

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu Yesterday and Tomorrow: In? Out? Beyond?

By LOUIS GABAUDE - August 24, 2017

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Good afternoon everybody,

One can never be sure why one has been invited to give a Keynote Speech. The question here is why you have actually invited a foreigner, a *Farang*, a non-Buddhist, to give what could be a potentially pretentious discourse on a Thai Buddhist monk whom you know – or should know – better than anyone in the world? Why have you invited an outsider to a party – a conference – dedicated mostly to ‘insiders,’ that is to participants who are ‘in,’ and by ‘in’ I mean ‘in’ Buddhism, and even ‘in’ ‘true’ Buddhism, or so it is that you believe?

My way – or perhaps my trick – to respond to this enigma and to avoid a possible trap will be to reflect on the conventional notions or concepts of ‘in,’ of ‘out,’ and of ‘beyond,’ precisely as they apply to our Hero of the day, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. I will look briefly at his life and try to spot places where he was ‘in,’ places where he was ‘out,’ and places where he was probably elsewhere: ‘beyond’ the easily defined ‘ins’ and ‘outs.’ While I do this, I will also remind you how these categories of ‘in,’ ‘out’ and ‘beyond’ can also be applied to the Buddha himself and to his teachings. Then, I shall suggest some conditions that enable the pursuit of Buddhadāsa’s way from this point onward.

In Thailand, perhaps more than in many other countries, official discourse with respect to national heroes, be they of worldly or religious spheres is often somewhat pompous, inflated, and, in the final account, artificial and even void: one cannot be an academic without being called ‘Doctor’; one cannot even be a monk – a non-ego by profession – without calling oneself ‘*Atamaphap*’ (My ego) or being called ‘*Maha*’ (Big), ‘Noble’ (*Chao Khun*), ‘Royal’ (*Raja*) and even ‘god’ (*Thep*); and now, as if all these *samanasak* honorary titles did not carry enough weight, the western secular title of ‘Doctor’ has become a much sought after rattle. Certainly, all these language tricks (*upāya*, อุกาญ) have a positive intention to invoke respect for respectable people. Unintentionally however, they may lead us into thinking that these highly respectable people belong to a different world, a different nature, and a different species.

Those who had the opportunity to see and know Buddhadāsa in his daily routine can probably realize that, before being a *Phrathamkosachan*, before being the Master we honor here, and even before being a monk, he was just a man.^[2] He was a man whose conditioned genesis deserves a reminder. As Buddhists, you know well the

conditioned genesis – the *paṭiccasamuppāda* – chanted by monks at funeral rites or the one commented upon at length by Buddhādāsa.^[3] But philosophers and anthropologists have also studied conditioned genesis, the conditioned genesis of humans and of human phenomena where the notions of ‘in,’ ‘out,’ ‘between’ and ‘beyond,’ continually interplay.^[4] I would now like to look at the life of Buddhādāsa by denoting his ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ first (1) in Phum Rieng, his native village, then (2) in Bangkok for his Thai study of Buddhism, then (3) at Suan Mokkh for his study of Buddhism beyond Thailand, and, finally (4), in his later years for his delivering a Buddhist message to urban generations, ‘out’ there, in Bangkok.

1. ‘IN’ AND ‘OUT’ OF THAI CULTURE IN PHUM RIANG (CHAIYA DISTRICT, SURAT THANI PROVINCE)

If we look at Buddhādāsa as a child in Phum Rieng, a coastal village near Chaiya, we note that, even from the womb, he was already ‘in’ and ‘out’ at the same time. Through his mother, he was certainly ‘in’ the so called ‘Thai’ culture, ‘Thai’ customs, and ‘Thai’ Buddhism. However, at the same time, because of his ‘Chinese’ merchant father, he was also partly ‘out’ of this ‘Thai’ rural culture, despite the fact that his father had been already schooled in a Thai Buddhist monastery. His two paternal uncles were running boats in the Gulf of Siam. When they came home, they told stories of business, travel, and ‘foreign’ worlds. Their home was the only shop in the village. It was a living cultural encounter between ‘Chinese’ men and ‘Thai’ customers. As a result, the family, in effect, inhabited two cultural floors simultaneously, while observing both Thai and Chinese festivals.

