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THAI BUDDHISM AND WOMEN
WITH A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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INTRODUCTION

Buddhism was begun by Siddhartha Gautama as a split from Hinduism. He denied the caste system in society. He believed that there should not be any division among the social classes. He left his household and became a homeless wanderer. He is said to have become fully enlightened or awakened after sitting under a bodhi tree. He led others down this same path. After a discussion with his disciple, Ananda, he also allowed women to be on the path to liberation.

Buddhism split into two schools: Mahayana (the large vehicle) and Hinayana (the small vehicle). Hinayana is also known as Theravada which translates to "the way of the elders" in Pali. Both claim to allow females to be ordained into the *sangha*, the Buddhist order of monks. Some scholars of Theravada Buddhism claim that females cannot be ordained into the *sangha*. This is the same in Thai Buddhism, a sect of Theravada Buddhism, although there are more scholars who argue that a woman cannot attain nirvana. Thai Buddhism does not allow females to be ordained into the monastic order. In order to reach nirvana, one must first become a monk. The only way for this to happen is for a woman to make enough merit to be reborn as a male in their next life. To be born a woman is viewed as negative karma. Women are perceived to be second-class citizens.

In contrast, Christianity offers a different alternative of salvation for all. Jesus Christ spoke of women as equal to men. He associated with women and healed them, and offered salvation to them. Women also had prevalent roles within the church as meetings were held in their homes. Women were also prophetesses, apostles, took on leadership roles along with their husbands, and were close followers of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 1: SIDDARTHA GAUTAMA

LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

The religion of Buddhism is divided into two branches or vehicles: Hinayana ("the small vehicle") and Mahayana ("the larger vehicle").¹ The sole founder of Buddhism is Siddhartha Gautama. He was considered to be a notable educator who revealed and distributed to the population a pathway to enlightenment from the sequence of rebirth that is properly called the "the middle way".² Siddhartha Gautama was born around 563 B.C. His family was a member of the warrior caste (*kshatriya*) near the holy city of Varanasi (*Benares*) in northern India. Buddhist tradition says that Siddhartha experienced "the four passing sights" or visions. The four visions were: first, an old, sorrowful man, followed by a man with illness. Next was a dead man being carried on a funeral bed. Gautama saw that life was not all pleasure and joy, but also included misery, suffering, and death. He then realized that this was his destiny also in life. Later in life, he saw his fourth vision, of a monk calmly walking alone in a yellow robe. This last vision led to his "great renunciation."³

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DHAMMA

Gautama came up with a new of ordering life through the *dhamma*, the accurate perception of actuality in its instructions.⁴ The first proclamation of *dhamma* is known as the "Deer Park Sermon." The Buddha spoke to his past contemporaries of a "middle way" between the two limits of his personal life -- self-denial and self-indulgence. He stated that this path led him to the truth. If they decided to follow it, they would have the opportunity to be enlightened. This proclamation became known as the "Four Noble Truths," which form the core of Buddhist

¹ William A. Young *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*. Upper Saddle, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall, 2005) 82.

² Ibid. 82

³ Ibid. 83

⁴ Ibid. 83

teachings.

The first of the Four Noble Truths is "life is suffering." Suffering is a condition of life that no one can avoid facing. The second truth is "the cause of suffering is desire." Desire directs us to attachment to the delusion that there is something lasting and static in existing. The third truth is that there is "release from the suffering of life." The fourth noble truth is "the way to find release is to find the Eightfold Path."⁵

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SANGHA

Siddhartha Gautama also established the *sangha*, the Buddhist order of monks. The followers who united with the early *sangha* came from various social classes of India. Due to the growth of the *sangha*, there was a need for rules of behavior. Therefore, the "Three Refuges or Jewels" were developed as the fundamental vows of an initiate into the *sangha*. It states, "I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the *dharmma*; I take refuge in the *sangha*." The new initiate was vowing to follow the example set by the Buddha, to survive an existence directed by the instruction of the "middle way," and to recognize the orders of the *sangha*.⁶ The form of government within the *sangha* was democratic, but as it grew, a hierarchical ranking developed. Permanent monasteries sprang up, and the *sangha* divided into separate orders with different leaders. These monasteries became important centers of secular as well as religious powers in India.⁷ Initially only men joined the *sangha*; women also requested initiation into the *sangha*. The Buddha later decided to allow women to become nuns with the same ability to attain the path leading to liberation as monks could.⁸ The essential regulations of the monastic life are referred to as the "Ten Precepts." They are: to refrain from taking life (*ahimsa*), do not take what

⁵ Ibid. 84

⁶ Ibid. 84

⁷ Ibid. 84-5

⁸ Ibid. 85

is not given, practice chastity, do not lie or deceive, do not take intoxicants, consume food in moderation and never after noon, do not gaze upon spectacles such as dancing and singing, do not ornament your body, do not recline on high or wide beds, and do not accept gold or silver.⁹ Gautama's final words to his followers were, "Work out your own salvation with diligence."¹⁰

FOUNDATION OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded in India about 500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Buddhism denies the authority of the Vedas. Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism can point to a specific founder, Siddhartha Gautama.¹¹ Gautama, the Buddha, was born about 560 B.C. in northeastern India.¹² The Buddha is author of no books or treatises. Moreover, it is extremely unlikely that any of his immediate disciples wrote anything of his teachings down. And yet it is said that the Buddha devoted some forty-five years of his life entirely to teaching and that by the end of his life he was quite satisfied that he had succeeded in passing on his teachings carefully and exactly, such that they would long be of benefit and help to the world.¹³

"The Buddha is not crucial to the essence of Buddhism...The point is that a teaching lies at the core of Buddhism, not a person," stated by Winfried Corduan.¹⁴ Siddhartha demonstrated premature signs of religious inclination.¹⁵ The term *buddha* literally translates to the "awakened one" in Sanskrit.¹⁶ Gautama realized that the mystery of enlightenment or liberation is neither in a luxurious life nor in depriving one's self. The secret to the mystery is found in a "middle way"

⁹ Ibid. 85

¹⁰ Ibid. 84

¹¹ Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983) 304.

¹² Ibid. 305

¹³ Rupert Gettin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998) 35.

¹⁴ Winifred Corduan *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press Academic, 1998), 220.

¹⁵ Ibid. 221.

¹⁶ Ibid. 222.

which is free of all ultimatums. Gautama determined that the trouble with being lies in becoming connected to physical or material existence, which is by nature temporary. "The key to salvation is to let go of everything."¹⁷

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

The Buddha taught that all phenomenal existence is *maya*¹⁸, here with the full meaning of illusion. However, instead of positing an ultimate reality (such as the Vedantic Brahman), Buddha declared that behind the illusion is absolutely nothing. Thus life is nothing more than illusion that takes away from the fundamental nothingness: *sunyata*, also meaning the void. Buddhism explained the supreme non-self, *anatman*. Metaphysically speaking, the time of liberation takes place when the being happens to recognize his position of non-self in the emptiness, which is *enlightenment*. All associations or connections have been defeated, and at this time the individual can penetrate the non-state of *nirvana*, which stands for "blown out." It is occasionally said that self-extinction is the objective of Buddha's way of life also expressed as one's self-extinctedness. Nonexistence is the actuality of life. The realization of life is to become nonexistent to this world. One merely has to become conscious of it. Until one achieves that consciousness, he or she remains on the cycle of *samsara*, nudged on by *karma*.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid. 223.

¹⁸ *Maya* means "illusion." It comes from the Sanskrit roots *ma* (not) and *ya* (that). Therefore meaning "not that."

¹⁹ Ibid. 223.

CHAPTER 2: THERAVADA BUDDHISM

BASICS BELIEFS AND FOUNDATIONS

Progress in life is up to the individual in Theravada Buddhism. Moving forward depends on his understanding and the desire or will of a person.²⁰ Theravada holds that humankind is distinct in the cosmos. There are existence of gods, but they are of no assistance in succeeding in true freedom. Self-sufficiency is the alternative.²¹ In Theravada Buddhism the primary feature of liberation is *bodhi* (wisdom), denoting deep understanding into the character of actuality, the source of angst and affliction, and the lack of an unattached center of selfhood. From these insights stream the "Four Divine Abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity, and joy in the happiness and well-being of others."²²

The Theravada *sangha* has by traditionally had a "monastic bias". Monasteries (and to a lesser degree the nunneries) are the religious dominants in domains where Theravada prevails, prompting every person to a greater loyalty outside of evident actuality. Monks and nuns--only partly secluded from civilization because they are reliant on locals for the one meal each that is place into their bowls used for begging--are deserving of immense reverence. In both Burma and Thailand, "taking the robe" for a three-month monastic withdrawal has practically indicated the path into male maturity.²³

The ideal for Theravadins is the *arhat*, the faultless devotee who, "wandering like the lone rhinoceros," goes out unaccompanied for enlightenment and, with exceptional focus, continues steadfastly in the direction of that objective.²⁴ Theravadins respect the Buddha as an ultimate sage who through his own labors aroused to the reality and became an unparalleled

²⁰ Huston Smith and Phil Novak. *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2003), 66.

²¹ *Ibid.* 67.

²² *Ibid.* 67.

²³ *Ibid.* 68

²⁴ *Ibid.* 68-69.

instructor who set out a pathway for them to pursue. His humanness is the foundation for Theravadins' belief that they also have the potential for nirvana. But the Buddha's straightforward individual authority concluded with his *parinirvana* (entrance into nirvana at death). At this point, he is aware of "nothing more of this world of becoming and is at perfect peace".²⁵

Theravada sought to incarnate a feature of the Buddha's teachings that has not thus far been mentioned: his vision of an entire society--a civilization--that was founded, like a tripod, on the monarchy, the monastic community, and the laity, each with responsibilities to the other two and meriting services from them in return. South Asian countries which remain Theravadin--Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia--assumed this political edge of the Buddha's point earnestly, and remains of his mold are apparent in those countries even today. Theravada remained faithful to its founders vision of a Buddhist civilization.²⁶ Theravada alleges to be the strictest school to the earliest instruction of the Buddha. This idea developed because of its relationship to the *Pali Canon* (Buddhist literature).²⁷ The *Pali Canon* is the most primitive written form of the Buddha's wisdom and was documented in a language similar to the one he spoke. Within Theravada, the *sangha* has "two central tasks: the "insight task"--the work of meditation---and the "book task"--learning and preaching informed by the Pali scriptures."²⁸ The Theravada school continued to be fairly accurate to the wisdom of Gautama by upholding a religion that focuses on monks.

The idea of *tathagatagarbha* means the Buddha nature is existing in every and all sentient beings. *Tathagatagarbha* literally means "the womb containing a Buddha" or "the

²⁵ Ibid., 69-70.

²⁶ Ibid., 72.

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Ibid., 75.

embryo or essence of a Buddha contained in a womb."²⁹ Original Buddhism under Siddhartha Gautama and his close followers had no separation between males and females in regards to their ability to reach nirvana even though discrimination in the society against women was prevalent in ancient India. The idea that females are not able to become a Buddha comes about in the first century B.C. The emptiness philosophy and the nature of Buddha existing in all living beings states that a woman can reach enlightenment as she is.³⁰

Nirvana is the Third Dharma Seal and "is the ground of being, the substance of all that is." His example is that water is the substance of the wave. "Nirvana is the complete silencing of concepts." The Buddha declared, "My dear friends, the Dharma I offer you is only a raft to help you to cross over to the other shore." The Buddha never intended for the dharma to be worshipped. "Nirvana is the ground of all that is. Nirvana does not exist separate of impermanence and nonself."³¹ "Nirvana means extinction, above all the extinction of ideas - the ideas of birth and death, existence and nonexistence, coming and going, self and other, one and many. All these ideas cause us to suffer." "The Eight Concepts of Buddhism are "birth, death, permanence, dissolution, coming, going, one, and many. The practice to end attachment to these eight ideas is called the Eight No's of the Middle Way - no birth and no death, no permanence and no dissolution, no coming and no going, no one and no many." "once these eight ideas have been destroyed, we touch nirvana. Nirvana is release from the Eight Concepts, and also from their opposites -- impermanence, nonself, Independent Co-Arising, emptiness, and the Middle Way." "Experience always goes beyond ideas."³² "Impermanence, nonself, Interdependent Co-

²⁹ Ibid., 69

³⁰ Ibid., 70

³¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 136.

