

WikiPitaka¹

A Searchable Buddhist Pali Canon "Tipitaka".

Target Users and Participants

This website will best serve the interest of scholars as well as practitioners of Buddhism. As a complete, searchable online Pali Canon, WikiPitaka will provide Buddhist scholars a powerful tool to explore and analyze the text.

Unlike other online Tipitaka, WikiPitaka allows users to contribute to the accuracy of the translation. That is, users can login, using their e-mails, and edit a page. The changes will be reviewed daily by an administrative staff consisting of the webmaster and a group of monks and Buddhist scholars.

The main target group is not western scholars but rather Buddhist scholars in Asian countries. This includes Burma, Cambodia, China, Japan, Laos, Mongolia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam. In these countries, Buddhism has about 376 million followers (Wikipedia). By estimation, 0.1 percent of Buddhist is considered scholars who would find WikiPitaka useful. That is, the number of users of WikiPitaka is estimated to be 376,000.

Doubt and Hope

In a conversation with me (April 18, 2006), Prof. Zimmermann, the director of Stanford Center for Buddhist Studies, said: "It is unlikely that scholars will participate in this project because they are very busy." I would defend WikiPitaka that when Wikipedia was first launched in 2001, people, including Jimmy Wales himself, would

¹ Discussion on the effect of title to its credential will be needed.

doubt its success in the same way Prof. Zimmermann do today. So, with sufficient amount of advertisements and communications, WikiPitaka can become a worldwide community of Buddhist scholars who use and create this website together.

Penetration and Access of the Target Users

Even though Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world (Wikipedia), most of the Buddhist Scholars are in developing countries where internet access is not so common (as in 2006). Also, most of the Buddhist scholars live an ascetic life style and might not have an access to the Internet. Thus, most of the target users might not be able to access the website in 2006.

Yet, in Thailand for example, monks and nuns have increasingly become technologically aware as the number of Buddhist websites maintained by practitioners and monks increases significantly during 2000-2005. Because the number of internet users in monastery settings is proportionate to the total number of internet users in Thailand, WikiPitaka will be successful when the internet usage reaches a level at which the people accept it as a daily activity.

In "The Growth and Development of the Internet in the United States" by Martin Kenny in 2001, Kenny concludes that the factors that contribute to the rapid growth of the Internet are political economy of the telecommunications system, the willingness of Americans to order remotely, and the creation of an infrastructure centered upon venture capital meant to support hightechnology entrepreneurship. In Thailand, the government invests much of its spending into creating these conditions through its brand new Ministry of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). For example, high speed internet ADSL cost has been decreasing constantly since last year. This

results in the dramatic increase in the number of ADSL users as well as the overall internet users, as shown in Figure 1 below.

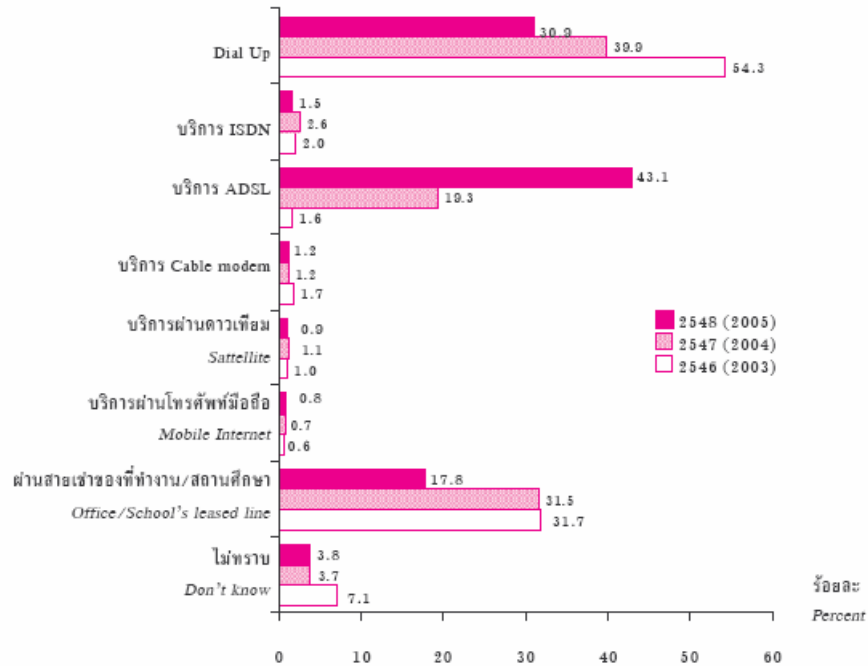


Figure 1: Access to the Internet
 Source: *Internet User Profile of Thailand 2005* by National Electronic and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC)

The strong support from the government results in the increase in national internet usage. As shown in Figure 2, the number of Thai internet users grows linearly ever year since 2000 and grows 266.1% in 2000-2005 (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/>).

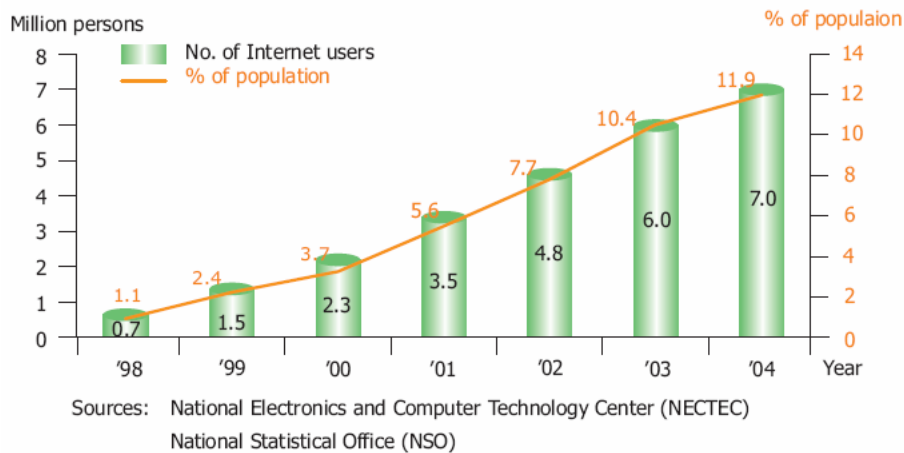


Figure 2: the number of internet users in Thailand 1998-2004

With the growth of high speed internet and the decrease in its cost, the number of internet users is estimated to increase exponentially in 2006 and the year beyond.

With the expansion of the internet usage in Thailand and in other Buddhist countries alike, we can predict that within ten years, Buddhist scholars will have an access to the Internet, and WikiPitaka can be accessed by every target user and participant. This means it is better to launch this project when the target community is ready, that is when most of the Buddhist scholars are familiar with the Internet and online research. This process can take five or ten years to come true.