

The Evolution of the Dhamma Wheel: From the Pre-Siamese Era to the Kingdom of Siam

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolution of the Dhamma Wheel, or Dharmacakra, from the Pre-Siamese Era to the Kingdom of Siam, focusing on its archaeological, cultural, and philosophical significance. Through multidisciplinary methodologies, the study explores the transformation of Dharmacakra and its pivotal role in shaping Siamese identity and heritage. Key archaeological evidence, such as Dharmacakra artifacts discovered at significant sites like Nakhon Pathom and U Thong, highlights its prominence during the Dvāravatī period, with these artifacts showcasing intricate craftsmanship and Pallava script that reflect the spiritual devotion and artistic achievements of early Siamese civilization. Furthermore, in the Kingdom of Siam, the Dharmacakra emerged as a central symbol of Buddhist identity, profoundly influencing cultural expressions and reinforcing the philosophical underpinnings of Siamese society. Its integration into temple architecture, inscriptions, and artistic motifs demonstrates its role in preserving and transmitting Buddhist teachings while fostering a shared cultural heritage. These findings collectively illuminate the Dharmacakra's historical, cultural, and spiritual importance, offering a comprehensive understanding of its enduring influence on Siamese civilization and its contribution to the broader Buddhist tradition.

Keywords: Cakra, Wheel of Dhamma, Dharmacakra, Dvāravatī, Siam

Introduction

Dhamma (Pāli) or Dharma (Sanskrit) encompasses a multifaceted range of meanings, with its interpretation contingent upon specific circumstances. It can signify the bearer, constitution, or nature of a thing, norm, law, doctrine, or phenomenon. This instance denotes the teachings of the Buddha, which provide a transformative path to liberation from suffering. The word Cakka (Pāli) or Cakra (Sanskrit), signifying "wheel," takes on significance in the Buddhist tradition. The Dharmacakra, interpretable as the "Dhamma-Wheel," stands as a symbol of the Buddha's teachings regarding enlightenment.

The Wheel (Cakka) serves as a shared symbol of political identity, religion, and art, reflecting cultural perceptions and teachings on faith. This article presents an engaging narrative for Buddhist scholars, examining contemporary perspectives on the artistic and cultural connections between India and Southeast Asia. It highlights the integration of the Dharmacakra doctrine into ancient evidence, with particular emphasis on the design and organizational patterns of Cakka sculptures. These elements demonstrate how Dvāravatī art extended early Khmer artistic traditions, illuminating the cultural interactions of the Mon people, who played a pivotal role in early Southeast Asian history but were later overshadowed by the Thai.

The primary focus of this study is the sculptural art of stone-embellished wheels, representing Buddhist symbolism and teachings. These wheels, with one meter or more diameters, were mounted on stone bases and created within a specific timeframe and region. For the 7th-century Dvāravatī people, the Wheel's form symbolized a profound connection between Dvāravatī and Indian artistic influences, which were assimilated and transformed to reflect a shared Southeast Asian aesthetic. This analysis explores the dynamic interplay of ancient Dharmacakra influences, providing insights into its historical components and adaptations to Siam culture.

Archaeological findings, such as Dharmacakra artifacts from significant sites like Nakhon Pathom and U Thong, provide tangible evidence of the symbol's early prominence during the Dvāravatī period. These artifacts, inscribed with Pallava script and crafted with intricate detail, reflect the spiritual devotion and artistic sophistication of the ancient Siam civilization.

In cultural and social contexts, the Dharmacakra serves as a unifying symbol of Buddhist identity, influencing traditional ceremonies, artistic expressions, and community values. Its presence in temple architecture, murals, and ceremonial rituals highlights its role in reinforcing shared cultural heritage.

Philosophically, the Dharmacakra encapsulates core Buddhist principles, symbolizing the Buddha's first teaching on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. This study delves into how this profound symbolism shapes ethical frameworks and guides practitioners in pursuing spiritual liberation.

Aim of the Article

The article aims to present the adoption of Buddhism in the prehistoric Siam society through the symbol of the Dharmacakra, which represents Buddhist teachings and demonstrates its integration into the social and cultural structure of that era. This approach helps to understand the significance of the Dharmacakra to prehistoric Siam from the early seventh century and the lingering Buddhist philosophy today.

