

Buddhism as Bridge to Cross-cultural relationships: A Case Study

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Abstract

Since ancient times, through Buddhism, many countries from Asia to Europe, became mutual friends and worked as brothers. Today, in the twenty first century, the earth is becoming one village through the achievements of modern science and technology, especially due to information technology. Even though, there are multi-approaches to build relationships with the other countries and cultures, due to certain diplomatic factors it has been still difficult to reach some part of the world without barricades. In the present paper, I will attempt to investigate how Buddhism is functioning as a bridge to build relations among nations going beyond constrains imposed by diplomatic or other factors. For this I will select three agents, one Buddhist organization, the Theravada Buddhist Association in Taiwan, two countries, Taiwan and Myanmar. In the late 1980's, due to diplomatic reasons, the state level relations between Sri Lanka and Taiwan were severed. In 1999, Venerable Bodagama Chandima, a Theravada Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, with the help of group of Taiwanese Buddhists established a Buddhist association under the title 'Theravada Samadhi Education Association' in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. Ever since the establishment of Theravada Samadhi education, irrespective of the severed diplomatic relations, the two countries were in an active exchange. Particularly, the relation took the form of cultural and has been continuing till today. The interaction between the two nations covers several aspects, health, education and disaster relief to mention a few. The next part of relation building by the Samadhi association is connected with Myanmar, a Theravada Buddhist country. In 2008, the cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar victimizing hundred thousand of people in three townships. Due to the state constraints, reaching Myanmar was difficult. However, the Theravada Samadhi education with the help of Sri Lanka government could reach the people with relief aids in the first stage. And in the second, a village with thousands of houses and other facilities like school renovated with new buildings and donated to the villagers. Through the analysis of the information relevance to the two lines of building cross-cultural relations, I will reach the conclusion that Buddhism is of potential in extending the relations among people where conventional practices of building and keeping relations fail.

Keywords: Buddhism, Cross-cultural relationship, Samadhi Education Association, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar