



# Santi Pracha Dhamma

Essays in honour of the late Puey Ungphakorn







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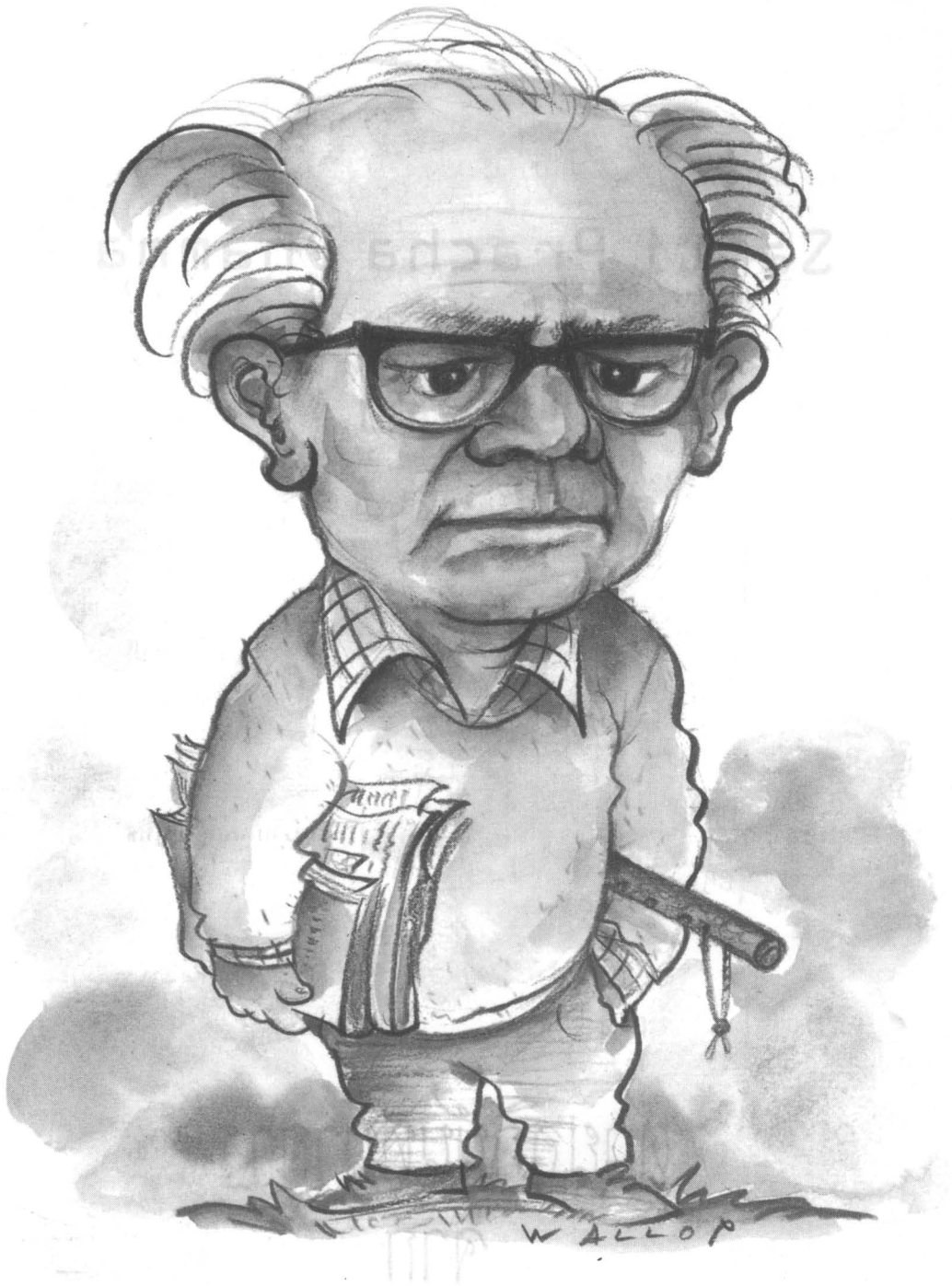
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the late Puey Ungphakorn



Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute  
The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation  
and  
The Foundation for Children



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## Explanatory Notes

On 14 December 1969 Phya Anuman Rajadhon was exactly 80 years old. Some of us managed to have a public library named after him at the National Library and he was present at the opening ceremony on his birthday. Prior to that, we founded the Sathirakoses Foundation and later expanded it to be the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF), which stands for the pen names of two good friends who were great scholars and writers: Phya Anuman and Phra Sarprasert.

Phya Anuman passed away on 1 July 1970, and the Siam Society under royal patronage had *In Memoriam Phya Anuman Rajadhon* published in his honor, since he was the first Thai commoner to serve as president of that prestigious institution. As for SNF we recently published *A View from Below*, explaining the foundation's various activities during the last 32 years. We are privileged that SNF has since been under the patronage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In 1990 SNF together with the Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development (TICD) and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) were proud to publish *Radical Conservatism: Buddhism in the Contemporary World* in honor of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's 84th birthday.

In 1999 SNF collaborated with the Foundation for Children in publishing *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* in honor of the Venerable Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto) on his 60th birthday.

Now the two Foundations are proud to publish another memorial volume for the late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn who passed away on 28 July 1999.

We are grateful to all the authors who contributed to this volume. Some wrote with English spelling, while others with American usage. We allow them to stand as they are. Romanisation of Thai words also depends entirely on each author. We do not insist on uniformity, and we do not insist on the use of diacritical marks. Although we prefer the word "Siam" to "Thailand", if the author uses the latter, we do not change it. For those who wrote articles in Siamese, we have them translated into English for the benefit of non-Thai readers. And we are grateful to the Sarn Saeng Arun Foundation for its financial support.

Some articles were first presented at the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in USA, and the authors kindly allowed us to publish them in this volume after their final revision. For this, we are grateful.

We hope the volume would be published on 28 July 2001—the second anniversary of Dr. Puey's demise—and we hope to open the Puey Inter-Cultural Forum at Wat Pathumkongka in Bangkok, the temple where he was once ordained a novice. Moreover, his ashes are now interned below a Buddha image in the main temple together with those of his mother and grandmother.

For those who wish to learn more about this Forum, please refer to Appendix II.

We are now celebrating Dr. Pridi Banomyong's natal centenary with UNESCO and the Thai government, an event which began in early 2000 and will last to the end of 2001. The Foundation for Children has published many books by and about the late senior statesman Pridi Banomyong, who was also Dr. Puey's mentor at Thammasat University and Dr. Puey's leader in the Free Thai Movement during WWII.

A memorial volume to the late senior statesman was published in Thai (*วิถีสังคมไทย*), French and English editions of the book are likely to be published later on by Thammasat University.

We hope to publish yet another memorial volume in 2006 to commemorate the natal centenary of the late Bhikkhu Buddhadasa.

S. SIVARAKSA

On behalf of the editorial board.



# Foreword

In this world, there is a select group of individuals, whose wisdom and commitment to the collective interest of society, distinguishes them from ordinary human beings. Dr. Puey Ungphakorn was one such individual in Thai society. His presence and contribution to Thailand's development enriched our lives, broadened our minds and deepened our collective conscience.

From a modest beginning, Dr. Puey excelled in his academic studies, which propelled him to top positions in the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Thailand, the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, and the Asian Institute of Technology.

Despite climbing the ladder of success in his profession, Dr. Puey remained throughout his life a humble man, whose interest was not in securing power, but in using his knowledge and position to address the injustices of Thai society. His pursuance of the principles of democratic governance and promotion of social justice led him inevitably to conflicts with those in authority. Yet, in spite of those struggles, Dr. Puey never wavered from his righteous path. He never compromised his high ethical and moral standards. To this day, we see the wisdom of his ideas, and the legacy of his life on our institutions and system of governance.

A lesser man would have sacrificed principles for expediency. Dr. Puey consistently chose the high road at his own risk and peril. He showed personal courage in joining the Free Thai Movement during World War II. He took it upon himself to speak the truth and stood up to those in power. He demonstrated the strength of his moral character and personal resolve in times of adversity and trauma.

He was a kind and compassionate person. His gentle manner and likeable personality endeared him to all those who came into contact with him. He was not a man who bore prejudice or held grudges against anyone.

Throughout his life, Dr. Puey strove for high ideals. He embraced the principles of "Santi" (peace), "Pracha" (people's participation) and "Dhamma" (righteousness). He was a man of integrity and selfless dedication, and a statesman, whom to this day, we all admire and respect.

Dr. Puey Ungphakorn was indeed a great man.

Anand Panyarachun  
Chairman of the Executive Board  
Asian Institute of Technology  
Twice Former Prime Minister of Thailand

# Plea to Live Without Fear

*Dr. Puey Ungphakorn wrote this open letter in 1976 with the intention of sending a message to dictator Thanom Kittikachorn after the latter abrogated the Constitution and ushered in oppressive rule. The letter became a resounding, leading voice for freedom.*

Dear Brother Thamnu,

Two years ago, before I left our beloved Thai Charoen Village to go to this far away place, you as the headman of our village had done something which I and others considered very worthwhile. The adoption of the common law of the village meant residents could hold on to something in their search for a better life. It was much better than subjecting them to the whims of only a few people. You allowed peaceful change in the village leadership and the election of a village council, which was empowered to adopt and consider rules for our co-existence. Those rules were based on popular virtue. That is, virtue is power, not the other way round. And virtue comes from the people.

Even I myself had doubts whether all the new rules were acceptable, and whether all council members were good. But I was glad that my brother Thamnu Kiatkong did what he did. It was better to have common rules than not. It was better to have the council than not.

Sadly, I have heard that now you have changed your mind. With a few supporters of yours, you have scrapped the village's rules, dissolved the council and turned back to the old style of ruling at the whims of some groups of people, which includes you still.

I have thoroughly considered your reasons but see no way of achieving the objective through the changes you've made. The security problems, external problems, economic, social and youth problems can be solved through serious effort without having to demolish the common rules of the village. You could have called a new election of the village's council if really necessary.

Most importantly, the restrictions of villagers' rights—the attempt to prevent them from using their brains to think, their mouths to speak and their hands to write freely—will deprive our village of benefits from the brainpower of residents as individuals or groups.

You can argue that village officials and villagers are singing your praises, and that only a few stupid voices are opposing the change. With all due respect, the officials are benefiting from the council's dissolution because now nobody can be a thorn in their side. For the villagers, you know that few will want to stick their heads out. Moreover, your armed village guards are using a climate of fear to make sure voices of dissent are kept as low as possible. If you want to really know how people feel, try intimidation.



There have been environmental pollution threats to our village. But nothing is worse than the pollution caused by the fear of intimidation. Such fear poisons people's minds and wisdom. This can lead to permanent brain paralysis. In the worst case, poisoned brains can erupt into something horrible as many nearby villagers have experienced.

When people are intimidated and made to be afraid, their instinct is to close their eyes. And whenever they close their eyes, the real catastrophe will come. Our enemies are waiting for that moment—the time when we close our eyes.

I share the same ambition as you. We both want to make Thai Charoen live up to its name and be a peaceful place for our children, where changes occur under common rules. There's not much we can do, but if you set this as a goal our children will owe you great gratitude.

Some people may be asking whether today's children deserve rights and liberty, whether they should be supported at all. I admit that sometimes I am frustrated myself by the young people. But when I think carefully, I'm proud of our children. They have been taught by us to foster social justice and freedom. Our teachings have been implanted in their minds. When one day something occurs that is totally opposite to what they have grown to learn, who wouldn't be disappointed?

The children are trying to overcome their fears to make their pleas to us. They still have faith in our goodwill. Why can't they deserve our compassion and pride?

With all the reasons I have mentioned, I'm begging you to restore the common law of our village and organise a new election for the dissolved council. Please do it as soon as you can, and the people of Thai Charoen, in the present and in the future, will always be grateful to you.

Khem Yenying



Sculpture by Mme Misiem Yip at Thammasat University, Rangsit Campus

# I Reminiscences of Puey





In a society with *pracha dhamma* [i.e., democracy and justice] the gaps between the government and the people, between officials and citizens, between women and men, between the rich and the poor, between prosperous regions and barren localities, between those who enjoy the right to education and those who do not, between those who enjoy the right to health and those who do not, etc. must be narrowed or eliminated. This [vision] does not emerge from political ideologies. Rather it is a matter of legitimacy—of *metta karuna*, solidarity, compromise, and respect for the human dignity of every person whether high or low born. Naturally, it will facilitate the peaceful resolution of the aforementioned problems.

*Puey Ungphakorn,*  
*The Ways of Nonviolence, 1977*

# Eulogy of Ajahn Puey Ungphakorn

---

M.R. Pridiyathorn Devakula\*

*I am deeply attached to Ajahn Puey*, and I am sure that for most of my generation all our lives have been touched by his humanity and vision.

He has permanently left his legacy on all of us, and indeed is part of the history of this nation.

Ajahn Puey was and remains a *“role model of humanity and integrity”*. I, along with many other Thais, am an admirer of Ajahn Puey. In fact, it is quite common to find people in the Bank of Thailand, other organizations, and entities or even ordinary peoples, who still talk about the moments when they personally worked with him or served under him.

What is a true mark of greatness is that his admirers come from all walks of life and levels of seniority. In some cases, surprisingly, we have seen his thesis in world class libraries— a moment of pride and inspiration to see our Thai compatriot being represented in world class institutes of learning.

The qualities of Ajahn Puey that are often pointed out in admiration are *humanity and humility*. Ajahn Puey was a man of great intellect who was filled with a drive and resoluteness to help his country and his people. He was the person who showed the world that *Buddhist philosophy* could be ideally applied to economic theory and people’s way of life, *“from womb to tomb”*.

Throughout his governorship at the Bank of Thailand, he was widely praised for his deep understanding and knowledge of economics and monetary policy, and for his legacy in establishing an acceptability and credibility for the idea of having an independent central bank. He was also very much admired for his strength, his determination and his courage; he refused to be swayed by political influence, but instead kept to the disciplined line of a sound fiscal and monetary policy.

Although then only in my teens and still a student, I found his work, his thought, and his

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\* Governor of the Bank of Thailand

efforts an inspiration. Ever since the image of Ajahn Puey as a true teacher of the precept “*to lead by example*” has remained imprinted deeply in my heart.

From another perspective, I am an alumnus of the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, where Ajahn Puey served as its first dean. My admiration for him and his work drew me to apply to this faculty, since I saw it as an opportunity both to be close to him and to study with him. I still consider my opportunity to study with him as one of the most precious moments in my life. I learnt a great deal from him, which expanded my horizon and proved deeply valuable in both my life and career.

When I was appointed Governor of the Bank of Thailand, the first awareness of the responsibility came hand in hand with the flashing thought of pride and honor to serve in a capacity where Ajahn Puey, my role model, once was. He was a great teacher, and now his great teaching will be put to the test as I look to his legacy to guide me in this responsibility.

Indeed, many people look at the current economic problems and feel disheartened, and yet when I look at what Ajahn Puey and his generation had done to rebuild the nation ravaged by war and to steer us through incredible development decades, *I cannot help but be inspired by the warm heartedness of his humanity and strength.*



# The Philosophy for "The New Century" Dr. Puey's "Santi Pracha Dhamma"

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Osamu Akagi

The death of Dr. Puey Ungphakorn was a sad and disappointing event for me in many ways. After I was notified of his death, I carefully checked five major Japanese newspapers everyday for about a week, and was surprised not to find his obituary in any of them. I had hoped that the death of a great man born in Asia should be known and acknowledged by Japanese people. The fact that he was not acknowledged was extremely disappointing.

The coming of "the new century" is no doubt the most popular phrase today. To be honest, I am not amused by this phrase at all. The main reason for this is that while everybody in the modern world greets "the new century" as it comes, not all parts of the world use the same Western style calendar. For example, according to the Buddhist calendar, which is most commonly used in Thailand, we are in the year 2544, the middle of the century. And Thailand is not the only country in Asia where we find such differences. There are several Asian countries where traditional cultures are still alive and effectively in use. These countries use calendars every day that are unique to their own regions. Thus the phrase "the new century" is based on the Western style calendar and has no significance at all in these countries. Nevertheless, we, myself included, routinely use the phrase "the new century" and assume that it has universal significance. The same can be said of another popular phrase "globalization".

"Globalization" is a tricky word and requires caution when using it, for the word basically approves the present situation of the Western world, and is built on "the Western technology and the Western view of the world". Our generation especially has paid careful attention to the advances of a variety of academic disciplines based on the Western technological growth and methodology. It is true that it has greatly improved our standard of living and is responsible for much of our present wealth. For instance, the human death rate has greatly decreased thanks to developments in medical science. Unfortunately, it is also true that the very development in medical science has deprived us of human dignity during the processes of illness and death. Is this an advance in medical science? One might as well call it a decline of medical science.

Modern scientific technology has given birth to very serious controversies, advanced medicine being only one such example; controversies over nuclear weapons, the handling of genomes and cloning, environmental pollution, etc. all constitute a threat to the very existence of humanity.



In order to solve these problems, we have to change our philosophy to break through our present technologically-oriented thinking. To emphasize this fact, we should start with efforts to value the different cultural backgrounds of people living on earth. Secondly, we should find a way on how to co-exist with nature. We have to scrap our arrogant idea that human beings are the supreme creatures over other forms of species on this planet. There is a need to restore ethical standards to all our relationships.

Dr. Puey's concept of "Santi Pracha Dhamma" (peace, participatory democracy and social justice) has always been a guide for me. His lifestyle was a powerful model for me. I was most affected by his transformation from an economic bureaucrat to an educator. He was quite aware of the limits of economic developments advocated by modern economy. He stressed the importance of the improvement in the educational standards. He started reform at the university level. While studying in Britain, Puey began his political activism with the anti-Japanese resistance movement called the "Free Thai Movement" during World War II. After the war, he received his doctorate from London University and returned to his motherland to become an economic bureaucrat in the Ministry of Finance. In 1959, at the age of 42 he became Governor of the Bank of Thailand.

At this early stage, he already had an idea of how to eliminate poverty through economic development. He had confidence that economic growth and commercial development could help increase people's income and help improve the standard of living but this would come at great cost. While he had some reservations about the country's military dictatorship, he was cooperative regarding their policy of economic development. However, he discovered a great gap between the growth in the cities and that in the villages. Capitalist opportunists and loan sharks took advantage of this gap and there was corruption among bureaucrats all across the country. Through this experience, Dr. Puey realized that economic growth would not always contribute to the improvement of people's lives. He gradually shifted his efforts from economic growth to social development through education. Throughout his term as the dean of the faculty of economics at the Thammasat University in 1964, he devoted himself to the educational reform of the university. He no longer considered himself an expert in economics, he was now an educator. He changed, as it were, from "hardware" to "software". His reform of the faculty of economics became a major success.

I believe that Dr. Puey should be praised for his ethical standards and altruistic motives. For instance, when he was appointed the dean of the faculty of economics at the Thammasat University, he was also Governor of the Bank of Thailand. Nevertheless, he received a monthly salary of 8,000 baht from the university and declined to receive the monthly salary of 25,000 baht from the bank. During the Phibun, Sarit, Thanom and Praphat administrations, political corruption was rampant among bureaucrats. He fought this trend and he received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for his work as a superior bureaucrat.

He was not just an educator; his final dream and goal was national reform. To achieve this goal, he educated many students who would later become responsible for the reconstruction of the nation. In 1975, he was appointed as President of Thammasat University. He held a firm belief that the improvement of the citizens' lives could be achieved only through democracy and wanted to eliminate military dictatorship. Later he introduced "Santi Pracha Dhamma" as a guideline to campaign for the elimination of military dictatorship.

Through some of Dr. Puey's writings such as "Buddhism and National Development" in 1971 and "The Memorandum of the Establishment of Democracy in Thailand through Peaceful Measures", I arrived at my own understanding of the meaning of "Santi Pracha Dhamma," which may be summarized as follows: the four most important values in human society are (1) ability, (2) freedom, (3) justice, and (4) compassion, and these four values should be sought after through peaceful measures. The influences of Buddhism are apparent here.

Let me conclude by saying that the philosophies taught by "Santi Pracha Dhamma" contain elements that could radically change our modern technologically-oriented thinking; the ideas of compassion and nonviolence are particularly Asian in origin, and have been universally aspired to. Regardless of our calendar, we should carry Dr. Puey's "Santi Pracha Dhamma" over into "the new century".



# The Economics of Enough

---

Nicholas Bennett

*He who knows when enough is enough will always have enough.*

Like Dr. Puey I have spent my life working in the so-called “development business”, and like Dr. Puey I have tried to give this development a human face. In my forty years in this endeavor, I have taught at schools and walked around Africa with no money; launched Uganda’s first five-year plan (and shared offices with Idi Amin); helped pilot the education reform in Thailand, whilst at the same time working for human rights, and training in non- violent action; and spent six years in a remote corner of Nepal designing and implementing a Gandhian development program through action oriented education. I have joined Jerry Rawlings’ revolutionary spirit in Ghana only to see it captured by middle class respectability; fought corruption in Cameroon; and cried as the Ethiopian Government saw the destruction of its neighbor as more important than the feeding of its starving people.

The nine years that I spent in Thailand in the 1970s have had a profound influence on my work and life. It was a period when a thousand different flowers were blooming throughout the world, some laying the promise of a brighter future, and some [riddled] with the temptations of insatiable desires: the cultural revolution, the defeat of the US in Vietnam, the overthrow of the Shah, and most important for my thesis the first mass-based nonviolent movement in Thailand, which succeeded in replacing the military dictatorship of Thanom and Prapas.

The 1970s was a period when there was a flood of new ideas: Schumacher with his extraordinary lucid article “Small is Beautiful: economics as if people mattered”; the Club of Rome with its “Limits to Growth”; and Illich with his “Retooling Society”. All these profoundly challenged conventional economic wisdom. It was also the decade when the first realization of the fragility of the environment began to surface, along with the consciousness that any endless economic growth hypothesis always resulted in impossibilities.

Of course the 1970s was not merely a decade of promise, but also one of horrors and emerging difficulties. New ways of killing and maiming of human beings were developed in the Vietnam war, which destroyed millions of lives. The black B-52s would take off from Utapao and other bases in Thailand like the angels of doom that they were, and their crews would return to drown their guilt in alcohol, drugs, and the arms of prostitutes. The non- violent students killed by

the Thai military in 1973, and again killed and arrested in 1976, demonstrated the fragility of human life. The fact that military juntas governed over 70% of countries worldwide created new human rights problems. The first appearance of the floating multinational corporations and the role of business in government challenged the very roots of the democratic process. The increasing power of television in the numbing of the world weakened popular participation in government. Despite the turbulence of that period we were filled with hope that rational people would soon realize that the endless economic growth model that was current at that time, and still is current today is untenable and that there are more appropriate alternatives, perhaps based on Buddhist thought.

It was in this turbulent period that I met Dr. Puey, first in Thailand, and then during his exile in England. It was in this period when I became impressed with the power of his mind, the warmth of his personality, and the hope (even during the early days of his exile) that he kept for the development of a better and more humane Thailand. Like many who crossed his path he has left a mark on me.

But for me his ideas on “*Santi Pracha Dhamma*” (peace, participatory democracy, and social justice) were not enough, because the economic model that was being pursued by Thailand (and now by almost every country in the world) was one based on values diametrically opposed to the Buddhist values he espoused: Morality is inconsistent with greed; western economic practice is based on greed. Compassion is inconsistent with capital accumulation; western economic theory is based on the need for capital accumulation. Mindfulness is inconsistent with advertising; western economics is based on the endless creation of new desires through advertising and other means. A new economic model was needed in the 1970s, and is even more needed now, a model that is both consistent with the evolving wisdom of Buddhism, and an awareness that there are limits to growth.

In our current economic model we become worried if the USA, or any of the large economic powers has a slow rate of growth, even though they may already have per capita levels of consumption ten times greater than those which exist in Thailand, or a hundred times than those which exist in Ethiopia. Even these existing consumption levels are producing unsustainable levels of global warming, which are likely to cause flood havoc in most of the coastal areas of Thailand. Imagine what the situation would be like if Ethiopia and all the countries in its position were to grow rapidly and reach the levels of consumption currently existing in the USA! If at the same time consumption in the USA continued to grow, the global warming floods might reach Sukhothai! If we do not develop limits to growth nature will do it for us. Examples of this premise surround us wherever we look, both in the western world as much as in the east. Angkor Wat is a prime example where increasing population combined with increasing consumption destroyed the productivity of the land within easy reach of Angkor, and thus the temple died with its supporting population.

A good example of the alternative development strategies that exist in more traditional societies is the following story:

A Thai fisherman was sleeping on the beach in the shade of his boat and a development expert came to speak to him.

“Why are you resting?” he asked.

“I have already been out fishing and have caught enough fish to feed my family,” the fisherman replied.

“But if you went out fishing again you could catch more fish.”



“And what would I do with those fish?”

“You could sell them and with the cash you may buy a bigger net.”

“What would I do with this net?”

“Catch more fish”

“And what would I do with those fish?”

“Sell them and buy a motor for your boat.”

“And why should I buy a motor?”

“To catch even more fish.”

“And what would I do with those fish?”

“Sell them and buy another boat.”

“And why would I want another boat?”

“So you can employ other people to catch fish for you, which would enable you to have leisure and rest.”

“But I am already resting!” the fisherman replied.

In simplistic terms, an individual’s satisfaction is a function of the achievement of his desires divided by his desires. His satisfaction can be maximized either by maximizing the achievement of desires or by minimizing desires. Western economics aims to increase overall levels of satisfaction by increasing the achievement of desires, whilst Buddhist economics should aim to increase overall levels of satisfaction by minimizing desires. Unfortunately, the satisfaction of one desire often leads to the creation of another, and thus we all tend to become hungry ghosts in a perpetual state of desire. As I have already mentioned above, the western economic model is based on the idea that economic growth can continue forever. It is thus necessary within this model to constantly create new desires that previously did not exist. Without this we might all be happy, like the fisherman, resting in the shade of his boat. Neither television sets, nor sofas emanate from our inherent desires, and thus a “need” for these has to be created through advertising and other means.

Certainly our planet can only have a future if the unbridled consumerism that is gradually spreading throughout the world can be replaced with an alternative that can also ultimately lead to human satisfaction. A Buddhist strategy of limiting desires has to be one element of this alternative. We cannot however expect that the ordinary man or woman will be able to reach a state of Buddhahood. Even most of the better known Buddhist teachers are far from this state and remain attached to their followers, or their authority, or their temples. Perhaps the greatest teacher of our time, Mahatma Gandhi remained attached to his vision of India, to his Khadi cloth and his staff, and was unsure of his Bramacharya even in his old age.

His most important economic principle was self-reliance, and as an example he believed that all should be able to weave the cloth that they would use to clothe themselves. Such self-reliance prevented the concentration of economic power, which is increasingly becoming one of the main impediments to a more sustainable economy. Certainly it is necessary to find ways to reduce this concentration, because if this cannot be done those without such power will always look at the consumption patterns of those with power as their heroes to be emulated. It is difficult to prevent further concentration, let alone to reduce that which exists, as we are led to believe the myth that we all have the chance to be “millionaires”.

Of course, self-reliance and self-sufficiency are not “efficient”. I may be good in carpentry, and poor in weaving. It is not “efficient” for me to be involved in weaving. By trading

my wooden products for someone else's woven cloth both of us could either have a greater level of consumption with the same labor input or the same level of consumption with a lower effort.

This concept of "efficiency" is very pernicious and is the main factor that justifies globalization. "Efficiency" can result in many people being put out of work whilst at the same time the total quantity of goods and services consumed throughout the world is increased. Who consumes the larger share of this increase in consumption of goods and services is a question that is rarely answered satisfactorily in the various international gatherings on globalization. It is clear that it is more important that there is full employment in the richer countries and that they consume more and more, than that there is full employment amongst the poor. Rarely are the real voices of the poor ever heard. Even rarer are the needs of the poor taken into account. For example in Ethiopia, most of the shoes that ordinary people wear are made by villagers from animal skins or old car tires. The local shoemakers earn just enough to feed their families, and their fellow villagers have the wherewithal to protect their feet. Now with the globalization of markets, colorful plastic shoes are imported and are gradually replacing the locally made ones, increasing consumer satisfaction no doubt, but moving yet more families (those of the shoemakers) into abject poverty. Obviously this localized self-reliance and mutual self support is extremely important in any strategy that might lead to the "Economics of Enough".

How big is an ideal "self-reliant group"? Large enough to have most of the essential specialists represented, but not so large to enable there to be concentrations of economic power. In ancient Greece it was thought to be a unit of 5,000 free men (slaves and women not included!). With such a population, all the main skills needed to satisfy minimum basic needs could be represented.

Is there any consensus as to what might be the minimum basic needs of a person? The existing literature is not at all clear on this. Certainly we need a minimum food intake, which is often quantified as 2,000 – 2,200 calories per day, but then probably more than a quarter of the world's population somehow survive and reproduce on less than this. Shelter from the rain, the sun, and the wind is a second minimum need—but then does the cardboard and plastic lean-to, that tens of millions of street dwellers use, satisfy this minimum. Clothing, again to protect from the elements is a third minimum need—but then to what extent are the hundreds of tribes who do not use clothes suffering deprivation according to their own values. A fourth need that is often quoted is the need for a basic education or literacy, but then how much more valid is a school system that is external to a person's culture than the indigenous learning one finds in all cultures. A final oft-quoted need is basic medical care, which is even more difficult to define as it can stretch from leaves to cure malaria to heart transplants.

Perhaps, more important than what should be the minimum basic needs in any society is who should be involved in determining these needs. Certainly not the development bureaucrat such as I, with my large permanent house in a sea of shacks; my flashy car driving through the barefoot masses; clothes to change as do the seasons and my moods; three meals a day; and a doctor to come at my beck and call. It is again necessary to give a voice to the poor to determine their own minimum needs.

The larger the basic economic unit within which we live, the more that our minimum needs will proliferate. In the village society that exists today in rural Ethiopia, apart from fertilizer, kerosene, matches, and some secondhand clothes, everything else that is consumed is produced

locally. The basic minimum needs of the villager have developed over many generations within the village community itself. In the city, with a multitude of different shiny imports, competing with thousands of different skilled workers producing different goods and services, it is very difficult to implement a basic needs strategy, and even harder to put into practice the Economics of Enough. In Thailand, the largely self-contained village society is long since dead. It is not, therefore, a question of protecting what exists, but fragmenting the large city units and markets, so that the pressures to “want” can be reduced, and the real basic needs again develop. This is not as Utopian as it sounds, as the first seeds of such a fragmentation are already beginning to appear in several western societies. For example, in some areas of England alternative types of money are being created which can only be used in small parts of some cities.

Given the power of consumerism, the influence of advertising, the excessive consumption patterns of the heroes of our societies how can we begin to reduce what is “needed”? Reduce our desires and learn to know when enough is enough? It is not that those who have the most things and receive the most services are more satisfied than others are. The more “developed” an economy, the greater the number of alcoholics, drug addicts, and depressives existing.

It is here that Buddhism has a role to play, not so much the organized hierarchical religion that one finds in Thailand, with its 300,000 monks in temples in every corner of the country, largely designed to control rather than enlighten, but what we might call secular Buddhism. No form, no robes, no ceremonies, no sexist stereotypes, no escape into rituals, but merely the wisdom of the Buddha’s message.

The message of the Buddha with his noble fourfold path to reducing suffering is far more valid than any ritual, robe, hierarchy, or organization. The message now is as valid as it was 2,500 years ago, and the rituals and hierarchy as irrelevant now as they were 2,500 years ago. If we were all aware, really aware, of the impermanence of everything, we could not possibly crave after things in the same way as we currently do. The real difficulty is that this message somehow has to be internalized, and once internalized to grow and overcome all the other competing messages that we are currently bombarded with. It is thus the development of appropriate practices in any eventual internalization of a basically simple message which is the key to any Economics of Enough.

The colonial powers in Asia facilitated their control over their conquered people with opium. The spread in the use of opium was not only designed as a revenue source, but also as a way of reducing the desires of the population for a reasonable wage and for participation in governing their own societies. Even in our modern world those who are addicted to narcotic drugs have very few basic needs apart from their “fix”. Few amongst us would consider the drugging of the world as an appropriate strategy for reducing basic minimum needs. Organized religions were referred by Karl Marx as “the opium of the masses”, as a way of conning or numbing us to accept the status quo. Equally few amongst us are those who would consider the “opium” of organized religions to be an appropriate strategy for reducing our basic minimum needs.

Organized Buddhism is no different from any other organized religions. Rituals allow the rich to justify their wealth and the poor to accept their poverty. Perversion of the Buddha’s messages encourages the poor to accept their poverty as a result of their karma in past lives and women to accept their inferior sexual position. Almost always organized religions, Buddhism included, are allied to the secular powers and are a key pillar in the exploitation and control of these

societies. The extent to which the large Tibetan monasteries impoverished the local populations is well documented—as are the holy amulets and the blessing given to “our soldiers” as they go out to slaughter and maim the enemy. Even in our modern world, organized Buddhism in Sri Lanka encourages and justifies a continuation of the war against the Tamils. It is clear to me that organized Buddhism is no better or worse than any other organized religion.

Even if we still believed that organized Buddhism should play a role in the reduction of the basic minimum needs of the masses, it no longer has the potential to do so, as the competing forces of television and advertising are too strong.

This is why the Buddhism that can play a role in reducing our desires and our needs must be one without robes, ceremonies, and rituals. Rather it must be one that is based on the wisdom of the Buddha’s message and some simple practices that the lay person in our modern world can follow.

The difficulty for the individual is to determine which practices he or she should follow, for just as there are a range of goods that manufacturers try to sell to us, there are a range of spiritual practices that so-called “holy men” try to encourage us to take up. “Spiritual materialism” can be as pervasive as ordinary materialism. Rather than trying to ground ourselves on one practice, we move from one to another in the same way as we might move from one set of clothes to another. Instead of spending time in our own practice, we read more and more books, look at more and more videos, and listen to more and more spiritual leaders.

The Buddhist teacher must give up his robes in much the same way as the Catholic worker-priests have done in Latin America and show by his example a path that the lay person might follow. The American meditation teacher, Jack Kornfield, is a good example. He spent more than a decade as a monk studying with various Buddhist masters in Southeast Asia, and on return to the US soon realized that people saw him as “weird” with his robes and alms bowl. He decided to disrobe and teach meditation as a lay man to lay people. He has helped many hundreds, if not thousands, into the power of meditation.

It is this process whereby more and more lay men and women learn to look inside themselves and spend increasing time each day both internalizing the fourfold path and finding the beauty that is inside, and thus have less and less desire and need to possess and consume external goods and services. It is this process of incorporating daily meditation practice within an ordinary lay existence that is one of the most important steps in any process of reducing our desires, and consequently limiting economic growth to levels that can be supported by the environment.

According to the Maharishi Foundation, when more than 5% of the population in a town meditate regularly there is a significant reduction in social ills such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and divorce. How much more the change if the same 5% could, in addition to their daily meditation practice, internalize the basic message of the Buddha on the impermanence of everything and the cause and solution to suffering. Perhaps with 10% or even 20% following such practices, the limits to growth might be in sight.

Growth will be slowed, stopped, and reversed. This will either happen through global warming and other environmental pressures or through our own decisions and actions. Only when we fully understand when enough is enough through our own practice and understanding, will we



ever have enough. The Economics of Enough, of zero or negative growth is an entirely new discipline, one that should increasingly challenge economic thinkers in the years to come. It is only unfortunate that Dr. Puey is no longer amongst us and able to help grapple with this challenge, as he did with so many others in his long and fruitful career.



# II

## Applying Dhamma



**If the principle of *pracha dhamma* is upheld steadfastly, there will not be any other ways to realize democracy and justice except by nonviolence. The reliance on weapons as threats or the perpetration of direct violence for the sake of promoting democracy and justice may yield only short-term benefits. It will not lead to permanent democracy and justice. When one side relies on weapons and the other side loses, it is natural that the loser will think of using weapons for revenge. When weapons collide, how can democracy and justice be preserved?**

***Pracha Dhamma* means that justice is authority, not that power is justice. *Pracha Dhamma* is rooted in the people. If the people do not want *Pracha Dhamma*, no one can give it to them.**

***Puey Ungphakorn,  
Memo on Thai Pracha Dhamma  
by Nonviolent Methods, 1972***

# Consumerism, Economism, and Christian Faith

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John B. Cobb, Jr.

## I

The issues of poverty and possessions have been central to biblical and Christian reflection. That does not mean that there is one clear position. It certainly does not mean that Christians have lived consistently by Christian teachings. Especially since the eighteenth century, confusion has reigned. It has been Christian (or post-Christian) cultures that have led the world in recent times into the unabashed worship of wealth.

The sharpest rejection of consumerism is found in asceticism. There was little of this in ancient Israel. The people of Israel were not discouraged by their teachers from participating in the good things of life. They believed that the created world is good and that human beings have the right to order it to their needs and to enjoy it. They were grateful for the fruitfulness of the land, for long life, and for numerous progeny.

The moral issue was whether people gained their possessions in ways that injured others and whether they took responsibility for those who lacked basic necessities. If one gained wealth by oppressing others, that was severely criticized. If one failed to share with the weak and powerless, especially with widows, orphans, and strangers, that was condemned. Obviously, to put the pursuit of personal gain ahead of moral concerns about justice and meeting the needs of the weak was completely unacceptable. Justice and righteousness come first, but there is no inherent conflict between obedience to God and worldly prosperity. Indeed, such prosperity can be a sign of God's favor, although it can also arouse suspicion that the wealth was acquired unjustly.

The situation with Jesus is somewhat different. Nevertheless, he did not teach asceticism either. We are told that he commented in this respect on his difference from John the Baptist. For Jesus, as for the Jewish tradition generally, there is nothing wrong with enjoying good food and drink.

For Jesus, however, the issue of relative values was sharpened. It was crucial that one seek first the *basileia*, the Commonwealth of God. Furthermore, this is presented as an all-consuming quest, such that people are prepared to turn away from all ordinary pursuits. Even family relationships and responsibilities, so important to most Jews, may be set aside for the sake

of God's Commonwealth. People are assured that when they seek this first, God will take care of them with respect to their material needs. The rich young ruler, who obeys all the Jewish laws but is still not inwardly at peace, is urged to sell all he has, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus. Jesus is quoted as saying that it is harder for a rich man to enter the Commonwealth of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. His conviction that when we encounter a neighbor in need we should share what we have can explain how a follower can hardly remain rich!

This concern about how worldly goods inhibit spiritual progress is not prominent in the Jewish scriptures and has introduced distinctive debates into Christianity. Many Christians have continued essentially the Jewish tradition. That is, we must all put first the quest for justice and righteousness. If one's concern for possession or consumption supersedes one's commitment to justice and righteousness, then it is sinful. Greed is one of the seven deadly sins. But if one puts first the Commonwealth of God, then one may find that gaining or retaining property is still acceptable. The issue is then the responsible use of that wealth.

Other Christians have held that there is a deeper incompatibility between seeking first the Commonwealth of God and gaining or retaining wealth. The latter, at a minimum, is distracting. The fullest service of God, in this view, requires the renunciation of possessions. It requires also the renunciation of family and family responsibilities. Even this, however, does not necessarily entail asceticism. The renunciation of family responsibilities involved the renunciation of sexual activity, but the enjoyment of food and drink and other comforts may still be quite acceptable. The monastic movement provided a context in which people could devote themselves entirely to God while having their material needs taken care of.

Of course, ascetic tendencies did enter Christianity and play a considerable role within it. Paul's dualism of spirit and flesh was understood in such a way as to condemn all bodily enjoyment. Denying the body its wants was felt to be spiritually positive. The judgment that sex was inherently evil played at least as large a role in the promotion of celibacy as the concern to free people from family responsibility. Denying other bodily desires such as those for rich food and bodily comfort could also be regarded as spiritually positive. A few Christians, for the sake of the spirit, have inflicted pain on their bodies. Nevertheless, most church teaching, even in the monastic traditions, has opposed asceticism as a normative ideal. That is, while there may be many circumstances in which faithfulness calls for sacrifice of bodily enjoyment, the bodily enjoyment that is thereby sacrificed for a greater good is, in itself, also affirmed to be good.

The Reformation opposed the monastic movement, which was the chief embodiment of this ideal. It held that the Christian calling is to serve God in the midst of all the ambiguities of life in the world, including family and business. This paved the way for a changing attitude toward the quest for wealth, but this was far from the intention of the Reformers. Their ideal was full participation in the processes through which money is made and then complete generosity in its use. As late as the eighteenth century, John Wesley, the father of my own denomination, taught that we should earn all we can, save all we can, and give all we can. Considerable sums of money passed through his hands, especially because of the success of his publications. He used some of this to take care of his own needs (and those closest to him) in a way that was frugal but not ascetic. But all the money that was not needed for this purpose was used to meet the needs of others.

Wesley's instructions to his followers to adopt the same procedure were very explicit. Nevertheless, many of them were more conscientious about earning and saving than about giving.



Before his death Wesley mourned the loss of the truly evangelical spirit of early Methodism occasioned by the accumulation of property by its members. Those with property, he concluded, could not give themselves wholeheartedly to Christ. Most Methodists, on the other hand, thought that as long as their quest for wealth did not interfere with their devotion to God, it was acceptable. And most thought that such a quest was possible.

## II

The great change occurred in the eighteenth century with the rise of industrialization. Previously production per person was relatively fixed. This meant also that wealth per capita was largely static. If one person got more, another would have less. To be greedy was to desire to get more at the expense of another.

In the eighteenth century people discovered a way of producing that made individuals far more productive. By employing fossil fuels to replace human labor, on the one hand, and by having each person perform limited repetitive operations, on the other, total production could be greatly increased. This worked best in a market where each person undertook to acquire as much as possible for as little labor as possible. This was understood to be “rational self interest,” hardly distinguishable from what had heretofore been called “greed.” In this new context, the pursuit of self-interest, viewed by Christians as sin, turned out to increase the total wealth and hence the availability of goods and services to people in general.

This was noted first by secular authors. Early in the century, Bernard Mandeville published *The Fable of the Bees*. His subtitle, *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, suggests his thesis that such “vices” as greed actually benefit society as a whole. David Hume also argued for the positive social value of commerce based on the profit motive, although he feared unadulterated greed and thought that in commerce it was mixed with other motives.

The writings of Adam Smith firmly established the changed evaluation of the quest for wealth. Although Smith personally, and in other writings, emphasized the importance of acting in terms of sympathy for others, in his most influential book, *The Wealth of Nations*, he pointed out that the market works best when each participant acts in terms of rational self-interest. Attempts by government to establish “just prices,” a practice going back to the Middle Ages, only inhibited and distorted economic development. So far as the economy is concerned, self-interested behavior turns out to serve the common good.

The change of nomenclature from greed to rational self-interest combined with the highly positive appraisal of its overall effects has confused Christian thinkers from that time on. The present state of Christian thinking and moral teaching has grown out of, and still reflects, that confusion.

Some have accepted the teaching of Adam Smith and the economists who have built on his work so far as the economy is concerned and then sought to contain the economy in a larger context. Government is asked to assume responsibility for those who are unable to succeed in the new, highly competitive, market. Of course, the church and individual Christians also try to contribute in this way. In addition, those who gain wealth are encouraged on a personal basis to share with others. But with respect to how the wealth is gained, except for the requirement of

honesty and obedience to the law, these Christians have had little to say. To be effective in the market, one must play by its rules and not by traditional Christian teachings. And these Christians accept the market as a socially needed institution.

Other Christians have reacted against the whole capitalist system. A system that inherently encourages individual greed and competition cannot, in their view, be affirmed. They have supported some form of democratic socialism. Socialism, as they understand it, meant that society as a whole would order its economic life for the good of all. The primary motive to which appeal would be made would be concern for the whole and cooperation with one's neighbors in the realization of the common good. The people as a whole would select the leaders of this society.

It would be difficult to find any actual experiment with thoroughgoing democratic socialism. The countries that have moved in that direction have maintained mixed economies, giving considerable space for market forces to work. Nevertheless, as an ideal it has played a large role in Europe, where the distinction between it and totalitarian Communism has been clear. The mixed economies partly expressive of democratic socialist ideals virtually abolished degrading forms of poverty and insured that the basic needs of all were met.

In the United States the distinction between democratic socialism and Russian Communism was successfully obscured, so that the former was associated with all the evils of the latter. Although many of the proposals of the American Socialist party have been enacted into law, they were accepted only in so far as they conformed to the first Christian response to capitalism, that is, governmental actions to deal with its abuses and to aid those who failed in the competition.

Any form of socialism, however democratic, employs governmental bureaucracy to operate nationalized businesses. On the whole it has turned out that this is less efficient than allowing business decisions to be shaped by competition in the market. Furthermore, the actual experience of employees of nationalized businesses is not necessarily preferable to that of employees of private business, when the government effectively regulates this. In short, it seems that most of the real gains from nationalization can be achieved by government regulations that safeguard the safety and health of workers, insure that they are taken care of when they are unemployed and when they retire, and allow them to organize to promote their own interests. The welfare state, expressive of the first Christian response listed above, has enlisted much of the support of those Christians who first called for socialism.

There are also Christians who criticize the welfare state. This state so reduces the penalties for irresponsibility and laziness, they argue, that many citizens are not motivated to make their proper contribution to the economy. The welfare state, in their opinion, does not take adequate account of human sinfulness. If we recognize that people are by nature strongly self-interested and motivated to serve the common good only by threats and promises that appeal to their self-interest, then we will avoid rewarding irresponsibility and laziness. We will limit our public care to those who are truly unable to take care of themselves.