You can tell me that all this is such a common feature in this country that it should not even deserve a mention. Yes, indeed, from the first King of Ayudhya, U Thong, to our recent Prime Ministers, to say nothing of University professors, teachers, writers, intellectuals, film-makers, soap-opera directors, making an extensive list, the Chinese factor is actually so ‘in’! It is intermingled with the Thai texture, to the extent that it may even be overlooked and forgotten. A friend of mine says, tongue-in-cheek, that if you take the Thai women and the Chinese men out of Thailand, the country will crumble because Thai women hold up families while Chinese men hold up the economy! Forgiving and forgetting the simplistic nature of this coffee table remark, one cannot but notice that, within Southeast Asian countries where the Chinese have been frequent migrants, Thailand has managed to digest them without big dramas, unlike what we have seen nearby. Moreover, Thailand has even paradoxically allowed many of these products of Thai-Chinese encounters under the mosquito net to proudly define ‘Thainess’ in their articles, books and works of art!

Even within the Thai Sangha, the ‘Chinese factor’ has not been totally out of the game. In addition to Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, other half-Chinese or pure Chinese monks have often filled the first page of newspapers out of proportion with their statistical weight for reasons and effects I cannot develop here. Let us simply note that, like Buddhādāsa, they are generally hardworking, self-confident, and outspoken, with a leaning towards originality, debate, confrontation, and official recognition.

The Thai-Chinese nest was not the only dual factor in Buddhādāsa’s conditional genesis in his home village of Phum Rieng. There was another. It was a religious one, a duality between Buddhists and Muslims. For the young Buddhādāsa, Muslims represented another door to the outside world. In later years, he would recount how his own Buddhist master would care for ailing Muslims, and how, as a result, they respected and loved him. Buddhādāsa would praise their morality, their honesty, as well as their opposition to images.

So, we realize that, from his early years, Buddhādāsa was already in a globalized house on the ethnic level, and in a globalized village on the religious level. He was raised in a kitchen, a shop, a market where not only goods are exchanged, but also words, and through them worlds. The memories he recalled about these early inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships do not mention antipathy, disdain, hatred, or bitterness. They reflect a realistic acceptance of a pluralistic society where each

individual and each community should and could peacefully accept the others' morals, values, and worldviews. To return to the thread of this talk, the young Buddhadāsa, while born 'in' a Thai society, was at the same time 'in' and 'out' of Chinese and Muslim worldviews. That was just the beginning of his apprenticeships of 'ins' and 'outs.'

2. 'IN' AND 'OUT' OF THE BUDDHIST SANGHA IN BANGKOK

We jump now to a later period when Buddhadāsa, after being a merchant from the age of fourteen to twenty, has become a monk, a *bhikkhu*, to comply with his Thai mother's wish. He will experience a second type of 'ins' and 'outs' when he comes to Bangkok, as a young monk, to study Pāli and Buddhism at Wat Pathumkhongkharatchaworawihan. This maturation period can be subdivided into two steps. The first one corresponds to Buddhadāsa's evolution from being an active participant 'in' the education system for monks to rejecting the very system of which he had become a part. The second step corresponds to his understanding that the decisive moment in the history of Buddhism had been the choice by Prince Siddhārta not to remain 'in' the royal palace but to go 'out' of it and lead the life of an ascetic in the forest.

2.1. 'In' and 'Out' of the Bangkok Education System for Monks

When he first comes in Bangkok in 1928, Buddhadāsa realizes that he does not like life there at all. He quickly returns home to complete the three-year basic doctrinal curriculum for Buddhist monks or '*Nak Tham*.' During that time he is still completely involved 'in' the educational system for monks devised by the *Thammayut* Prince Wachirayanwarorot and even begins to teach at the doctrinal school just created in Chaiya with the financial help of one of his uncles. He inspires the creation of a group for which the motto will be '*The gift of the Dhamma excels all gifts*.' This was a discrete reaction against his mother's practice of the gift, of simply giving to monks, making merit for the sake of merit in order to go to heavens after this life. He is then so 'in' the system that he finally accepts the necessity of going back to Bangkok to obtain the higher grades that would allow him to ascend the hierarchical ladder in the sangha through the study of Pāli. However, after one year, he is fed up again with Bangkok miasma as well as with the study of Pāli as it was taught there, and makes the decision to go back to his village for good, and study the *Tripitaka* alone.