³² Ibid., 139

Arising, and the Middle Way are all keys to open the door of reality."³³ "The Three Dharma Seals (impermanence, nonself, and nirvana) are the keys one can use to enter the Three Doors (sometimes called the Three Concentrations) of Liberation -- emptiness (*shunyata*), signlessness (*animitta*), and aimlessness (*apranihita*)." The Three Dharma Seals lead to the Three Doors of Liberation which ultimately lead to "When we enter these doors, we dwell in concentration and are liberated from fear, confusion, and sadness." Emptiness (*shunyata*) means "empty of something"; it does not mean nonexistence.³⁴ "Emptiness is the Middle Way between existent and nonexistent."³⁵ "Emptiness is a Door of Liberation when we penetrate it deeply and we realize Interdependent Co-Arising and the interbeing nature of everything that is." "The Second Door of Liberation is signlessness, *animitta*, meaning the absence of perceptual attributes."³⁶ 'Sign' here means an appearance or the object of our perception. When we see something, a sign or image appears to us, and that is what is meant by "*lakshana*." "Signs are instruments for our use, but they are not absolute truth, and they can mislead us. Perceptions often tell us as much about the perceiver as the object of perception. Appearances can deceive."³⁷ "The greatest relief is when we break through the barriers of sign and touch the world of signlessness, nirvana."³⁸ "The Third Door of Liberation is aimlessness, *apranihita*, is the Sanskrit term for "throwing away". There is nothing to do, nothing to realize, no program, no agenda. This is the Buddhist teaching about eschatology." The purpose of a human is to be a human. "This teaching of the Buddha allows us to enjoy ourselves, the blue sky, and everything that is refreshing and healing in the present moment." "There is no need to put anything in front of us and run after it. We

³³ Ibid., 140.

³⁴ Ibid., 146.

³⁵ Ibid., 147.

³⁶ Damien Keown. "[animitta](http://www.encyclopedia.com)." *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. 2004. *Encyclopedia.com*. 6 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

³⁷ Ibid., 148.

³⁸ Ibid., 149.

already have everything we are looking for, everything we want to become."³⁹ "All elements for your happiness are already here. There is no need to run, strive, search, or struggle. Just be. Just being in the moment in this place is the deepest practice of meditation."⁴⁰

SACRED TEXTS

The chief holy manuscripts in the premature stage of Buddhist accounts are identified jointly as the *Pali Canon*. The term *Pali* comes from the language of the original Buddhist manuscripts, which Theravada Buddhists assert was the language of the Buddha. Organization of the manuscripts in Pali is a representation of the denial of the power of the Sanskrit Vedic literature. The Canon is also referred to as the *Tripitaka* ("three baskets"): *Vinaya Pitaka* ("the basket of disciplinary regulations"), *Sutta Pitaka* ("the baskets of discourses"), and *Abidhamma Pitaka* ("the basket of higher philosophy"). The thirty-one parts of the manuscript in the Pali Canon derived during the first five hundred years after the demise of the Buddha. The manuscripts were initially oral traditions before they were written. The first basket is compiled of rules for all areas of the existence of a Buddhist monk. The second basket includes the basic instructions of the Buddha. The *Dhammapada* comes from this second basket. It is a text on morality. The third basket centers on a study of the character of life as it is implicit in Theravada training.⁴¹

The basic Theravadan teaching about human nature is that there is no eternalness in life. Life will begin and end and continue to cycle until one reaches *nirvana*. For Theravadans, the truth of human nature is *anatman* (*anatta* in Pali), which means "no eternal self."⁴² When the Buddha discusses rebirth, he refers to the example of a flame being passed from candle to candle.

³⁹ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 153.

⁴¹ Young, 86.

⁴² Ibid., 87

The heat that causes a new flame to ignite. The same existence being transferred to another. Human existence is the same way. Everything change and nothing is permanent. William A. Young states, "As long as life is 'on fire' with desire, its influence will be passed into a new existence, "igniting a new life. When the candle flame is extinguished, it no longer causes a new flame. When the flame of desire, in a human life is blown out, there is no more 'rebirth.'"⁴³

The Vinaya provides the governing procedures of ordination and the rules governing life as a monk or nun, known as the *pratimoksa* (Pali *patimokkha*). The Vinaya is written for the discipline of the participants of the monastery. In early Buddhism, becoming a monk simply involved leaving the home life and becoming homeless. Ordination involved a request to the Buddha and receiving his acceptance with the words: "Come, monk. Well taught is the Dharma. Live the spiritual life for the complete ending of suffering."⁴⁴ A Buddhist nun would follow the same pattern of ordination and discipline. The Vinaya states that a candidate for monkhood must be of age "to scare a crow," typically seven or eight years old. A novice monk has his head shaved and puts on robes. Then he declares the formula of going for refuge to the Buddha, *dharma*, and *sangha*, and vows to follow the ten precepts (*siksa-/sikkha-pada*): to abstain from injuring living organisms, to avoid taking what is not offered, to abstain from all sexual things, to avoid lies, to abstain from intoxicants, to avoid eating after noon, to abstain from going to leisure activities, to avoid wearing jewelry or using perfumes, to abstain from sleeping on comfortable beds, and to avoid from handling gold and silver.⁴⁵ A novice may become a candidate for full ordination at the age of 20.⁴⁶ At the end of the ordination ceremony a Buddhist monk is told that the four essential 'resources' (*misraya/missaya*) that he can count on for the four 'requisites'

⁴³ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁴ Gethin, 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 87-8.

(*pariskara/parikkhara*) of “food, clothing, lodging, and medicine are food offered to him as alms, robes made of discarded rags, the foot of a tree, and fermented urine respectively.” Monks are allowed to have eight items as his personal possessions: three robes, an alms bowl, a razor, a needle, a belt, and water-strainer. The appearance and role of a monk is now distinguished from that of laypeople in society. His family makes a promise to support him during his time as a monk. He also leaves behind his occupation and his personal possessions and lives off of the generosity of the lay people.⁴⁷

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

According to the Buddha's teachings, the First Noble Truth is the place to start one's spiritual journey. Even though he was leading a life of material abundance, he was suffering.⁴⁸ The "Parable of the Mustard Seed" addresses the issue of suffering. The woman realized that suffering was the fate of all people. All aspects of life, even the pleasant ones, have the seeds of the suffering that is shared among all human experience. The First Noble Truth, *dukkha* or suffering, is perceived as the problem; the cause is found in the Second Noble Truth, suffering is caused by craving or desire (*tanha*).⁴⁹ Desire leads to attachment of things or people, which is suffering for humans. Humans would not suffer if they were not attached and would not be attached if they did not desire people or things. Theravadans consider that even craving for religious ways of life lead to connection with something. To rid one's self of all desires is viewed as necessary to genuine religious existence. The Third Noble Truth is the End; it is the extinction of craving. This extinction leads to *nirvana*. There is a way to get rid of the suffering caused by desire. The aim and way to end suffering for Theravada Buddhism is freedom from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). When desire is quenched then suffering and rebirth ceases. There

⁴⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁸ Young, 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 89.

is a cessation to suffering.⁵⁰ *Nirvana* (Pali *nibbana*) follows suffering. *Nirvana* literally means "blowing out." Reality is on fire with desire and this needs to be extinguished. This is the cause of suffering and pain. When the desire is put out, suffering ceases. *Nirvana* happens whenever a person is awakened just as the Buddha was.

The lotus flower is an universal representation in South Asian religions for freedom and enlightenment. This representation is seen in a Theravadan text known as The Questions of King Milinda, which directs toward the certainty of *nirvana*: "As the lotus is unstained by water, so is *Nirvana* unstained by all the defilements." The person who observes the way of the Buddha and reaches liberation is called an *arhant* (Pali for "worthy one"; also written *arhat* or *arahant*). An *arhant* has defeated attachment and craving and will no longer be reborn after this life has ended. There is not a certain number of lives that a person must be reborn in order to become an *arhant*; it depends on a person's merit.

The means is the Fourth Noble Truth, which is the Noble Eightfold Path of the Middle Way. The termination of suffering is found in the steps of the Noble Eightfold Path. These steps are: right belief, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right means of livelihood, right endeavor, right mindfulness, right meditation. This is known as the "middle way" between denying one's self and indulging one's self. It is a modest and centered method of existing. There are no expressions of devotion to gods or a personal god. No God helps a person reach enlightenment.⁵¹ According to the First Noble Truth, birth, death, disease and old age are all painful and is therefore suffering. Having what we do not desire and not having what we desire is painful and is therefore suffering. The Second Noble Truth is the craving desire for the pleasures, happiness, and prosperity in this life and in future lives. The Third Noble Truth is to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 90.

⁵¹ Ibid., 91.

be free of suffering one must extinguish the craving. The Fourth Noble Truth leads to the cessation of all pain by the Noble Eightfold Path.⁵² The way to reach *nirvana* and to stop pain and suffering. A key concept in Buddhism is *nirvana*, which is the final goal for Buddhists.⁵³

In the practice of Theravada Buddhism, becoming an *arahant* and attaining nirvana is limited to monks. Theravada Buddhism is centered in Southeast Asia where monks and nuns gather in monasteries and convents. In most Southeast Asian countries, monks wear yellow robes, shave their heads, and own very few possessions. Every monk and nun vows to observe the ten precepts of monastic life.⁵⁴

LAY PEOPLE

The spiritual life of lay people includes observing the first five precepts, spending a limited amount of time in a monastery (for young men especially), showing generosity to monks and nuns, receiving instruction from monks and nuns, and showing respect and honor for the Buddha by visiting shrines holding images and/or relics of the Buddha. The most important monuments in Theravada Buddhism are *stupas*. *Stupas* are unique dome- or bell-shaped constructions that accommodate relics related to the Buddha or other early leaders. In Theravada Buddhism, the Buddha is not being worshipped as a god. Supporters are showing respect for the one who has achieved enlightenment and characteristically pledge themselves to follow his model.⁵⁵

There are five precepts taught by Buddhism that all Buddhists should follow: kill no living thing (including insects), do not steal, do not commit adultery, tell no lies, and do not drink intoxicants or take drugs. There are other precepts that apply only to monks and nuns.

⁵² McDowell, 307.

⁵³ Ibid., 309.

⁵⁴ Young, 93.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 93.

These include: eat moderately and only at the appointed time, avoid that which excites the senses, do not wear adornments (including perfumes), do not sleep in luxurius beds, and accept no silver or gold.⁵⁶

THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND RELIGION

Some scholars consider Theravada Buddhism to be an atheistic religion, which denies a vital role for a personal god or gods. Theravada Buddhism asserts that gods have no responsibility to act in human liberation, neither do other spirits or human agencies. Each person "work out his or her own liberation."

Theravada Buddhism is growing stronger in South Asia after a decline and a history of political oppression and uprisings.⁵⁷

Other scholars consider Buddhism to be a dharmic religion. It is a division of Hinduism that split and became its own spiritual structure. Buddhism was established in the sixth century before the birth of Jesus Christ. It came about in an era of discontentment regarding Hinduism's indistinct theoretical origins and unsettled good. Buddhism is believed to be best understood as a philosophy rather than a religious system because it does not embrace a God. The highest level of knowledge in Buddhism is referred to as nirvana.⁵⁸ The term, the Buddha, means "the Enlightened One." The Sermon at Benares holds the crucial perceptions of Buddhism, which are referred to as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path. Buddhism accepts evil, and the solution for evil is encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths which lead to the Eightfold Noble Path.⁵⁹ Early Buddhist commonly assumed that when a monk reached enlightenment, he would

⁵⁶ McDowell, 311.

⁵⁷ Young, 94.

⁵⁸ Ergun Caner, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008) 114.