Methodology

This article adopts a historical interpretive methodology to examine primary sources, such as inscriptions, manuscripts, photographs, and artifacts, focusing on evidence related to the Dharmacakra. As a significant symbol of Buddhism, the Dharmacakra's journey from its origins to distant lands amidst diverse cultural settings illustrates its integration into the prehistorical landscape of Siam and its continued relevance in contemporary society. This analysis highlights the local context and perspectives to explore how Buddhism was assimilated into the early communities that once inhabited the areas now known as Thailand.

The first sermon

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, often translated as "The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma," is one of the most significant teachings in Buddhism. It marks the Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment, delivered to the five ascetics with whom he had practiced severe asceticism. Exploring this Sutta through the commentaries and translation can provide a comprehensive understanding of its significance, content, and impact on Buddhist philosophy and practice.

The Sutta appears in several key collections, including the Vinaya Pitaka and the Samyutta Nikaya (Connected Discourses). Central to this Sutta are the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which underscore its importance across various texts. These fundamental teachings are further explored

and elaborated upon in other significant texts, such as the Khuddaka Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, and Majjhima Nikaya, providing additional insights and practical guidance on their application.

The content of this Sutta can be summarized as follows:

The Four Noble Truths

1. The truth of suffering
2. The cause of suffering
3. The end of suffering
4. The path leading to the end of suffering

This foundational teaching introduces key Buddhist doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths, the Middle Path, and Dependent Origination. The Buddha advises monks to abandon two extremes—indulgence and self-mortification—and instead follow the Middle Path, which fosters wisdom and ultimately leads to Nibbana.

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. Right View (sammā ditṭhi)
2. Right Thought (sammā saṅkappo)
3. Right Speech (sammā vācā)
4. Right Action (sammā kammanto)
5. Right Livelihood (sammā ājīvo)
6. Right Effort (sammā vāyāmo)
7. Right Mindfulness (sammā sati)
8. Right Concentration (sammā samādhi)

These principles serve as a comprehensive guide to ethical conduct, mental discipline, and the cultivation of wisdom, forming the core of the Buddha's path to liberation.

The spread of Buddhism to Suvāṇṇabhūmi

The spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia intertwines with Indian cultural influences and trade networks. According to Sri Lankan chronicles, by the 3rd century BCE, the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka's efforts significantly impacted Buddhism. Ashoka became a vigorous patron of Buddhism, using his considerable resources and influence to spread Buddhist teachings. Ashoka sent emissaries to regions far beyond the Indian subcontinent, including Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Among these missionaries were Ashoka's children, Mahinda and Sanghamitta, who played key roles in establishing Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This missionary fervor spread to Southeast Asia regarded as Suvāṇṇabhūmi, or the "Land of Gold," where archaeological evidence highlights early exchanges of traders in the region.

In the MahājanakaJātaka (Ja 539), Mahajanaka, deprived of his inheritance to the throne of Mithila, ventures into overseas trade with Suvāṇṇabhūmi, starting from Kalachampa (Eastern Bihar). This narrative illustrates the active trade between the Eastern Ganga hinterlands and overseas territories and underscores the wealth Indian merchants accrued from the Indian Ocean trade. This depiction, supported by the Digha Nikaya, describes merchants crossing the ocean and undertaking voyages from Champa to Suvāṇṇabhūmi, Pataliputra to Tampralīpti, and Banaras to the sea.

According to the Mahāvamsa, Thera Moggaliputta Tissa, Asoka's teacher and council chief, dispatched missions to spread the teachings of the Buddha to neighboring countries. The nine groups of missionaries were assigned to different regions. The Dīpavamsa (Chapter VIII) mentioned the names of Theras Sona and Uttara on the missionary route to Suvāṇṇabhūmi. Among Ashoka's nine missionary

routes, the two Buddhist propagation routes designated outside India include one to Ceylon and another to Suvarṇabhūmi. While Ceylon is well-known as Sri Lanka in both ancient and modern geography, Suvarṇabhūmi has seemingly vanished from records, leaving the precise identification of the territory uncertain.

