

Buddhism In The Philippines

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I found this interesting article on Wikipilipinas and reproduce it with acknowledgement.



Buddhism, particularly Vajrayana Buddhism, gained a foothold in the Philippines with the rise of the Indianized Buddhist Srivijaya Empire centered in Sumatra in the 7th century. Archaeological finds in the Philippines include a number of Buddhist images common to Vajrayana iconography that dates back to this period. These include a number of Padmapani images and the Golden Tara found in 1917 at Esperanza, Agusan. Evidence of the extent of cultural and religious influence from the Srivijaya empire can be seen in the so-called "Laguna Copper Plate", which is written in the Kavi (old Javanese) alphabet in a mixed vocabulary of Tagalog, Old Malay, and Sanskrit in the year 900AD. Translation

"Long Live! Year of Saka 822, month of Vesak, according to Jyotisha. The fourth day of the waning moon, Monday. On this occasion, Lady Angkatan, and her brother whose name is Bukah, the children of the Honourable Namwaran, were awarded a document of complete pardon from the Commander in Chief of Tundun [modern day Tondo in Manila], represented by the Lord Minister of Pailah [Paila, Bulacan], Jayadewa. By this order, through the scribe, the Honourable Namwaran has been forgiven of all and is released from his debts and arrears of 1 Katî and 8 Suwarna before the Honourable Lord Minister of Puliran [Pulilan, Pampanga or Pulilan, Angat, Bulacan], Kasumuran, by the authority of the Lord Minister of Pailah. Because of his faithful service as a subject of the Chief, the Honourable and widely renowned Lord Minister of Binwangan [Binwagan, Pampanga] recognized all the living relatives of Namwaran who were claimed by the Chief of Dewata, represented by the Chief of Medang. Yes, therefore the living descendants of the Honourable Namwaran

are forgiven, indeed, of any and all debts of the Honourable Namwaran to the Chief of Dewata. This, in any case, shall declare to whomever henceforth that on some future day should there be a man who claims that no release from the debt of the Honourable..."

Vesak is the Buddhist name of the month - though now it's shortened to a single day - which celebrates Buddha's birthday and enlightenment. Vesak or Vesakha (in Pali) is the holiest month in the Buddhist calendar and is usually the time when debts are forgiven and festivals held. Swasti is also a very traditional Sanskrit-Buddhist greeting (similar to the modern Thai, *sawatdee*).



The Laguna copper plate therefore indicates that the areas mentioned - Pampanga, Tondo and Bulacan - had already adopted Buddhism.

With the advent of Spanish colonialism in the 16th century, the Philippines became a closed colony and cultural contacts with other Southeast Asian countries were restricted. In 1481, the Spanish Inquisition commenced with the permission of Pope Sixtus IV and all non-Catholics within the Spanish empire were to be expelled or to be "put to the question" (tortured until they renounced their previous faith). With the refounding of Manila in 1571, the Philippines became subject to Spanish law and the Archbishop of New Galicia (Mexico) became the Grand Inquisitor of the Faithful in Mexico and the Philippines. In 1595, the newly appointed Archbishop of Manila became the Inquisitor-General of the Spanish East Indies (the Philippines, Guam, and Micronesia) and until 1898, the Spanish Inquisition was active against Protestants, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. As was the case in Latin America and Africa, forced conversions were not uncommon and any attempt to resist the authority of the Roman Catholic Church was seen as both rebellion against the Pope and sedition against the Spanish King, and was punishable by death. Buddhist practices, festivals and iconography had to be converted and adopted to Catholicism if they were to survive Spanish persecution. A good example of this was is the saniculas biscuit of Pampanga that has its roots in Buddhism. Syncretism (the blending indigenous religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism and indigenous folk religions) became necessary. This can be seen instantly with statues of the Virgin Mary, including the depiction of the halo,

hand poses, and rainbow-arches, look almost identical to statues of Tara especially in Binondo and other areas.

Buddhism seemed to have virtually disappeared during the 400 years of Spanish rule. With Revolution of 1896 against Spain and later with the coming of the American colonial regime in 1898, religious freedom was instituted. Mahayana and Zen Buddhist temples began to be built in the 1920s and 30s. Davao, due to the large number of Japanese residents, and Cebu, due to the large number of Chinese settlers, had the largest Buddhist populations in the Philippines. After World War II, most Japanese were expatriated to Japan and the Chinese and Chinese-Filipinos became the predominant Buddhist ethnic group. In the 1960s, Vietnamese refugees arrived and established a temple in Palawan.



At the same time, Japanese Buddhist temples and organizations began to re-emerge such as Sokka Gakkai International. Today, Buddhists account for about 1-3% of the Philippine population. Currently, only the Mahayana and Zen are present in the Philippines. Theravada Buddhism is now confined with nationals from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, as well as Cambodia and Laos. However, the linguistic influence left its most lasting marks on every Philippine language throughout the archipelago with the following Buddhist and Hindu concepts directly from the original Sanskrit. About 25% of the words in many Philippine languages are Sanskrit terms:

From Tagalog.

- *budhi* "conscience" from Sanskrit *bodhi*
- *dukha* "one who suffers" from Sanskrit *dukkha*
- *guro* "teacher" from Sanskrit *guru*
- *sampalataya* "faith" from Sanskrit *sampratyaya*
- *mukha* "face" from Sanskrit *mukha*
- *laho* "eclipse" from Sanskrit *rahu*

From Kapampangan

- *kalma* "fate" from Sanskrit *kama*
- *damlá* "divine law" from Sanskrit *dharma*
- *mantala* "magic formulas" from Sanskrit *mantra*

- *upaya* "power" from Sanskrit *upaya*
- *lupa* "face" from Sanskrit *rupa*
- *sabla* "every" from Sanskrit *sarva*
- *lawu* "eclipse" from Sanskrit *rahu*
- *galura* "giant eagle (a surname)" from Sanskrit *garuda*
- *laksina* "south (a surname)" from Sanskrit *dakshin*
- *laksamana* "admiral (a surname)" from Sanskrit *lakshmana*

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