



“Progressive Islam in the Asian Context – Need for Building Islam and Buddhism Relations”

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ ط
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

*Verily, Allah and His angels confer blessings
on the Messenger ﷺ*

*O you who believe! Confer blessings on him,
and greet him with a goodly salutation ...*



Qur'aan | Surah Al-'Ahzab 33:56

Dedication – Professor Ismail al Faruqi – The Last Muslim Phenomenologist of Religion

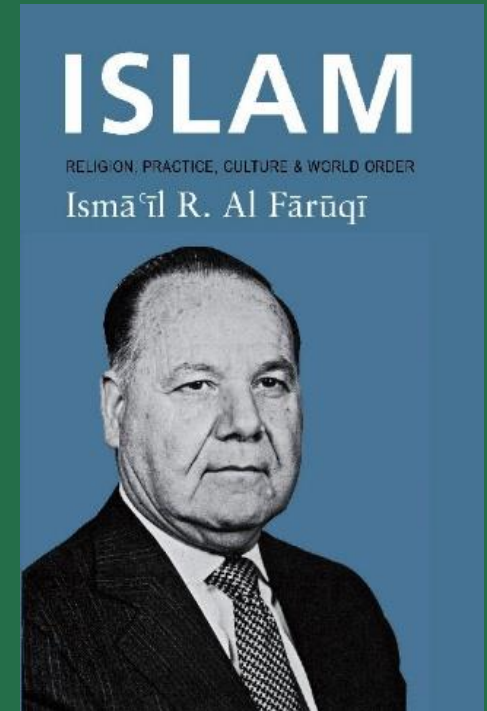
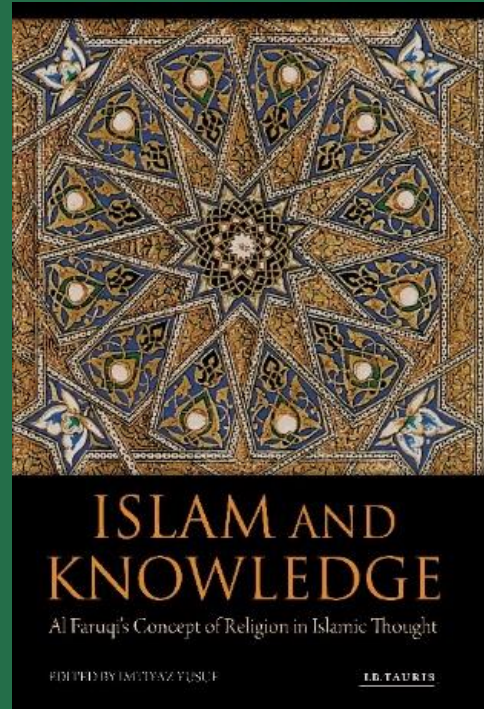
Prof. Ismail al Faruqi (1921-1986) was a Palestinian Islamic scholar, writer, and activist. Governor of Galilee 1945 – 48 . Professor of Islamics at Temple University, USA and previously at Syracuse University, USA.



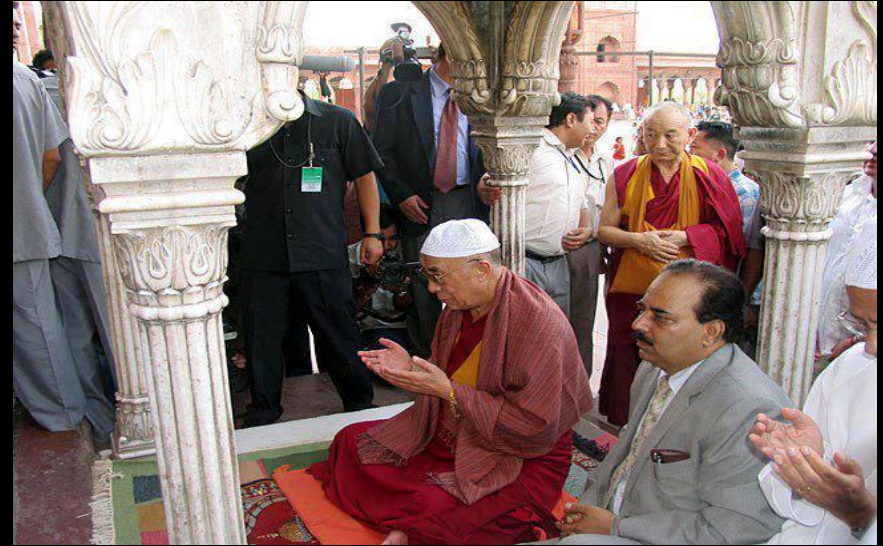
Dedication – Professor Ismail al Faruqi – The Last Muslim Phenomenologist of Religion

Works focus on a comprehensive vision of Islam and its relationship to all aspects of life and culture. Presented Islam as a religion of reason, science, and progress, emphasizing action and the work ethic. Combined the classical affirmation of God's oneness (tawhid) with a modernist interpretation and application of Islam to modern life through the exercise of ijtihad.

Established Islamic studies programs, recruited and trained Muslim students, organized Muslim professionals, and was an active participant in international ecumenical dialogue.



Dalai Lama and the Muslims





Structure of Presentation

- ❖ My presentation is made up of 5 parts.
- ❖ 1. Progressive Islam/Muslim – Meaning.
- ❖ 2. Islam and Buddhism relations from the perspective of Progressive Islamic thinking - a perspective from the Quran.
- ❖ 3. Quran's view of other religions, the institution of Prophethood and Muslim scholarship on Buddhism.
- ❖ 4. The current state of Islam-Buddhism relations and related conflicts.
- ❖ 5. Conclusion.

PART 1

❖ Progressive Islam/Muslim – Meaning.

Progressive Islam/Muslim - Meaning

- ❖ The term progressive Islam or Muslim does not mean a new type of Islam.
- ❖ It refers to Islam as a religious movement of justice, equality which responds dynamically to challenges of social change throughout its past, present and future.
- ❖ Islam is a religion that compels us to engage in *fikr* – think. It is religion for the people or community that thinks.

❖ أَلَوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

- ❖ “*wherein there is health for man. In all this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who think!*” (Quran 16:69)

Progressive Islam/Muslim - Meaning

- ❖ As a progressive movement lays emphasis on the Qur'anic values of truth (*haq*), justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), wisdom (*hikmah*).
- ❖ There is no place for sectarianism in Islam (Sunni or Shi'a or Isma'ili or *ahl-e-hadith* or *salafi* . Islam as described in the rises above all these differences which occurred in history.

Progressive Islam/Muslim - Meaning

- ❖ A progressive Muslim studies his/her own religion in depth and tries to understand it as objectively while having full respect to the beliefs of others. The Quran says, “**And abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest, exceeding the limits they abuse Allah through ignorance**” (6:109).
- ❖ Further in the same verse, Allah says, “**Thus to everyone people have We made their deeds fair-seeming; then to their Lord is their return so He will inform them of what they did.**” Thus ultimately it is Allah who will judge.
- ❖ In today's condition progressive Islam and Muslims have to respond to the ever growing challenges of social media, globalization and how to build peaceful religious coexistence.
- ❖ Not allow Islam to be manipulated by politicians for their selfish political gains.
- ❖ Education today has to prepare the young people for developing creative new ideas for social change.

Progressive Muslim - Meaning

1. The key words in this verse are that for 'every people' 'We made their deeds fair-seeming' to 'them'. Then who are we human beings to condemn the beliefs and deeds of others? Let Allah alone be the judge of who is right and who is wrong in their beliefs.
2. A progressive Muslim celebrates pluralism, as diversity is the creation of Allah. "If Allah had desired He could have made entire humanity one community." (5:48). The Quran also says, "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors. Surely there are signs in this for the learned." (30:22). Thus, a progressive Muslim will have no prejudice against the speakers of different languages or the people of different religions and color for they all are the creations of Allah.

Progressive Islam/Muslim - Meaning

- ❖ Today's Muslim faces dynamic and hard challenges in all areas of life and knowledge (natural sciences, social sciences and humanities) for which there is a need for new *fiqh* – jurisprudence based on *Sharia* – the Quranic principles .
- ❖ All sections of Muslim *ummah* – the *Ulama*, the scholars, the laypeople, men and women should engaging in learning from the Quran and not be blind followers of our outdated *adat* – traditions and customs.
- ❖ Progressive Muslims have to prove that Islam is not an outdated religion and is also not the source of violence and terrorism.
- ❖ This requires learning and evolving a new system of education which does not bifurcate-separate religious and general education – integration of knowledge.

Progressive Islam/Muslim - Meaning

- ❖ Progressive Muslims have to prove that Islam is not an outdated religion and is also not the source of violence and terrorism.
- ❖ This requires learning and evolving a new system of education which does not bifurcate-separate religious and general education – integration of knowledge.
- ❖ Progressive Islam/Muslim lays stress on the core teachings of the Quran.
- ❖ See Islam as movement of social change for all times which does not get stagnated but is a dynamic system.

Approaching the Islam-Buddhism Relations

- Phenomenological and history of religions approach – it is not polemical.
- Parallels between religions help build understanding and dialogue.
- Parallel lines do not meet except at a meeting station/platform and separate again.
- Rejects the myth of religious or ideological superiority as a philosophically and religiously untenable position.

RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT – SCIENCE OF RELIGION

- “He who knows One, Knows None” - Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) founder of *Religionswissenschaft* – “Science of Religion” being academic study of religion different from theology established itself as an academic discipline in German universities in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- It is not “religion of science” – religion tested/evaluated by modern empirical science. It views religion as a fallacy.
- *Religionswissenschaft* – “Science of Religion” is also known as History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion.

PART 2

- ❖ Islam and Buddhism relations from the perspective of Progressive Islamic thinking - a perspective from the Quran.

Introduction

- ❖ This presentation stresses the importance for Islamic Studies in Muslim countries to integrate the study and research about Buddhism.
- ❖ Buddhism is not a new religion for the Muslims. Muslim scholars have studied and written about Buddhism since their 8th century arrival in Asia.
- ❖ Muslims scholars of Comparative Religion made important contribution to the study of Buddhism during the 11th-12th-13th centuries.
- ❖ But is a lost tradition today. It ended during the colonial and post-colonial era.
- ❖ Islamic Studies programs began depending on Orientalism (which has Christian theological and Western epistemological foundations) to study and comment on Buddhism.

Introduction

- ❖ In face of the rise of China/India/Asia there is an urgent need to revive the study of Buddhism and other Asian religions of Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto new approaches of phenomenology and history of religion studies.
- ❖ Islam is the most pluralist/ inclusivist of all religions.
- ❖ No religion is an island today.
- ❖ I view the emerging Buddhist-Islam conflicts soon in South and Southeast Asia Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand as sources of Asian Islamophobia – a new face of anti-Islamism.

Contemporary Muslim Misunderstandings of Buddhism

- ❖ Buddhism is not polytheism - it is non-theism.
- ❖ Non – theism does not deny the existence of God, gods (devas) while the Buddha denies that he is God.
- ❖ First Muslims called the Buddhists as “Ahl al-Kitab” in Sind (India and Pakistan) – do not attack monks, temples, let them pay *jizya* as protection tax.
- ❖ Buddhist religious sites exist in Pakistan – Gandhara, Taxila, Peshawar - "पुरुषपुर - Purushapura - City of Men” – Akbar.

Religious Nationalist Conflicts Between Muslim-Buddhist

- EVERY GROUP IS VULNERABLE DEPENDING ON STATUS - All conflicts are about majority-minority relations.
- Majority-minority classification is a colonial “non-inclusive” social construct.
- 1. Sri Lanka – Ethno-economic conflict rooted in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and militarism against Tamils, Christians and Moor – Sri Lankan Muslims.
- 2. Myanmar – Burmese racism against Rohingya and all other Muslim groups. Muslims are outsiders – Indian, Chinese, Rohingya and mixed parentage. Muslims are called *kala* – dark skinned.
- 3. Thailand – Ethnoreligious conflict between Kingdom of Siam and the Kingdom of Pattani – political conflict.
- Thai call Malays and Muslims as *khaek* – guests
- Malays call Thais as *Orang Siam* – Siamese and call themselves as *Orang Melayu*.

Religious Nationalist Conflicts Between Muslim-Buddhist

- 4. Malaysia – Ethno-economic conflict between Malay marginal majority with the economically rich Chinese who are viewed as Buddhists.
- 5. Indonesia – Ethno-economic conflict between Indonesian Muslims with the economically rich Chinese (Cino) who are viewed as Buddhists.
- 6. Singapore – Chinese (Buddhist, Confucianists, Christian) Malay (Muslims), Indian (Hindu, Christians, Muslims) tensed social relations. Controlled by religious harmony law, any disruption of harmony leads to imprisonment.

Islamic Studies and the Study of Buddhism - Asian Religions

- ❖ Muslims are pioneers in the study of world and Asian religions before Europe, the factors for this are:
- ❖ Historical trading relations between Arabia, Iran and India and China via Southeast Asia.
- ❖ Spread and conversion of Asians to Islam; continued coexistence between Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Confucianists for centuries in the pre-colonial era.
- ❖ Islam and Buddhism existed in the form of different kingdoms, languages, cultures, schools of thought and religious practice.

Islamic Studies and the Study of Buddhism

- Hinduism-Buddhism was established in Southeast Asia between 7th-11th centuries – the era of rise of Islam in the Middle East.
- Islam got established between Southeast Asia in 12-15th century.
- Christianity arrived in the 15th century.
- In the 900 years history of Islam-Buddhism's coexistence in Southeast Asia as far as I know there is no one Southeast Asian Muslim scholar of Buddhism and vice-versa.

Islamic Studies and the Study of Buddhism - Asian Religions

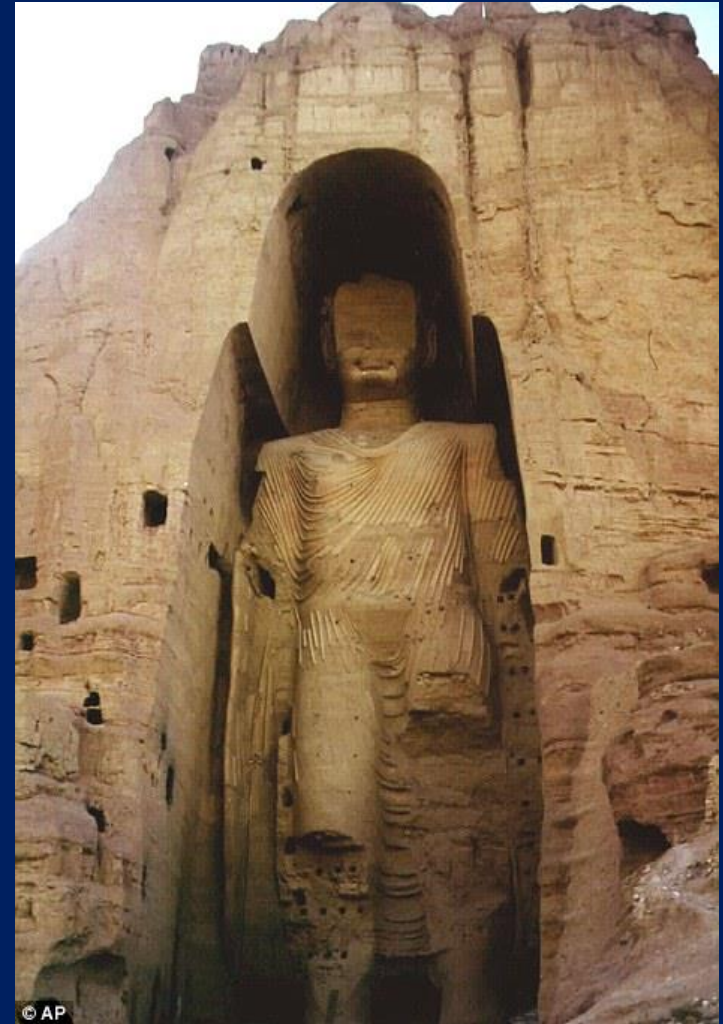
- ❖ As the world, Middle East and Asia enters the impact of the global age with rise of China and India every dimension of living Islam being affected.
- ❖
- 1. We are witnessing the rise of **Asian Islamophobia** which cannot be responded to only emotionally and based on ignorance of Asian religious world view.
- 2. Asian Islamophobia among Buddhist and others sees Islam as a religion of violence and threat to all cultures and civilizations.
- 3. Need for Islamic Studies to engage with the Asian religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto.
- 4. Develop a new crop of scholars, researchers and educators who know Asian languages – Sanskrit, Pali, Thai, Japanese; religions and cultures able to engage in building interreligious relations and dialogue with Asian religions.