These Christians do not suppose that true Christians share this irresponsibility. What they oppose is the naïve expectation that society as a whole can expect most of its members to be fully Christian in this respect. Also, they may hold that even Christians are not free from the effects of original sin, so that for them, too, the discipline of want, when they fail to perform their due service to society, is desirable.

The overall result of these developments has been that most American Christians today support something very much like the status quo. They want government to provide a modest safety net that does not discourage work and to regulate business in an evenhanded way for the sake of safety and the environment and to prevent discrimination based on race or gender as well as monopoly control. They want competitive market forces to operate within those limits. They want businessmen to be honest and to act according to the law. And they want those who do well to share their wealth with the church and with charities of various sorts.

This does not mean that thoughtful Christians favor consumerism, although most of us fall victim to it to some extent. We still believe that we should be content with a modest level of consumption and refuse to allow advertising to persuade us of our need for more and more. Nevertheless, as the general standard of living rises among those with whom we associate, our notion of a “modest” level of consumption rises. Most of us expect to have more space in our homes, more toilets, more electronic equipment, more varied food, better automobiles, more vacation travel, and larger wardrobes than seemed needful or desirable thirty or forty years ago. We have been changed by the consumer culture. The new levels of comfort and convenience in themselves can be affirmed as good.

In what way do we Christians, if at all, actually resist consumerism? Here we vary greatly. Some are truly frugal in their lifestyles. Others live more comfortably, but still give generously to good causes and more needful people. Many choose work according to their judgment of its value to others and satisfaction to themselves rather than according to how well it pays. Many devote time they could use to make more money (or enjoy spending) to volunteer work in the church and in the community. Many make decisions about their work with serious consideration of how they affect personal relations and other non-economic needs within the family. In short, although increasing consumption is a widespread social goal, and most Christians participate in it, Christian teaching about relative values has not altogether lost its potency.

The situation in the United States, then, is one in which Christianity still resists all-out consumerism, but only marginally. It has accepted the basic economic system of capitalism, but tries to preserve a sphere of personal life and decision-making that modifies and surrounds it. It rarely confronts the evils of consumerism head-on with much clarity or force.

### III

I have myself been still more concerned about the silence of Christianity in the face of economism. I believe this is a more fundamental force in society than consumerism. Indeed, I believe that it is society’s commitment to economism that supports and encourages consumerism.

By economism I mean the conviction that economic values are the most important and the restructuring of society to express that valuation. It is the move from a market-economy to a market-society. Economism certainly supports consumerism since it regards the increase of consumption as the supreme value. But the relation is also more complex. For the economy to function well we need not only ever-increasing consumption but also ever-increasing investment, which requires ever-increasing saving. While some people take pride and pleasure chiefly in their purchases of goods and services, others take pride and pleasure more in the size of their portfolios.

The moderate Christian response to capitalism, as described above, gives a great deal of freedom to the market within its province, but requires that it be limited and regulated by political institutions that express other values. Economism works against this. It regards the growth of the economy as the first priority and sees the role of government to be primarily the creation of the conditions most supportive of this growth.

Since World War II this fundamental shift of power between the political order and the economic order has gone a long way. Economic interests have always played an undue role in political decisions. In the past, however, government has been understood to have purposes and goals other than economic ones, and economic decisions have been supposed to serve these goals. Today the primacy of economic considerations is often unabashed.

The change is even clearer in other major social institutions than in government. One may consider education as an important example. In the nineteenth century and prior to World War II, the chief role of the public schools was to prepare people for American citizenship. Students came from many cultures, and at least those from Europe were expected to adopt a standard American culture. Since this standard culture was Protestant, Roman Catholics developed an alternative. But the purpose of those schools was even more cultural and religious than was that of the public schools.

Today arguments in favor of using public funds for education are formulated in terms of investments in human resources. The task of the schools is to prepare youth for work in the market place. Issues of citizenship are rarely mentioned. Preparing youth for a cultured life plays an even smaller role.

Higher education has changed at least as dramatically. During the earlier period it was dominated by the liberal arts college. These colleges were understood to prepare people for leadership in society. This involved cultural as well as institutional leadership, and preparation included shaping each student's moral integrity as well as personality development.

These concerns have not disappeared in liberal arts colleges, although they are muted. But these colleges now represent a small part of higher education as a whole. They are often considered to be preparation for professional schools rather than as fulfilling the goal of education in themselves. In any case, the dominant image of higher education is now the state systems of community colleges and universities. The purpose of these elaborate systems is to prepare people for particular jobs and professions and to be leaders in the world of business. A student who comes to such institutions simply seeking an education apart from any job orientation is viewed askance. The traditional liberal arts maintain a tenuous foothold partly because astute leaders in business recognize the value of breadth of historical and cultural perspective in a rapidly changing environment.

Still more dramatic is the effect of economism on the global scene. There has been a systematic and brilliantly successful effort to reorder human life on the planet so that it will all serve the market. Nations have not disappeared, but many of them now have little power to order their internal affairs. This ordering is determined by the need to make payments on debts and by the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The task of governments in this new order is to make their countries attractive for investment by transnational corporations. To do this they must provide a docile and industrious workforce

adequately prepared and ready to work for long hours at extremely low pay. They must insure that there are minimal restrictions on corporate activity for such purposes as environmental protection. And, of course, they must provide the requisite infrastructure for transportation and communication.

The new global economy puts pressure on wealthier nations to dismantle their welfare systems. These raise the cost of production so that those who produce within them have difficulty competing with those who produce elsewhere. The outflow of productive enterprises from Europe to low-cost sites has led to high unemployment there. Although European countries resist the reduction of their services to needy people, their ability to afford these services indefinitely in the context of the new global economy is in question.

The United States has taken the other route, the one dictated by economism. It never developed a full welfare state, and it is now moving in the opposite direction. It has allowed wages for less skilled work to fall and reduced both benefits and the safety net. Even so, many producers that were paying good wages here have moved to low cost countries. Other formerly well-paying positions have been abolished through computerization. Those who live from capital are doing extremely well as are those who have scarce specialized skills. The standard results of applying economic principles are to enrich the wealthy and impoverish the poor, with a diminishing middle class. This is happening in the United States.

Obviously, unlike the governments of many poor countries, that of the United States is still very powerful. It has had the power to lead the world into the new economic order. Fortunately, its efforts express some other values as well. For example, the government works to preserve the environment and protect endangered species. There is wide public support for these programs.

Opposition to some of these programs comes from those who could profit in the short term from activities that are forbidden. Economic thinkers typically support this opposition, but as long as the issues are fought out within the nation, public opinion can support policies that involve some short-term economic losses for the sake of long-term environmental gains.

However, for the sake of promoting the globalization of the economy, the United States government has led in founding institutions that can overrule decisions about these matters made within the nation. This issue focuses especially on the World Trade Organization. That organization was created for the sake of overcoming barriers to trade. In at least three instances, other countries have protested to the WTO that US legislation designed to protect the environment or endangered species is in restraint of trade. In all these cases the WTO has sided with the protesters and required the United States to give up its laws.

#### IV

I am illustrating the enormous role that economism plays in world affairs today. I think of it as the first truly successful world religion. By religion in this context I mean that which organizes the whole of life and thought around a single vision or commitment. Economism is now playing that role. Much religion is idolatrous in the sense of encouraging devotion to goals or entities that are not worthy of such devotion. Idolatry is the great enemy of Christian faith. Wealth



is a limited good whose pursuit undermines many other goods. Economism as commitment to the increase of wealth is clearly, even grossly, idolatrous.

Regrettably, Christianity as a whole has not recognized that it now faces the most powerful and successful idolatry of all time. There are several reasons for this. First, Christians of my generation, who until recently played much of the leadership role in the church, grew up understanding nationalism as the great idolatry to be combated. The reduced role of nationalism in world affairs long seemed a gain. The shift of focus from competition for power among nations to increasing the availability of goods and services desired by the world's people was something Christians should celebrate.

Second, economic issues seemed too technical to justify close attention by most Christians. Long ago, as I explained above, we acknowledged the role of market forces as something outside our purview. The elaborate disciplinary development of economics as the study of the market seemed to have turned it into an entirely autonomous science about which Christians in general could have nothing to say.

Third, Christians were experiencing wave upon wave of valid criticism for their historical roles in promoting such evils as anti-Judaism, colonialism, racism, patriarchalism, anthropocentrism, homophobia, and sexual repression. Rethinking our faith in light of these criticisms has preoccupied us. Much excellent work has been done. Some of this rethinking, especially on the issue of homosexuality, threatens to split our denominations. Questions of world trade and a new international order run by transnational corporations have seemed remote.

Recently it has been possible to direct some attention to some of the more obvious evils associated with the dominance of the new religion of economism. The rise of sweatshops everywhere has troubled the Christian conscience. The misery of people in the poorest nations saddled with unpayable debts has evoked support for the Jubilee movement. But there is still very little fundamental theological reflection about the idolatry that commands the worship of most of the world's leading politicians, technicians, financiers, industrialists, and academicians. Christians approach the evils they criticize as if they were abuses that could be corrected without changing the basic nature of the system.

This situation is unlikely to change as long as most Christians continue to believe that the basic policies that follow from economism also follow from Christian faith. Their thinking is as follows. Christians are deeply concerned about poverty. Communism tried to relieve poverty by redistributing wealth. The consequences were disastrous. The only other way to provide desperately needed goods and services to the poor is by so increasing total production that the poor can benefit along with all others. This is just the policy to which economism is devoted. Of course, as Christians we have other goals, and we should not subordinate all these to economic growth. But economic growth is of great importance, so that, on the whole, we can support the policies economism proposes. Granted, economism is an idolatry. But Christians recognize that few can altogether escape idolatry. We ally ourselves with those whose idolatry leads to actions close to those called for by our faith.

My own passion for the rejection of economism arises from my conviction that the policies to which it gives rise will never achieve the goods it promises and in fact lead to disaster in both the short and the long term. One way I have tried to show this is by demonstrating that the

economic growth at which economism aims, measured roughly by Gross National Product or Gross Domestic Product, does not improve the economic condition of real people. The activities of corporations can increase the GNP or Gross World Product while leaving human beings on the whole no better off economically. To show this, some of us developed an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (which has been further developed into a Genuine Progress Indicator) that shows that economic welfare in the United States has remained quite static as GNP has dramatically risen. It is now common knowledge that the vaunted national prosperity has not benefited the poor in this country. ISEWs have been prepared for a number of other countries with similar results. To continue policies that increase Gross World Product without benefiting those who truly need increased consumption should not receive the support of Christians.

My second argument is that even if by some measures vast growth does reduce the percentage of the world's population that is desperately poor, present policies will destroy the natural basis for our life together long before they resolve the problem of poverty. We are already living unsustainably. To devote our primary energies to increasing consumption is to speed up the impending catastrophe. Indeed, in many parts of the world, the ecological crisis has already come. The poor experience it first and most bitterly. Some forms of growth are fully compatible with sustainability. But policies designed to promote growth in general rarely favor these.

My third argument is that all these economic considerations fail to deal with the real needs of people. Poverty is a real problem in the world, but it is not possible to define it in dollar terms. There are people with extremely little income who live happy and contented lives. There are people whose income is much higher who are unable to meet the critical needs of their families. And there are, of course, very rich people who are miserable and make all about them miserable. Policies designed to improve the real quality of life of human beings will prove very different from those designed to increase production and consumption overall. Such policies may also direct us in paths that will prove sustainable.

