Buddhism assimilates and changes within society. Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Nepal have different models of Buddhism that has uniquely adapted to their environment. The differences range from rules monks have to follow all the way to various expectations of Sanghas. Even with these different models there is still common overlap. Although it seems these various alterations of Buddhism are straying from their roots, it is a transformation necessary for Buddhism’s survival.

Theravada Buddhism is Sri Lanka’s main form of Buddhism (C 110). In Sri Lanka the monastic code is vital in achieving Enlightenment. Monks that follow the monastic code can be split up into village monks and forest monks. The village monks are seen as figures with public responsibility guiding the morals of a nation (C 111). The village monks deeply interact with society and have major influence over the villagers. Villagers consider monks as ceremonial specialists that are in charge of presiding at funerals, chanting pirit, and preaching (C111). Monks are encouraged to preach to the laypeople for the laypeople’s happiness and to help the world (D 175). This is a reasonable role for monks, since they rely a greatly on the village laymen. A monk is unable to make his own food or clothes so he must solely rely on the lay villagers. The villagers have incentive to provide for monks, since they gain merit from the ceremonial practices the monks preform for them. The merit the laypeople gain can be stored for a better rebirth, given to the gods for help with a worldly aim, or given to help a dead relative’s future (C 111). This is an ideal symbiotic relationship between layperson and monk. Village monks also have the roles of landlord and politician, yet this role is achieved only because of the Sangha.

The Sangha plays a major role in influencing lay culture. In Sri Lanka’s past the Sangha had a large impact over the ruling kings. The king gave land to the Sangha and the Sangha gave the king his legitimacy to rule (C 118). The Sangha could intimidate the king with threats of being reborn as disgusting animal if he violated any property rights or laws benefiting the Sangha (C 116). The royal land grants given by kings and other donors transformed the Sangha into large estates. The ownership of the Sangha’s temples and land would pass from an uncle to a nephew to keep the Sangha in the family (C 117). Between the Sangha and the king it is unclear who was more powerful as the king was able to disrobe monks in order to keep the purity of the Sangha. All the Sangha’s political power seemed to stem from their ownership of land, as there was a direct correlation between land and power. The Sangha’s vast reach into politics and land ownership enables them to have a vast cultural impact.

Some monks believe the social influence of the Sangha has caused it to deviate from the main teachings of Buddhism. In Sri Lanka, there are monks who believe the Sangha’s intermixing with lay life is directly opposed to moral purity (C 119). There is similar feeling that the Sangha has a tendency to become domesticated, thereby providing a permanent home for the monks living. Focusing on moral purity or following a stricter practice of Buddhism are some reasons for a monk or layperson to go into the forest and become a forest monk. Other reasons can include family problems, unemployment, and escape from social oppression (D 147). The forest dwelling monks live a solitary life devoted to moral and mental self-discipline. The forest monks’ duty focuses meditation, unlike the local village monks’ duty, which focuses teaching and studying, scripts. Many laymen support their local monks, but once a year travel to visit forest monks give them alms, worship them, and seek their wisdom (C 123). Some forest monks have a ban on talking, when they are in groups, to further isolate themselves and practice their meditation. Furthermore as seen by the forest monk Tambugala Anandasiri, forest monks are very conscious and respectful of animals in the forest and view them as fellow suffers. Sri Lankan forest monks can be seen as a reform movement against village monks and Sanghas.

The desire for reform can also be seen in Thailand with Thudong monks. The Thudong tradition has become very popular in Thailand. Thudong monks leave their monastery to go on pilgrimage and visit Buddhist shrines throughout the country. They tend to go in secluded areas to overcome their kilesa or defilement, mainly their fear (B 209). Thudong monks are overly strict with following the Vinaya code, which includes eating one meal a day from their alms bowl without judgment of the food (A 192). During the nights Thudong monks are allowed to use big umbrella-like shelters with mosquito net attached to protect them (A192). Similar to the Sri Lankan forest monks, when Thudong monks are in a group they tend to keep silent. The high prestige associate with forest monks in Sri Lank is not associated with Thudong monks. For fear of being identified with beggars or tramps only a few Thudong monks talk about their experiences. Since the Thudong tradition is not well respected, monks that become Thudong monks usually are apathetic of societies opinion on them.

Other than Thudong monks Thailand has Thai village monks living in Sanghas just as in Sri Lanka. Theravada Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand (A 186). The state has vast influence over Theravada Buddhism within Thailand. The Thai Sangha is considered a national institution under control by the State. For example, civil authorities have power over and the ability to meddle with the Sangha. This has led to the institutionalization of the study of Dhammah, which is a main difference from Buddhism in Sir Lanka (A 188). One’s success in studying the Dhammah is mostly focused on the ecclesiastical examination system, not through meditation. The Sangha is made up of two sections, the Mahanikaya and the Dhammayuttika-Nikaya (A 189). The Mahanikaya find pastoral and parish activities to be very important, while the Dhammayuttika-Nikaya focus more on study and meditation.

