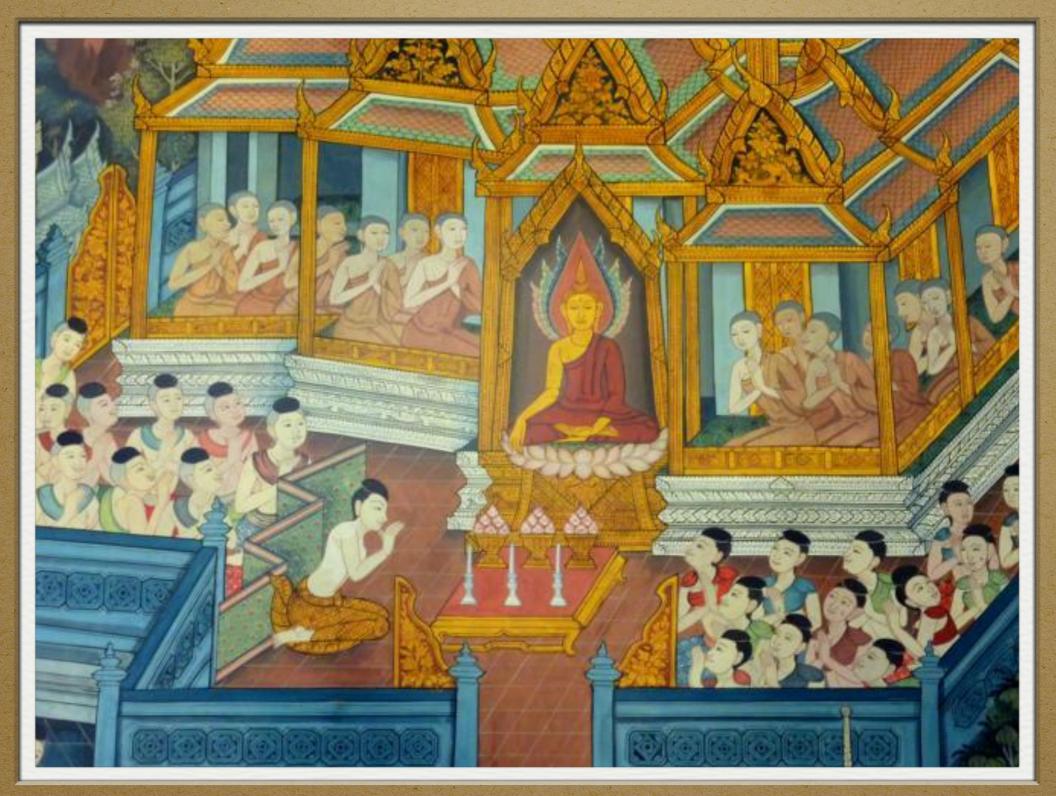


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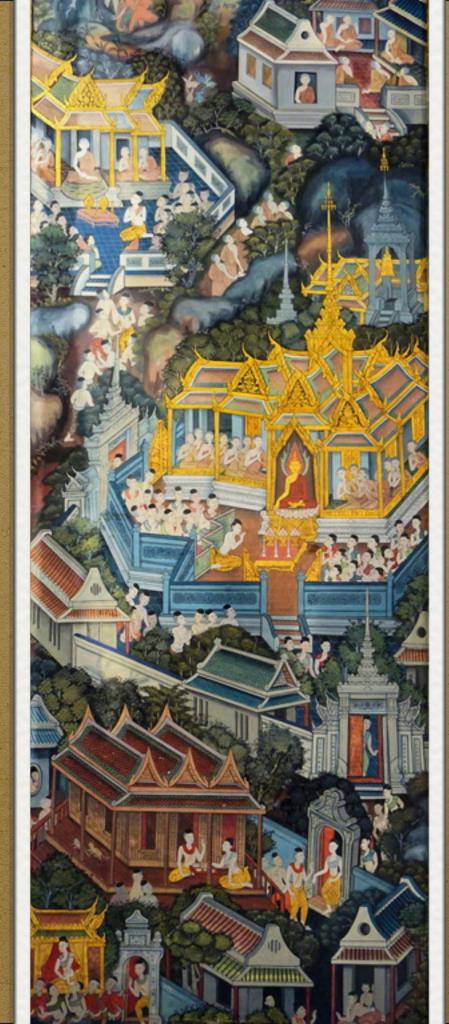