PART 3

- ❖ Quran's view of the institution of Prophethood and Muslim scholarship on Buddhism.

Islam as Violent Religion – Buddhism as non-violent

- ❖ Buddhists from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Korea, Japan are all pained by the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan. Islam is a violent religion.



After the Destruction



The Remaining Buddhist Sites in the Muslim World –

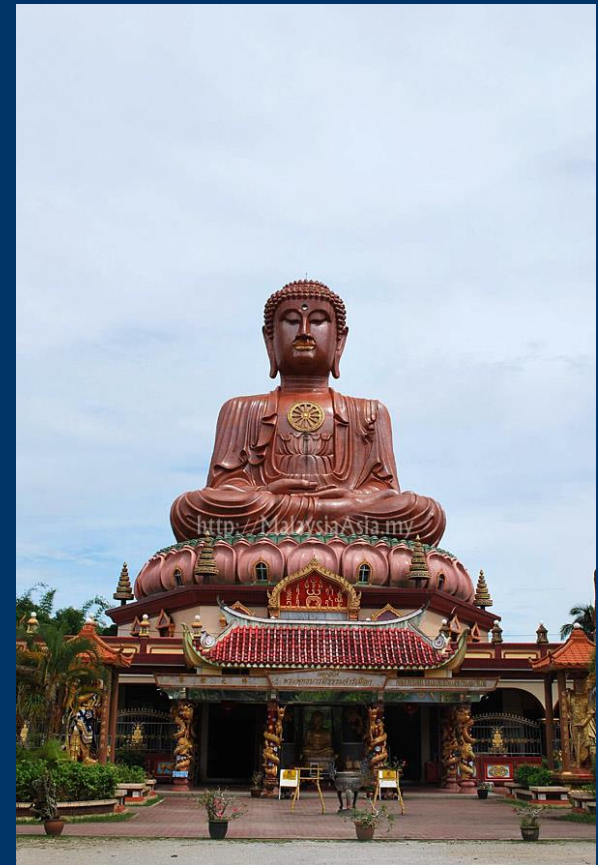
IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA- NOT THE MIDDLE WEST – LIVING EXAMPLES OF MUSLIM TOLERANCE





Wat Machimmaram – a Thai Buddhist Temple with a giant sitting Buddha statue located in the Tumpat district of Kelantan, about 20 km from Kota Bharu.

There is an ethnic Thai community here in an overwhelmingly Muslim state.



Record of Islam and Buddhism Dialogue

- Encounters between Islam and Buddhism are as old as Islam itself.
- The first encounter between Islam and Buddhist communities took place in the middle of the seventh century C.E.
- Early Muslims extended the Qur'anic category of *ahl al- Kitab* (People of the Book or revealed religion) to Hindus and Buddhists in Sindh.
- During the second half of the eighth century C.E., Central Asian Muslims translated many Buddhist works into Arabic. Arabic titles such as *Bilawhar wa Budhasaf* and *Kitab al-Budd* are clear evidence of Muslim learning about Buddhism.
- Islam-Buddhism encounter is mentioned in *al- Firhist* of Ibn al- Nadim (d. 995 C.E.)
- The Barmak family of Central Asia, played an influential during the early Abbasid caliphate.

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Record of Islam and Buddhism Dialogue

- al- Tabari (d. 923 C.E.), reported that Buddhist idols were sold in a Buddhist temple next to the Makh mosque in the market of the city of Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan.
- The 12th -15th centuries encounters between Islam and Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand was of a mystic orientation.
- The *pondoks* or *pasenterens*, Muslim religious schools of Southeast Asia, seem also to have been influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist temple schools of the region.

Muslim pioneers of Study of Hinduism and Buddhism in the 11th - 14th Centuries

Al- Biruni (973 – 1048) from Khwarazm, a region adjoining the Aral Sea now known as Karakal, Pakistan was an astronomer, mathematician, ethnographer, anthropologist, historian, and geographer. He spent 12 years in India, learned Sanskrit language, wrote the famous” “*Kitab Tarikh Al-Hind*” (History of India) from an impartial view.

“ This book is not a polemical one. I shall not produce the arguments of our antagonists in order to refute such of them, as I believe to be in the wrong. My book is nothing but a simple historic record of facts. I shall place before the reader the theories of the Hindus exactly as they are, and I shall mention in connection with them similar theories of the Greeks in order to show the relationship existing between them. ” Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Biruni, *Alberuni's India*, Abridged edition. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), p. 7.

Muslim pioneers of Study of Hinduism and Buddhism in the 11th - 15th Centuries

- Abd al- Karim al- Shahrastani (1086–1153 CE) an influential Persian historian of religions and a historiographer and the author of “*Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*” (lit. The Book of Religious Parties and Schools of Philosophy” was one of the pioneers an objective and philosophical approach to the study of religions.
- As per Eric J. Sharpe, “the honor of writing the first history of religion in world literature” belongs to al- Shahrastani, he described and systematized all the religions of the then known world as far as China. (Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (Duckworth Publishers, 2009, p. 11.)
- According to al- Shahrastani, the Qur’anic perspective of the universal institution of prophethood enables the Buddha to be counted among prophets that have appeared in different places and different languages.

Muslim pioneers of Study of Hinduism and Buddhism in the 11th - 15th Centuries—

- Rashid-al-Din Hamadani, (born 1247—died 1318), Persian statesman and historian. He was a Jewish convert to Islam and the author of a universal history, *Jamī' al- tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles). It has been referred to as the “first world history.”
- He wrote a detailed life story of the Buddha.
- In his works he aimed at making Buddhism accessible to Muslims.
- Sheila S. Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid Al-Din's Illustrated History of the World* (Khalili Collections, 1995).

A folio from the *Jami' al-tawarikh*
(Compendium of Chronicles)