Many Thai village monks are only temporarily monks. Many monks leave their monastery when the rainy season ends. Anywhere from 25 to 40 per cent of monks are considered temporary (A 191). A common reason to become a temporary monk is to achieve a mature status. Young men go into the monastery for a rainy season to achieve adulthood right before they get married. The popularity of obtaining ordination into a Sangha before marriage could explain not only why leaving the Order has no stigma attached to it, but also why leaving brings an aura of prestige to the ex-monk. Even though monkhood is a rite of passage in laymen society, getting into a Sangha is has its hurdles.

Membership into a Sangha takes effort on behalf of the candidate. The candidate for ordination requires support from a number of laypeople. The candidate needs permission from the abbot of the desired monastery he wants to join before he can become ordained. The laypeople need to provide the Eight Requisites, material paraphernalia, appropriate offering of many and goods to the candidate for the ordination ceremony (A 191). The candidate needs to guarantee he is 20 years old or older, is in good health, not in bad standing if society, and has proper consent from his parents or spouse for him to be ordained. Further requirements for ordination include being literate as the candidate is expected to learn Pali responses and recite them during his ceremony. Although there are a number of requirements needed to become ordained, there are many reasons for a candidate to desire monkhood. For laymen becoming a temporary monks enables them a chance at receiving a great education both religiously and secularly, which will benefit them upon return to lay society (A 191). Regardless of the reason for becoming a monk, the role of a Thai monk is similar to a Sri Lankan village monk. Thai monks do ordination ceremonies, cremation ceremonies and merit creating ceremonies called parittas for milestone occasions (A195). Through these ceremonies, Thai monks maintain the symbiotic relationship with Thai laymen exactly like Sri Lankan monks and laymen.

Disjoint from Sri Lanka and Thailand, Nepal has a liberal outlook on the rules for a monk. A unique aspect of Newar Buddhism is that monks can be sexually active, stay with their families, have professions, and live within society. All male members have gone through the bare chuyegu initiation ritual before going through puberty (G 292). Their sons will undergo the same initiation ritual in the same monastery, as their sons are the only ones eligible for initiation. The requirement of patriarchal descent allows the monastic property to stay within the family, which is different from Sri Lanka way of passing ownership of monastic property. As a further requirement, the son’s mother must be part of a family whose male members are in the same Sangha as the father or the son is disqualified from initiation. The initiation process lasts four days. For three days the boys behave as monks similar to the behavior of Sri Lankan monks. On the fourth day they disrobe and are able to act like laymen, but still have the title of monk and become permanent members of the Sangha. The new monks are now able to serve as family priests. The family priests are able to perform funerary rites and life cycle rites, which resembles the Sri Lankan and Thai monks roles.

Another differentiating aspect from Sri Lanka and Thailand is the vast effect of the caste system on Newar Buddhism. Caste determines whether or not a boy can obtain monastic ordination and membership to the monastery. Sons with matriarchal families not members of the father’s Sangha are considered of mixed caste are unable to have monastic ordinations. The boys who get initiated into their Sangha are that of the Sakya caste or Vajracarya caste (G 292). While both Sakyas and Vajracaryas can become members of a Sangha, only Vajracaryas can become tantric priest and perform the fire ritual (I slide3). The status of Vajracarya or Sakya is passed down through the father and mother to the son through the initiation ceremony. To be a Vajracarya the mother can be either Vajracarya or Sakya as long as the father is a Vajracarya. There is a similar ordination ceremony for girls called the ihi ceremony that initiates them into their caste (G 295). The caste system manages to permeate through monastic life and define Newar Buddhism.

The models of Buddhism that developed in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Nepal are very similar to its origins, yet still deviates in some major ways. The ever-present caste system in Newar Buddhism, the strong influence of the Sangha on lay society in Sri Lanka and Thailand, and Theravada Buddhism as a state religion in Thailand seem to misaligned with the teaching of Buddhism. These changes are necessary for Buddhism to survive in a changing society. Buddhism must be easily livable within society or its followers will dwindle. The deviations present in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Nepal enable Buddhism to adapt and prosper.

1. The way of the Monk and the Way of the World: Buddhism in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia
2. Forest Recollection Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand
3. They will be Lords upon the Island: Buddhism in Sri Lanka
4. The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka
5. Nepal Mandala- A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley
6. Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest
7. Newar Buddhism. The Survival of Indian Buddhism in Nepal
8. The Disciples’ Way: the monastic ideal in Newar Buddhism
9. [Newar Monks and Monasteries Oct2012.pdf](https://bspace.berkeley.edu/access/content/group/9962da06-24e3-471c-a230-4e72b1e20aef/Newar%20Monks%20and%20Monasteries%20Oct2012.pdf" \o "PDF" \t "_blank)