"Norms Engineering and HerStory"

# Buddha Catu Parisa The Buddha's Fourfold Community



https://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/images/Wat-Pho-Murals-Original-00051.jpg



# Wat Pho "Temple of the Reclining Buddha" Bangkok, Thailand

Life Story of Leading Arahant
Therī Bhikkhunī
Dhammadinnā
Foremost in Dhamma Teaching

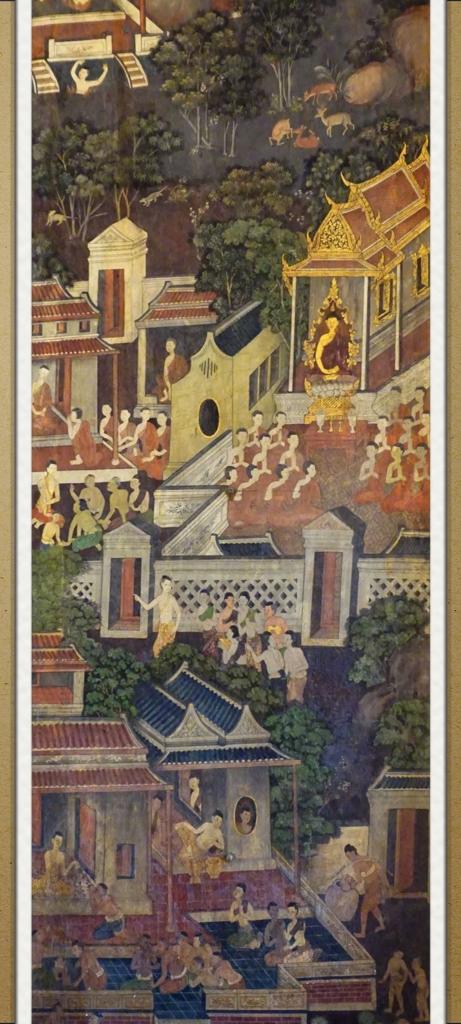
Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma (credit: https://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/Wat-Pho-Murals.htm)

## Life Story of Uppalavāṇṇā Therī Foremost in Spiritual Power

"King Rama III undertook the sixteen year and seven monthlong month restoration of the Ayutthayan period monastery Wat Bodharam (commonly known as Wat Pho), initially begun by King Rama I when he established it as a first grade royal monastery in 1788 CE. King Rama III's son Prince Laddawan led in the restoration of the Western Vihara, the famed Temple of the Reclining Buddha, on whose walls may still be found the Mahavamsa mural paintings of the arrival of Aśokan daughter Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta (Skt: Sanghamitra) with the Bodhi tree to Sri Lanka, her meeting with King Devanampiyatissa and her ordination of Queen Anula with her company of 500 women, establishing the Buddhasasana. Other walls in the sanctuary of the Reclining Buddha are covered by extensive and elaborate mural paintings of the thirteen foremost bhikkhuni disciples of the Buddha and their stories (as here), as well as paintings of the ten foremost laymen and laywomen disciples. This great restoration was undertaken by the king to maintain Wat Pho 'as a center of both arts and knowledge for the Thai people, where descendants could look indefinitely'."