Shakyamuni offering fruit to the devil,
from the life of the Buddha

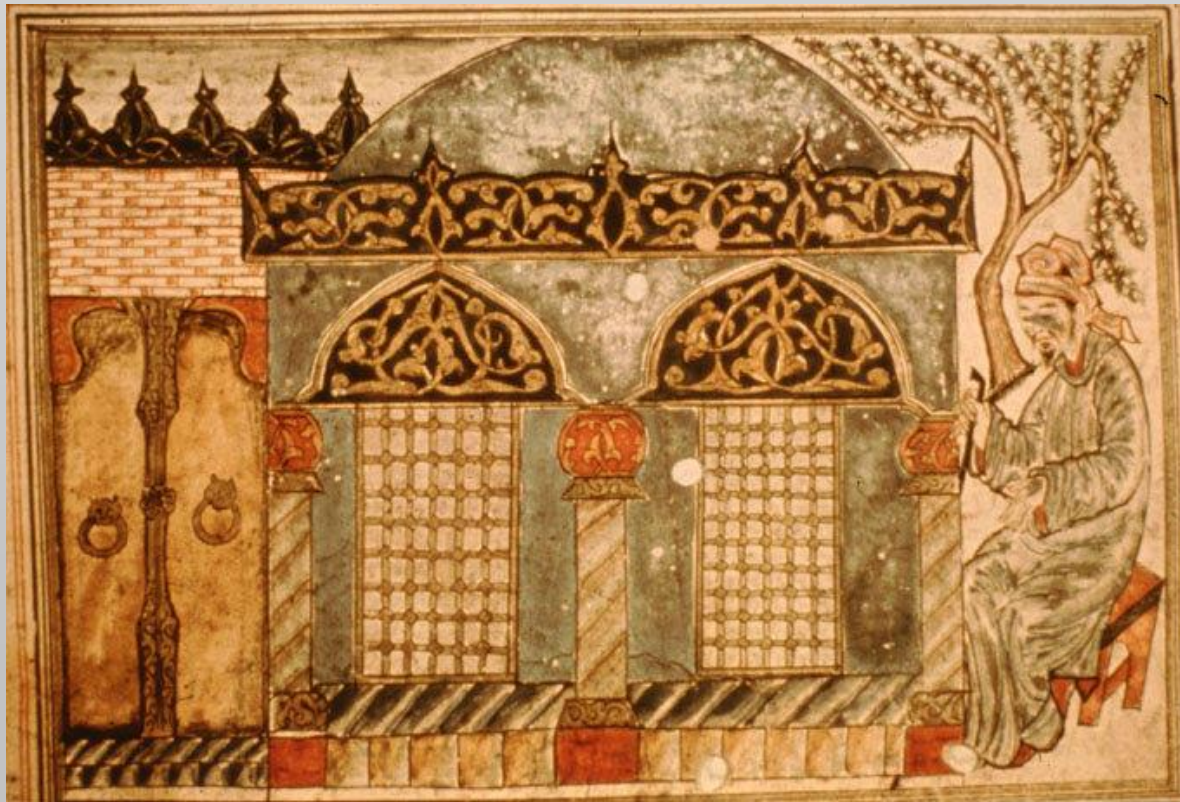


A folio from the *Jami' al-tawarikh*
(Compendium of Chronicles)
The Grove of Jetavanam (Rsipatana) -
where the Buddha achieved Enlightenment



A folio from the *Jami' al-tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles)

Kushinagar, where the Buddha achieved Nirvana



Muslim pioneers of Study of Hinduism and Buddhism in the 11th - 13th Centuries—

- Hafiz-e Abru (Persian: حافظ ابرو) died June 1430) was a Persian historian working at the courts of Timurid rulers of Central Asia. He was a historian and author of many historical and historico -geographical works in Persian, which were commissioned by Shahruk, the Timurid ruler of the 15th century
- His book *Majma' al- tawarikh* is a universal history to the year 830/1426, written for Shahruk's son Baysongor.
- The first three sections concern, respectively, the pre-Islamic prophets, Mohammad and the caliphate and the dynasties contemporaneous with the Abbasids and the Mongols up to the death of Abu Said.

و سگیان را حاضر کرد و تعبیر این خواب بر سید ادشیان می‌داد تا قی و تفکر بسیار یافتند و گفتند این خواب دلالت می‌کند
 بر آنکه او را سیری شود که پادشاه جهان بآشدمایت بود که همه کسان او را سجد کنند و می‌داران چون مدت تابستنی او
 از نه ماه بگذشت و بر رسید ماها ما با هم تفریح بیای زفت و بدست راست شایخی از می می‌کرد در بر جلال از وی سیری در وجود



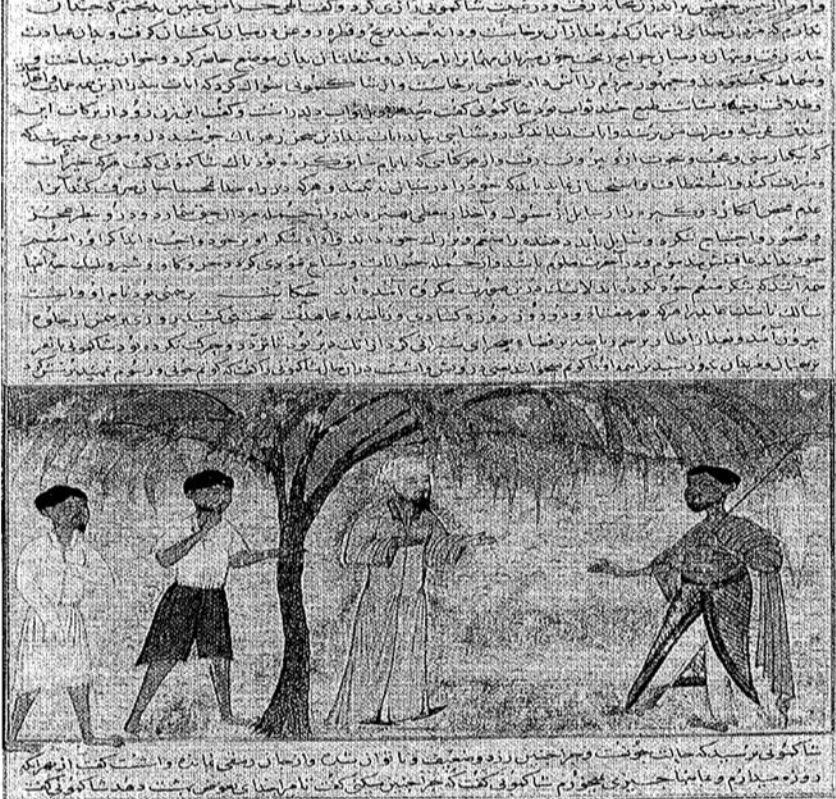


Fig. 7. Sakyamuni greeting a Brahmin (the dervish Vasishta). Herat, ca. 1425. From the *Majma' al-Tavārikh* of Hafiz-i Abru. (Photo: courtesy C. L. David Foundation, Copenhagen)

Sakyamuni, known to the Brahmins as Gautama the Monk, accompanied by his disciples, meets the hermit [called a dervish in the Persian] Vasishta who leads a life of strict asceticism, taking nourishment only once in 72 days. To Sakyamuni's enquiry as to his physical and psychical decline, Vasishta answers that this can be attributed to the asceticism which he imposes upon himself in order to obtain Paradise as a reward. Hereupon Sakyamuni teaches him that the abstinence inherent in this ascetic life cannot lead him to the true end because it arouses only feelings of anger and hate. Then Vasishta implores to be shown the right Way.²⁹

and Sakyamuni instructs him how to attain this.

The artist has illustrated the text here as straightforwardly as the painter of the Buddha's birth. In the center of the page Sakyamuni gestures toward Vasishta at the right. Vasishta does not appear emaciated, but he is dressed as a holy man and holds a fly whisk. One of

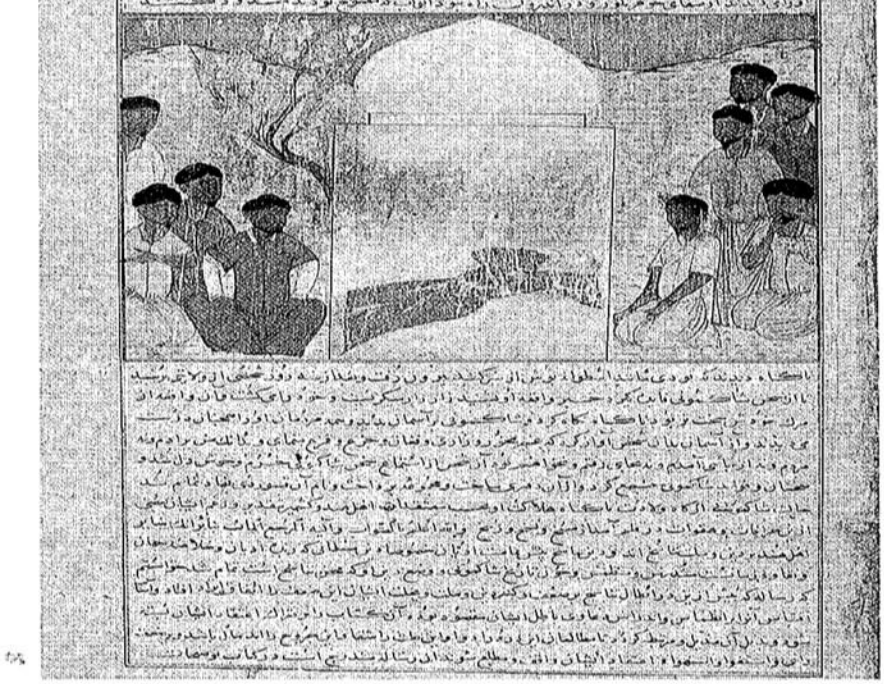


Fig. 8. The appearance of Sakyamuni. Herat, ca. 1425. From the *Majma' al-Tavārikh* of Hafiz-i Abru. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Nasli M. Heeramanek Collection, Gift of Joan Palevsky. (Photo: courtesy Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Buddha's companion draws his forefinger to his lips in the standard Persian gesture of astonishment. Presumably he is shocked by Vasishta's appearance.