Probably the strongest obstacle to getting a hearing for this critique of economism is the widespread sense that there is no viable alternative to the current global economy. Christians agree that it is far from ideal, but many suppose that the most we can do is ameliorate the suffering it causes. Understandably, most of the Christians who adopt this view are ones who themselves are not seriously injured by the global economy or who see prospects of adjusting successfully to it. The voices of the hundreds of millions of its victims are muted in our ears. Yet even they often hope only to moderate its impact in peripheral ways.

## V

If present directions dictated by economism are as profoundly destructive as I have argued, Christians are called to think about economics and society in much more radical, and truly theological, ways. I believe the best starting point in the tradition is Catholic thought of the late nineteenth century. The Church sought a third way to the alternatives of socialism and capitalism. It expressed this in terms of the economy serving human community. This was combined with the principle that decisions should be made at the lowest level possible so that people can participate in shaping their own lives. At that time, there was little thought of the natural environment of human life or of the value of the other creatures with which we share the world. These concerns must be added. With that addition, I believe we have the basis for a healthy and healing alternative to which

Christians could give enthusiastic support.

It should be stated in advance that this is not a utopian proposal. It is open to abuse as much as any. The claim is not that it would solve all problems but that it would provide a context in which problems have a chance of being dealt with successfully by people of good will. This is in contrast with a system that inherently generates a race to the bottom and leads toward massive ecological catastrophes while working against efforts to solve the problems it generates.

Economism supports policies that systematically destroy existing communities. This is true alike of traditional agricultural communities and of factory towns. It favors agribusiness that substitutes machinery and oil for human labor, and monoculture for the varied production of family farms. It favors the closing of factories whenever capital can be invested more profitably elsewhere.

An economics for community seeks to produce for human need as close to the consumers as possible. It calls for the development of existing peasant villages so that they can become more productive rather than their replacement by agribusiness. It favors a decentralized economy of relatively small-scale production where that is feasible. The small, relatively self-sufficient communities would be grouped into larger units within which there would be production of goods that require larger markets.

Politically the world would be organized into communities of communities. Many decisions would have to be made at the global level, but any that can be made regionally or locally should be made there. The more the economy can be decentralized to serve local and regional markets, the more political power can be decentralized to those areas. What must be avoided are markets that transcend political boundaries. The market must serve the community as that expresses its desires in government.

There is no guarantee, of course, that local communities would adopt responsible policies. We know that special interests can control local governments. On the other hand, it is usually easier for citizens to organize to express their will locally than nationally or globally. We know that majority ethnic groups can tyrannize over minorities. Often it is necessary to have civil rights protection enforced from higher levels to prevent this.

Furthermore, there is no assurance that people will take care of their local environment. Nevertheless, there is greater likelihood of this than that multinational corporations will do so. Furthermore, instead of having a global organization intent on breaking down all barriers to trade, such an organization would aim at encouraging local communities to become self-reliant in sustainable ways. Government at higher levels would restrict pollution that crossed borders and discourage unsustainable activities.

I have said that this system would not solve all problems but that it would provide a context in which efforts to solve them would be realistic. In a village or small town it is possible to organize Christians (and others who share our values) to press our concerns. We can work to reduce the excessive influence of wealth on political leaders. We can work to protect our natural environment from abuse. We can work to be sure that those who cannot meet their own needs are aided by society. We can work for fair wages and good working conditions without fear that these will make our products uncompetitive. We can work for good schools that prepare young people

to live as productive members of society capable of appreciating the finer values of our heritage. We can work for acceptance of minorities of various sorts as full members of the community. We can work to keep the real values of consumption subordinated to the many greater values that are important to community life.

I have presented my statement in purely Christian terms. In no way do I wish to claim that only Christians have the concerns that I have identified. But we have a unique history on the basis of which to think and act today. One urgent feature of that thought and action is to reach out to others to establish alliances and patterns of mutual support.

In particular, I have been impressed by how close I come as a socially engaged Christian to the views and concerns of socially engaged Buddhists. On another occasion when paired with Sulak Sivaraksa, I suggested that for Buddhists the most natural focus is on consumerism, since that is a personal distortion based on obvious illusions as to what makes for happiness. I suggested that the distinctive Christian contribution would be on the overarching system, theoretical and actual, of economism, since Christians tend to attend more to overall historical movements and changes. That may or may not prove to be the case.

In any case, any difference between us is minor in comparison with our shared commitments. I am reminded of the irony that it was a conservative Catholic who wrote an influential essay on "Buddhist Economics." There is currently a significant decline in the ability of socially engaged Christians to rally other Christians to deal responsibly with the crucial issues of the day. I rejoice that there seems to be a considerable rise in the ability of socially engaged Buddhists to give leadership. May they continue to flourish!



# Ariyavinaya in the Age of Extreme Modernism<sup>1</sup>

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Vira Somboon

*It remains to be seen whether the time of postmodernity  
will go down in history as the twilight, or the renaissance, of morality.*

Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*.

The teaching of the Buddha has been known for its two complementary components, namely, the doctrinal part and the disciplinary part. The *Tripitaka* comprises both the Buddha's teaching on truths and his enactment of personal and social practices for monks, nuns and laypersons. The former is referred to as *Dharma* (*Dhamma* in Pali) and the latter, *Vinaya*. It is thus not surprising that during its earliest period Buddhism was primarily known as the *Dharma-Vinaya* of the Buddha. The propagation of Buddhist doctrines was meant to be both the spreading of the truths discovered by the Buddha and the application of practices and disciplines established by him. The two have been, ever since then, the two sides of the same coin.

The term '*Vinaya*,' however, lost its original meaning in later periods and was reduced to rigid reference to particular codes of conduct either for monks, nuns or laypersons. In Siam, it is the Venerable Phra Dhammapitaka (Prayudh Payutto) who has time and again emphasized the importance of *Vinaya* in its broader sense and re-introduced the term '*Ariyavinaya*' to Thai-Buddhist audiences. He has also done likewise in many of his lectures given to Westerners interested in Buddhist ethics and social institutions. He warns Buddhists to take heed in meaningful applications of Buddhist practices in contemporary situations and emphasizes that, without such activities, Buddhists might be in an impasse. And the personal and social practices of *Dharma* might be considered irrelevant to their surroundings whether locally, socially or globally.

In his voluminous *magnum opus*, *Buddhadharma*, he succinctly points out the importance of *Vinaya* and its relations to Buddhism as a whole:

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<sup>1</sup> An outline of the ideas of this paper was first presented at the Ariyavinaya Preparatory meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July 2000. A more developed version was later given (in Thai) as the 6<sup>th</sup> Sem Pringpuangkaew Lecture on 29<sup>th</sup> November. The paper was then read, as a guideline for further discussions, at the Seminar on Ariyavinaya on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2001. I am highly indebted to questions, comments, criticisms, encouragement and suggestions contributed by participants on these occasions.

The Buddha taught principally about the solutions to internal problems concerning mostly with mental wisdom. The teachings in this respect are plentiful. However, in terms of the solutions to external problems, and the teachings at the level of morality, he taught only general principles related to the nature of human beings. These include, for example, the avoidance of injury and exploitation, either by deeds or words, of lives, properties and beloved things, and the cultivation of mutual help and support. The details beyond this are matters varying on other conditions in the environments of differing places and times. In these matters, people who have already known the general principles of the solutions should lay down the criteria and methods in accordance with those related conditions. They are not matters, which should be rigidly codified for human beings. There are, nonetheless, examples, which the Buddha gave in laying down the solutions to external or social problems of human beings. This is the society of the *Sangha*...which he established by himself, and the *Vinaya*, which he laid down as a system of solutions to many socially-related external problems. (This system) was set up for the specific purposes of the *Sangha* itself and for the wholesome establishment of the *Sangha* amidst local environments of that particular time. Students of Buddhism at present usually overlooks the *Vinaya*. If one understands the essence of the *Vinaya*, one will be able to see the ideas of Buddhism regarding the solutions to external problems at societal levels... Those who have understood the essences of these principles will be able to establish systems to deal with problems and situations in societies of their own times.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, he also warns Buddhists that the neglect of *Vinaya* and the failure to apply its essences and principles to changing conditions may result in two harmful consequences. The first consequence is what I would consider “passive seclusion.” The second is what I would regard as “potential limitation.” As he puts it:

If we neglect the subtle meaning of *Vinaya* and fail to put the social intentions of Buddhism inherent in the *Vinaya* into practice,...if we fail to arrange a pattern of living and practice, or a system of Buddhist living, relevant and applicable to our ages, and to propagate it along with the exposition of the contents and principles of *Dharma*, it is highly likely that Buddhism will have to face the following consequences.

The area of practice along Buddhist principles or the circles of Buddhist living will become narrowly circumscribed. And (Buddhist circles) will become simply passive without being active at all. This will make Buddhist communities withdraw themselves more and more from human societies, like people who flee to stay together in an island surrounded by water and secluded from other people.

Various environments, particularly social conditions, will be modified by other external powers and influences in the way which Buddhism has no participation in their making and control. Once these environments have been changed to the extent that they become incompatible with Buddhist practices, they will bear effects on Buddhism itself. The effects may go so far as to render Buddhist practices impossible. If it goes thus far, the situation may be regarded as (the results of) neglect and heedlessness of Buddhists themselves.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Phra Rajavaramuni (Prayudh Payutto), *Buddhadharma* (Bangkok: Khana Radom Dharma, 1982), p. 918. (In Thai)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450.



It is the application of *Vinaya* in this broader sense, which he refers to as “*Ariyavinaya*”, that would prevent Buddhists from falling into the conditions of “passive seclusion” and “potential limitation” described above. Moreover, the application of this kind would make Buddhism relevant to contemporary situations and meaningful to actual conditions of individuals and societies. My following discussion of the concept of *Ariyavinaya* stems largely from Phra Dhammapitaka’s exposition of the term, its original meaning and essential characteristics. Broader interpretations and the attempts to apply the concept to present conditions are however mine and are under my sole responsibility.

## Ariyavinaya: A Canonical Survey

To begin with, an important remark should be made on the word “*Ariya*” or “*Arya*.” The term, in my opinion, has been overemphasized in its racial aspect. This overemphasis resulted largely from historical and linguistic studies of Indic literature during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The racial aspect of the term was also highlighted in part due to a nascent atmosphere of anti-Semitism within some intellectual and cultural circles.<sup>4</sup> This misplacement of meaning became popularized and, in fact, vulgarized later on by racist ideologies in the twentieth century. It is inarguably true that the word *Ariya* or *Arya* originally referred to a race of people or, more accurately, a linguistic-cultural heritage of people who invaded the Indian sub-continent thousands of years ago and subdued the indigenous people whom they called “*Milakkha*” (in Pali) or “*Maleccha*” (in Sanskrit). By the time of the Buddha, however, the terms *Ariya* and *Milakkha* both carried with them linguistic and cultural connotations rather than racial ones. *Milakkha* was used mostly to refer to the uneducated thus ignoble ones, while *Ariya* was used mostly to refer to well-trained thus noble ones.<sup>5</sup> An evident usage of *Ariya* in this sense, even in relation to birth, was when the Buddha advised Angulimala Bhikkhu to calm down a frightened pregnant woman by telling her that “once I was born to a noble birth, I have never intended to take away life from any sentient being.”<sup>6</sup> Being born as a member of the noble ones here had obviously nothing to do with races. There are also some instances in which the two terms referred to different languages such as their usage in the *Vinaya* concerning the proper utterance of the Bhikkhu intending to renounce monkhood.<sup>7</sup> Again, the issue here involves a linguistic connotation rather than a racial one.