— p17: "Glimmers of a Thai Bhikkhunī Sangha History," Tathālokā (2007)

Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma (credit: https://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/Wat-Pho-Murals.htm)



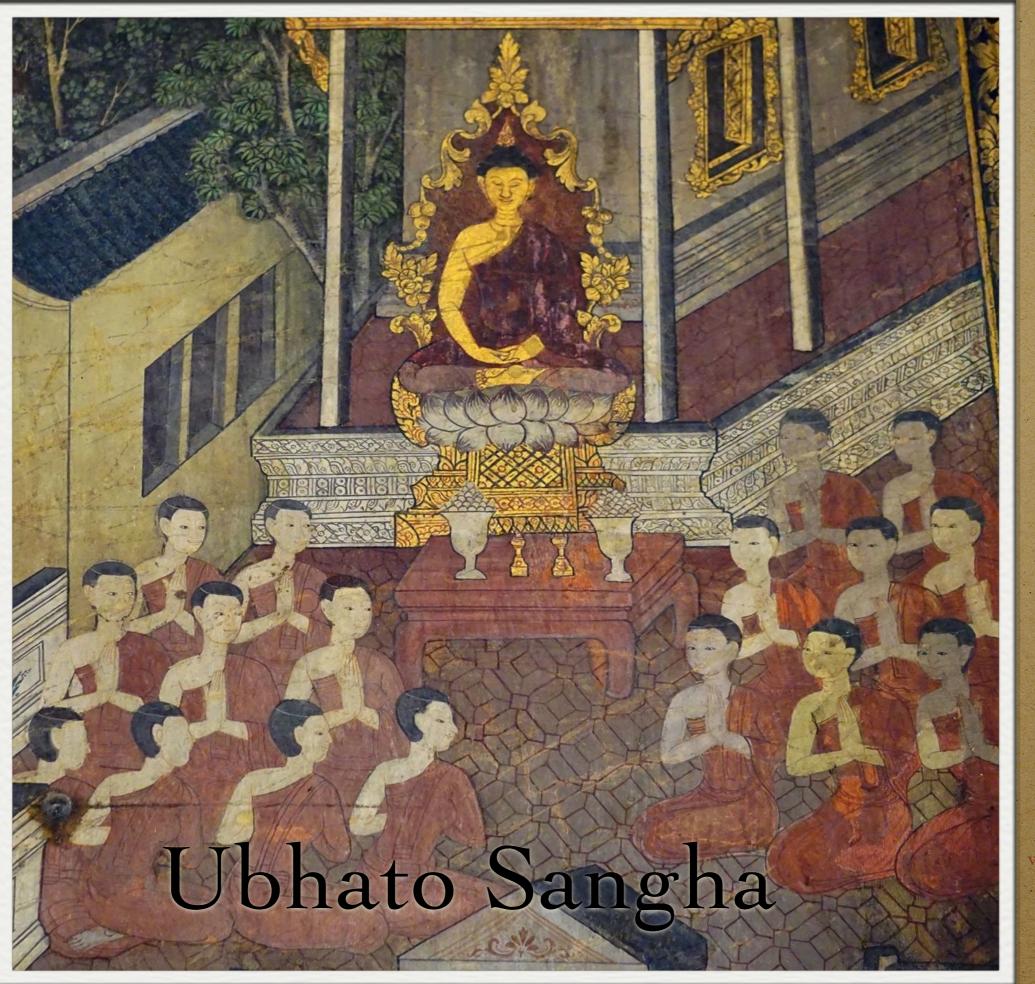


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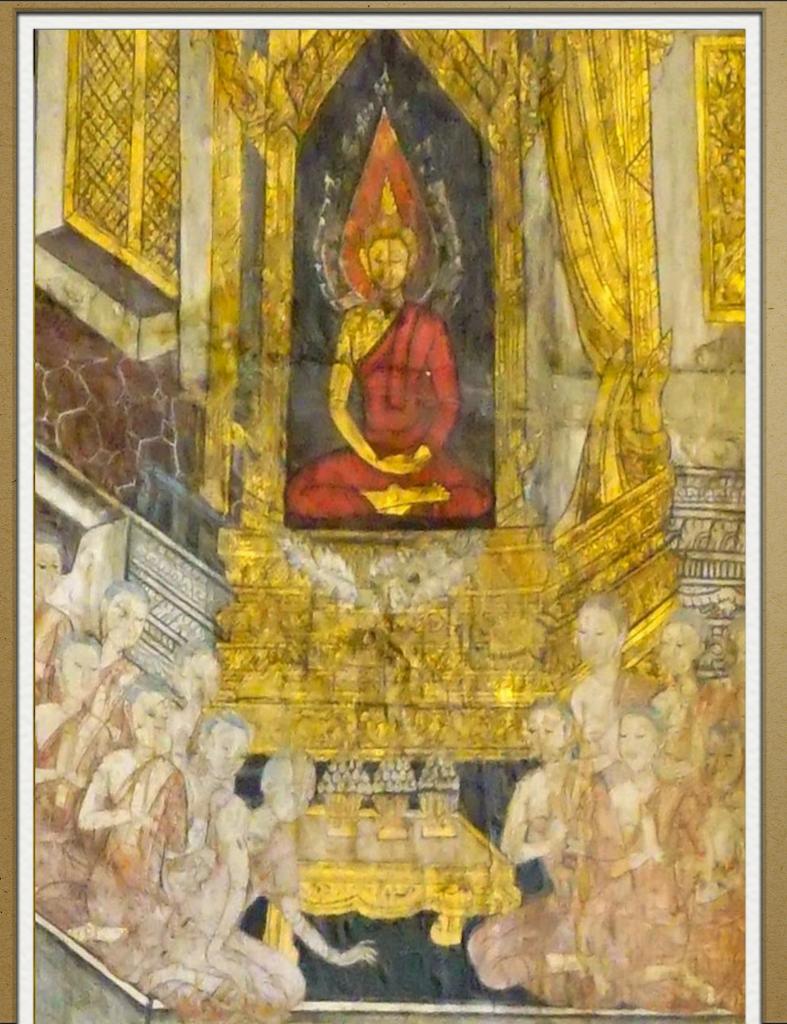
Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma (credit: https:// www.photodhar ma.net/Thailand/ Wat-Pho-Murals.htm)

ordaining novices or probationers



## Fourfold Community with Buddha Wat Pho, Bangkok, Thailand

Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma (credit: https://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/Wat-Pho-Murals.htm)