Later, in his life, he would admit that during these years he was seduced by his early success, letting loose his 'me' and 'mine.' He would also criticize the official Buddhist studies in Thailand for training young monks in Buddhist 'philosophy' and Pāli sophisticated levels just to become parrots able to preach on anything at length without real spiritual growth.

The reason why he reacted that way was his awareness of the difference between what he read in the *Tripitaka* and what he saw in Bangkok Buddhist temples. This leads us to the second step announced previously for this period: the realization that the decisive moment in the history of Buddhism had been the choice by Prince Siddhārta not to remain 'in' the royal palace but to go 'out' of it.

2.2. 'In' and 'Out' of the Palace or the Pre-condition for Enlightenment

Buddhadāsa did not read the life of the Buddha as an accumulation of extraordinary events and miracles; on the contrary, he saw it as a sequel of quite rational decisions. To begin with, the main pre-condition to the realization of Buddhahood was the going out of the palace and the decision by Siddhārta to live in the forest, to sit on sand and to beg for food, as a renunciant, a *sādhū*, a mendicant. You are probably familiar with Buddhadāsa's obsessive and constant reminders of these first years of what we now call 'Buddhism' and of his material 'translations' of the primitive nomadic life through his open *ubosot* surrounded by trees or his circle of stone seats (*Lan hin khong*, ลานหินโค้ง) as a preaching hall.

Buddhist tradition acknowledged the importance of the departure from the powerful and comfortable royal palace by calling it the 'Great Departure'; it is depicted all over Asia through sculptures and paintings in a myriad of cultural forms. What is less often depicted is the importance that this departure, as a model, would hold not only for Buddhists, but also for the history of humanity.

A French sociologist, Louis Dumont (1911-1998),^[5] has drawn the attention of the academic community on Prince Siddhārta's coming out of the palace as the most well-known model – the paradigm – of modern 'individualism.' Here, 'individualism' does not imply 'egoism,' but involves instead a 'personal' decision, a 'personal' choice, a 'personal' will, or in Indian terms a '*pacceka*' will. According to the social structure at that time, individuals were obliged to follow the path, the rights, and the duties imposed by virtue of social position, or cast. However, in this fixed and 'frozen' society,^[6] there was – and still is in the present day – a safety valve for independent and resolute minds, one which offered the possibility to reject the rights and duties of one's caste by becoming a renunciant (*sannyasi*), a *sādhu*, a professional mendicant. This sociological reading of the Great Departure envisions the future Buddha as the champion of individual freedom, of personal choice, of radical 'individualism.' However, this demanded a high price in Indian society: the radical renunciation of what society, through one's caste, could guarantee: the possibility to have a family, to work and earn your living, to enjoy social relations and status. In other words, the Indian renunciant gave up all social rights by gaining radical freedom.

In India, today, the possibility for an individual not to play by the standard rules of society and to look, instead, for some kind of mental liberation is still an option under the renunciant status of the '*sādhu*.' I do not want to be accused of *lèse-majesté* against Maha Thiap, but if I were the Dean of the Faculty of Buddhist Studies at Mahachulalongkorn University, I would make a book on *sadhus* a compulsory reading for students. A suggestion could be a book written by another French sociologist – sorry for drawing your attention to my compatriots! – one who has spent a few years with *sadhus* in India. This book gives a contemporary version of the life Prince Siddhārta must have lived, 2500 years ago, after he had left the palace.^[7] In a way, the *sadhus* are actually still alive in Thailand, but just as a 'souvenir' in Thai language. When people have made offerings, listened to a sermon and a blessing, they respond with one voice: '*Sathu! Sathu! Sathu!*' Perhaps, the monks, upon hearing the words might ask themselves: am I still really a '*sādhu*,' a free man looking for mental liberation? Have I really left the palace of my enslaving desires? Have I really left the palace of my political ambitions? Have I really left the palace of my imperialistic and righteous power? So many questions! So many answers!