The Suvarṇabhūmi is referenced in numerous ancient texts, including Indian, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Chinese sources, highlighting its historical and cultural significance. Early Indian sources, including the Arthashastra and various Puranas, mention Suvarṇabhūmi as a mainland Southeast Asian region and Suvarṇadvīpa as the island counterpart. The Milindapañha (2nd–3rd century CE) notes sea routes to Suvarṇabhūmi, Takkola, and China. Scholars debate Suvarṇabhūmi's exact location, with suggestions ranging from Lower Myanmar and the eastern Isthmus of Kra to the upper western coast of the Malay Peninsula. This region played a vital role in trade routes linking India to Southeast Asia and beyond, with Takkola as a key port. These trade networks facilitated significant cultural and economic exchanges across the region.

In the central plains of Siam, various civilizations initially inhabited this area, including the Mon people, who established significant cultural and social framework. This pre-existing heritage influenced the evolving Thai identity absorbed into the broader historical narrative of Siam. Nakorn Chaisri (present Nakorn Pathom), known to the Chinese as "Lang-ya-shu," was a vital center in the ancient landscape of Siam.

Overall, the historical and cultural significance of Suvarṇabhūmi highlights its pivotal role in the spread of Buddhism and early trade networks in Southeast Asia. Emperor Ashoka's missionary efforts and the integration of Indian cultural influences facilitated the region's transformation into a vibrant hub for religious and economic exchanges. Despite debates over its exact location, Suvarṇabhūmi's legacy is evident in archaeological findings, ancient texts, and its connection to thriving trade routes. These early interactions laid the foundation for developing Buddhist traditions and cultural identities in the central plains of Siam and beyond, leaving an enduring imprint on Southeast Asia's historical narrative.

The development of Buddhism in Siam

The history of Buddhism in Siam, today known as Thailand, is intricately linked with the region's geography and ancient trade networks. The Mahāvamsa, an ancient Sri Lankan chronicle, mentions that during the reign of Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century BCE, the Sona and Uttara were sent to Suvarṇabhūmi. This mission played a crucial role in establishing Buddhism in the region. Scholars have identified it as the southern part of present-day Myanmar, particularly Thaton, or the central part of Thailand. This area was a significant cultural and religious crossroads in Southeast Asia, where Buddhism was patronized by rulers and leaders of ancient kingdoms, including Dvāravatī in central Thailand. These connections illustrate the importance of Siam as a vital center for the spread and development of Buddhism in the region.

The development of Buddhism can be categorized into four distinct phases:

1. The early Theravāda Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Ashoka.
2. The Mahayana influence from Central Asia during King Kanishka's reign.
3. Theravāda influence from the Pagan Kingdom (modern-day Myanmar).
4. The Theravāda revival aligned with Sri Lankan traditions.

According to P.A. Payutto, Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Siam in prehistoric times, the territory which is now Thailand. Later, Mahayana Buddhism gained prominence through Central Asian

influences during King Kanishka's era, spreading further through the Srivijaya rulers in southern Thailand and the Khmer rulers in northeastern and central Thailand. This period saw the coexistence of Theravāda, Mahayana, and Brahmanical practices, which shaped the region's cultural and religious synthesis.

The Bagan Kingdom played a pivotal role in strengthening Theravada Buddhism, particularly under King Anawrahta's influence in the 11th century CE. As Bagan's influence expanded, Theravāda Buddhism supplanted Khmer dominance in northern Thailand, becoming widely accepted in the region. The revival of Theravada Buddhism aligned with Sri Lankan traditions began in Nakhon Si Thammarat and reached its peak during the Sukhothai period. King Ramkhamhaeng promoted Theravada practices, integrating them with local traditions and diminishing Mahayana influence. By the reign of King Lithai, Theravada Buddhism had become firmly established as the principal Buddhist tradition in Thailand, shaping its religious and cultural identity in enduring ways.