## Ubhato Sangha

Wat Pho,
Hall of the
Reclining Buddha,
Bangkok, Thailand

Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti
Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma
(credit: https://www.photodharma.net/
Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/Wat-Pho-



#### Upāsikās and Bhikkhunīs with Buddha Gandha Kuti, Pagan, Myanmar



## Transmission of the Lamp

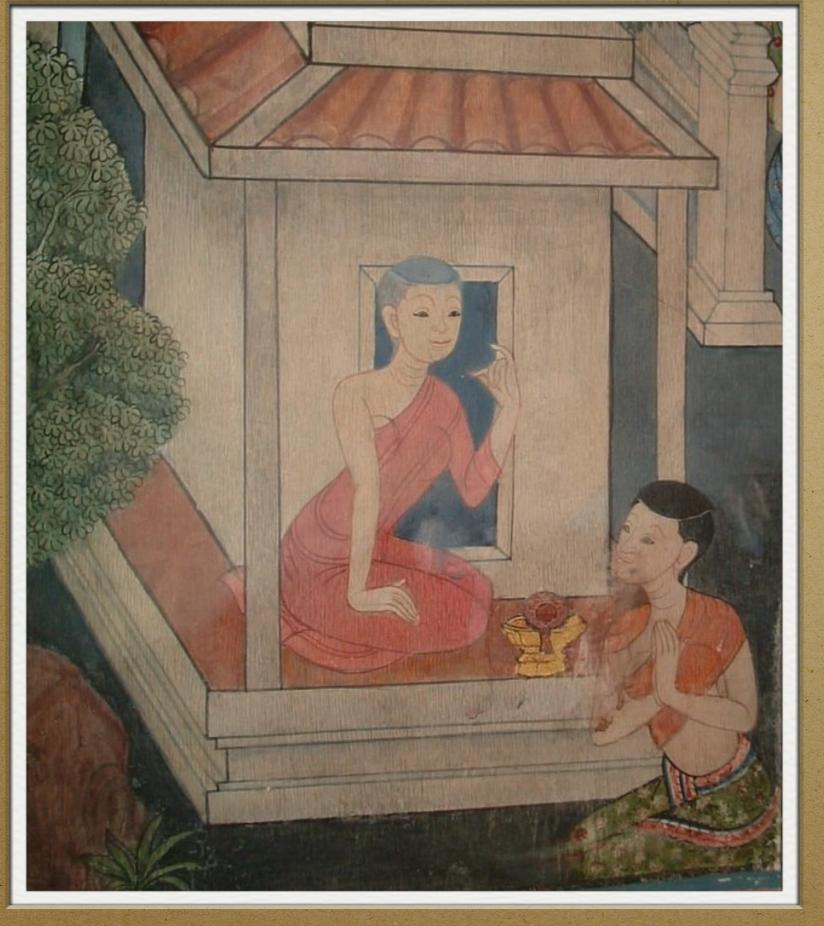
Mihintale, Sri Lanka: Sanghamittā Therī, Mahinda Thero, Emperor Aśoka, King Devanampiyatissa, Anulā Devī, Marittha