We will come back to this later!

For now, let us simply note that Buddhadāsa's rejection of a life in the temples of Bangkok for that in a deserted monastery forgotten in a forest near Phum Riang was the result of his meditative reading of the Buddha's life such as told in the *Tripitāka*. His going out to the forest was not uncommon or extraordinary, one must note, since it was well defined by the Buddha himself^[8] and later endorsed by various groups of monks, mostly known as '*araññavāsī*,' '*araññika*,' or 'forest-dwelling' monks,^[9] and exemplified recently in Thailand by Luang Pho Man's (1870-1949) inspiration and foundations. Three features, however, are remarkable in the case of Buddhadāsa. First, his attention to the renunciant state of the Buddhist monk looks like a discovery, or more precisely a rediscovery, because it was made and highlighted by an urban or semi-urban young man alien to the Thai forest tradition. Second, this discovery is not here opposed to a deep study of Scriptures, but only opposed to the scholastic study of commentarial post-canonical literature. Third, this discovery has been described, reflected, and rationalized by Buddhadāsa himself as a mental and rational itinerary.^[10]

So, we can see how, according to Buddhadāsa's explanation, his coming 'out' of Bangkok may be seen as logic, parallel to, and a consequence of the coming out of the palace by the Prince Siddhārtha. At this point, you may be excused if my 'ins' and 'outs' begin to cause dizziness, but this is not yet the end. I have another 'in' and 'out' set upon which I must ask you to ponder: the 'in' and 'out' of Buddhism as transmitted in Thailand.

3. 'IN' AND 'OUT' OF BUDDHISM AS TRANSMITTED IN THAILAND

We know that Buddhadāsa's going back to a deserted monastery in Phum Rieng and then to the Suan Mokkh we know, hides a paradox. It was in these rather isolated and obscure places that Buddhadāsa actually opened himself to unsuspected avenues and understandings of the message of the Buddha, paths and insights that would have been undiscovered, unseen or rejected had he pursued the standard Pāli studies curriculum in Bangkok. Here again, I will distinguish two steps in this discovery: first, the opening to western criticism of the Scriptures and, second, the opening to the western discovery of Ch'an and Zen Buddhism. I will call these two steps « 'In' and 'out' of the Buddha's word » and « 'In' and 'out' of 'Theravāda'. »

3.1. 'In' and 'Out' of the Buddha's Words

In the common and public construction of Buddhadāsa's image and reputation, there is a factor which, if not hidden, is not particularly highlighted. I have in mind the 'foreign' factor in Buddhadāsa's maturation. This impact began as soon as he was a young monk through readings of Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), of the *Mahabodhi* journal, of the *British Buddhist Journal*, of the *Buddhism in England Journal*, of *Buddhist Annual of Ceylon*, all western or westernized Buddhist tools that his brother Dhammadāsa^[11] (1908-2000) received and shared. A few years later, Buddhadāsa would also receive and read books sent by Thai students in England, notably Sanya Dharmasakti (1907-2002),^[12] a future president of the Supreme Court and of Thammasat University, and a future Prime Minister (1973-1975) as well.

From Buddhadāsa's writings about the *Tripitaka* and about the notion of 'Word of the Buddha' (*Buddhavacana*), we can infer that he absorbed much of the western criticism of the Scriptures. This critique had been initiated for the most part by historians of religions as well as by Protestant exegetes who had convincingly shown that the Bible, including the books of the New Testament, were the result of later compilations of several strata of various fragments from various authors. The first Western Buddhists, primarily English and German, i.e. with a Protestant background, had no problem in transposing, more or less cautiously, the historical criticism of Christian Scriptures for application to Buddhist Scriptures. Similarly, Buddhadāsa, although still holding the *Tripitaka* as high as the Protestants held the Bible, saw no problem in deconstructing, showing variances, multiple versions of the same event, and, went as far to say, in a provocative style, that some sections of the *Tripitaka*, the Abhidharma for example, could be thrown into the sea without loss! Unsurprisingly, a radical stance of this type was absolutely unpalatable for the Buddhist establishment. In it was seen proof that Buddhadāsa was not a true Buddhist but, rather, a communist poison hiding at the core of Thai Buddhism in order to destroy it. In other terms, for many, he was 'out' while pretending to be 'in'!