The last of the Persian depictions of the Buddha Sakyamuni of which we know the whereabouts is another rendition of the death of the Buddha and his attainment of nirvana (fig. 8). Recalling the text from the 1314 version of this scene, we will note the inclusion of the domed building in which Sakyamuni lies while the dark-skinned Indians watch him from outside. Unlike the earlier artist, the painter of this scene has taken up the challenge of portraying the Buddha inside the crystal mausoleum with no entrance. Conforming to the other Hafiz-i Abru illustrations, the painter has eschewed artistic license in favor of precision, and he thus succeeds in providing the visual equivalent of the text.

Neither this work nor the *Jamī' al-Tavārikh* painting shows the beam of light that signals the Buddha's attainment of nirvana, so both scenes may represent the moment before that event. Although later the text

A Comparative Note

The first comprehensive academic study of Buddhism from Western Christian perspective was written in 1844 (19th century) the one by the French scholar of Sanskrit Eugène Burnouf it is titled - *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*.

In early European view, the Buddha is of African origin, an idolatry religion and Buddhism is more of threat to Christianity than Islam.

It set the ground for the beginning of the Western studies about Buddhism while the Muslim abandoned the study of Buddhism until today.

Over decades the content of Christian- Buddhist understanding changed and is more vibrant movement today.

See : Donald S. Lopez Jr, *From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha*, Reprint edition. (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Muslim Appreciation of the Buddha

*“Dar rah-e taleb ‘ aghel wa diwaneh
yekist;*

*Dar shuyuh-e ehsgh khish wa biganeh
yekist;*

*Anrah keh sharab -e wasl -e janan
dadand –*

*Dar madhhab-e u Ka'abe wa butkhaneh
yekist.”*

*On truth's path, wise is mad, insane is
wise.*

*In love's way, self and other are the
same.*

*Having drunk the wine, my love, of
being one with you,*

*I find the way to Mecca and Bhutkhane
-Buddhist monastery are the same.*

Rumi, Kuliyat -e Shams-e Tabrizi 302

در راه طالب عاقل و دیوانه یکیست
در شیوه عشق خویش و بیگانه یکیست
آنرا که شراب وصل جانان دادند
در مذهب او کعبه و بتخانه یکیست

Islam and Buddhism “Nanak” – Muhammad Iqbal (Bang-e-Dra-143)

*The nation could not care less about Gautama's message—
It did not know the price of its unique pearl!*

*Poor wretches! They never heard the voice of truth:
A tree does not know how sweet its fruit is.*

*What he revealed was the secret of existence,
But India was proud of its fancies;*

*It was not an assembly-hall to be lit up by the lamp of truth;
The rain of mercy fell, but the land was barren.*

*Alas, for the shudra India is a house of sorrow,
This land is blind to the sufferings of man.*

*The Brahmin is still drunk with the wine of pride,
In the assembly-halls of foreigners burns Gautama's lamp.*

*But, ages later, the house of idols was lit up again—
Azar's house was lit up by Abraham!*

*Again from the Punjab the call of monotheism arose:
A perfect man roused India from slumber.*

(Javed Nama-12) Taseen-e-Gautam (Gautam Budh Ki Taleemat) The Teachings of Gautam

Ancient wine and youthful
beloved are-nothing; for men
of true vision the houris of
Paradise are-nothing.

Whatever you know as firm
and enduring passes away,
mountain and desert, land, sea
and shore are-nothing.

The science of the
Westerners, the philosophy of
the Easterners are all idol-
houses, and the visiting of
idols yields-nothing.

Think upon Self, and
pass not fearfully
through this desert,
for you are, while the
substance of both
worlds is—nothing

On the road which I
hewed out with the
point of my eyelash
station and caravan
and shifting sands
are nothing.

Transcend the unseen,
for this doubt and
surmise are nothing; to
be in the world and to
escape from the world-
that is. Something!

The Paradise that
some God grants unto
you is nothing; when
Paradise is the reward
of your labors-that is
something.

((Javed Nama-12) Taseen-e-Gautam (Gautam Budh Ki Taleemat) The Teachings of Gautam.

Do you seek repose for your soul? The soul's repose is nothing; the tear shed in sorrow for your companions-that is something.

The cheek's beauty lives for a moment, in a moment is no more; the beauty of action and fine ideals-that is something.

The wine-drenched eye, the temptress glance and the song are all fair, but sweeter than these-there is something.

Qur'anic Perspective of Other Religions

لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا ۚ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ ۚ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ۚ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ. (Qur'an 5:48)

Qur'anic Perspective of Interreligious Dialogue

وَلِكُلِّ وِجْهَةٌ هُوَ مُوَلِّيُّهَا ۖ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ۚ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

For, every community faces a direction of its own, of which He is the focal point. Compete therefore, with one another in doing good works. Wherever you may be, God will gather you all unto Himself: for, verily, God has the power to will anything.
Quran 2:148

Islam-Buddhism

The main difference between Islam and Buddhism lies in their being **theistic** and **non-theistic** religions.

Muslims need to know the difference between pre-Islamic polytheism – worshiping of stones and other elements as Gods from Asian religions which do not have the notion of polytheism.

Asia religionist pay homage to teachers/sages – gurus as sources of religious knowledge, they are not worshipped as gods.

Islam-Buddhism – Common Ground

The Quranic advise for the Muslims to be a *ummatan wasatan* (the Middle Nation) and the Buddha's teaching of *majjhima-patipada* (the Middle Way) as deterrence against extremism and intolerance serve as the common ground for socio-religious interchange and dialogue between Islam and Buddhism.

“Dialogue Between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts *Ummatan Wasatan* (The Middle Nation) and *Majjhima-Patipada* (The Middle Way)” *Islamic Studies*, 48:3 (2009) pp. 367–394;

"Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism Through The Concepts of *Tathagata* and *Nur Muhammadi*", *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* Vol. 5 (2005) : 103-114.

“Dialogue Between Sufism and Buddhism: The Concepts of *al-Insân al-Kamîl* and *Bodhisattva*” in Imtiyaz Yusuf, (ed.) ***Measuring the Effect of Iranian Mysticism on Southeast Asia*** (2004) pp. 207-221.

Buddha and Muhammad— In History of Religion and Founders of Religious Traditions

Buddhism and Islam hold that human beings have always engaged in search for meaning.

- Buddhas and prophets before historical Buddha and Muhammad.
- Qur'an mentions 25 prophets, including Muhammad from the Semitic tradition and institution of prophethood as a universal phenomenon:

Ghafir (The Forgiver)

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُمْ مَّن قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن لَّمْ نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ فُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

And indeed, [O Muhammad], We have sent forth apostles before your time; some of them We have mentioned to thee, and some of them We have not mentioned to thee (Quran 40: 78; cf. 4: 164).

Rasuls and Buddhas

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

And never have We sent forth any apostle otherwise than [with a message] in people's own tongue . . . (Qur'an 14: 4).

Buddhas appear in different epochs to teach the path to *nirvana*.

Messages of Buddha and Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad and the Buddha sought answers to age-old questions about the human predicament: What does it mean to be human? Why is there anguish and suffering?

The Buddha called this phenomenon *dukkha* (suffering). Liberation comes in the form of Nirvana – Enlightenment.