⁵⁹ Caner, 115.

stop living. This type of Buddhism carries on today and is known as Theravada Buddhism. The term Theravada is translated as "The Doctrine of the Elders" in Pali.⁶⁰

According to a traditional reading of the canonical texts, the ordination of Theravada nuns is not possible for technical reasons (i.e., the non-existence of recognized Theravada nuns who would be able to carry out their part of the ordination procedure). For nun ordination to be possible, the *Vinaya* texts' prescribed ordination procedure would have to be changed.⁶¹ That is, in this case, the equal spiritual potential of both genders for Awakening, for which reason the Buddha established the order of nuns.⁶²

Buddhism is not a collection of theoretical writings nor a philosophical system of thought. What lies at the heart of Buddhism, according to its own understanding of the matter, is *dharma*. *Dharma* is not an exclusively Buddhist concept, but one which is common to Indian philosophical, religious, social, and political thought in its entirety. According to Indian thought *Dharma* is that which is the basis of things, the underlying nature of things, the way things are, in short, it is the truth about things, the truth about the world. More than this, *Dharma* is the way we should act, for if we are to avoid bringing harm to both ourselves and others we should strive to act in a way that is true to the way things are, that accords with the underlying truth of things. Ultimately the only true way to act is in conformity with *Dharma*.⁶³ In presenting its teachings to the world, the Buddhist tradition would thus point towards an unbroken lineage or succession of teachers and pupils: just as the Buddha took care to instruct his pupils, so they in turn took care to instruct theirs. This is visible in the *sangha*. The *dharma* is a part of the *sangha's* responsibility in teaching others. To become a monk or nun in Buddhism requires a ceremony

⁶⁰ Caner, 116.

⁶¹ Martin Seeger, "Thai Buddhist and the Authority of the Pali Canon." *Contemporary Buddhism* 8, no.1 (2007): 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶³ Gethin, 35.

with rules and rituals that was performed by Siddhartha Gautama himself. The ceremony requires that at least five ordained monks of at least ten years experience to be present. Therefore when a monk is ordained, he is now part of the direct lineage to the Buddha. This same principle occurs outside the *sangha* because the members teach the lay people also. This training is the foundation for ridding one's self of greed, aversion, and delusion because it is the foundational reason for suffering.⁶⁴ This same training, practice and way of life was followed by the Buddha.

The earliest texts allow that in order to attain enlightenment one must first become a monk. The foundation of the lifestyle of the monk is complete renunciation of household duties for religious life and complete reliance upon the kindness of the society for their provisions of food and clothing. Buddhism was dependent upon the willingness and desire to renounce normal life and become part of the *sangha*. The followers of Buddha fell into two social categories: homeless wanderers and lay supporters.⁶⁵

The achievement of enlightenment is not obtained in just one lifetime. It can take multiple lifetimes to reach nirvana. Sakyamuni achieved full Enlightenment around the age of thirty-five, after beginning his homeless life about six years prior. Attaining enlightenment did not take a short period of time. Humans have no true perception of the ultimate realization of Enlightenment is potential except for the vast training over long periods of time is taken into consideration.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁶⁶ Eric Cheetham, *Fundament of Mainstream Buddhism* (Boston: Boston Tuttle Publishing, 1994) 39.

CHAPTER 3: THAILAND

THE RELIGION

The religion of the country of Thailand is Buddhism, specifically from the Theravadan branch. More than 100 million Theravada Buddhists are in the world; most are in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and most parts of Vietnam. The Theravada school began in Sri Lanka shortly after monks from India established Buddhism there. Theravada Buddhism initially reached Thailand in the third century B.C. but did not become deeply rooted until the Sukothai era (between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries).⁶⁷ Buddhism has acted as an essentially important part in the historical development of the country and continues today as a support of Thai society. For many Thais, their religion is an important part of daily life. Thai Buddhism has acquired the influences of numerous distinct cultures because of the country's position at the crossroads of Southeast Asia. Thai Buddhism is complexly intertwined with "Hinduism, ancient local folklore, and an assortment of gods, demons, and monsters" making it an intricate but captivating belief system.⁶⁸ Thai Buddhism has taken in a great deal of local beliefs, superstitions, and folklore, which presents it as unique in countless manners.⁶⁹

THE NATIONS

The Theravada nations of Southeast Asia include Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. The current inhabitants of Southeast Asia come mainly from the ethnic people who immigrated from southwest China beginning in 1000 BC. These migrations of people progressed through the thirteenth century AD. These regular movements from China were

⁶⁷ Arne Kislenko, *Culture and Customs of Thailand: Culture and Customs of Asia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

channeled into four north-south courses by the great rivers of the Southeast Asian peninsula--the Irrawady, the Salween, the Chao Phraya and the Mekong Rivers. A fifth course ran along the coast of Vietnam. The people groups who moved along and occupied the Chao Phraya in recent times are known as the modern Thais.⁷⁰ According to the Buddhist history, the Indian ruler Asoka sent a Buddhist mission to Southeast Asia in the third century BC. The geographical axis from which Theravada Buddhism stretched all over Southeast Asia is Thailand.⁷¹

Since Thailand has eluded Western rule and preserved its long-established monarchy, the monarchy is Thailand's national identity. The Thai people are understandably pleased with their political liberation and their ancient culture of government. Thailand is one of the most westernized countries in Southeast Asia even though it has never been ruled by a western country. The people's devotion to Buddhism persists undiminished. Most Thai men make it priority to engage in the *sangha* for at least a few weeks or months at some point in their lives. This practice of "temporary ordination" is exclusive to Thailand and provides the Thai laity an particularly solid rapport with the *sangha*.⁷²

THE HISTORY OF KINGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE

Rama Khamhaeng organized Theravada Buddhism as the state religion of Thailand; but in addition he began what was to stay a distinguished part of Thailand: "its subservices to the throne."⁷³ During the Ayutthaya era Thai Buddhism continued to be strictly Theravadin, but the king--viewed as a *bodhisattva* incarnate or as a *cakravartin* or "wheel turning monarch" acquired control over the *sangha*. While enduring strictly Theravada in religious direction, the Thai rulers of the Sukothai and Ayutthaya periods preserved at court Hindu Brahmin priests to execute the

⁷⁰ Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Freemont, CA: Jain Publishing Company, 1994), 99.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 122.

different practices and ceremonies connected to the throne. This tradition describes the ongoing presence of Hindu aspects---in the form of shrines and festivals---in the spiritual life of Thailand. The continuing high status of the king of Thailand---though the real power was taken away during the coup of 1932---likely derives ultimately from the ancient tradition of Khmer-style kingship in the Sukothai and Ayutthaya eras.⁷⁴

Because of the skillful diplomacy of the Chakri kings, Thailand has avoided the European colonialism that was the fate for the rest of Southeast Asia. The Chakri rulers have also been significant in transforming Thai Buddhism by lessening its Mahayanist and Hindu additions. Rama I (r. 1782-1809), the first king of the Chakri line, pursuing the model of Asoka, took on a cleansing of the *sangha* by executing policies to restrain tolerance with the monks. He also arranged a compilation and modification of the Theravada scriptures.⁷⁵ Within the time that Rama III held power (r. 1824-51), representatives were sent out to Sri Lanka in 1840 and 1843. These representatives brought back authentic transcripts of the Pali Canon upon which to build enduring labors to correct the Thai canon, which was concluded to be fallible and unfinished.⁷⁶ With concern for the reconstruction of Buddhism the most noteworthy of the Chakri rulers was Rama IV, also known as Mongkut, who ruled from 1851-1868. Mongkut rose to the throne two years before his contemporary, Mindon (r. 1853-1878) became king of Burma. He spent twenty-five years of his life as a monk while his older brother remained king until his death. During this time, he became widely-known as an earnest Buddhist scholar and reformer. He also became articulate in the English language and aware of Western culture. Upon rising to the throne, Mongkut strengthened the reconstructionist tasks of his older brother Rama III by further establishing the actions and principles of monastic explorations. He also supervised the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 124.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 124-125.

fulfillment of the careful correction of the Thai Buddhist canon that had been in development since Rama I. Overall Mongkut's all-embracing transformation plan came to be recognized as the *dhammayuttika* or "adherence to *dharma* movement. Ultimately, this faction involved formulation of the strict *Dhammayut* sect, which became the second major stem of Thai Buddhism besides the ancient Mahanikaya. Mongkut directed the Buddhist modernization progress to purify Thai Buddhism of non-canonical additions and to reinterpret non-coherent parts of the scriptures in light of Western rationalism.⁷⁷ Mongkut was influential in leading Thailand into the present time in the political and diplomatic areas as well in the sacred area. His political labors, which ended in agreements with both Britain and France, probably kept Thailand from European colonialism. These treaties were extremely adverse to Thailand in provisions of territorial and trade concessions, but they launched Thailand's global position as a self-sufficient country.⁷⁸ Mongkut also made extensive changes in the Thai financial system and culture with the assistance of western advisors. During his lifetime, the results of these changes were restricted primarily to Bangkok, but at present Thailand generally is one of the richest and most modernized countries in Southeast Asia, mostly as a product of the forces Mongkut put into action. Mongkut's son Chulalongkorn, King Rama IV (1868-1910), persisted with his father's plan of politically playing the French off against the British and preserving freedom at the value of detrimental treaties with Western authorities. He also sustained Mongkut's strategy of modernization and steady Westernization. In Thailand, in contrast to the remainder of Southeast Asia, this modernization course happened under the support of the long-established regime rather than under the pressure of a foreign government. As a result, Buddhism in Thailand continued as a supportive power in government rather than as a center of disagreement. Chulalongkorn's

⁷⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 125-126.

chief involvement in Thai Buddhism was his establishment of advanced schooling amenities for monks which later became Buddhist universities. The monks educated within, generally from the *Dhammayut* sect, functioned as the stirring energy behind Chulalongkorn's striving and thriving strategy of using Thailand's enveloping structure of monasteries to extend primary education among the population. Thailand's constitutional governments have demonstrated to be unsteady, however, so that the king still has substantial actual supremacy.

The position of the king of Thailand maintains the strong allegiance of the people and continues as the key figure of national harmony and honor. The king also remains the apparent leader of the Thai *sangha*.⁷⁹ Thailand has become one of the most westernized countries in Southeast Asia even though it has avoided control by a Western nation. The Thais have preserved their freedom with their skillful political negotiations with foreign powers and adaptations of foreign thought into their society. That cost is a conflicting culture, which is deeply devoted to Buddhism and its very old royal institution, but also intensely tainted by Western pressure.

During World War II, as an ally of Japan, Thailand was in fact an exploited colony. After the war, the United States granted generous economic aid to Thailand and backed Thailand in the re-negotiation of unfavorable treaties signed earlier with Britain and France. Eager to gain a trading partner in Southeast Asia, traditionally a European market, America endowed greatly monetarily in Thailand, chasing its own kind of colonialism with the population. Later, during the Vietnam War, the United States used Thailand as a staging area and a "rest and relaxation" center for its troops. This pumped yet more American dollars into the Thai economy. The American investment helped to make Thailand one of the most prosperous nations in the Eastern hemisphere, but it had a negative side. American leave of absence to Thailand during the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 126.

Vietnam War resulted in extensive prostitution. Today, many tourists visit Thailand for its sex trade alone. At the same time, an observant visitor will notice that every bar and brothel has a small Buddhist shrine at which the prostitutes pray without fail before going on duty. Thailand is infamous for its role in the manufacture and trade of illicit drugs, and organized crime is pervasive. The serious level of corruption in Thailand is recognized and deplored by many Thais, but it is a source of livelihood for many others. Thailand remains, along with Japan and Sri Lanka, one of the primary Buddhist voices in the modern world.⁸⁰

BUDDHISM IN THAILAND

Almost ninety-five percent of Thailand's sixty-five million are Theravada Buddhists. The greatest threat to Buddhism in Thailand is the enticement of materialism that has increased as exposure to modern, secular, and Western manners has grown in popularity. One influential Thai Buddhist reform movement, the *Dhammakaya*, highlights that financial rejuvenation is not irreconcilable with Buddhist instructions, and centers on the quest for individual serenity. This movement has won the sponsorship of the Thai royal family and is accepted among those who have profited from the globalized financial system. Other Thai monks have led efforts to transform distorted governmental organizations and build up more environmentally accountable strategies and agendas.⁸¹

Thailand has grown quickly economically in the last twenty years. The "Westernisation" of the standard of living and the swift development of the tourist trade have resulted in consequences of widespread sexual services industry and an HIV/AIDS epidemic.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁸¹ Young, 95.

⁸² Areewan Klunklin and Jennifer Greenwood, "Buddhism, the Status of Women and the Spread of HIV/AIDS in Thailand." *Healthcare for Women International* 26,no. 1 (2005): 47.