But for Buddhadāsa, on the contrary, the historical and literary deconstruction of the *Tripitaka* encouraged a search for the real 'heart' in the Buddha's message. Embarkation upon this voyage led to the discovery of Zen Buddhism, once again, through western books.

3.2. 'In' and 'Out' of 'Theravāda'

There are probably other or different 'proofs' elsewhere, but Dhammadāsa told me that, around 1937, Phraya Latphli Thammaprakhan, *alias* Wong Latphli^[13] (1893-1958) – a future Minister of Justice and President of the Office of the Juridical Council – lent several books on Zen Buddhism, written in English, to Buddhadāsa because he

had asked him to revise his translation of the *Sutra of Wei Lang*. Buddhādāsa finally published his own revised translation in 1947, some ten years later, an indication that Buddhādāsa was very cautious in his reading and absorption of Chan/Zen literature. [14] He realized rather quickly that zen concentration or meditation was not radically different from what Theravāda says about the fruits of *samādhi* where there is no need of texts or of study.

So, here again, we have a case of an apparent 'out there' in a Chinese / English / Japanese / Mahāyāna / Ch'an / Zen maelstrom which Buddhādāsa manages, in the end, to transform into an 'in' where a Thai Buddhist can hopefully find his own 'roots'!

Time is short, but I still have a last double set of 'ins' and 'outs' for your consideration. While, up to this point, Buddhādāsa's play with 'ins' and 'outs' involved only himself and the rather limited circle of his parents and friends in Chaiya, this last set deals with a mature Buddhādāsa, who was no longer a cautious 'student' but a master in process, quite confident in his positions, however controversial.

4. 'IN' AND 'OUT': WHICH BUDDHIST MESSAGE FOR URBAN/MODERN GENERATIONS

I have chosen two significant episodes illustrating the evolution of Buddhādāsa thought and the impact that occurred after WWII. In the first case, I will reflect on Buddhādāsa's position on the role of Buddhism in a modernizing society and in the second on the role of Buddhism in a 'nation' threatened by communism.

4.1. After WW2: 'In' and 'Out' of Buddhist Thai Practices

Buddhādāsa was invited to give lectures at the Buddhist Society in Bangkok. There, the public would not be a tiny group of provincial parents and friends but members of an Association of elite educated bourgeois. Is it possible that Buddhādāsa miscalculated the nature of his public? Perhaps he thought that Bangkokians would be as 'advanced' as the group of friends who invited him? Perhaps not? The fact is he gave two very provocative conferences in June 1948 about the theme: 'The mountains on the road towards the Dharma of the Buddha.'^[15]

'Mountain' here stood for 'obstacle.' And imagine what? The three 'obstacles' on the Buddhist way that Buddhādāsa exposed were the 'Three Jewels' of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha! Briefly shortened, here are the three reasons: the Buddha is an obstacle because people pay homage to a statue instead of living illuminated by the teaching of the Buddha; the Dharma is an obstacle because people copy manuscripts instead of understanding the message; the Sangha is an obstacle because people see monks as magicians.

Needless to say, these conferences, while welcomed by already convinced personalities like Sanya Dharmasakti, Phraya Latphli or Pridi Banomyong (1900-1983) [16], were the target of ferocious attacks and debates, perhaps the first time Buddhādāsa was accused to pave the way for communism. It was asked: if the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are the main hindrances on the Buddhist way, what is the future of Buddhism in Thailand? The *sāsanā* will not be sustained: no one will give food to the monks, no one is going to maintain temples, etc. Buddhādāsa responded in many ways. Here, I will recall just one of his answers: there are actually two kinds of Buddhisms, 'one for the spring chickens or ducklings who need to stay within their cage' and another 'for those who can fly'!^[17] But the reasoning that fits into my reading of the framework of 'ins' and 'outs' is that which was added by Buddhādāsa: '*In Thailand, we are lagging behind. Today, when they talk of the supramundane (lokuttara), students of Buddhism turn to Japan or China, and most particularly to the Dhyāna or Zen sect, more than they do to Thailand.*'^[18]

