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#### **Buddhist Monasteries**

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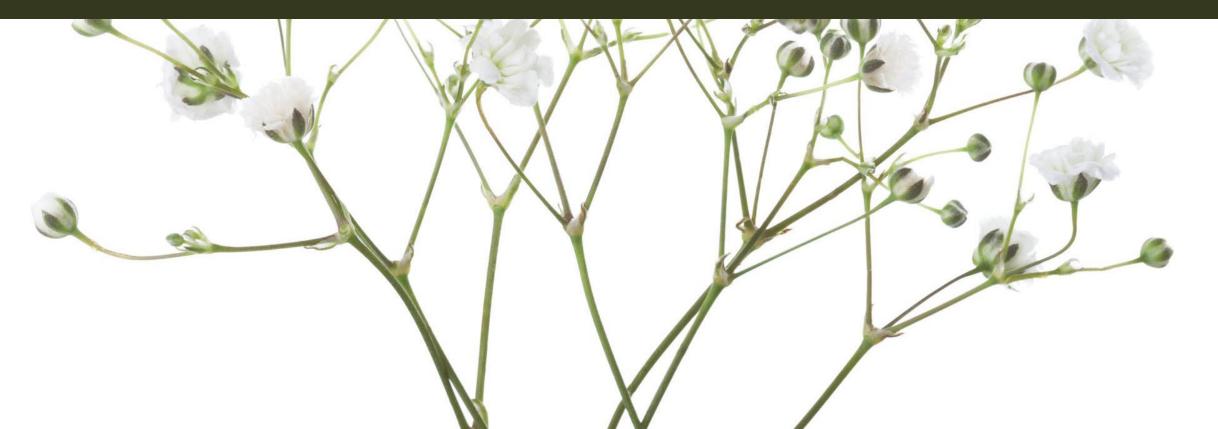
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## Buddhist Monasteries: Their Design, Inhabitants, and Role in Buddhist Tradition Bella Rushing



# Background

- → Buddhism is one of the largest religions in the world, originating in India nearly 2,500 years ago
- $\rightarrow$  Adhere to the teachings of the Buddha
  - $\rightarrow$  Everything is suffering
  - $\rightarrow$  The cause of suffering is clinging
  - $\rightarrow$  Quit clinging
  - $\rightarrow$  The eightfold path
- $\rightarrow$  Three denominations
  - $\rightarrow$  Theravada
  - $\rightarrow$  Mahayana
  - $\rightarrow$  Tibetan







# Monks Versus Laypeople

- → Monks have renounced the ways of the world and are ordained scholars and teachers of Buddhism
- $\rightarrow$  Laypeople actively participate in society and practice Buddhism in the context of everyday life
- $\rightarrow$  The relationship between the two is mutually dependent
  - $\rightarrow$  Laypeople provide for the needs of the monks through alms
  - $\rightarrow$  Monks provide teaching to the laypeople

History of Monasteries

- → At its conception, Buddhism did not use monasteries to house the disciples of Buddha or Buddhist monks
  - $\rightarrow$  Buddha taught asceticism- giving up all ties to the world
  - $\rightarrow$  Monks relied on laypeople to provide them for any needs
- $\rightarrow$  Buddha commanded his followers to take his teaching all over before his death
- $\rightarrow$  Eventually, monks and nuns would begin to congregate in groups during the rainy season
- $\rightarrow$  These communities became permanent, setting the ground work for monasteries
- $\rightarrow$  Monasteries were built close to laypeople to continue the interdependent relationship

### Monastery Inhabitants

- $\rightarrow$  Monasteries are inhabited by monks and nuns
- $\rightarrow$  Path to monkhood
- 1. Layperson becomes novice monk (vows aren't binding)
- 2. Novice monks live in monastery and has a "spiritual guide" that helps them study and learn
- 3. Novice monks (at least 20 years old) decide to become an ordained monk
- 4. "Go forth," Acceptance, Proclamations

\* Each monastery has monastery-specific steps that a novice monk must take

#### Monastery Design

- → Found all around the world in many different places, each containing unique architecture
- $\rightarrow$  Key similarities
  - → Three important architectural components
  - 1. Stupas (Remains of Buddha)
  - 2. Vihara ("shared space")
  - 3. Chaitya (assembly hall)





## Social Organization

- $\rightarrow$  Each monasteric community has a hierarchy within
- $\rightarrow$  Equality is viewed as dichotomous with hierarchy
- → Typically assigned by seniority and reflected in seating arrangement of monks when participating in formal activities
- $\rightarrow$  Typical hierarchy
  - → Oblates, Candidate/Postulant, Novice Monk, Lay Brother, Choir Monk, Monk, Herodeacon, Hieromonk, Sub-prior, Prior, Abbot, Hegumen, Archimandrite or Mother Superior
  - → Hegumen, archimandrites, bishop (these are positions outside the monasteries and are often region/denomination specific)

#### Novice Versus Ordained Monks

- $\rightarrow$  Novice monks have little authority in a monastery and may not be full-time residents
  - $\rightarrow$  Required to abide by 10 rules
  - → Participate in some aspects of monastery life, but cannot hold position in monasteric hierarchy
- $\rightarrow$  Ordained monks participate fully in monasteric life and are permanent residents
  - $\rightarrow$  Required to abide by about 250 rules
  - $\rightarrow$  Typically assigned a specific job along with their hierarchical position
- $\rightarrow$  Organization and rules come from the Vinaya and Pratimoksa (and chayiks for Mahayana)

## Monasteries in Society

- → Monasteries have adopted an important role in Buddhist society as a place for pilgrimage, education, spiritual growth, and refuge
- → Buddhist pilgrimage tours are popular among both monks and laypeople and involve travelling to different monasteries and sacred sites of Buddhism
- → Popular tourist destinations, as they each contain unique art, architecture, spiritual experiences, and even stunning natural views
- $\rightarrow$  Monasteries play (and have played) an important role in education
- $\rightarrow$  Students could be taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and even things like law, medicine, and astronomy by the monks in monasteries



- $\rightarrow$  Monasteries are a foundational piece of the Buddhist tradition
- $\rightarrow$  "Hub" of cultural significance in Buddhism
- $\rightarrow$  Serve as homes, place of worship, educational centers, and religious centers









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