The Dhamma Wheel in the Pre-Siamese Era

The Dharmacakra (Wheel of Dhamma) holds a profound significance in Buddhist art and thought, symbolizing the Buddha's first sermon at Isipatana, where he set the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion. In the Dvāravatī civilization (6th–11th century CE), which represents one of the earliest Buddhist cultures in Thailand, the Dharmacakra emerged as a prominent motif in religious art and architecture. The Dharmacakra, a representation of the Buddha's teachings, is often depicted in stone carvings and freestanding pillars across Dvāravatī sites. These artifacts typically mark the Buddhist realm, symbolize the Noble Eightfold Path, a Buddhist core teaching, and are often accompanied by depictions of animals like deer, referencing the Deer Park at Isipatana. Inscriptions near these artifacts frequently reference the Four Noble Truths, highlighting their doctrinal significance.

Linguistic variations

The three variations of the term Dharmacakra found in this study are " Dharmacakra," "Dharmachakra," and "Thammachak." These terms are closely related, each representing different linguistic adaptations of the same concept—the "Wheel of Dhamma," which symbolizes the Buddha's teachings and the path to enlightenment. Dharmacakra is a Pali term commonly used in Theravada Buddhism, while Mahayana traditions have influenced the word Dharmachakra, and Thammachak is the colloquial Thai version of the word Dharmacakra. These terms will be referenced according to the sources and contexts in which they appear.

Archaeological Discoveries

The Significant archaeological sites in Central Thailand, such as those in Nakhon Pathom and U Thong, are believed to have been significant trading hubs connecting with other regions. These sites have yielded numerous Dharmachakra artifacts, which indicate their extensive use in religious rituals. The artifacts feature intricate floral carvings that are characteristic of the distinctive Dvaravati artistic style. Many of the Dharmachakra bear inscriptions in Pallava script, emphasizing the essential teachings of Buddhism. It suggests that the Dharmachakra were not merely decorative but also functioned as focal points for communal worship and as teaching tools to convey the Buddha's principles.

The Dhamma Wheel of Nakhon Pathom

Major archaeological sites such as Nakhon Pathom and U Thong have yielded Dharmacakra artifacts, which suggest their widespread use in ritual contexts. For instance, Excavations in Nakhon Pathom uncovered numerous Dharmachakra sculptures dating back to approximately the 12th Buddhist century. These wheels, intricately carved from large stone blocks with hubs, rims, spokes, and elaborate patterns, highlight the importance of the Dharmachakra in ancient societies. The remarkable craftsmanship reflects the dedication and faith of these communities, who invested significant effort and skill in creating these sacred symbols. The high quality of artwork suggests the existence of a royal artisan guild producing these pieces, which is evident in the intricate craftsmanship of the Dharmacakras and bases. One of the standout Dharmachakra in Nakhon Pathom has a diameter of 95 cm and is 1.09 meters in height (including the base). This Dharmachakra is found at Sa-ne Temple in Mueang District, Nakhon Pathom. The National Museum in Bangkok currently displays it in the Dvāravatī Room of the Maha Surasinghanat Building. The Wheel features three key elements: a central hub, thinly spaced spokes, and a carved outer rim adorned with floral and lozenge patterns. The 15 spokes resemble pillars, each anchored to the hub, with bases adorned with leaf-like decorations. This sculpture is considered a rare piece due to its intricate and beautiful designs, surpassing those found elsewhere.

Inscription

Thammachak (Nakhon Pathom) Inscription (K.Th. 29), discovered at Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom Province, dates back to the 12th Buddhist century. In 15 bars, the Pallava script inscribed a description of the Four Noble Truths. It conveys metaphorical messages where the Wheel symbolizes the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, the Origin of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, and the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering. The teaching revolves three times, representing *saccañāṇa* (knowledge of truth), *kiccañāṇa* (knowledge of what needs to be done), and *katañāṇa* (knowledge of what has been accomplished), with twelve characteristics.

Than Phra Thammachak, found in Kamphaeng Saen District, Nakhon Pathom. The inscription written in Pallava script and Pali, from the 12th Buddhist century, is 37 cm in width, 36 cm in length, and 14 cm in thickness. The artifact has four writing lines on one face; it presents a Gatha describing the Four Noble Truths.