Now, '*Lokuttara*,' the 'supramundane,' the 'world beyond,' is the precise field of battle of the ideas we are dealing with. First, for the 'spring chickens' mentioned above, the 'world beyond' is the world after death. Daily Buddhist merit-making

rituals form a system preparing for this timely ‘beyond.’ Second, for scholars in Abhidharma, the ‘world beyond’ is precisely that of the scholastic Abhidharma, the supreme teaching – *paramattha dharma* – by definition. It is exactly the one that Buddhadāsa thought is beyond the understanding and needs of most people, it being, in fact, another way of preparing the ‘after-death’ quite like common meritorious rituals finally. Addressing his opponents, Buddhadāsa concluded cruelly with the question: *‘If I believe what you say, that means that in our Thai country, there are only monks afraid to starve, afraid that folks will not give them anything anymore and who do not dare to move onwards and say the truth, isn’t it?’*^[19] The truth? Which truth? The truth that the common system of meritorious or magical Buddhism is a lie? This is for you to answer.

Whatever your response to this challenge, the return of Buddhadāsa to Bangkok in his maturing years shows he has grown up and stands securely on his own ground, confident in his views. ‘Out’ there in Chaiya, he has discovered a Buddhism which now allows him to believe the ‘Buddhism for chicken’ that is confident to be ‘in,’ is actually outside the original purpose of the Buddha, out of the interest of thinking people, and completely ‘out’ of the modern game. This sets the condition that allows the message of the Buddha to remain alive, requiring the return to its roots, that is to the... going out of the Palace.

4.2. Facing Communism: ‘In’ and ‘Out’ of the ‘Nation’

Having commented upon topics more or less exclusively ‘religious’ involving only ‘doctrinal’ or ‘spiritual’ views or reasons, let us now address a problem in which religion, here being Buddhism, is drawn into the political arena by communism. Time does not permit an in-depth exposition of Buddhadāsa’s treatment of communism.^[20] Here, I will recall just a few elements pertinent to my reflexion upon ‘in’ and ‘out.’

One morning of 1968, Buddhadāsa was listening to the radio and heard the Vice-President of the United States saying that they bombed North-Vietnam in the name of ‘morality.’ Buddhadāsa was surprised,^[21] just like he had been chocked and even ashamed, 30 years before, when the Japanese had looted, raped, and murdered at will in Nanking, partly in the name of Buddhism.^[22] Later on, probably ignorant of the 1968 reaction of Buddhadāsa to their previous ‘moral’ bombings in Vietnam, the US government attempted to recruit Buddhadāsa for their fight against communism. He answered that he was already fighting communism through his preachings against the three roots of evil. The emissaries put their dollars back in their pockets, and went successfully to the Eastern coast, near Chonburi.

These two anecdotes show that Buddhadāsa did not want to be involved in an open and specific struggle against communism ‘in Buddha’s company.’ Venturing into a dangerous minefield, Buddhadāsa participated in the heated debate around the definition of ‘Nation’ (*chat*, ชาต), the first of the three pillars of the country – together with Religion and the King. The official stance was that the fight against communism was a fight to save the country, i.e. the Nation. But Buddhadāsa, I would say ‘as usual,’ proposed a ‘moral’ definition to the Nation that was not a ‘geographical’ one.

For him, the much adored ‘Nation’ had already crumbled and disappeared well before the advent of communism. This was due to the lack of morality among the politicians as well as the lack of morality in fighting communism. Sure, communism would fail too because of its similar lack of morality and would die out, ‘just like a wave on the beach’ of history. In any case, ‘morality’ was the magic word which inspired him to say: *‘If I had faith in Marxists at the beginning, it was because they are also able to solve some moral problems and Mao Zedong is a great moralist of our time.’*^[23] This optimistic declaration about a man who is said to have unnecessarily caused the death of several tens of millions of people may of course be attributed to a Pridian inspiration^[24] but also to many, in the western media of the time, including Americans, to say nothing of French intellectuals.

When Buddhist monks are dragged or engage voluntarily into the political arena that Prince Siddhārta left for good long ago, contradictions inevitably arise. The whole story of Buddhism may be read as a perpetual temptation, for the ‘renunciant’ bhikkhus, to renounce renunciation, to ‘return to the palace,’ to retrieve – or at least join with – the *khsatriya* power and the *khsatriya* dharma, as if politics were the continuation of religion by other means.