CHAPTER 4: THAI BUDDHISM

Thai Buddhism is ruled by the Triple Gems (*Tiratna*): the Buddha, his teachings (the *dhamma*), and the Buddhist community (*sangha*). Images of the Buddha are found in many places in Thailand, such as in palaces, temples (*wats*), museums, homes, hotels, restaurants, office buildings, and corner stores. The *dhamma* is recited in *wats* and during prayers but can also be distinguished through Thai folktales, popular movies, and Thai schools, where it is commonly taught. The *sangha* is most likely best comprehended through the great magnitude of monks (*phra*), highly evident with their shaved heads and bright orange or red robes, discovered all over the nation. Ancient Indian reports of Thailand refer to it as "The Land of Yellow Robes" because of the number of monks.⁸³

GENDER ROLES

In Thailand, it is widely believed and practiced that Buddhism encourages gender and sexual discrimination and differentiation. Influential temples and Buddhist intellectuals teach that women and homosexual people are lower than, so ritual and practices within popular Buddhist practice derive from this inherent belief. Women are not allowed to be ordained as monks in Thailand; they are also not allowed in sacred places such as certain *pagodas*. It is common in northern Thailand to see a sign in front of a *pagoda* explicitly stating "Women not allowed." in the same way, homosexuals are singled out. Homosexuality is seen as the result of bad karma in past lives, so homosexuals would not be considered for ordination as well.⁸⁴

The notion of gender equality in Buddhism is first referred to in the *Tripitaka Vinaya*, where the Buddha, when pushed for an answer from Ananda, announced that it is possible for

⁸³ Kislenko, 29.

⁸⁴ Kularir Pipat, "Gender and Sexual Discrimination in Popular Thai Buddhism." *Journal for Faith, Spirituality and Social Change* 1, no. 1 (2007): 68.

women to leave their household life by becoming *bhikkuni* (female monks). He also stated that it is possible for women to achieve different levels of enlightenment. He allowed women to be ordained as female monks. Many of the women in the Buddha's time achieved enlightenment at diverse levels, according to the *Then Gatha Sutra* in *Tripitaka*. The *Tripitaka* also states that there should be four Buddhist groups: *bhikku* or male monk, *bhikkuni* or female monk, *upasaka* or layman, *upasika* or laywomen. The Buddha said that the structure of these four groups is required for Buddhism to be firmly rooted, and that these four groups must study, practice, and be able to defend the *dhamma*. The construction of these four groups mirrors the equivalent duty and gender equality of both genders to perform and maintain Buddhism. Reference to lack of ability to follow Buddhism or to achieve enlightenment because of physiological sex does not emerge in Buddhist texts. Instead, the center of *vipassana* or Buddhist insight meditation is clarified as mindfulness in the four foundations: body, feeling, mind or thought, and *dhamma* or objective of the mind. Enlightenment is considered a development of the mind and the body and is only a basis, called *rupa* or form in meditative practice. Due to the lack of clear mention of the confines of physiological sex and the confines placed on spirituality practice, it would apparently pursue that physiological and biological diversities between men and women would have no effect on their aptitude to attain enlightenment.⁸⁵ However, Thai Buddhism as it is presently accomplished deems that physiological sex does not make a distinction in terms of enlightenment. Some Thai monks, specifically of the prominent *Dhammakaya* Temple in a suburb of Bangkok, instruct that to be born as a woman is a result of bad karma accumulated in past lives. Women cannot reach enlightenment or nirvana. If she wants to become enlightened, she must make much merit by offering donations to the temple, then pray to be born as a man in

⁸⁵ Ibid., 69.

the next life, as only men have the ability to be enlightened. This idea first appears in the commentary on the Tripitaka written by senior monks five centuries later.⁸⁶

MALE ORDINATION

When a man wants to be ordained, the public agrees with and encourages him. But when a woman wants to be ordained, the public questions and discourages her. Women's ordination is considered to be an escape from life's problems, whereas men's ordination is considered to be a desire for purity and liberation. The basic belief that women are inferior to or lower than men and are impure leads to the discriminating religious practices against women. For instance, in the Buddhist temples of northern Thailand, the sign "Women not allowed" is placed outside a fence surrounding *prathat* or *pagoda* containing the Buddha's relics.⁸⁷ This belief in discrimination, inferiority and impurity of women underwrites the thought that women should not be ordained as *bhikkunis* or female monks. The Tripitaka says that the Buddha allows *bhikkunis*. The *bhikkuni* order has spread vastly throughout countries in Asia, such as Sri Lanka, China and Taiwan. However, the lineage of the *bhikkuni* order was broken before it reached Thailand, and Thailand does not have an established order of *bhikkuni* like other Asian countries.⁸⁸

The teachings of dominant temples have resulted in lack of religious access and equal support for Thai Buddhist women, either through the banning of women in public religious arenas or by withholding ordination from them. According to Sharlardchai Ramitanondh, a Thai feminist anthropologist, when women are forbidden from entering an area or realm, they are also forbidden from attaining the information that is part of that spectrum. Women are denied

⁸⁶ Ibid., 69-70.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 70.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 72.

entrance into certain areas that men are allowed. Therefore, women are not allowed to experience the same as men. The Sangha Act of 1928 forbids Thai monks from establishing women as nuns. This presents a barrier to the religious development of Thai Buddhist women by withholding legal and financial assistance from the government. Restricting women's access to knowledge and information in these two vital ways restricts their power and influence in the religious area.⁸⁹ Lack of a *bhikkuni* order is made up by the *mae chii* (tradition Thai Buddhist nuns) order. However, the status of *mae chiis* has always been challenging and vague. The Thai government has never officially acknowledged *mae chiis*, their rank changes with various understandings of diverse government divisions. For example, the Ministry of Transport and Communication deems *mae chiis* to be laywomen since they follow only eight or ten precepts. *Mae chiis* are not able to receive educational and financial help from government divisions as monks do. However, the Ministry of Interior deems *mae chiis* to be ordained women because they shave their head, wear a white robe (which signifies religious standing and live in the temple). Although they do not have the right to vote. *Mae chiis* face a double standard. Many young Buddhist women who are fascinated in spiritual things tend to reject becoming a *mae chii* because of the lack of respect and stature. The other option is to become a *bhikkuni* through more difficult ways.

The Sangha Act makes it almost impossible for women to gain access to ordination within the country; they have to go to another Buddhist country to seek ordination. However, ordination in another country necessitates adequate financial income; many do not have the finances. Another way they can obtain ordination is from foreign Theravada monks and nuns who visit Thailand. In either situation, an obstacle faced is that they need language proficiency in order to communicate with foreign monks and nuns, if an interpreter is not readily available.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 72-3.

Ordination by foreign monks and nuns has never been recognized by the Thai Sangha.⁹⁰

One of the unintended consequences of restriction on ordination of women have been vulnerable to violence. Violence against Thai women in the religious realm has manifested in both physical and sexual ways. *Mae chii* are not provided with a temple of their own and must live-in residence with male monks, because they do not have legal recognition and financial support from the government. Their specific responsibility is to provide service to male monks in order to make merit for their future lives. Some monks have been taking advantage of this structural unfairness of roles. Monks are not permitted to be alone with an individual woman. However, some have commanded *mae chiis* to come to their room at night on the charade of learning the *dhamma* or doing extra household works, then raped the women. Because *mae chiis* are expected to respect monks as their masters, they do not have the authority to reject seemingly these commands. Monks are respected members of society and culture. It is difficult to report such abuses and to have abuses addressed by officials.⁹¹

GENDER BIAS AMONG THAI WOMEN

Gender bias can be found in Thai Buddhist women, especially in *mae chiis*. Many *mae chiis* believe that women are lesser than men because they are born from accrued negative karma. Therefore, *mae chiis* feel the need to make more merit by serving monks in order to acquire better rebirths (as a man). They tend to be subservient to the prejudice brought against them. *Mae chiis* have been carrying on patriarchy by not expressing gender bias. This could explain why Thai *mae chii* never organized into an organization to work against unmerited gender associations in Thai Buddhism and remain unacknowledged and diminished in Thai Buddhism.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁹¹ Ibid., 74.

This bias against women is found more among educated and middle-class women than the laywomen. However, due to the gender biased teachings and preaching of Thai Buddhist institutions, Thai women of all social standing feel to be tainted. They conform to the expectation of women in the temple and in public by maintaining physical distance from monks and refraining from religious studies. Women encompass the majority of temple followers and partakers in its routines and events, even though they are treated as second-class citizens in society.⁹²

THAI BUDDHIST WOMEN AND PROSTITUTION

According to Tavivat Puntarigivat, professor at Mahidol University in Bangkok, there is a linkage between the state of Buddhist women and prostitution in Thailand. Temple education functioned as a social ladder for poor people, females did not have access to the same opportunity and are forced into the labor market, including the sex industry.⁹³ There are several ways in which Buddhism legitimates trafficking. First, Buddhist teachings influence cultural valuations of women both as inferior to men and as the embodiments of sexuality, especially as sexual temptresses who present obstacles for monks attempting to maintain their vows of celibacy. The use of the female body as a symbol of attachment to the world of sensuality is a common theme throughout the Buddhist world, beginning with the story of the Buddha's renunciation from lay life. The Buddha's struggle under the Bodhi tree for Enlightenment years later involves rejecting the sensual enticement of Mara's "daughters" who have been sent to seduce him away from his spiritual goal. The influence of Buddhism on trafficking and the sex trade is indirect and subtle rather than direct and explicit. As Vietnamese scholar Thanh-Dam Truong observes, "the trade in women in Thailand arose from social conditions which were

⁹² Ibid., 75.

⁹³ Ibid., 75-76.

external to Buddhism as a body of thought, but has been consolidated by the biases inherent in Buddhism.” Women’s identity is depicted in Buddhist scriptures as embodied and social, embedded in relationships with others, and dependent on things of this “world”—the world of *samsara* or suffering.⁹⁴

Buddhist scriptures stress that women are connected to the physical realm of the senses and emotions, in contrast to men, who are more able to practice detachment, and are able to practice the spiritual path.⁹⁵ Prostitution is understood to amass negative karma by strengthening desire and connection to the sensual world of craving (which brings about bondage to *samsara*). Prostitution is not believed to be a “sin” in Buddhism as it is in Christianity, Islam, or other religions, and prostitutes are not always perceived negatively in Buddhist teachings. The earliest Buddhist scriptures include narratives involving prostitutes, sometimes as friends of the Buddha, whose generosity helps to sustain the *sangha*. (This fact itself may be a significant factor maintaining trafficking in Thailand).⁹⁶ Second, in accepted Buddhist perceptions, to be born a woman is the effect of earlier bad karma. Many Buddhist scriptures state that a woman can attain enlightenment only after having being reborn as a male. In order to be reborn as a male, females must gain merit. Women are limited in their means of merit-making because they are excluded from the Sangha. This further contributes to the discrimination of females in Buddhist cultures. A number of Thai women are opposed to the reestablishment of women in the Sangha. They believe they have more freedom and authority outside of the Sangha. If females were permitted into the Sangha, they would be subject to the “eight special rules” which state that nuns are inferior to monks. Women’s opportunities to earn merit are limited to birthing and

⁹⁴ Lucinda Joy Peach, "Human Rights, Religion, and (Sexual) Slavery" *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2007): 70.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

raising a son who will enter the Sangha and to merit-making activities, such as practicing kindness, giving money and goods to family and to the local monks and temple. Prostitutes take pride in how they can delight their parents and their villages by sending money home. Some family members willfully disregard question as to how the money that their daughters send home was worked for, as it can be used to make merit to the local temple. Women's work in the sex industry may be their best way of refining high merit. The Sangha does not excuse the sexual mistreatment of women through trafficking and forced prostitution, it has not officially contested these practices. The Sangha receives monetary benefit from the trafficking of women both directly and as capital. This leaves little benefit for the Sangha to condemn these practices.⁹⁷

The Buddhist belief encompasses several views that are potentially freeing for trafficked women: the central religious aim of Enlightenment, moral values, optimistic descriptions and illustrations of women and the feminine in Buddhist art and literature, and Buddhist narratives and stories.⁹⁸ The ultimate goal of the Buddhist way, also referred to as enlightenment or Buddhahood, is a resolution to the problem of rescuing women from repression. The central aim of Buddhist training and instruction proposes the opportunity of a final liberation, one which would free trafficked women from the attachment of suffering they encounter in this world of *samsara*. The ability of women to attain the chief aim is well rooted in Buddhism, despite the male-based language.