It is noteworthy that, in the Buddhist Canon, there are in fact only 12 places where the term *Milakkha* is used, whereas the term *Sudda* (*Sudra*), or the lowest caste, appears in 194 places.<sup>8</sup> This should tell us much about the social conditions in the Buddha’s time. During that time it is obvious that the caste system had become the dominant social structure, thus functioning as a “socially-related external force” with which Buddhist teaching and practice had to cope. The Buddha’s solution to this problem was quite radical and uncompromising. The Buddha re-defined the term *Ariya* as the quality, which would lead human beings to enlightenment and a noble life regardless of their social or caste backgrounds. The term, therefore, cut through the dominant social structure; and, with the establishment of a *Sangha* on the basis of social equality, Buddhism

<sup>4</sup> See an analysis in J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment, The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 191–3.

<sup>5</sup> See for examples, *Sutta. Di. Patikavaggo*, passage 354; *Sutta. An. (1): Eka-duka-tikanipata*, passage 205.

<sup>6</sup> *Sutta. Ma. Majjhimanipanna-sakam*, passage 531.

<sup>7</sup> *Vinaya, Mahavibhango* (1), passage 32.

<sup>8</sup> The numbers, as well as many other findings, are obtained by using the search program in the CD-ROM: *BUDSIR/TT [Buddhist Scriptures Information Retrieval / Thai Translation Version]*, (Bangkok: Mahidol University Computing Center, 1998).

provided a viable solution to both individual's internal conditions and his socially-related external impediments.

In order to grasp fully the core ideas of *Ariyavinaya*, it is helpful for us to examine some of the contexts, in which the term is used in the Pali Canon.

In numerous occasions, the term was used when a person had committed an offense against the Buddha or his disciples. These mistakes might be either in terms of opinions, words or deeds. Once the offender recognized his own fault and made an apology, the Buddha or his disciples would then accept the apology and make a concluding remark. The remark usually ended with a statement: "recognizing a mistake as a mistake, doing the right thing in return, and intending to be careful in the future, these are indeed progress along (the path of) *Ariyavinaya*." In all of these cases, the situation would also involve the teaching of relevant Buddhist understanding and practice.

For example, Nigrodha, a teacher of another religious doctrine during the Buddha's time, boasted to his disciples and lay supporters that he could ask the Buddha a question that would render the Buddha speechless. He and his disciples thus went to see the Buddha. Nigrodha then asked the Buddha about the differences between the perfect ascetic practice, which would lead to an aversion to wrong doings, and the imperfect ascetic practice. Instead of remaining speechless, the Buddha began by criticizing various ascetic practices as imperfect ones with logical explanations and exposed to Nigrodha, by means of a dialogue with him, a perfect practice which would lead to an aversion to wrong doings. Nigrodha was astounded by the Buddha's answers. He then told the Buddha about his previous intention and made an apology to the Buddha. The Buddha accepted the apology and made a concluding remark that "recognizing a mistake as a mistake, doing the right thing in return, and intending to be careful in the future, these are indeed progress along the path of *Ariyavinaya*."<sup>9</sup>

On another occasion, a nun (*Bhikkhuni*) pretended to be sick and devised a plan to make Ananda Bhikkhu come to see her. Having been along with a man to her abode to visit her as an appropriate gesture toward a fellow member of the whole *Sangha*, Ananda then realized that the illness was a pretension and was done with a seductive intention. He thus gave her a sermon on how to turn foods, the body, craving, self-attachment into the means of spiritual liberation, emphasizing in the end that a monk or a nun should firmly practice celibacy. The nun apologized to him for her wrong intention and pretension. Ananda then accepted her apology and made the same concluding remark as cited above.<sup>10</sup>

It may be seen from these examples and many others along the same line that the concept of '*Ariyavinaya*' implied the pattern or the system of Buddhist practices itself, and that the term was commonly used by the Buddha and his disciples.

Another significant usage of the term '*Ariyavinaya*' appeared in many incidents where the Buddha or his disciples gave a definition or interpretation of a keyword, an idea or a practice.

<sup>9</sup> *Sutta. Di. Patikkavaggo*, passage 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Sutta. An. (2): Catukkanipato*, passage 159. For other occurrences along the same line, see for example: *Vinaya. Mahavibhango (2)*, passage 294; *Vinaya. Mahavaggo (2)*, passage 174; *Vinaya. Cullavaggo (2)*, passage 115 and passage 369; *Sutta. Di. Silakkhandhavaggo*, passage 139; *Sutta. Ma. Majjhimanipanna*, passage 37 and passage 159; *Sutta. Ma. Uparipannasaka*, passage 695.

In these cases, the Buddha or one of his disciples or an interlocutor would begin by referring to a concept, an idea or a practice; and then its definition, interpretation and explanation “according to *Ariyavinaya*” would be given. The following are examples of the use of the term in this pattern.

Vasettha came to discuss with the Buddha and challenged him on the notion of Brahma and how to enter the stage of Brahmahood. The Buddha asked Vasettha many questions to which Vasettha, either by himself or by recalling his teachers’ words, had no concrete answers. The Buddha then provided the definition of Brahma and the path to enter Brahmahood—according to *Ariyavinaya*. Sensory pleasures via five sensory perceptions (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching) were identified as imprisonment; only those who could break through this imprisonment could enter the stage of Brahmahood.<sup>11</sup>

In a well-known discourse, *Sigalaka Sutta*, the Buddha went into the city of Rajagaha for his morning alms-round. On his way to the city he encountered Sigala, scion of a well-to-do family, wearing a wet cloth, making his hair wet, and paying homage to the six directions (the front direction, the back, the left, the right, the nadir and the zenith). This was probably a form of traditional worship performed to invoke, for protection, the spirits of gods inhabiting those directions. The Buddha asked Sigala why he was doing thus. Sigala answered that his father, when he was on his deathbed, told him to do so. The Buddha replied by saying, “according to *Ariyavinaya*, young householder, the six directions should not be worshipped this way.” Sigala, of course, went on to ask how to worship the six directions according to *Ariyavinaya*. What followed was the Buddha’s teaching on how a householder should behave in his or her domestic life and the proper behavior which he or she should maintain in his or her social relations.<sup>12</sup> The advice he had given to Sigala in this discourse became one of the cornerstones of Buddhist ethics for laypersons in many Buddhist societies. The preaching of this discourse and its propagation has continued to the present time.

The attempts of human beings to understand the nature of the world have created varying answers, systems of thought, and schemes of cosmology. During the Buddha’s time, the question concerning the nature and extent of the world was inevitably fundamental to the teachings of various schools of thought and practice. There are a number of incidents in which the Buddha was asked by his disciples or by other people about the definition of “the world.” In all these instances, the Buddha gave a definition of the world, according to *Ariyavinaya*, by referring to the five sensory perceptions and the activities of the mind and its thought. The world was thus perceived in relation to the thresholds of perception and to the mind’s inclination resulting from its attachment to the objects of sensory pleasures. With this approach, Buddhism neither confirmed nor rejected the existence of the world in an absolute way. At the same time, to understand the world in this sense also provided a lucid way for human beings to go beyond or to be freed from the world itself. This is to overcome one’s attachment to the objects of sensory pleasures. I do not want to elaborate on the details of the issue, since it may turn this paper into a discussion of metaphysics and ontology. The crucial point here is that the term *Ariyavinaya* was also used on several occasions to deal with one of the most important concepts in any system of thought and practice.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Sutta. Di. Silakkhandhavaggo*, passage 377.

<sup>12</sup> *Sutta. Di. Patikkavaggo*, passage 173.

<sup>13</sup> See *Sutta. Sam. Salayatanavaggo*, passage 101, passage 171, and passage 287; *Sutta. An. (4): sattaka-atthakanavakanipata*, passage 242.

Many of the ideas and practices, which were raised and discussed with the Buddha in light of *Ariyavinaya*, belonged to Brahmin traditions and the doctrines of contemporaneous teachers. Among these discourses were the dialogues on trances and meditative attainments, physical and mental developments, the renunciation of speech, the training of sensory faculties, the purpose of spiritual training, the practice of auspicious walking, the three highest forms of knowledge, the cleaning of demerits, and the practice of cleansing<sup>14</sup>. In all of these cases, the Buddha would clarify the concept according to the relevant school of thought and practice; in some cases, he would refute it by an analytical dialogue; and in all cases, he would re-define and elaborate on the concept from the perspective of *Ariyavinaya*. The person, who discussed the matter with the Buddha, would then see the idea or the practice in a new light.

In addition, there are some other places where the term was used to add a spiritual dimension to an ordinary word. For example, the ocean, according to *Ariyavinaya*, was compared to the dangers of sensory perceptions; the thorn was defined as beloved forms; the generous training of a horse was compared to the emphasis on wholesome deeds and heavens<sup>15</sup>. In these incidents, the Buddha linked an ordinary or day-to-day word to an aspect of the *Dharma* or the *Vinaya*, using the kind of word that would be effective for the person's particular background and behavior.

## The Cultural Dynamism of Ariyavinaya

The contexts and uses of *Ariyavinaya* as seen above show us some important respects of the concept itself. First of all, *Ariyavinaya* always involves an aspect of awakening, a capacity to view an idea or a practice in a new light. In all these instances, we clearly see how a concept or a set of practices is turned into a means for the exposition of the *Dharma*. In other words, when something is defined or explained "according to *Ariyavinaya*", it becomes a learning experience leading one towards the Four Noble Truths. In some cases it brings forth the inherent nature of suffering or anguish, while in some others it exposes the cause of suffering and the necessity to eradicate it. In some cases it sheds a new light on the purpose of an idea or a practice, while in others it establishes the way to attain such a purpose.

Secondly, the dynamism of *Ariyavinaya* is highly evident. In all these cases, we can clearly see how the teaching of *Ariyavinaya* respond to a particular context of the teaching itself. Nowhere does the teaching come as a rigid set of rules irrelevant to the situation or the need of the interlocutor. In each of these cases, we see the dynamic interplay between a keyword, an established idea, practice or institution existing in the Buddha's time on the one hand, and a re-definition, re-interpretation or re-establishment from the perspective of Buddhism on the other. This dynamism allows for creative applications of general principles. It also creates an atmosphere of open exchange and questioning, which finally leads to a new understanding and a practicable change.

<sup>14</sup> For details respectively, starting from the dialogue on trances and meditative attainments, see *Sutta. Ma. Mulapannasakam*, passage 102; *Sutta. Ma. Mulapannasakam*, passage 408; *Sutta. Ma. Majjhimapannasakam*, passage 37; *Sutta. Ma. Upalipannasaka*, passage 855; *Sutta. Sam. Nidanavaggo*, passage 304; *Sutta. Sam. Mahavaravaggo*, passage 1483; *Sutta. An. (1): Eka-duka-tikanipata*, passage 498; *Sutta. An. (5): dasaka-ekadasakanipata*, passage 119; and *Ibid.*, passage 165.

<sup>15</sup> For details see respectively: *Sutta. Sam. Salayatanavaggo*, passage 285; *Ibid.*, passage 334; and *Sutta. An. (2): Catukkanipato*, passage 111.

In this sense, I would like to regard *Ariyavinaya* as the re-definition, re-interpretation, re-formulation, and creation of ideas, guidelines or practices relevant to a specific context of time and place, leading human beings to the realization of the Four Noble Truths. *Ariyavinaya* is, therefore, Buddhists' active responses to external conditions, resulting in new approaches, new understandings, new sets of values and precepts, or establishments of communities or institutions.