When bhikkhus are ‘engaged’ against Tamils in Sri Lanka, they ‘return to the palace,’ to the power of the palace. When bhikkhus are ‘engaged’ against Muslims in Burma, they ‘return to the palace.’ When bhikkhus are ‘engaged’ for Buddhism to be the national religion of Thailand, they ‘return to the palace.’ When bhikkhus are ‘engaged’ to take Phra Wihan back, they ‘return to the palace.’ When bhikkhus are ‘engaged’ to save the Nation by bringing gold bars and bullions to the government coffers, they also ‘return to the palace!’ But all of them pretend not to play politics!

CONCLUSION

What happens now with the return of Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives to Bangkok? Actually, the answer is in your hands.

Hopefully, it may be that this return is along the line he followed all his life but most clearly in the 60s and 70s: expressing an old message in ways and terms accessible to contemporary eyes and ears. The problem is that, in the matter of sight, our vision is somewhat affected by the big elephant called ‘Buddhadāsa.’ Each of us sees and cares for a piece of the large literary corpus he has left us. You have allowed me to suggest, as I led you today through my duets of ‘ins’ and ‘outs,’ that this corpus is much more diverse, rich and stimulating than we usually believe. One may prove anything by picking this or that and forget that everything, even the teaching of Buddhādāsa, was and is a teaching in process, an education growing out of experience, i.e. from mistakes. So, before pulling the tail as if it were the whole, we probably should take time to read around to find the ears, the head, the belly and the legs, so that, in the end, our elephant may remain whole and possibly alive, not tortured and torn apart to death.

Thank you for your attention.

[1] This is the text prepared in advance and polished by Rebecca Weldon. Due to various factors (mood, inspiration, or time constraint) the actual speech has been slightly different.

[2] See more on that in my ‘[Buddhadāsa’s contribution as a human being, as a Thai, as a Buddhist](http://suanmokkh.org/articles/14)’ (<http://suanmokkh.org/articles/14>) in: Sulak Sivaraksa (ed.), *The quest for a just society: the legacy and challenge of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu*, Bangkok, The Inter-Religious Commission for Development, Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, 2537 (1994), pp. 27-59.

[3] For simplicity, I use here ‘Buddhadāsa’ even if at that time he was not yet called by his later pen name.

[4] See: Daniel Sibony, *Entre-deux: l’origine en partage*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1991; Michel de Certeau, *L’étranger ou l’union dans la différence*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1969.

[5] Louis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986. (First published in French in 1983); Alan Macfarlane, ‘Louis Dumont and the origins of individualism’, *The Cambridge journal of anthropology*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1992/1993, pp. 1-28; Ton Otto & Nils Bubandt (Editors), *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010; Carl Olson, *The Indian Renouncer and Postmodern Poison: A Cross-Cultural Encounter* (New Perspectives in Philosophical Scholarship), Peter Lang, 1997.

[6] Indian society is called here ‘holistic’ because everything is organized by and for the society as a ‘whole,’ and not for the simple sake of its individuals.

[7] Patrick Levy, *Sādhus. Going beyond the dreadlocks*, New Delhi, Prakash Books, 2010. French first edition: *Sādhus: un voyage initiatique chez les ascètes de l’Inde*, Paris, Les éditions du Relié, 2009.

[8] Living as an ascetic in the forest is not enough: 'Endowed with four qualities, a monk is fit to stay in isolated forest & wilderness dwellings. Which four? [He is endowed] with thoughts of renunciation, with thoughts of non-ill will, with thoughts of harmlessness, and he is a discerning person, not dull, not a drooling idiot. Endowed with these four qualities, a monk is fit to stay in isolated forest & wilderness dwellings.' (Araññika Sutta: A Wilderness Dweller, AN 4.259 PTS: A ii 252 Thai 4.263, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu)

[9] To say nothing of numerous texts in the *Tripitaka* collected by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu in his *Tam roi Phra Orahant (ตามรอยพระอรหันต์)*, see: Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, chap 10, p. 196ff; Prince Damrong, *Tamnan Khana Song (ตำนานคณะสงฆ์)*, Phra Chao Nong Ya Thoe Hemawadi prot hai phim nai ngan sop Khrua Yai Saeng muea pi kun Pho.So. 2466, Bangkok, Rong Phim Sophonphiphatthanakon, 62 p.; Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity*, Chichester, Wiley Blackwell, 2014, *passim*; Kate Crosby, *Traditional Theravada Meditation and its Modern-Era Suppression*, Hong Kong, Buddha Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2013.