The Qur'an liberates human being in form of belief of monotheism and instituting justice and equality based on the moralist monotheism. Where monotheism guides human morality and ethics of good.

Messages of Buddha and Muhammad

The messages of the Buddha and Muhammad are the messages of Truth about:

- Allah/God – the Absolute, respectively.
- *Sunyata* as Emptiness based in the doctrine of *Dharma* – about universal order/natural law and liberation through *nirvana* – enlightenment.

Today we have ethnicized and nationalized them by giving them passports and identity cards like ourselves.

They carry many passports today.

A Muslim View of Buddha

Early Muslims viewed the Buddhists as *ahl al- Kitab* - the people of Book similar to the Sabians mentioned in the Qur'an.

Professor Muhammad Hamidullah (d. 2002) promoted the view that the Buddha was a Prophet. He refers in particular to the mention of a fig tree (*figus religiosa*) in the Qur'an's Surah – Chapter 95: 1

A Muslim View of Buddha

➤ وَالَّتَيْنِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ

➤ By the fig and the olive,

➤ وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ

➤ By Mount Sinai,

➤ وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ

➤ And by this land made safe;

- Prof. Hamidullah holds that since **the** Buddha attained *nirvana* under a wild fig tree (*Ficus religiosa*) – and since this tree does not figure in the life of any of the Qur’anic Prophets. The mention of fig in the Qur’an is a symbolic reference to the Buddha (Hamidullah 1974).

A Muslim View of Buddha

- An Egyptian mid-twentieth century scholar, Hamid Abdul Qadir published a work *Budha al-Akbar: Hayatuh wa Falsafatuh* (Cairo: Maktabat Nahdat Misr, 1957).
- He takes the position that the Prophet Dhul-Kifl (meaning “the one from Kifl”) mentioned in the Qur’an (21: 85 and 38: 48), refers to Buddha.
- Although most scholars identify Dhul Kifl with the Prophet Ezekil, Abdul Qadir believes that “Kifl” is the Arabicized form of Kapil, the abbreviation of Kalipvastu (the birth place of the Buddha).

A Muslim View of Buddha

وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِدْرِيسَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

And (mention) Ishmael, and Idris, and Dhul Kifl. All were of the steadfast. (Quran 21:85)

وَاذْكُرْ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَالْيَسَعَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ وَكُلٌّ مِنَ الْأَخْيَارِ

And make mention of Ishmael and Elisha and Dhul Kifl. All are of the chosen. (Quran 38:48)

This is not acceptable to Buddhists and is seen as stretching as trying to own Buddha.

I am just reporting that such a view is present among Muslims. In contrast to this is the other Muslim view that Buddhism is a false religion like others.

Messages of Prophet Muhammad and the Buddha

- The messages of the Buddha and Muhammad are the messages of liberation through different approaches to the Truth.
- Liberation through:
 - *Tauhid* – Moralistic Monotheism - Belief in Allah as the greatest freedom
 - *Sunyata* – Emptiness and detachment
 - As ways to end exploitation of human being by human beings as the cause behind injustice, inequality and suffering.

PART 4

CURRENT STATE OF ISLAM- BUDDHISM RELATIONS

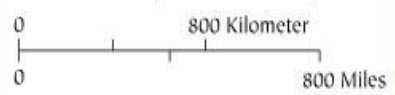
ABSENCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

ONGOING ETHNORELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND VIOLENCE



- National Capital
- Major Cities

Azimuthal Equal-Area Projection



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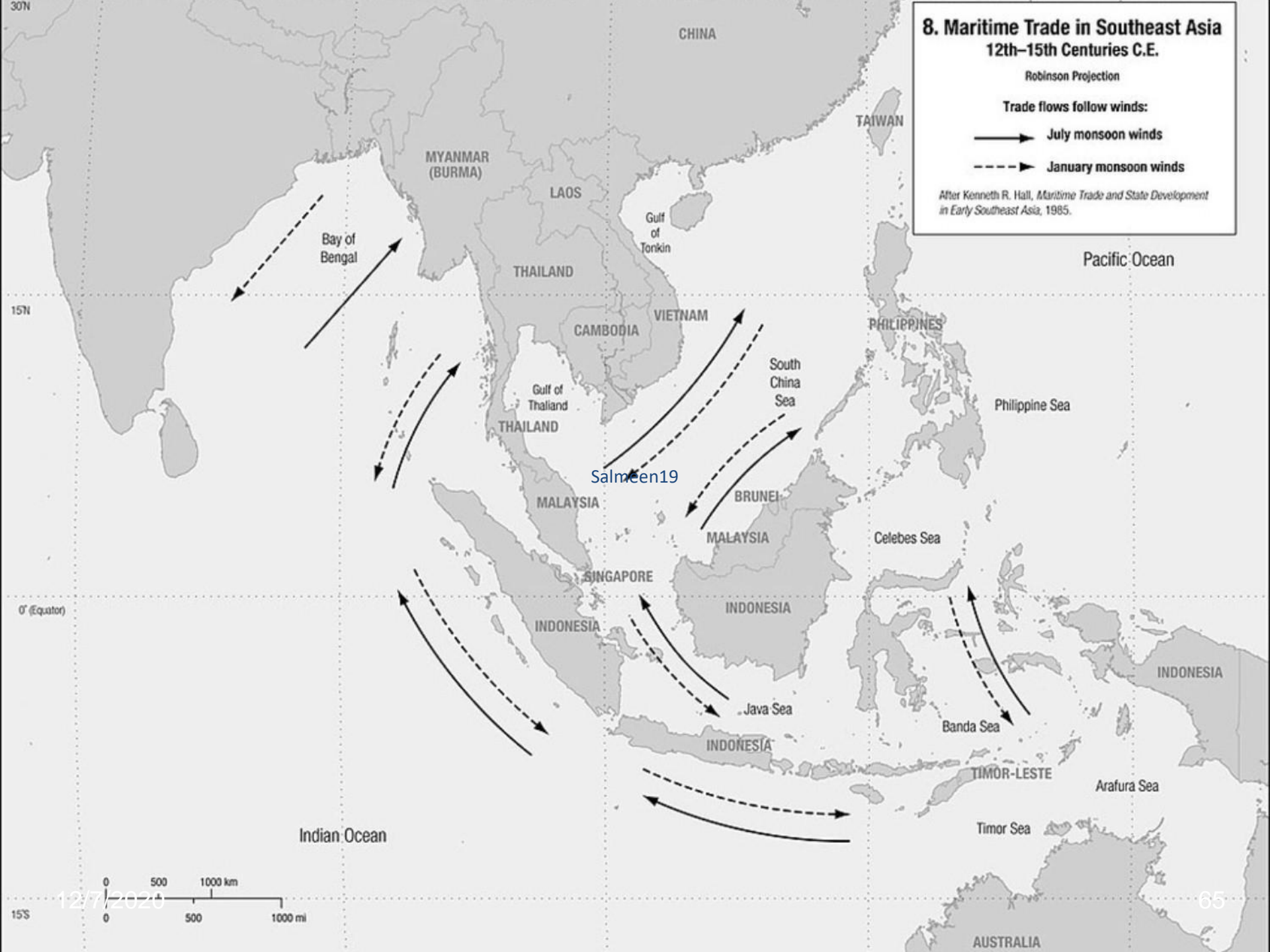
8. Maritime Trade in Southeast Asia 12th–15th Centuries C.E.