Two of the five essential precepts pertinent to all Buddhists are of particular significance to trafficking. The first forbids people from harming others and the fourth prohibits immoral sexual behavior. Also the Noble Eightfold Path to be employed in "right livelihood" forbids working in professions that involve hurting others. These can be relevant to denounce

⁹⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 74.

trafficking and the sex work connected with it. The Buddhist values of *metta* and *karuna* are known as loving kindness and compassion for other sentient beings. These principles could be used to reject the emotional, physical, mental, and sexual injury that trafficked women face. A third potential method to altering the negative judgment of women that cultivates the trafficking in Thailand is to accentuate existing constructive descriptions and symbols of women and the feminine in Buddhism.⁹⁹

BUDDHISM AND EQUALITY CLAIMS

Buddhist teachings contain the fundamental equality principle that all human beings are equal to one another in their ability to attain enlightenment. In Theravada Buddhism, this principle is found in the doctrines of *anatta*, or “no self,” and that of *praticya samutpada* or “dependent co-arising.” These teach that all persons are the same. All beings are co-dependent, they are not different from one another.¹⁰⁰ Providing the liberating potentials of Buddhist is an insufficient response to the experiences of trafficked women. First, before achieving Buddhahood, human beings wait in this world of *samsara*. Second, enlightenment is believed to engage a quantity of lifetimes of endeavor to achieve. This is even more remote of an opportunity for women. Third, women often are kept from learning and performing the duties of the Dharma by family responsibilities or other limitations, especially observed in the lives of trafficked women.¹⁰¹

“Many advocates of the *bhikkuni* ordination consider that there is a very direct relationship between the low status of women in Thai Buddhism and the inferior status of women in Thai society, which places them at risk of abuses such as domestic violence and sex

⁹⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 75-6.

trafficking, as well as increased vulnerability to HIV.”¹⁰² Women who become *mae chiis* shave their head and eyebrows shaved, give up their possessions and practice celibacy just as *bhikkunis* (nuns) do. *Mae chiis* only observe eight of the ten precepts rather than the 311 rules of the *bhikkuni patimokkha*. This seems to place them closer to lay Buddhists, who follow only five precepts. The low status of the *mae chii* is further diminished by the indistinct way in which they are dealt with by various government ministries in Thailand. There is no agreement about whether they are religious or lay persons. The Ministry of the Interior classifies the *mae chii* as a “skilled ordained” (candidate for ordination) who has abandoned worldly affairs and are not entitled to vote, but the Department of Religion and the Ministry of Communications regard them as lay women meaning they can vote. Therefore, the Department of Religion supports education for monks and novices but not for *mae chiis*, and the Ministry of Communication grants travel subsidies to monks but not to *mae chiis*.¹⁰³

Thailand lies in a distinct position with only five Thai women who live as Theravada *bhikkunis*. Monks in Thailand are not allowed to ordain women under the 1928 Sangha Act. The public and the monastic community have not been warm towards the introduction of the *bhikkuni* tradition in Thailand. The consensus in Thailand is that standing of women and choices within Buddhism need to go through alteration, but many disagree that it is more fitting to work towards changing the *mae chii* organization rather than to introduce the *bhikkuni* ordination.¹⁰⁴

The gender-related issues facing women in Thailand are domestic violence, sex trafficking and HIV transmission. These have religious and cultural aspects that are commonly

¹⁰² Emma Tomalin, "The Thai Bhikkhuni Movement and Women's Empowerment" *Gender Development* 14 no. 3 (2006): 386.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 377-8.

unnoticed by secular development groups and by the Buddhist establishment.¹⁰⁵ Two main subjects have materialized in discussions with ordained and lay Buddhist women in Thailand regarding the social benefits of the *bhikkuni* ordination. The first is the pragmatic function of Buddhism in offering diverse services to the community, which includes the denial of free religious and general education to girls. It is contended that the lack of education helps to promote the possibility of the sex trafficking of young girls. Most boys who become ‘temporary monks’ come from socially disadvantaged upbringings, and girls from comparable backgrounds are most probable to end up trafficked into the sex trade. It is argued that the opportunity for girls to become “temporary nuns” would help prevent them from being trafficked.¹⁰⁶

The establishment of a community of ordained females in Thai Buddhism would provide opportunities of education in the temples for girls also. Tomalin suggests that ordained females into the *sangha* could offer counseling services to women who have faced abuse, problems in their marriage, or have contracted HIV. In other countries, bhikkunis are consulted by lay people for support and advice. Due to societal constraints, it is challenging for women to receive religious and pragmatic advice from male monks. Thai women are viewed as subordinate to men. This influence is perceived as negative towards gender roles and social attitudes. These negative perceptions are also seen in Buddhist academic literature dealing with gender. “As Van Esterik writes, Buddhism is a ‘key component of Thai identity’ providing ‘a way of viewing the world, a sense of reality, moral standards, and a shared language and metaphors for analyzing their existing life situation.’” Buddhism strengthens the insight that women are of inferior rebirth than men because of *kamma* obtained in earlier lives and “women are socialized to be relational, socially embedded and family oriented than independent autonomous, self-

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 388.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 388-9.

determining individual.” This inherent weakness of women is supported within the structure of daily public Buddhist practice and tradition.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 379.

CHAPTER 5: WOMEN AND THAI BUDDHISM

It is frequently thought that females in Thailand benefit from more freedom and have more rights than in any other country in Southeast Asia. In part this is due to the fact that Thai women have taken part in a much larger role in financial and political affairs than females in other nations.¹⁰⁸ It is also common throughout a great deal of the country for women to manage family-run enterprises and household finances. This most likely progressed in part because of Buddhist rituals, which bestowed men the principal responsibility in the priesthood (*sangha*). Since only men could work for merit by enlisting in the priesthood, women sought out other opportunities.¹⁰⁹

Buddhism is often held to be responsible for the discrimination women in Thailand suffer. Male domination as a category of standard structure is perceived to be at the core of Thai culture. Thai advocates such as Sukanya Huntrakul and Khin Thitsa contend that Buddhism gives women less rank by insinuating in its doctrines and practice that they are lesser compared to men. Yet various Western and Thai scholars have observed that Buddhist texts and customs are indeed widely more complex and often present contradictory descriptions of women. In some *jataka* tales, "women are heroic, and often more moral and virtuous than men."¹¹⁰

Buddhist scholars of both genders claim that there is no separation between men and women on the way to *nibbana* (*nirvana*). Scholars indicate that in relation to the Buddhist canons, women can reach *nibbana* without having originally been born as males and those that believe they cannot have been indoctrinated from pre-Buddhist misogyny. In early Buddhist texts,

¹⁰⁸ Kislenko, 127.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 127.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

women are presented as fully equal to men, a contemplation strengthened by the notion of *karma*.¹¹¹

GENDER OR SEXUAL IDENTITY

In Buddhism, "sexual identity is not fixed for eternity"---the conclusion being that one can change sexes in other existences. In future lives, a person may be reborn as a different gender. Therefore, one is not eternally a female or male. Nevertheless, as many critics and scholars emphasize, in none of Buddha's former existences was he a female. More importantly, the Buddhist clergy (*sangha*) does not acknowledge the equal opportunity of females in the priesthood. The majority of women ordained as monks follow the Mahayana tradition, not the Thai Theravada sect. Therefore, the function that religion participates in gender issues is not completely apparent. It is as challenging to accuse Buddhism for the tribulations women confront in Thai culture as it is to blame Christianity for the unfairness women face in the west.¹¹²

"Gender identity is more basic for most people than identification in terms of color, shape, or even culture."¹¹³ In stories about the Buddha, his female rebirths ceased before his animal rebirths.¹¹⁴ Rita M. Gross contends that many Buddhists do not believe in the "existence of a permanent, abiding self; but the attitudes and actions indicate they do believe in the real existence of gender."¹¹⁵ A Buddhist slogan on self and gender is "The self does not exist, but it has gender." This view seems to be illogical because if one does not have natural existence, then no characteristic of that person can have innate being.¹¹⁶ Existence, in the Buddhist

¹¹¹ Ibid., 130.

¹¹² Ibid., 130.

¹¹³ Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

understanding, means that the “appearing 'something' is unconditioned, uncaused, and independent of its matrix, that it exists independently rather than interdependently.”¹¹⁷ The disagreement over gender essentialism includes what makes females inferior to males.¹¹⁸

Fundamentally, Buddhism is affected by suffering, its root and its finish, and the pathway to such liberation for all of the human race.¹¹⁹ The *Samayutta-Nikaya* declares that both men and women can achieve nirvana. The *Therigatha*, the songs of the Elder Women "is included in the Pali Canon with the *Theragatha*, the songs for the Elder Men."¹²⁰ Buddha nature translated in original Sanskrit is *Tathagatgarbha* or "the womb or embryo of the Thus Gone." "Thus Gone" is a title for the Buddha.¹²¹ Within the turnings of the wheel of dharma, resources are found of the approach in Buddhism that shows respect of the co-humanity of male and female.¹²²

QUALITIES OF A WOMAN

The four qualities of a successful woman and to attain victory in this world, in Buddhist thought, are that she is capable of her work, manages the domestic help, behaves in a manner that is pleasing to her husband, and protects his earnings. A woman is capable of her work by doing skillful and diligent and is able to act and arrange all things in a proper manner. A woman manages the domestic help (slaves, servants or workers) by knowing of their health and giving proper amounts of food to them. A woman behaves in a manner that is pleasing to her husband by not committing any deed that her husband would not be pleased with. A woman protects her husband's earnings by guarding his money and spending it wisely. When a woman possesses the qualities of faith, moral discipline generosity, and wisdom, she is successful in the other world.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁹ Gay Watson, "Buddhism and the Feminine Voice" *Contemporary Buddhism* 4, no. 1 (2003): 27.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹²¹ Ibid., 29.

¹²² Ibid., 30.

A woman is accomplished in moral discipline by abstaining from destroying life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from intoxicants. A woman is accomplished in generosity by avoiding stinginess, being freely generous to all. Finally, a woman is accomplished in wisdom by possessing the wisdom that leads to the destruction of suffering.¹²³

TEXTS AND SOURCES

There are eleven texts from the early Indian era which are written by, about, or concerned with women.¹²⁴ The most prominent piece of literature is the Vinaya literature, a body of documents concerned with the set of laws that direct standards of behavior for Buddhist monks and nuns. The Vinaya literature contains several hundred standards for both monks and nuns, although there are more for nuns than monks. These standards range from common ethical rules to others such as protocol. Generally, the Vinaya passages for nuns, and other important texts on women, are quoted from the Pali texts. Within the Pali Vinaya texts, three texts appear specifically relating to and for nuns: the *Bhikkuni Kandhaba*, and *Bhikkuni Vibhanga*, and the *Cullavagga* which is related to nuns and their relative status in the Buddhist sangha. The *Cullavagga* is the most commonly referenced text in the debate of Buddhism and gender. This text communicates the actions enclosing the foundation of a community of nuns. According to the *Cullavagga*, the Buddha initially rejected the ordination of women in the Sangha. He changed his decision after talking with Ananda, his personal attendant and chief disciple. After the conversation, Gautama granted ordination of women into the Sangha if they agreed to follow eight specific regulations. The first rule is a nun must always bow down to any monk despite the situation, age, or number of years of experience.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Alice Collett, "Buddhism and Gender: Reframing and Refocusing the Debate" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 2 (2006) 57.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 58.