#### Bhikkhu & Bhikkhunī Sangha Entering the Dharma Realm

Borobudur, Java, Indonesia

Image couriesy of Ven. Anandajóti Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma "Borobudur", (credit: https://www.photodharma.net/)



#### Bhikkhunīs Teaching Laywomen

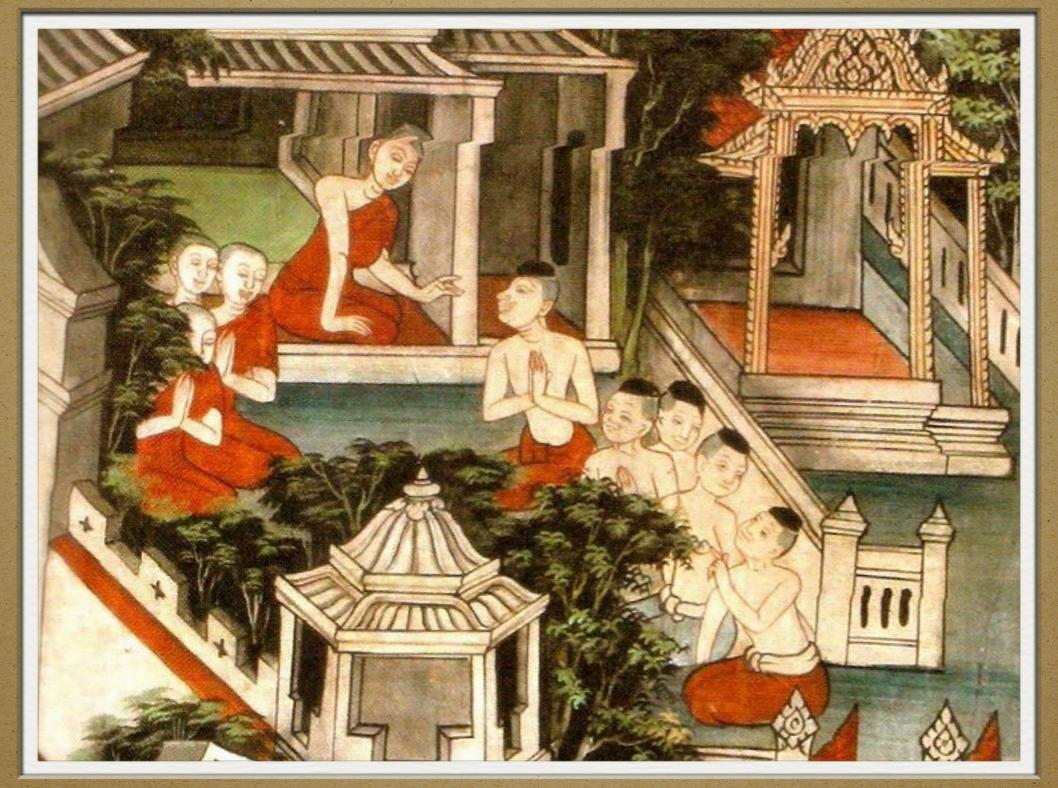
Wat Pho, Thailand

Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti
- Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma
(credit: https://www.photodharma.net/
Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/Wat-PhoMurals.htm)

