Mahāyāna Elements in Theravāda Tradition

[A Study of Mahāyāna Influence in Sri Lankan Buddhism]

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Supervisor’s Recommendation:

This thesis was prepared by Ven. Yan Yin under my supervision and I recommend that it be suitable to be considered for the conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This research was undertaken in order to clarify Mahāyāna elements and its influence in Sri Lankan Theravāda tradition. This area of research has been taken randomly by some scholars such as Ven. Moratuwe Sasanaratana Thera (in Sinhalese), Prof. D. J. Kalupahana and other foreign scholars etc. According to our present knowledge it has not been exhaustively studied in modern research works. So we have taken this aspect in a broader perspective covering philosophical, cultural and religious areas with reference to Pāli, Sanskrit, Sinhala and Chinese sources. No doubt this research has contributed much to the existing knowledge of the field.

Without a prior knowledge of the Indian background of the emergence of Theravāda and Mahāyāna one cannot discern the main differences and similarities of both the traditions. So we have given a brief account of the Indian religious background up to the second Buddhist council in order to clarify various reasons for the emergence of Theravāda and the basic Mahāyāna tradition called Mahāsāṅghika.

The second chapter deals with the expansion of Buddhist sects after the second Buddhist council until the third council. And it also explains how the Theravāda tradition was introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. by the missionary group headed by Ven. Mahinda Thera. Through this one can understand the nature of Buddhism introduced to Sri Lanka.

The Mahāyānic elements crept into the Sri Lankan society throughout the history. So the third chapter was devoted to explain in brief the main incidents of Mahāyāna influence in Sri Lankan history with passing comments on the development and expansion of Mahāyāna in India at the time.

In addition to the Indian and Sri Lankan background of the two Buddhist traditions, one should have a good knowledge of the main features of Theravāda and Mahāyāna in order to understand Mahāyāna elements in Theravāda. Therefore the fourth
chapter deals with the main teachings of *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* in the developed form.

The first analysis of the main theme of the research comes in the fifth chapter. Here we have made an attempt to elucidate philosophical, cultural, religious and other evidences in Sri Lankan *Theravāda* tradition related to *Mahāyānic* teachings.

The conclusion includes a summary of the foregoing chapters and the general conclusions that could be arrived at through this research. Our final conclusion is that the two traditions evolved from the same sources and underwent radical changes due to various causes and conditions in the history and finally the followers of both the traditions became one in ritualistic aspect though there are some differences in philosophical analysis.