The Dhamma Wheel of U Thong

U Thong has been inhabited since prehistoric times and later evolved into a significant trading port during early historical periods. Excavations at the archaeological site in U Thong have uncovered evidence of continuous habitation from prehistoric times through the Dvāravatī period, dated to the 7th–11th Buddhist centuries, as verified by radiocarbon dating. Clay seal inscriptions and artifacts from the site indicate the coexistence of Brahmanism and economic activity, alongside the dissemination of religious influences from India.

By the 11th–16th Buddhist centuries, U Thong became a key trade center influenced by Indian Buddhism and Brahmanism, identified by Georges Coedès as the heart of the Dvāravatī Kingdom. Archaeological discoveries, such as monk sculptures influenced by Amaravati art (9th–10th Buddhist centuries) and inscriptions in Sanskrit and Mon, reflect the integration of Buddhism into the region's cultural and spiritual framework. These findings highlight U Thong's role as a significant center for the propagation of Buddhism, even as the Dvāravatī culture declined in the 16th century.

An archaeological site in U Thong has revealed evidence of a remarkable Dharmachakra dated to the 12th Buddhist century, with a diameter of 95 cm and a height of 130 cm: it features 15 open spokes and a base adorned with blooming lotus petals. The rim is intricately carved with alternating circular and square patterns. The square pedestal measures 48 cm in width and 50 cm in length, with an octagonal stone pillar supporting the Dharmachakra. The pillar, 280 cm in height, is decorated with floral motifs and swan carvings. The Dharmachakra, with its pedestal and pillar, were found intact in their original condition, approximately 30 centimeters apart, during the restoration of Pagoda No. 11 in the ancient city of U Thong, Suphan Buri Province. This artifact stands as a testament to the deep integration of Theravāda Buddhism into the sociopolitical framework of the time. It served as focal points for communal worship and didactic tools for imparting the Buddha's teachings.

The Dharmachakra found in U Thong is believed to have been influenced by post-Gupta Indian art. A notable characteristic of this Dharmachakra is its placement atop pillars. This feature corresponds with the discovery of Buddha figurines in the Dvāravatī art style at Khu Bua in Ratchaburi, Thailand. This connection reinforces the notion of the Dharmachakra as a sacred object and highlights its significance within these artistic traditions.

The Dhamma Wheel of Si Thep

Sri Thep was influenced by Indian culture during the Funan Kingdom, with its earliest structures dating back to the 6th–7th centuries BE. After the decline of Funan, the city was abandoned for about 500 years before being restored by the Khmer Empire in the 12th Buddhist century. Archaeological evidence suggests the coexistence of Brahmanism, Theravada, and Mahayana Buddhism from the 11th–15th Buddhist centuries, with Brahmanism losing prominence while Buddhism persisted due to the influence of Dvāravatī culture. Shaivism reemerged in the 16th Buddhist century under Cambodian political influence, and Mahayana Buddhism gained prominence during the reign of King Jayavarman VII in the 18th Buddhist century.

A Dharmacakra dating to the 12th–16th Buddhist centuries was discovered at Khao Khlang Nok in Si Thep District. With a diameter of 150 cm and 32 open spokes, it features intricate designs blending artistic and cultural influences. The geometric patterns include alternating spirals and squares symbolizing growth, vitality, and purity, alongside lotus petal motifs representing spiritual awakening. The design also incorporates elements resembling ancient Indian temple pillars, highlighting the integration of Indian architectural styles. The placement and decorative style of the Dvāravatī Dharmacakra reflect a unique blend of local and Indian influences.

The Siam Palm-leaf manuscripts

Palm-leaf manuscripts marked a transformative era in preserving and disseminating Buddhist teachings, becoming the primary medium for recording sacred scriptures and doctrines. Over 1,500 years, Buddhist literature in Siam flourished, transmitted in Pali and local languages like Thai, with surviving manuscripts spanning from the late Ayutthaya period to the early Rattanakosin era. Manuscripts from this era, such as the *Samantapāsādikā Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā* Commentary, reflect the enduring legacy of Buddhist knowledge and are preserved at Thailand's National Library, showcasing the profound cultural and spiritual heritage of Buddhism in Siam.