### Bhikkhunīs Teaching Bhikkhunīs

Queen's Chedi, Thailand





## Bhikkhunīs Teaching Laymen Wat Pho, Thailand

Image courtesy of Ven. Anandajoti Bhikkhu's Photo Dharma (credit: https://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Pho-Murals/Wat-Pho-Murals.htm)

#### Bhikkhunīs Teaching Kings & Queens

Borobudur, Indonesia

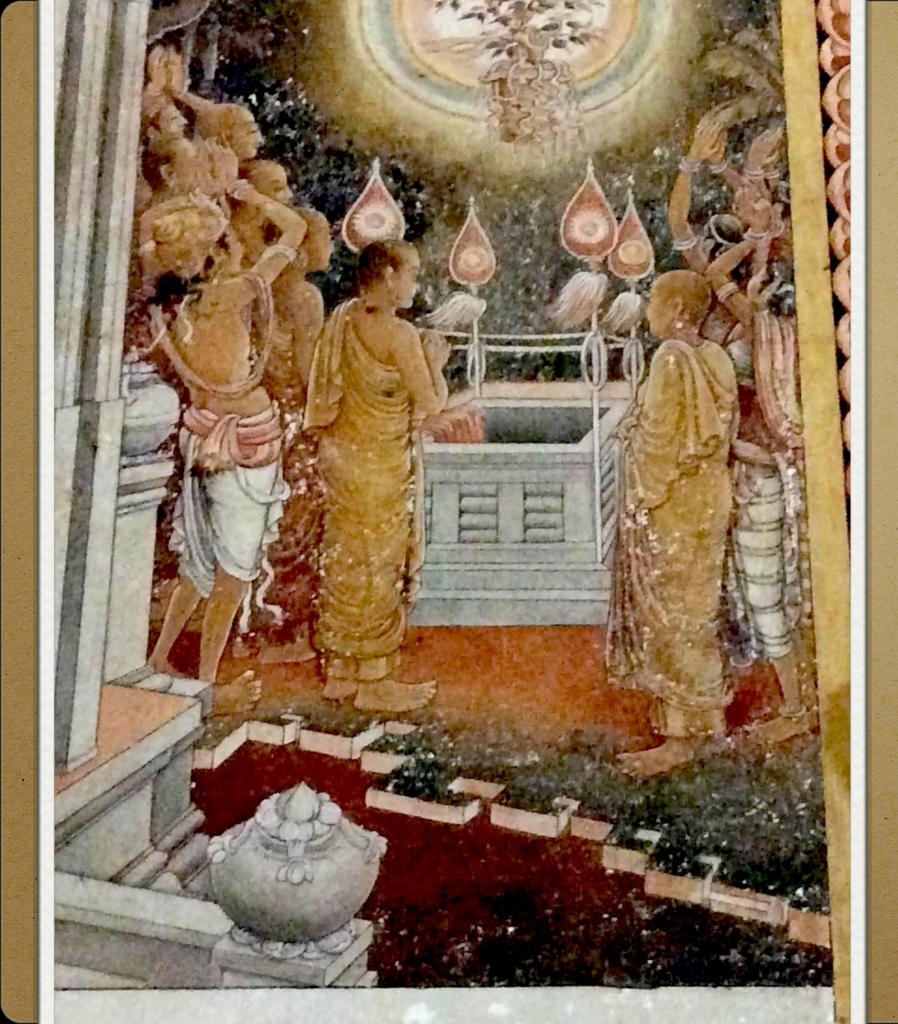




#### Awakened Bhikkhunī Luminaries & Leaders

Noppapolbhumisiri Chedi (Queen's Chetiya) Doi Inthanon, Highest Point in Thailand

Image courtesy from the private photo collection of Tathālokā Therī. Photo by Darren and Bee Noi (2007)



Bhikkhu & Bhikkhunī Leaders Working Together with Fourfold Community

Kelaniya Rāja Mahā Vihāra, Sri Lanka

Image from the private photo collection of Tathālokā Therī (2017)