The next piece of literature is the *Therigatha*. It is a compilation of verse-form poems whose authors were elder nuns who lived during the time of Gautama. These are among the most ancient noted voices of women from any era of history. The verses speak of women whom rejected the world, resided in forests and caves, and achieved high levels of spiritual experience through the practice of the Buddha's instruction. Another piece of literature from the Pali texts is the *Samyutta Nikaya*. Chapter, *Bhikkumisamyutta*, includes short stories about women, some from the *Therigatha*, and some who are not recorded anywhere else. The *Avadanasataka* and the *Divyavadana* contain narrative stories of the conversion of males and females.¹²⁶ The *Dhammapadatthakatha* is a commentary of the *Dhammapada* and includes narratives of women disciples and laywomen. The *Anguttara Nikaya* text of the Pali Canon includes a listing of both nuns and laywomen of the Buddhist community who were known for the qualities of wisdom, teaching, faith, and recitation. Lastly the *Manorathapurani* is a commentary on the *Anguttara Nikaya*. This piece of literature provides accounts of stories of women with important roles in the community.¹²⁷

The primary source of information on Buddhism is provided by Brahmin *pundits* or learned men. Based on this, westerners gained their perspective of Buddhism through the Hindu point of view. The continuing study of Buddhism through textual history was started with the gaining of Buddhist documents from Nepal and Sri Lanka.¹²⁸ The historian viewing gender through textual support sees all texts as of equal validity. The Vinaya literature stands out as most influential and when making an effort to restructure a thought of gender affairs or approaches toward females.¹²⁹ Arvind Sharma's "sociological theory of relative deprivation"

¹²⁶ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 67.

proposes numerous early females chose life in the monasteries as freedom from expressive and ethnic deficit. This theory was tested by Sharma with the proof of the *Therigatha*. In the majority of the circumstances, the result was the "spiritual attraction" and not emotional or cultural deprivation. According to the Pali Canon and secondary sources, Sharma came to the conclusion that females cannot become Buddhas. Women can hope to be reborn as a man in a future existence. As a male, they can attain Buddhahood.¹³⁰

ALMSWOMEN AND LAY WOMEN

In ancient India, discrimination of almswomen and lay women occurred in the Buddhist communities. During the days of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) and his immediate followers, males and females were able to equally attain arhatship, the equivalent of Buddhahood.¹³¹ Throughout the era of Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism, the principle came about that females could not achieve Buddhahood; it is only a possibility for men.¹³² The same thoughts are found in Pali literature in the *Bahudhatukasutta* of the *Majjhima-nikaya* (No. 115) that "it is impossible for a woman to become a Buddha, Universal Monarch, Mara, Indra, or Brahman, but it is possible for a man to become any one of these five."¹³³ An additional Pali text that is similar in thought is the *Atthanavagga* of the *Anguttaranikaya* (AN I. 15). The sutta in sections 12-16 states that "it is impossible for a woman to become a *Samayak-sambuddha*, Cakravatin, Sakra (Indra), Mara, or Brahma, although it is impossible for a man to attain any of these five, in a manner similar to that of the *Bahudhatukasatta*." The belief that a female cannot attain any of the five pinnacles is revealed in separate Pali and Chinese texts. Some scholars suggest that this thought did not exist when Gautama established the Buddhist Order, but was created after the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹³¹ Kajiyama Yuichi, "Women in Buddhism" *The Eastern Buddhist* 15, no. 2 (1982), 53.

¹³² Ibid., 54.

¹³³ Ibid., 57.

sangha was split into numerous schools. The son of Emperor Asoka, Mahinda, took the Buddhist tradition to Sri Lanka. There it became the foundation of Theravada Buddhism. The tradition and customs of Sri Lanka which are practiced to this day in Pali literature is known as the Southern Tradition. Some scholars place the idea that a woman cannot attain Buddhahood as appearing in history between the late third century and the first century B.C.¹³⁴ The *Majjhima-nikaya* (I. 169) states,

"And be it woman, be it man for whom
Such chariot doth wait, by that same care
Into Nirvana's presence shall they come."¹³⁵

The *Therigatha's* verses and psalms show examples of almswomen and laywomen's achievement of arhatship (the highest religious state in Original Buddhism). Numerous monks and nuns were enlightened to Buddhahood through the direct teaching of Siddhartha Gautama.¹³⁶ There was no separation in enlightenment between the Buddha and his followers and between monks and nuns. Gautama initially hesitates to allow females into the Sangha. He did not believe they could not achieve enlightenment but he needed to consider the problems that could occur between the monks and the nuns, and the *sangha* and the lay community. Gautama was considered to be a distinguished overseer and an impressive religious teacher.¹³⁷ Siddhartha Gautama established eight principle regulations for almswomen which imposes inequality against almswomen. These rules include, "An almswoman, even if of a hundred years' standing, shall make salutation to...and perform all proper duties towards an almsman, if only just initiated"; and, "From

¹³⁴ Ibid., 58.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 59.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 60.

henceforth official admonition by almswomen of almsmen is forbidden."¹³⁸ Some scholars believe that Gautama encouraged equality for males and females in spiritual aptitude despite the community discrimination against females. Sutta one of the *Anguttara-nikaya* VII.59 speaks of seven kinds of wives: murderous, theivish, masterly, motherly, sisterly, friendly, and subservient. The first three kinds are considered bad and will end in hell. The other four are good and will attain bliss. The seventh, a slave-type of wife, is considered to be the best because it is reproved by the Buddha.¹³⁹ Iwamoto notes that moral and immoral types of wives are also noted in the sutras. Some scholars believe this shows "good faith on the part of Buddhists in favor of women."¹⁴⁰ During the time of Gautama and his immediate followers, there was not any separation or discrimination between males and females. Since the admittance of females into the Sangha, a struggle for power has existed between the monks and the nuns. The almswomen were able to attain some rights through Gautama but their status declined after his death.¹⁴¹

The most significant cause of the initiation of the thought that a female cannot become a Buddha occurred on the occasion of Gautama's deification. Yuichi summarizes as, "Gautama was a human being, although he had extraordinary insight and charisma. Once the disciples who actually had observed Gautama's physical appearance were no longer living, he began to be deified by people, who attributed him with the same 52 physical marks which ancient Indians believed were possessed by Cakravartin."¹⁴² In both a Jataka story and a Pali manuscript, Gautama states that the former princess Muni is a former incarnation of Siddhartha as a female.¹⁴³ Both males and females are equal in their emptiness when all existences and material things are empty

¹³⁸ Ibid., 60-1.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴² The Cakravartin was a mythic universal monarch, who they said would appear in India to unite the subcontinent, conquering all rival warlords and bringing peace to the world. (Ibid., 68)

¹⁴³ Ibid., 57.

of their "essential natures." This "philosophy of non-distinctionism" counteracts prejudice between males and females.¹⁴⁴

GENDER ROLES

Gender roles, which are mainly related to Theravada Buddhism, folklore, and ancient superstitions, are articulated through *kreng jai* (the hierarchy of social rules and protocols, which very tightly govern social life in Thailand). Buddhist ideology symbolizes women as lesser than men in society and negatively values female sexuality. Buddhism is part of the problem of taking advantage of and subordination of women in Thailand.¹⁴⁵ Buddhism in Thailand is focused on religious activities at the temple and is centered on male authority and superior status enforcement act as sexual differentiation between males and females. In the religion of Buddhism, men carry out all the public functions including leading the chanting, conducting rituals, and participating in the temple (*wat*). The organization of space in the temple or meeting hall signifies the distinction of status between women and men, monks and laypeople, and elders and young people. Monks are seated upon a raised platform, and the elderly men are seated closest to the monks. Women are allowed only to sit around the perimeter of the meeting area. The elderly men are always first in giving food or money to the monks. Then the younger men follow. After all males then the most elderly woman may make her offering followed by the other women.¹⁴⁶

WOMEN AND MEN IN SOCIETY

Mae chii are perceived to be of lower status than monks. Their role is to help maintain the temple, clean for the monks, and to cook for them. Monks follow 227 rules which demand

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴⁵ Klunklin, 47.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 47-8.

celibacy and forbids physical contact with women including their female family members.¹⁴⁷ Klunklin and Greenwood believe that “Buddhism clearly disvalues women relative to men.” Men are the only gender allowed to enter the priesthood and always come before females in religious celebrations. This understanding of gender value and the tasks to which it leads, are supported in folklore, ancient superstition, and *kreng jai*.

Thailand is a society in which men hold the political, corporate, and religious power. Thai women find influence in the home in their responsibility as mother-nurturer. The mother-nurturer (*mae*) role is elevated in the female code of social and sexual conduct to the point that a woman is not regarded as fully adult until the birth of her first child. Young girls and adolescent women are nicknamed “*mae*” in their families, especially in central Thailand, in training for their adult status.¹⁴⁸

Thailand has a population of 64 million people, the majority of whom are Buddhist. *Kreng jai* sees the ideal Thai woman, the *kulasatrii*, as being submissive in all things to her husband; she is obedient to her husband, sexually pure, and strictly monogamous after marriage. The ideal Thai man, the *chaaii chaatrii*, is greatly different. He drinks, fights, and is sexually polygamous.¹⁴⁹

A woman’s status and position in the religious realm is not certain. Thai Buddhism has thrives on women who support the monks, temple activities, and the raising of children as bearers and supporters of the religion. Without women, monks would starve, and temple activities and merit attainment would cease to operate. Buddhism would cease to exist in this

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 49.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 55-6.

world. Although in Buddhism the position of women is secondary to that of men's place.¹⁵⁰ No females are allowed to touch a monk. All physical contact is forbidden between females and the monks. A monk cannot accept an offering directly from a woman; a woman cannot use a monk's seat because it will be considered unclean. Vichit-Vadakan refers to the purity-pollution dichotomy. "Women are viewed as polluted because of their menstrual blood. Young girls and old women are not accepted, possibly because of the former's potential to become polluted and the latter's history of having been polluted."

WOMEN AND KARMA

Fundamentalist Buddhists believe that females are born with lower karma than men from the start. A woman must suffer and must learn to tolerate her suffering courageously so that she may have the opportunity to be born a man in the next life. This is treated as a universal truth in Thai Buddhism. Monks are considered to be symbols of sacredness and women are banned from becoming monks and cannot gain merit as monks. Women can add extra merit through their sons who are ordained as monks. Men who become monks can pass on the merit to their wives and mothers. This may account for the special bond between mother and son in Thai society¹⁵¹

Buddhism is a philosophy of freedom for humanity from suffering. Early Buddhists held that a person's gender, like a person's caste or class (*varna*), presents no obstacle to achieving the Buddhist goal of nirvana or enlightenment. According to tradition, women can pursue the path of liberation and become arhats, Buddhist saints who have separated entirely from the

¹⁵⁰ Juree Vichit-Vadakan, "Women and the Family in Thailand in the Midst of Social Change." *Law and Society Review in Southeast Asia* 28, no. 3 (1994) 521-2.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 522

suffering of the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*).¹⁵² This view is expressed a number of times in the early Buddhist literature.¹⁵³ This is clearly expressed in the following passage:

‘Straight is the name that Road is called, and ‘Free
From Fear’ the Quarter whither thou art bound.
Thy Chariot is the ‘Silent Runner’ named,
With Wheels of Righteous Effort fitted will.
Conscience the Learning-board; the Drapery
Is Heedfulness; the Driver is the Dharma,
I say, and Right Views, that they run before.
And be it woman, or be it man for whom
Such chariot doth wait, by that same car
Into Nirvana’s presence shall they come. (*Samyutta Nikaya I 5:6*)

The path is open to both men and women.¹⁵⁴ Early Buddhists perceived women to live a more restrictive life compared to that of men.¹⁵⁵ Cabézon does not believe that Buddhism was doctrinally egalitarian. Historically, it is thought that the Buddha could have been more egalitarian, but the Buddhist canon presents gender differentiation. Nuns gained a better place in society because they accepted the authority of the monks. The order of the nuns was perceived to be of second-class status by society. This resulted in weakened reputation, educational possibilities, and financial assistance from the government¹⁵⁶ Based on textual studies, Charles Keyes suggests that “‘Thai culture regards women to be more “natural” than men in their role of supporting the religion: “While a man must reject his ‘nature’ (that is, his sexuality) in order to pursue the Path, a woman must first realize her ‘nature’ (becoming a mother) as a prerequisite to her traversing the path.’ In other words, it is the religious duty of women to nurture the religion by providing sons for the *sangha*. Such a notion, of course, is antithetical to the meaning of renunciation.”¹⁵⁷ Present-day Theravada Buddhists believe that the sacred activities of women

¹⁵² José Ignacio Cabézon, *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 8

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-8.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

should be understood within the role of mother.¹⁵⁸ Most of the literature written by Buddhists in the conversion movement is by men, and the majority of leaders in local Buddhist groups are men.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 41.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 102.

