

Dependent Buddhism

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Missionary Buddhism has been in Malaysia and Singapore for over 100 years now. The Sinhala Mission claims to be the Chief High Priest of all Buddhism here. Then, there are the Thai missions with their charms (protective and good luck), flower baths, and love blessings. We have to pay for all such services, of course (and that is the idea, anyway). The Burmese missions are fewer and tend to focus on their own tradition, and seem to be the least destructive of the foreign missions.

We see these Foreign Missions, especially the Sinhala missions, dividing local Buddhists. They leave their local childhood temples to start their own Buddhist Mission Societies in the very same town, even neighbourhood. This is going backwards: when the real mission is our own locals working together, we are continuing to promote the Chief High Priest and Sinhala Buddhism, instead of working together to grow the Bodhi tree in our own land.

After 100 years of Foreign Mission, our local Buddhists still say they do not understand the suttas. They ask: How do we practise these sutta teachings? Yet, western Buddhists listening from these very same suttas say: This sutta is very deep and beautiful! It makes me think and feel happy. Now I can meditate better!

What is happening here? For more than a century, the English-speaking Buddhists have been taught the Buddhism of paritta chanting, blessed threads, merit “transfer” and priestly blessings. In other words, we have been conditioned to DEPEND on these monks as PRIESTS.

We even employ them in our Buddhist centres, paying them salaries, besides giving them donations, feeding them meals, free medical care, and other benefits. We even provide them with personal cars to drive around at any time of the day.

In fact, we feel terrified at the idea should they decide no more to be our “kept monks.” We do not seem to know how to conduct our own puja, keep the precepts, study the suttas, meditate, help one another with personal problems. We think that all our problems, especially the serious ones (such as passing exams), can only be solved with priestly blessings.

On uposatha days, we keep the 8 precepts, including not taking solid food after noon. But these Foreign Missionary Priests eat whenever they like, even taking dinner and other pleasures. They send back huge amounts of money back to their home country, and smuggle taxable items (since people tend to spontaneously respect the robes).

One Missionary Society held a “retreat” for their inner-circle members and had a good time loudly gambling. Should we pretend all this did not happen, especially in the name of Buddhism? We often blame the Teacher, the Foreign Missionaries, when such things happen. Is this what 100 years of Missionary Buddhism has taught us? What have we been taught, when we do not even keep such basic moral conduct taught in the Sigālovāda Sutta? What will our rebirth be? Do we even believe in karma and rebirth?

No one can solve such problems as long as we keep treating these Foreign Missionaries as PRIESTS. We cannot grow up and wise up as Buddhists when we follow such a DEPENDENT Buddhism. A good sign is that more of us are showing interest in the suttas, keeping the precepts meaningfully, practising meditation and working together in fellowship. Yet, we need to do more.

Such a DEPENDENCY problem takes generations to heal. For us to be independent, SELF-RELIANT lay Buddhists, we can and must do our own pujas, conduct lay last rites for our late beloved (laymen conducted the last rites of the Buddha himself!), dedicate merits (transference-free!), and work to understand the suttas better.

The Foreign Missionaries have been spoon-feeding us for over a century, treating us as babies, and taking away our candies. They can keep the candies (if this is any real good). We need to grow up, independent of PRIESTLY BUDDHISM, of Buddhist Brahmanism. We should work to understand dependent arising and dependent ending.

We must go back to the Buddha as our one and only teacher; practise the Dhamma of self-reliance, self-awareness and selflessness; and aspire to the path leading to the noble sangha of streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats.

We close our eyes peacefully when we meditate. We close our eyes mindfully to the Buddhism of the Chief High Priest, and instead visualize the radiant smiling Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree in our park. Sadhu.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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