The palm-leaf manuscript features diverse scripts, languages, and artistic designs. The most common script is Khmer, vital in preserving religious and literary texts, alongside other scripts such as Tai Tham

(Isan), Lanna, Mon, Burmese, Sinhala, and Thai. Collections at the National Library of Thailand highlight this variety, featuring Khmer, Lanna, Tai Tham, and Mon, reflecting the region's linguistic and cultural richness.

The primary language used is Pali or Magadhi, which is essential for transmitting Buddhist teachings. Additionally, Thai, Isan Thai, Lanna Thai, and Sanskrit are frequently found, illustrating the manuscripts' adaptability to regional audiences and their role in fostering cultural and religious exchanges.

The manuscripts' covers and bindings emphasize both preservation and aesthetics. Made of durable hardwood, the rectangular covers are designed to protect the palm leaves, which are bound together with cords through pre-punched holes. These covers often feature intricate craftsmanship, from simple carvings to elaborate designs with lacquer, gilding, glass inlays, or engraved ivory, demonstrating their cultural and artistic significance.

These manuscripts are classified according to their cover designs, each distinguished by its unique materials and decorative techniques. Some manuscripts retain their natural, untreated form, showcasing the raw texture of the palm leaves. Others are coated with a glossy black lacquer, providing a durable finish and enhancing the manuscript's appearance. Another version features a rich red lacquer coating, which gives the manuscript a vivid and striking look.

For more luxurious editions, some manuscripts are adorned with gold through a solid application or a gold coating, adding an element of prestige and highlighting their sacredness. Specific versions are also embellished with decorative patterns on the edges of the leaves, which may reflect regional artistic styles or cultural significance. The variations combine intricate lacquer finished with ornamental designs on the edges, creating a visually stunning effect.

In addition, simplified versions of these manuscripts focus on streamlining the design while retaining key elements. Some editions feature a more modest application of gold, providing a subtle yet refined appearance. Special editions, in particular, may showcase intricate decorative patterns, including celestial or mythological motifs, transforming the manuscript into a work of art and cultural heritage. Other versions are coated with dark-toned lacquer, enhancing their elegance and refinement. Overall, these different types of manuscripts showcase a wide range of materials, techniques, and decorative styles, underscoring their importance not only as vehicles for knowledge but also as works of art that reflect the cultural and religious values of the time.

Overall, the Buddhist literature in Siam stands as a testament to the region's rich linguistic, cultural, and artistic heritage. The diverse use of scripts and languages, including Pali and local dialects, highlights the adaptability and cultural exchange that sustained the preservation and dissemination of Buddhist teachings. The exquisite craftsmanship of the manuscripts, from their protective designs to intricate decorative elements, underscores their dual significance as both repositories of spiritual knowledge and cultural artifacts. These manuscripts, preserved primarily in the National Library of Thailand, embody the intellectual and spiritual legacy of Siam, reflecting a profound dedication to safeguarding Buddhist wisdom and artistic expression for future generations.

The Dhammacakka palm-leaf manuscripts

The Dhammacakka manuscripts' content includes books that explain the meaning called *Aṭṭhakathā* (commentaries). Books that describe the content of the *Aṭṭhakathā* are called *Ṭīkā* (sub-commentaries), and those that define the *Ṭīkā* are called *Anuṭīkā* (further sub-commentaries). The original *Ṭīkā* is known

as the Mūlatīkā (primary sub-commentary), and newly composed Ṭīkā on the same subject is referred to as Navaṭīkā (new sub-commentaries). Books that explain specific terms and relationships between phrases found in the Aṭṭhakathā and Ṭīkā, often used as translation guides, are called Yojanā. Books that explain complex or obscure points, particularly ones that are perplexing or create doubt, are known as Ganthī. The Dhammacakka palm-leaf manuscripts include the following elements:

Aṭṭhakathā-Dhammacakka-Saṅkhepa, the set of palm leaf manuscripts "Aṭṭhakathā-Dhammacakka-Saṅkhepa," a summary commentary (Aṭṭhakathā) on the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta, offers a concise remedy by addressing two external extremes: self-mortification (attakilamathānuyoga) and sensual indulgence (kāmasukhallikānuyoga), both of which are deemed unworthy of pursuit, and explaining the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca), accompanied by detailed exposition (niddeśa).