Robinson Projection

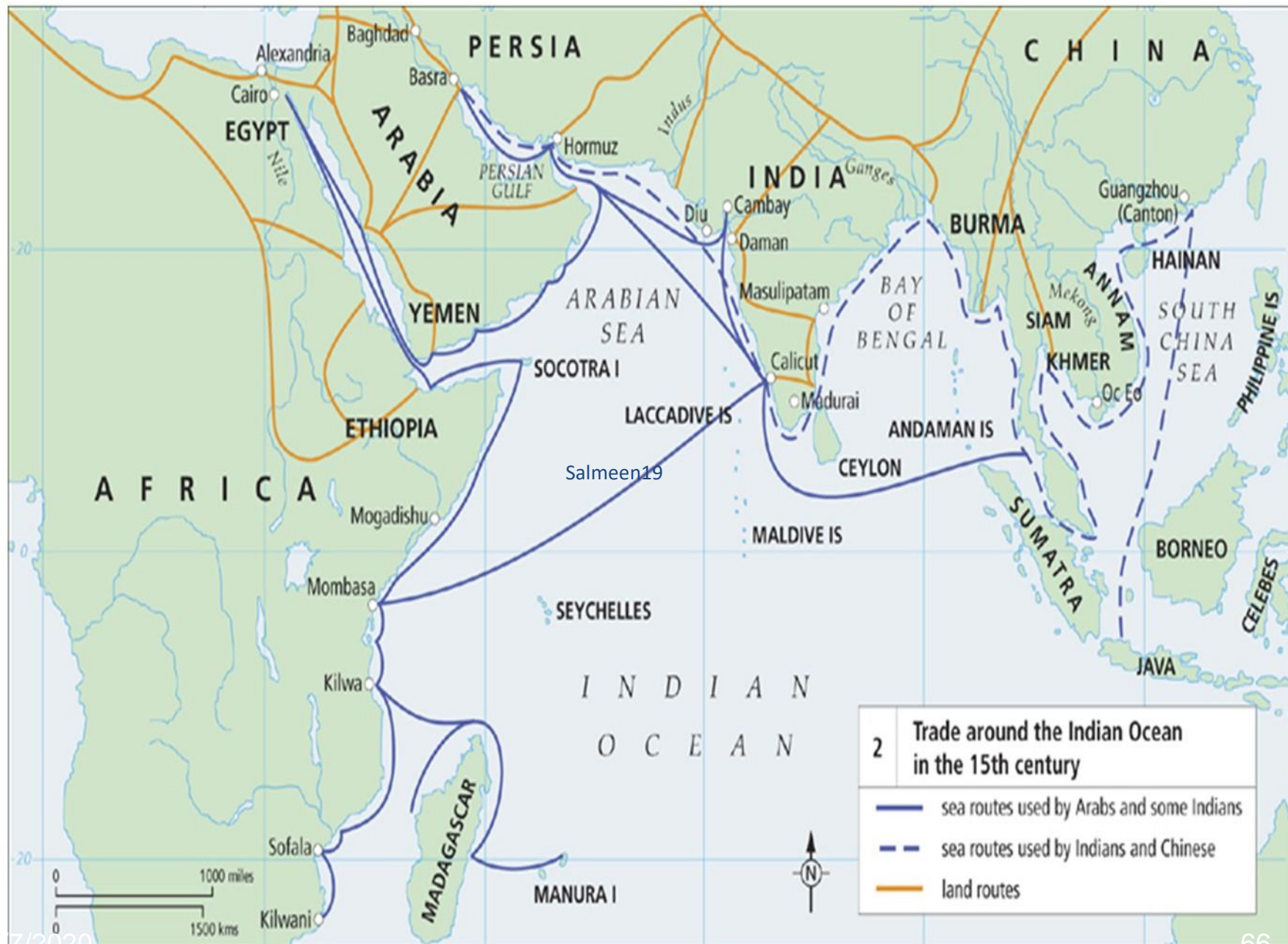
Trade flows follow winds:

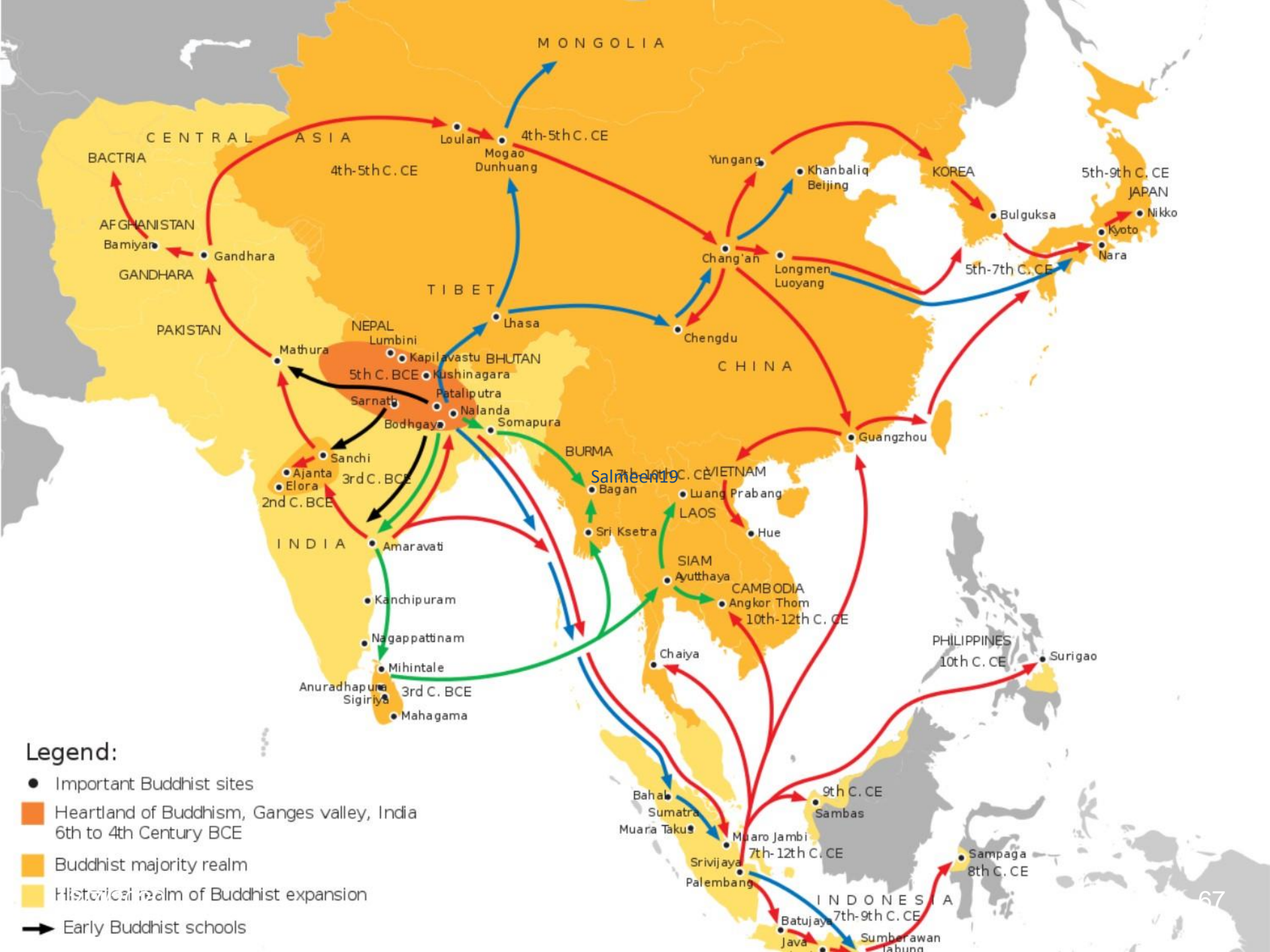
- ▶ July monsoon winds
- - - - -▶ January monsoon winds

After Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, 1985.



Salmeen19





Southeast Asia as Home of Buddhism Today

- After the death of Buddhism in India, Southeast Asia is the home of Buddhism today. Asia from Myanmar to Japan is Buddhist.
- Thailand is the largest Buddhist country in the world. It is the Saudi Arabia/Vatican (world political and missionary center) of Buddhism;
- The center of the Buddhist world today is Southeast Asia.
- Buddhists Southeast Asia is its "Mecca", or center, itself.

Southeast Asia as Home of Buddhism Today

- Just as the Southeast Asian Muslims call the region "Serambi Makkah" - the veranda of Mecca.
- Thailand Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China and Japan are the "al- Azhar" and "Medina" - the intellectual centers of Buddhism.