CHAPTER 6: CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC

In Thai Buddhism, women do not have the chance nor ability to reach *nirvana* or enlightenment. To be born a female is because of bad karma in a previous life. A woman can only hope to be born in the next life as a man so that he then can become a monk and eventually reach nirvana. A woman can only accomplish this by making merit, donating to the temple, and taking care of her family. Buddhists can only reach enlightenment through doing good deeds and making merit. There is no forgiveness when one does wrong. Life is trying to make up for what has been done and doing enough in order to move forward in the next life. Even as Buddhists may go astray from the ways of the Buddha, they do have the opportunity to come back by their own choice. There is no true person calling them and pursuing them to Buddhism. In Theravada Buddhism, scholars claim that women have the ability to reach *nirvana*. Women do not have to hope they make enough merit to be reborn as a man in the next life. *Nirvana* ultimately leads to complete emptiness and nonexistence in this world. It is said in the Thai culture, that "To be Thai is to be Buddhist." One is born Buddhist and does not make the choice to follow this way.

SALVATION FOR ALL

In contrast, Christianity provides a salvation for all people, both males and females, which gives fulfillment in life. Christianity shows no favoritism for either gender or age group. Males and females have equal opportunity to salvation through Jesus Christ. John 3:16 tells of God's love for the world and His gift, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,

but in order that the world might be saved through him.”¹⁶⁰ Salvation is provided for those who choose to accept the gift. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”¹⁶¹ Salvation is not based on works or merits of a person. It is based on faith and grace.

All people have sinned and none are perfect except for Jesus Christ, the Son of God Romans 3:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹⁶² Every person is a sinner; they have sinned in the past, will sin in the future, and continue to sin in the present. No one is perfect. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”¹⁶³ Because of sin, humans have strayed away from their Creator and Redeemer. Each person has gone their own way in life and need rescuing from the impending danger of eternal death. “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”¹⁶⁴ “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”¹⁶⁵ God provides the human race with another option than wandering alone. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁶⁶ God sacrificed his one and only son for the sins of the world.

1 John 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse up from all unrighteousness.”¹⁶⁷ “Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved,” states

¹⁶⁰ John 3:16-17

¹⁶¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

¹⁶² Romans 3:23

¹⁶³ Isaiah 53:6

¹⁶⁴ Hebrews 9:27

¹⁶⁵ Psalm 103:12

¹⁶⁶ Romans 6:23

¹⁶⁷ 1 John 1:9

Romans 10:9-10.¹⁶⁸ “And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”¹⁶⁹ “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”¹⁷⁰ “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”¹⁷¹

These passages state that if a person confesses that she has done wrong in life, believes that Jesus is Lord and he was crucified, buried and raised from the dead, he will be saved. A person must call on the name of Jesus in order to receive salvation.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”¹⁷² At the point of salvation, a believer is made into a new creature. His old ways have been put in the past and have been forgiven. The believer is a new creation and has taken on new and better qualities, characteristics, morals and ethics with the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

In an encounter with the adulterous woman, Jesus forgave her of her sins and gave her salvation. “And he said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”¹⁷³ “But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”¹⁷⁴ Jesus Christ offered equal opportunity for all people to receive salvation. All, male and female, are adopted as children of God. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”¹⁷⁵

WOMEN AND THEIR ROLES IN THE CHURCH

Women and men were disciples of Buddha during his time on earth. Women were

¹⁶⁸ Romans 10:9-10

¹⁶⁹ Acts 16:31

¹⁷⁰ Acts 2:21

¹⁷¹ Romans 10:13

¹⁷² 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷³ Luke 7:50

¹⁷⁴ Acts 15:11

¹⁷⁵ John 1:12

initially not allowed into the Buddhist *sangha*. Later, Buddha decided that women should also be allowed as nuns. Over time, this perception changed. Presently in Thai Buddhism, women are not allowed to be ordained as nuns but may serve as *mae chiis*. Women play active roles in Buddhism through merit-making, supporting the monks, and raising sons to enter the *sangha*.

Disciples or followers of Jesus Christ who were men and women. One woman mentioned in Acts 9 is Tabitha (Dorcas). “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.”¹⁷⁶ “Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”¹⁷⁷ In this passage, Priscilla and Aquilla took on a pastoral leadership role in guiding Apollos with wisdom.

Women were also prophets as mentioned in Acts 21. "He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied."¹⁷⁸ There were four females that were referred to as prophets. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae."¹⁷⁹ Phoebe is a female apostle in the church. "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."¹⁸⁰ Junia is also another female apostle mentioned in Romans. "For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers."¹⁸¹ Women's homes were used as gathering places for

¹⁷⁶ Acts 9:36

¹⁷⁷ Acts 18:24-26

¹⁷⁸ Acts 21:9

¹⁷⁹ Romans 16:1

¹⁸⁰ Romans 16:7

¹⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 1:11

churches. The Christians gathered for church meetings at Chloe's house. "When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."¹⁸² Mary, the mother of John Mark, is another example of allowing the church to use her home as a meeting place.

"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us."¹⁸³ Lydia and her household was saved and baptized. "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house."¹⁸⁴ Nympha also held church gatherings in her home. Women were disciples, devout followers, and apostles of Jesus Christ. They opened their hearts and offered their homes as gathering place for church meetings.

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."¹⁸⁵ The gifts of the Spirit are given to all believers both male and female.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."¹⁸⁶ Male and female are created in the image of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ

¹⁸² Acts 12:12

¹⁸³ Acts 16:14-15

¹⁸⁴ Colossians 4:15

¹⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

¹⁸⁶ Genesis 1:27

Jesus."¹⁸⁷ There is no differentiation between whom salvation is offered to.

JESUS' MINISTRY ON EARTH

Buddha had much interaction with women. He accepted them as nuns in into the *sangha* and as disciples. They showed some importance within the times of the Buddha as they are mentioned in the Pali Canon and other Buddhist writings. As time went on, their importance fell and in Thai Buddhism were not allowed to serve as a nun in the *sangha*.

During Jesus' ministry on the earth, he had many encounters with women. In Mark 5:25-34, Jesus ignores ritual impurity laws by healing a woman of a blood disease. In John 4:7 - 5:30, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman. This is ritually unclean because she was a foreigner and woman. In Matthew 15:2-28 Jesus helped a Canaanite woman, also a foreigner. Luke 10:38-42 mentions Jesus teaching Mary, the sister of Martha. At this time, Jewish tradition did not allow for women to be educated. Jesus accepted women into his inner circle of followers. Luke 8:1-3 mentions 12 male disciples and an unspecified number of female supporters. Some scholars believe the females could have accounted for nearly half of his supporters. Jesus first appeared to women after his resurrection as stated in Matthew 28:9-10. Matthew 27:55-56 and Mark 15:40-41 mention that women were present at Jesus' execution, while the men had fled from the scene. John 19:25-27 contradicts this by stating John was present at the scene. Jesus expressed concern for widows throughout His ministry on earth by showing his support for the widows. This is shown in Luke 2:36 dealing with Anna, the prophetess, was a widow who stayed in the temple, Luke 4:26 deals with Elijah being sent to a widow's house, Luke 7:11 talks about Jesus raising the widow's son, Luke 20:47 deals with people who take advantage of widows, and Luke 21:1 tells of the widow who gave the two small

¹⁸⁷ Galatians 3:28

copper coins as an offering compared to the rich who were putting in very little..

Jesus told numerous parallel male and female stories. Some of these are Simon and Hanna in Luke 2:25-38, the widow of Sarepta and Naaman in Luke 4:25-38, the healing of a man possessed by a demon and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law starting in Luke 4:31, and the woman who lived a sinful life and Simon starting in Luke 7:36. Other parallel stories are the man and woman sleeping together in Luke 17:34, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11, Dionysius and Damaris in Acts 17:34, and Lydia paralleled with the jailer's conversion in Acts 16:14-334.

CHAPTER 7: THE IDEAL THAI CHRISTIAN WOMAN

The ideal Thai Christian woman has many of the same characteristics of that of an ideal Thai Buddhist woman. The primary distinction is that the Christian woman is focused on God first, then her family. The Thai Buddhist woman is focused on herself and making enough merit to progress in the next life. Family is still of importance also.

The ideal Thai Christian woman can be found in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." The ideal woman has each of these characteristics and portrays them in her daily life and interactions with others. She is loving toward her family, her friends, her neighbors, the poor and needy, and all whom she comes into contact with. Most importantly, she has love for God. She is unselfish and benevolent in concern and affection for others. Secondly, she is joyful in all she does. She takes great delight and is happy and cheerful in her relationships, communication, work, and activities. She has peace, a sense of well-being and fulfillment, during hardships and conflict. This comes from God and is dependent upon His presence. She is patient and enduring in the trials of life. She is steadfast in her faith and trust in God. She is able to endure persecution and ill-treatment from others. She displays kindness to all around her. She does services for others and is gracious for what she has and receive. She is pleasant in her interactions and thinks of others first. She shows goodness through her morals and ethics. Everything she does is beneficial, helpful, profitable and of quality for her life. She performs her duties in love and manifests kindness. She is faithful to God, her husband and her family. She is loyal, trustworthy and constant in her speech, actions, and thoughts. She is steadfast, dedicated, dependable and honest. She shows gentleness in her disposition. She is mild, soft, tender, well-managed and not sudden in what she does. She is careful in her thought,

words, and actions. Finally, she has self-control. She manages and has power over her own desires, lusts, emotions, and feelings. She is able to direct her personal behavior. Her temperance is one that is more about moderation than control.

The ideal Thai Christian woman is similar to that of the Proverbs 31 woman found in the Bible of Christianity. She holds many of the same characteristics. The qualities included in this type of woman is good character as a wife, devotion as a homemaker, generosity as a neighbor, influence as a teacher, effectiveness as a mother, and excellence as a person. A wife of noble character, found in verses 10-12, means that she is rare and more precious than jewels. A godly woman is rare to find. Her husband trusts her because he knows she will not show him any harm or evil, and she shows kindness to him throughout their life together. She is consistent in what she does, how she acts, and whom she loves. Her husband can count on her to do him good and to be a blessing to him every day. She also shows consistency in her relationship with God. A Proverbs 31 woman produces devotion to her home and her responsibilities as a wife, found in verses 13-19 and 21-24. A devoted homemaker works joyfully. She delights and takes pleasure in her work. She willingly performs her daily tasks in the home. She is discipline, energetic, and diligent in her work. She is a good steward of her time and spends her money wisely. She is provident, elegant, influential, and industrious in her work, dress, and attitude. She provides for all in her household: her husband, her children, and workers. She wakes early in order to provide food for her household. She makes sure they are nourished and healthy. She continually works with great energy to complete her tasks. This type of woman shows generosity to those around her through compassion and generous giving to the poor and needy (verse 20). She has a heart of compassion for those who are physically and materially poor and needy. A Proverbs 31 woman is influential as a teacher (verses 25-26). She has wisdom and is poised in speech. She

speaks with wisdom from experience and teaches kindness for all. She is a woman of virtue. She adorns herself with a meek and quiet spirit, strength and honor. Her speech reflects that of what is in her heart. Loving and kind-hearted words erupt from her tongue. Through her character and influence, she is a teacher to the younger women and her family. She is also an effective mother and wife, found in verses 27-29. She manages her home; she takes care of the condition of the home and the people in it. She seeks to know that is going on with her children. She is ready to discipline them, restrict them, praise them and help them as needed. She cares about their moral habits and religious instructions. She encourages them to pray, read the Word of God and to worship. She is not idle with her time and continues her work despite hard times. She is respected and praised by her children and her husband. He distinguishes her to be the best among all. Finally, she shows excellence as a person through her fear and honor for God (verses 30-31). She is favored by her husband and God. She respects her Creator, Savior, Redeemer, and Sustainer. This virtuous woman will be rewarded by viewing the fruits of her labor. She lives each day by and through love. She is ultimately a role model for women of all time.