Ganthī-Dhammacakka, the Ganthī-Dhammacakka manuscript set typically consists of five bundles containing explanations of the Dhammacakkappavattana-sūtra. The content is organized in a way that simplifies the understanding of the Sutta by breaking down its sentences for easier comprehension.

Ṭīkā-Dhammacakka, the Ṭīkā-Dhammacakka manuscript is a Pāli commentary on the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, consisting of 10 bundles. The text serves as an exegesis, or detailed explanation, of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, incorporating interpretative stories and analogies to elucidate its teachings. The commentary provides insight into the Sutta's meaning, drawing parallels and offering comparisons to support a deeper understanding of its concepts.

Saddhammavilāsinī-Aṭṭhakathā-Dhammacakka, the commentary on the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta consists of 14 bundles and offers a detailed exegetical commentary on the Dhammacakka[ppavattanasutta]. The manuscript provides an interpretative explanation, drawing on established perspectives to clarify the Sutta's meaning and core teachings.

The Dhammacakka manuscripts stand as a testament to Buddhist scholarship's intellectual depth and cultural significance, meticulously crafted to unravel the profound teachings of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. These manuscripts encompass a range of textual genres, including Aṭṭhakathā (commentaries), Ṭīkā (sub-commentaries), and Ganthī (explanatory texts), each serving a unique purpose in elucidating the Sutta's meaning. Together, they offer a layered approach to understanding the Buddha's pivotal sermon. These manuscripts highlight the sophistication and devotion embedded in preserving Buddhist knowledge. Their layered structure underscores the efforts of ancient scholars to make the profound teachings of the Buddha accessible to diverse audiences. Beyond their doctrinal value, these texts serve as cultural artifacts, reflecting the intellectual rigor, spiritual dedication, and artistic craftsmanship of the period in which they were created. Their enduring legacy inspires and guides practitioners and scholars, ensuring the timeless relevance of the Buddha's first sermon.

Conclusion

The evolution of the Dhamma Wheel, or Dharmacakra, from the Pre-Siamese Era to the Kingdom of Siam reflects Buddhism's profound and enduring influence on the region's cultural, artistic, and philosophical heritage. As a symbol of the Buddha's teachings, the Dhamma Wheel embodies the dissemination of Buddhism through missionary routes, profoundly shaping South and Southeast Asia's cultural and religious landscapes. Suvannabhumi, a significant cultural and trade hub, played a pivotal role in integrating diverse artistic and spiritual traditions, fostering a rich environment for flourishing Buddhist thought and symbolism.

Archaeological discoveries, such as Dharmacakra artifacts from sites like Nakhon Pathom and U Thong,

provide tangible evidence of the Dhamma Wheel's prominence during the Dvaravati period. Intricately crafted and inscribed with Pallava script, these artifacts underscore Indian ancient influence on Thai civilizations' spiritual devotion and artistic sophistication. Their presence reveals the deep integration of Buddhist philosophy into the cultural and religious practices of early Siamese society, where the Dhamma Wheel served as a unifying symbol of Buddhist identity.

The preservation and dissemination of Buddhist teachings through palm-leaf manuscripts further highlight the significance of the Dhamma Wheel in Siamese history. Meticulously crafted with linguistic and artistic precision, these manuscripts represent a transformative epoch in the region's intellectual and spiritual heritage. They served not only as repositories of Buddhist doctrine but also as vehicles for cultural exchange and education, reflecting the central role of the Dhamma Wheel in transmitting the core principles of Buddhism across generations.

By tracing the evolution of the Dhamma Wheel from the Pre-Siamese Era to the Kingdom of Siam, it becomes evident that this symbol not only reflects the rich artistic and spiritual traditions of the past but also serves as a cornerstone for understanding the profound influence of Buddhism on the cultural and historical development of Siam and its enduring legacy in the present.

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