Islam-Buddhism in Southeast Asia

- There is also lack of knowledge among the Southeast Asian Muslims and Buddhists about their shared religious language/terms such as:
- *agama/ sasana* – religion; *puasa* – fast; *hari raya* – day of celebration, *dharma*, *sriwijaya*, *gajah*, *aneka*, *rani*, *raja* ;
- even personal names such as “Bukhari, Shinta, Mitra, Sundari” because of the past intermixing of Sanskrit, Pali, local Indo-Malay languages, Persian and Arabic

Islam in Contemporary Buddhist Scholarship and Asian Islamophobia

Contemporary Muslim manned Islamic Studies is focused on the Western/Judeo-Christian reception of Islam – seeking their appeasement.

It is ignoring or is unaware of the rising Asian Islamophobia – from Sri Lanka and Myanmar to Japan – fear of Islam as religion of violence.

The Buddhist mind cannot conceive of how a religion can be used of violence – *ahimsa* – non violence is the first and foremost principle of Buddhism.





Zheng He, Mosque, Surabaya, Indonesia.





Indonesia

The Masjid Agung
Demak or great mosque of
Demak the oldest mosque
in Java, Indonesia.

The mosque is believed to
be built by Sunan Kalijaga –
one of the nine saints of
Indonesia during the reign
of Sultan Raden Patah in the
15th century under the over
lordship of Majapahit.



Indonesia

Mesjid Jami Tan Hok Liang, mosque built in Chinese style by famous preacher **Anton Medan aka KH Ramadhan Effendi aka Tan Hok Liang** for Chinese Muslims of Indonesia in Cibinong - West Java.



Indonesia

Al- Manar Mosque in Kudus
- Central Java, built in 1549 by
Sunan Kudus (Ja'far Shodiq),

This mosque integrates a 20m
high ancient Hindu watchtower
as its minaret, and a Balinese
temple gate as its main
entrance.

Traditional Javanese Muslims
believed seven pilgrimages here
during the Gerebeg Besar (Idul
Adha) festival is worth one
complete pilgrimage to Mecca.
Kudus, which means "holy" in
Arabic, is the only town in
Indonesia with an Arabic name.



Islam in Southeast Asia – Demography

- 250 million Muslims live in Southeast Asia i.e. about 25% of the total world Muslim population.
- 190-205 million Buddhists in Southeast Asia i.e. 35% to 38% of the global Buddhist population.
- Muslims make up about 42% and the Buddhist about 40% of the total Southeast Asian population.

Islam in Southeast Asia – Demography

- Three Southeast Asian countries viz., Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei are Muslim majority countries.
- Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Singapore are Buddhist majority countries.
- Philippines is the only Catholic majority country in Southeast Asia.

Religious Character of SEA Societies

- ❖ World religions operate along ethnic lines in Southeast Asia
- ❖ Malay is a Muslim
- ❖ Thai is Buddhist
- ❖ Filipino a Catholic
- ❖ Chinese a Taoist/Confucian/Christian

- ❖ Religious labels such as
 - Malay Buddhist or Malay Christian;
 - Filipino Muslim or Filipino Buddhist,
 - Thai Muslim or Thai Christian are seen as contradiction in terms.

- ❖ For example the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand do not call themselves as Thai Muslims nor do the Mindanao Muslim call themselves Filipinos.

- ❖ Religious conversion in Southeast Asia means leaving one's ethnic group. Hence, there is a low rate of religious conversion.

Religious Character of SEA Societies

- ❖ Southeast Asian states (not yet nations) are semi-secular, religion is an important identity marker. Singapore and Vietnam are more secular than others.
- ❖ Southeast Asian political cultures are religion based:
 - Buddhist political culture in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia – kings and leaders seek to be models of *Dhammaraj*;
 - Muslim political culture in Malaysia – sultans are the custodians of Islam;
 - Catholic values inspire social and political development in the Philippines and East Timor;
 -

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 - Muslim political culture in Malaysia – sultans are custodians of Islam;
 - Catholic values form and shape social and political and religious issues in the Philippines and East Timor;
 - Indonesia operates on the ideology of *Pancasila* – in which belief in God is the first principle of state identity.

Ethnoreligious Conflicts in Southeast Asia

Minority conflicts in the region are ethno-religious:

1. Rohingya of Myanmar, Pattani Malays and Mindanao Moros (13 ethno-linguistic groups) are Muslims;
2. Karennis of Burma are Baptists or Roman Catholics;
3. Hindu and Christian minorities in Malaysia, Indonesia.



CONCLUSION

Religion and Peace

- ❖ Religious truth is not the exclusive property of any one religion - it is available to all.
- ❖ No religion is free from the stain of violence.

Conclusion

- ❖ Need to produce and develop a new progressive understanding of Islam among Muslim which will highlight the:
- ❖ Humanitarian face of Islam.
- ❖ Illustrate Islam as a religious movement of justice, equality which responds dynamically to challenges of social change throughout its past, present and future.
- ❖ Islam is a religion that compels us to engage in *fikr* – think. It is religion for the people or community that thinks.

Conclusion

- ❖ Show that Islam is a progressive movement which lays emphasis on the Qur'anic values of truth (*haq*), justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), wisdom (*hikmah*).
- ❖ There is no place for sectarianism in Islam (Sunni or Shi'a or Isma'ili or *ahl-e-hadith* or *salafi* or religious prejudice towards other religions based on ignorance.
- ❖ Need to interreligious friendship and alliances between Islam and Asian religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, etc.

Conclusion

- ❖ There is an urgent need to revamp Islamic Studies programs to include the study of Buddhism and other Asian religions.
- ❖ Enough time and effort has been spent on the study of Christianity and Judaism to no avail benefit for Islam.
- ❖ Christians and Jewish scholars of religion continue to engage in stress that the Bible is the subtext of the Quran.
- ❖ Islam did not emerge in Arabia but elsewhere i.e. in Jewish/Christian lands of Jerusalem and Syria.

Conclusion

- ❖ The world of Islamic Studies is facing challenges:
- ❖ Need to develop an academically scientific approach towards teaching and research about Islam and Buddhism, etc.
- ❖ As an antidote to rising Asian Islamophobia as another disrupter against the Muslims on the world stage.

Conclusion

- ❖ Asia is rising, Islamic Studies is unprepared for this challenge.
- ❖ Buddhism is the fastest spreading religion in the West after Islam, while Christianity is the fast spreading religion in China today.
- ❖ China will soon become the largest Christian country in Asia – “The Second Asian Episode.”
- ❖ Martin Marty, *The Christian World: A Global History*. (New York: Modern Library, 2009).
- ❖ Christian-Buddhist-Jewish Studies and dialogue is well prepared for this new emerging world.
- ❖ Muslim academics are not even concerned about this development.

Conclusion

- ❖ Asian Buddhists view Islam as a religion of violence, terrorism and beheadings.
- ❖ They fear Islam and keep away from Muslims.
- ❖ Buddhist women fear women in burqas – now newly donned by their former Muslim friends.
- ❖ The Buddhist question for which I have no answer is:
- ❖ “What is the limit of violence in Islam?”

Conclusion

- Jaluluddin Rumi, the 13-century Muslim mystic was an ardent believer and practitioner of religious co-existence:
- *“The wars of men are like the quarrels of children; both are meaningless and stupid.”*
- Pics follow





วิทยาลัยศาสนศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล

CRS International Center for Buddhist-Muslim Understanding
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International Conference on
Compassion: The Bridge Between Buddhism and Islam

ความเมตตา: สะพานเชื่อมโยงศาสนาพุทธและศาสนาอิสลาม
on 3-4 October 2013

International Conference on “Ethics, Climate Change and Energy”. Date: 27-28 Nov 2014.

International Conference On “Multiculturalism In Asia - Peace And Harmony”. Date: 25-26 August 2016.













12/7/2020





Buddhist-Muslim Solidarity in Peace



Ven. Sri Pannavaro Mahathera Sangha former head of the Sangha Theravada Indonesia. In 1998, he was awarded the title of Chao Khun by King Bhumibol (Rama 9) of Thailand.