The ideal Thai Christian woman follows the 5 Precepts of Buddhism and the Ten Commandments of Christianity. These two sets of rules are similar in nature and content. The Five Precepts are rules for daily living of lay people in Thai Buddhism. The Ten Commandments are rules that the Christian God gave to His people for living in the world. The first precept states not to harm living things. The Buddhist concept includes people, animals, and anything breathing. This parallels Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder." In this statement, God is referring to not murdering people. The second precept says not to take things that are freely given. This parallels Exodus 20:15, "You shall not steal." This is the same principle in both religions. The third precept is not to participate in sexual misconduct and parallels with Exodus

20:14, "You shall not commit adultery." The same idea of a wife being loyal to one is present in Christianity and Buddhism. The difference is that in Buddhism a man is allowed to have other women for sexual pleasure. The ideal Thai Christian would be faithful to only her husband. The fourth precept is not to use false speech and parallels with Exodus 20:16, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." The fifth precept states not to take intoxicating drink and drugs causing heedlessness. This idea parallels with Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." This woman would not get drunk on drinks and take intoxicating drugs for her personal use. She would find fulfillment and pleasure in the Holy Spirit.

The ideal Thai Christian woman follows the Noble Eightfold Path which also parallels key ideas in the Bible of Christianity. First, the right view is right understanding, vision, or perspective. It is the right way of looking at nature, life and the world. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The right view is found in salvation: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."¹⁸⁸ Salvation comes from "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"¹⁸⁹ Second, right intention, also known as right thought, resolve, conception or aspiration, is the exertion of one's own will to change. A Christian woman aims to have desires and motives that honor God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 states, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Third in this path is right speech which deals with the way one uses their words. James 1:19 states, "Know this, my beloved brother: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Many Thai women are quiet and gentle in spirit. Thai

¹⁸⁸ Acts 4:12

¹⁸⁹ John 14:6

people use the concept of "save face" to deal with conflict and difficult situations. They would rather not say something about the wrongdoing than to have to confront another person. Fourth in this progression is right action or conduct. A person should train herself to be morally upright in all she does. This idea is found in John 14:21, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." The right conduct or action for the Thai Christian woman is to obey God's commandments and through that she is showing him love. The fifth part of this path is right livelihood which means, in Buddhist terms, not to engage in trades or occupations which result in the harm of other living beings. The Christian idea of this concept is found in 2 Timothy 2:15. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." This woman is one who finds her livelihood in pleasing God, not humans. The sixth idea is right effort or endeavor. The person makes an effort to abandon all the wrong and harmful thoughts, words, and deeds. This idea is seen in Hebrews 12:1-2, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." The Thai Christian woman must make effort to get rid of every hindrance and to give her best to God. The seventh step is right mindfulness, memory, awareness, or attention, in Buddhist thought, is to constantly keep one's mind alerted to phenomena that affect the body and mind. In the Christian perspective is found in Philippians 2:5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." This woman should have her mind and attention focused on Christ Jesus. Finally, right concentration or contemplation is concentrating

on an object or attention until reaching full concentration and a state of meditative absorption in Buddhist thought. This principle is found in Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, no things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory." Submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and setting your heart and mind on him is how one puts an end to suffering and sin. A Thai Christian woman focuses on Christ and the his will rather than on herself.

Thai Buddhists and Christians are encouraged in meditation yet in different ways. The Thai Buddhists sees meditation as a conscious effort to change how the mind works. It comes from the Pali word for meditation *bhavana* which means 'to make grow' or 'to develop'. Meditation is used to overcome problems or to develop a psychological state. Thai Buddhists take meditation trips for days or weeks at a time. This is portrayed as a vital part of Thai Buddhism. It helps a person in a variety of ways: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Meditation is central for Christians also. The ideal Thai Christian woman would not meditate on herself, but she would meditate on Christ and the Scriptures. Charles H. Spurgeon wrote, "It is well to meditate upon the things of God, because we thus get the real nutriment out of them." "Yet further, meditation is of great value in opening up truth and leading us into its secrets."¹⁹⁰ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."¹⁹¹ Christ has thoughts, plans and ways for each believer. As a

¹⁹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon

¹⁹¹ Isaiah 55:8-9

Christian woman, she should focus on achieving Christ's words and ways. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."¹⁹² This woman should have the same mind as Jesus Christ, focusing on the same qualities and people He did. "The Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and they you will have good success."¹⁹³ The ideal Thai Christian woman learns, memorizes and meditates on the Scriptures. If she knows what God's Word says then she will be able to follow God's will and be successful in His ways. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."¹⁹⁴ The Christian is to find pleasure and delight in meditating and reflecting on God's Word at all times. "When I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night."¹⁹⁵ This verse talks of meditating upon God in the night and during the times when it is difficult. "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands."¹⁹⁶ Meditating on the Word of God allows one to remember how He was faithful to His people and how He will continue to be.

Other characteristics of the ideal Thai Christian woman are found in the Four Divine Abidings of Buddhism: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. These are also found in Christianity but are using different terms: love for one another, compassion, joy and respect.

First, the ideal Thai Christian woman is caring or showing love for one another. This is portrayed in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are

¹⁹² Philippians 2:5

¹⁹³ Joshua 1:8

¹⁹⁴ Psalm 1:2

¹⁹⁵ Psalm 63:6

¹⁹⁶ Psalm 143:5

my disciples, if you have love for one another." Ephesians 5:21-6:4 is a summary of caring and loving one another, specifically, husbands and wives, parents and children, and Christ and the church. Philippians 2:3-4 states, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Caring for and loving one another encompasses these passages. In the first passage, Jesus Christ commands believers to do so. In the second passage, Paul reminds the reader of the importance and need for loving one another. The third passage discusses not having rivalries and not being conceited or vain, but living a humble life and looking out for the interests of others.

She portrays compassion as stated in 1 Peter 3:8, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." This woman is to be sympathetic of others, attitude of charity and benevolence, affectionate and pitying of others and their situations, and not proud and reflecting a spirit of submission. Colossians 3:12-13 says, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." She must be forgiving because the Lord has forgiven her. She must show patience towards others, dealing with them in a gentle and kind way, and be humble. She is too have a compassionate heart for those in need. "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."¹⁹⁷ An important avenue for having compassion is to be of one mind and accord with other believers. This means being

¹⁹⁷ Philippians 2:1-3

of the same mind or thoughts and having the same love for God. Galatians 6:2 states, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The goal of a Christian woman is to fulfill the law of Christ which is done by bearing another's burdens as Christ bears all of our burdens. Proverbs 14:21 states, "Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor." Verse 31 says, "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him." Proverbs 29:7 states, "A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge." All three of these verses from Proverbs deal with being generous to the poor and needy. The "poor" refers to those who need physical and material provisions. The "needy" refers to those who need spiritual provisions. If one is generous to the poor and needy, then he is blessed, honored and righteous. The opposite is one who is despised, oppressed, and wicked. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself from the world."¹⁹⁸ James 1:27 discusses compassion by caring for the orphans and widows as they have no one to care for them. Jesus Christ did the same and stressed the same ideas. Ephesians 4:31 states, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." This verse summarizes the main idea behind compassion. Kindness should be shown to all people. A person should be tenderhearted and show empathy for other and their situations. Forgiveness is vital in a person's character. Just as Christ has forgiven believers of their wrongdoings, then believers should do the same. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 says, "That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." Believers are united as one body in Christ in which there is no division. The members of the body are to care for one another, suffer together and rejoice together. This is a

¹⁹⁸ James 1:27

key definition of compassion where all are acting as one and bearing the burdens of the other members. Finally, 1 Corinthians 9:22 states, "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some." This is the ultimate example of compassion. Paul became like the people he was with in order to reach them on their level and for them to receive salvation. The goal of being compassionate is to reach all people around the world.

This woman portrays joyfulness in her life. This mentioned in the fruit of the spirits in Galatians 5:22-23. James 1:2 states, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."¹⁹⁹ Despite trials, tribulations, temptations, and tests, one should be joyful in what they have, the opportunities given and provided. A person's joy is complete only in Christ and his presence. Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." This is a reminder to believers to be joyful in everything. The ideal Thai Christian woman will this in all circumstances of her life. Proverbs 10:28 states, "The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish." Proverbs 12:20 says, "Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy." Proverbs 15:30 states, "The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones." Joy and rejoicing is a delight for those who have salvation, peace, and righteousness. This type of woman should possess these qualities.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 states, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Ephesians 5:1 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." 1 Thessalonians 1:6 states, "And you

¹⁹⁹ Romans 12:12

became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit." "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."²⁰⁰ The passages above are summary of what the ideal Thai Christian woman should encompass. Ultimately, she is to be an imitator of Jesus Christ and his ways. She is not to be influence by the world, but an influence on the world.

Next, the ideal woman displays respect for God, parents, husband, children, authority and others surrounding her. Every person begins life as a child to a set of parents. The ideal of respecting and obeying parents is relevant as a child and an adult. The level and manner of respect change based on age and situation. Ephesians 6:1-3 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'" Exodus 20:___ is where the original commandment and promise was make by God. Colossians talks about how it pleases God when children obey their parents. Children are not only obeying their parents but also God's commandments in the Bible. This delights God because his children are showing their love for him through their obedience. Proverbs 1:8-9 says, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck." This verse in Proverbs states that obeying instruction and teaching is adornment for one's head and neck, important parts of one's body. This is a cherished quality that will carry over into other parts of life. Ephesians 5:22-25, 33 states, "Wives, submit to you own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head

²⁰⁰ Romans 12:1

of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." 1 Peter 3:7 says, "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayer may not be hindered."

These two passages deal with husbands and wives. Wives are commanded to submit and respect their husbands. God has placed the husband as the leader of his home. Husbands are commanded to love their wives and be willing to sacrifice for them as Christ did for the church. The wife is also commanded to respect her husband, and he is commanded to love his wife. An aspect of love is respect. If one loves her spouse, she is showing him love. Ephesians 6:5 states, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ." A worker is commanded to obey his employer or leader of their workplace. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-13 says, "And to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one." This passage talks of respecting people, their situations, and their privacy. One is to live his life in the right and proper manner in order to be an example to nonbelievers. "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you."²⁰¹ This verse commands people to respect those are coworkers and colleagues. This also means showing respect for employees and employers. Romans 13:7 states, "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." The previous verse deals with the issue of respecting and obeying authority. The following verse is a summary

²⁰¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:12

statement for the characteristic of respect. The qualities of honor, love and fear are displayed.

"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."²⁰²

Suffering is another key concept for the ideal Thai Christian woman as it is prevalent in Buddhism and Christianity. Christ overcame suffering by solving the problem of sin, which is the real source of suffering, by his death, burial and resurrection. A Christian woman can rise above suffering because of the hope of the future life that is free of suffering. Romans 5:3 states, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance." Paul is encouraging believers that despite suffering there is good that comes up. Because of suffering, one can grow in Christ and in character. Another aspect of suffering is found in Philippians 3:10, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

Finally, the ideal Thai Christian woman finds contentment and fulfillment in Christ. Philippians 3:7-8 states, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." This woman finds complete contentment in Christ in all she has. Even if she has lost much, she is to be content in her salvation and love in Christ and is to share it with others. She is to be dependent only on Christ in all situations and circumstances of life. Even if family and friends leave or fail her, there is one person she can always trust in. "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."²⁰³

²⁰² 1 Peter 2: 17

²⁰³ Philippians 4:13

CONCLUSION

Women, within the confines of Theravada Buddhism, can reach nirvana if they attain enough merit. Within the realm of Thai Buddhism, women are not allowed to reach Buddhism. They must first obtain enough merit in order to be reborn as a male in the next life. Only males may become monks and then may reach enlightenment. The religion of Thai Buddhism is repressive towards females for this reason. There appears to be much gender discrimination. Women are viewed as second-class citizens compared to men.

In comparison, Christianity allows salvation for all people despite their gender. Males and females serve roles within the body of Christ. Jesus Christ valued women in His ministry on earth and after His resurrect before His ascension. He talked with women, healed women, cared for the widows, forgave women's sins, and educated women.

In the future, I plan to do further research and writings on the topic of women in Thai Buddhism, what are the qualities and characteristics of the ideal Thai Christian woman, how she interacts in the society and culture, and discipling other Thai women . This project has given me great insight into critically thinking about how to better reach out to Buddhists in Thailand and in other parts of Asia.

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