[10] Cf. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: *10 pi nai Suan Mok (10 ปีในสวนโมกข์)*. Now available at: <http://www.e4thai.com/e4e/images/pdf2/สิบปีในสวนโมกข์.pdf>; *Attachiwapawat khong than Phutthathat Lao wai muea wai sonthaya (อัตชีวประวัติของท่านพุทธทาส เล่าไว้เมื่อวัยสนธยา, พระประชา ปสนุนธมฺโม สัมภาษณ์)*. Now available at: http://www.buddhadasa.org/files/pdf/B_pdf/kp/kp1.pdf.

[11] ธรรมทาส พานิช (2451-2543)

[12] สัจญา ธรรมศักดิ์ (2450-2545).

[13] พระยาสัตตพลีธรรมประคัลภ์ = วงษ์ สัตตพลี (2436-2511)

[14] See my comments in Louis Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu* (http://publications.efe.fr/fr/livres/132_une-hermeneutique-bouddhique-contemporaine-de-thaïlande-buddhadasa-bhikkhu), Paris, Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988, pp. 42-45.

[15] The set of four conferences given to the Buddhist Society during and after WWII was published for the first time in one volume in 1955 by the Group 'Gift of Dharma' (Khana Thammathan): *Chumnum Pathakatha Chut Phutthatham (Ruam 4 rueang) (ชุมนุมปาฐกถาชุด พุทธธรรม ร่วมเรื่อง) - Withi haeng kankhao thueng Phutthatham (วิถีแห่งการเข้าถึงพุทธธรรม) [July 13, 1940]; Khwamsa-ngop khue phutthatham (ความสงบคือพุทธธรรม) [June 28, 1942]; Phu khao haeng withi phutthatham (ภูเขาแห่งวิถีพุทธธรรม) [June 5, 1948]; and Khayai khwam phu khao haeng withi phutthatham (ขยายความภูเขาแห่งวิถีพุทธธรรม) [June 23, 1948].*

[16] ปรีดี พนมยงค์ (2443-2526).

[17] Buddhādāsa, 'Banthuek kio kap phu khao phutthatham' (บันทึกเกี่ยวกับภูเขาพุทธธรรม) in *Chumnum pathakatha chut phutthatham (ชุมนุมปาฐกถาชุด พุทธธรรม)*, Bangkok, Phrae Phitthaya, 2512 [1969], p. 367ff.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] See: Louis Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu* (http://publications.efe.fr/fr/livres/132_une-hermeneutique-bouddhique-contemporaine-de-thaïlande-buddhadasa-bhikkhu), Paris, Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988, pp. 413-443.

[21] Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *Dhammapatimok*, lem 1 (ธรรมปาฐโมกข์ เล่ม ๑), Chut Thammakhot 31, Chaiya, 2518, p. 306-307.

[22] See: Louis Gabaude, 'Bouddhismes en contact: un zeste de zen dans le bouddhisme thaï', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 87-2 (2000), p. 403-404.

[23] Quoted by Phra Pracha Passanathammo (พระประชา ปสนุนธมฺโม), *Phutthathat kap khon run Mai (พุทธทาสกับคนรุ่นใหม่)*, Bangkok, Munnithi Komon Khimthong, 2526 [1983], p. 234.

[24] In 1949, after a failed coup against Phibun Songkhram, Pridi left for China where he stayed for 21 years before settling down in France. As a tribute to the man who had 'asked him to spread a modern Buddhism,' Buddhādāsa recorded an address to be read when Pridi's ashes were dispersed in the Chao Phraya on May 11, 1986. See my translation in French in Louis Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu*, Paris, Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988, pp. 485-488.

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