Taken together as a whole, *Ariyavinaya* is exactly what Stephen Batchelor, a contemporary Buddhist, calls "the culture of awakening." It is a culture because it amounts to "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society," a definition of culture succinctly given by one of the founders of Anthropology.<sup>16</sup> *Ariyavinaya* originates from the awakening of the Buddha and his disciples and their attempts to cultivate a way of life and a system of relationship conducive to such awakening. It is, in this sense, the culture of awakening.

Like Phra Dhammapitaka Batchelor contends that "today (Buddhism) is in further danger of being reductively identified with its forms of meditation. If these trends continue, it is liable to become increasingly marginalized and lose its potential to be realized as a culture: an internally consistent set of values and practices that creatively animates all aspects of human life."<sup>17</sup> This creative and dynamic animation of aspects of human life along the path of awakening in accordance with the Four Noble Truths, I think, lies at the core of *Ariyavinaya*.

### Toward a Culture of *Ariyavinaya*

What would *Ariyavinaya* or "a culture of awakening" look like? What are the key components of creativity and dynamism of Buddhism when it is applied to external situations? I think we need a lucid guideline for such a dynamic process. This guideline needs not be a strict formulation of regulations; nevertheless it should provide some basic criteria for us to see the possibilities and limits of our application. In other words, in dealing with a myriad of changing conditions we need the criteria, which can help us in judging whether an idea or practice would enhance ourselves and others toward the realization of the Four Noble Truths. Here we will find another concept introduced by Phra Dhammapitaka very helpful. This is the notion of *Ariyavuddhi*.<sup>18</sup>

*Ariyavuddhi* literally means "noble progress," "noble development," or "noble maturity." It consists of the elements, which would make one progress in one's moral and spiritual quests. According to the Buddha's teaching, these elements are the signs reflecting the development of a person along the path of enlightenment. They are conviction (*saddha*), morality (*sila*), learning (*sutta*), generosity (*caga*), and wisdom (*panna*).

The first development or maturity is conviction. Buddhism does not require us to accept any dogma or blind faith. Nevertheless any form of moral and spiritual practice entails our

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), pp. 19 - 20. The definition was given by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> See Phra Rajavaramuni (Prayudh Payutto), *op. cit.*, pp. 408 - 24. This term is referred to in the Pali Canon as *Ariya Vaddhi*, *Panca Sampada*, and *Panca Dhana*.

conviction or confidence in its course and attainment. Conviction and confidence direct our attention to a particular end and a set of means. In Buddhism, the emphasis is on the conviction on the inherent ability of all human beings (in fact, all sentient beings) to attain the goal of enlightenment. The conviction is thus placed on our own abilities as human beings. We have confidence in the Buddha and his illustrious achievement not because he is a divine being, but because he has given us an example of the highest stage a human person may attain. We are convinced that the *Dharma* he teaches is consisted of the truths and the ways to realize them. We have confidence in it not because it is something we must put our faith in, but because it simply makes sense to us, and, having pondered upon it and practiced it, we have realized a glimpse of its final outcomes by ourselves.

The second criterion of progress is morality. The term 'morality' usually implies the moral precepts to which we have to adhere; but, in its broadest sense, morality involves a pattern of living and relationship. Buddhism posits that all conditions are interdependent. It is our pattern of living and its relationship with ourselves, our fellow human beings, our fellow sentient beings and the environment that are the main concerns. Morality in Buddhism is based on an understanding of proper conducts toward oneself and one's total surrounding. It includes an ethical ground, a social and political standpoint as well as an ecological attitude, all of which aim to set up wholesome relations between us and all living and non-living things alike. Moral precepts, whether monastic or domestic, are thus not established as commandments; they are rather conceived with a view to create and enhance such a wholesome pattern of living and relationship.

The crucial point is that this pattern of living and relationship involves external conditions of differing times and places. We are now in a world in which several conditions have tremendously changed the way human beings relate to themselves, to other people and to things surrounding them. Buddhists are at present challenged by unprecedented forms of violence, deprivation, sexual misconduct, misinformation and intoxication. How we may respond to these new conditions and find a way to set up a wholesome and meaningful pattern of living and relationship is among the most important issues relevant to a culture of *Ariyavinaya* in the contemporary world.

The third criterion of development is learning. The Pali term '*Sutta*' normally refers to 'hearing' or 'listening.' This is because the oral tradition was the main form of communication and teaching during early periods of Buddhism. With the advents of printing, mass communications, and information storage and retrieval systems in the present world, the term should encompass all forms of information and communication. It amounts to what we call 'learning' in general. This learning process includes the information we receive, the communication in which we engage, and our perception resulting from such activities. According to Buddhist criteria, a noble disciple should hear much about the *Dharma*, be able to retain what he has learnt, and have a clear (rational) understanding of his learning.

In the past, the 'hearing' of the *Dharma* and the basic understanding of its core principles were what concerned Buddhists most. They are no less important nowadays, perhaps even more so; but the means of learning may vary from the oral tradition of the past. We also have to take the effects and implications of the forms of communication into consideration. To have a face-to-face dialogue with one's teacher in a forest monastery differs greatly from watching someone preaching via the mass media in the midst of an electronic surrounding. People in the past also learned *Dharma* from beautiful poems reflecting on meditation, from paintings depicting the truths of the



natural worlds, from works of music filled with serenity and compassion, from tales of previous lives of the Buddha, from dramas on human tragedies and resolves, and so forth. How people may learn likewise through the modern media and information systems is, again, at the core of a contemporary culture of *Ariyavinaya*.

The fourth aspect of maturity is generosity. Generosity entails sharing, giving and charity. It also involves a set of values and practices with regard to wealth. In its broadest sense, it incorporates what we now regard as activities in the economic sphere. The ideas of sharing and giving are stepping stones toward higher levels of renunciation. They do not stem from an attitude of pity but from a correct understanding of one's *self* and a sense of empathy for the conditions of fellow human beings.

The practice of generosity in the contemporary world may be enlarged to include the sharing of opportunities in various spheres of human activities. It can also imply a higher sense of tolerance—an awakened willingness to respect others' convictions and commitments and to work with them for the benefit of all regardless of their backgrounds. Moreover, as we will discuss further, the ideas of sharing and giving need to be emphatically expanded so that our present ways of life may become more conducive to ecological balance and sustainability of development. Ecology implies the giving and sharing of resources among all forms of life; and sustainability implies our concerns for the well-being of the next generations and their children.

Last but not least is the fifth aspect of development, namely, the cultivation of wisdom. For Buddhists, wisdom is both the means and the end. The path to enlightenment begins with wisdom, progresses with wisdom, and ends in wisdom. It is wisdom that makes us able to be incessantly aware of the birth, development and decline of all conditions. A culture of *Ariyavinaya* would help us in understanding the causal interdependence of all things. This understanding would, in turn, help us to see the proper extents and applications of the first four criteria explained above.

Although there are many levels and dimensions of wisdom in Buddhist practices, the one which could contribute much to critical thinking in the contemporary world, I think, is the proper view of welfare or well-being. In its broader sense, the term 'welfare' refers to the goods, which all living beings expect from their lives. As for human beings, it involves what we deem worthy of our pursuits and gives the meanings to our actions. The central question is not whether life itself has a meaning or not, but rather what kinds of meanings we would like to create for our lives. In the present world, in which bigger is better, more is better, faster is better, the more convenient and speedier the better, we strongly need a clear understanding of meanings and purposes.

For Buddhism, an awakened mind should be able to see welfare in its three levels: its temporal level, its spiritual level and its ultimate level. The first level deals with our *short-term benefits* including survival, basic needs and other forms of worldly gratification. The second level deals with *long-term benefits* including the cultivation of the mind, spiritual development and finer forms of gratification. The ultimate level is the attainment of enlightenment or the fullest awakening itself. In a world, in which everything is boiled down to its lowest common sense, that is, to its bottom-line temporal level, the cultivation of this encompassing perspective of welfare is highly needed.

In terms of its dimensions, Buddhism sees welfare as a dynamic process of application

and cooperation. There are three dimensions of welfare with which we have to be concerned: the welfare of oneself, the welfare of others, and the mutual welfare of all. These dimensions of welfare, along with its three levels discussed above, do not present themselves to us in a ready-made solution. They require that we work in collaboration with others in order to achieve a well-rounded, beneficial, and fair condition.

In this sense, wisdom would not only mean a personal attainment of one's spiritual insight, but would entail an interaction with external situations and an engagement for the welfare of others. It is from this perspective of wisdom that we may see the inter-related meanings and the holistic applications of conviction, morality, learning, and generosity in the context of our contemporary circumstances.

### **The Age of Extreme Modernism**

What kind of circumstances, then, are we facing? What are the main characteristics of contemporary conditions with which a culture of *Ariyavinaya* should be able to cope? Many people suggest that we are now entering a new age, a new era, a new form of society, or a new mode of civilization. Many call it 'the age of information,' stressing on the spread of computer and communication technologies. Many consider it 'the age of globalization,' stressing on the worldwide connection of all forms of cultures and communities. Many others regard it as 'post-modern,' emphasizing the dissolution of all forms of epistemological certainty and the rampant intermixtures of seemingly contradictory beliefs and discourses.

For me, it seems too early for us to arrive at such a conclusion. I would agree with the idea that we are far from entering into either a new era or a new mode of society; we live instead in a world characterized by the intensification, radicalization and universal spread of 'modernity.' "Rather than entering a period of post-modernity," the sociologist Anthony Giddens argues, "we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before."<sup>19</sup> This condition, I think, has also reached the point where it threatens all other forms of cultures and alternatives, resulting in a circumstance almost utterly out of human control. Humanity now lives under a self-imposed condition in which its degree and scope of power has far exceeded its ability to comprehend and handle the consequences.

I would like to call this condition "extreme modernism." It is extreme in the sense that modernity now relies simply on its own justification and devours all other forms of actualization of human beings. Modernity claims itself to be void of ultimate values, particularly the kind of values related to certain religions and traditions, yet the claim itself is based, as we shall further discuss, on a set of pre-determined justification. The justification of modernity, in its extreme form, demands nothing less than our total neglect of other forms of aspiration and realization. Extreme modernism posits that modernity, as hitherto the most developed form of human living along a single straight line of human evolution, is the only direction where the world is, and must be, heading. Anything short of its total acceptance amounts to nothing but nostalgia, which, in exemplary words of an economist, is "pissing into the wind."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 513.

Modernity is itself a doubled-edged sword with its benefits and shortcomings. It has brought with it opportunities and constraints. The expansion of modernity has undoubtedly constituted much of the world's history during the past couple of centuries. But to view modernity as a single, continuous and coherent set of developments, I think, is mistaken. Therefore, we do not need a total standpoint on this matter. What we need is rather a fuller understanding of its diversified elements and aspects as well as their processes and consequences. And from a Buddhist point of view, we may then ask ourselves whether or to what extent those elements and aspects are conducive to a Buddhist set of priorities or notion of welfare. How could we turn aspects of modernity into a culture of *Ariyavinaya*? Or, for that matter, how *Ariyavinaya* could provide, for Buddhists themselves at least, a succinct evaluation of key aspects of the situation and a viable solution to the present threat of extreme modernism?

What are the key aspects of modernity and their characteristics in this age of extreme modernism? What would be Buddhist understandings of these aspects, leading finally to a set of interrelated ideas and practices or a culture of *Ariyavinaya* relevant to present situations? To fully address these two questions requires tremendous efforts I could not hope to undertake in this paper. The followings are some of the issues, which, I think, may contribute to further discussion and formulation in details.

Modernity as a whole is the outcome of its underlying aspects. To understand and deal with it we need to see the bases, structures and processes of these aspects as well as how they relate to one another. In order to find a way toward a culture of *Ariyavinaya* in the present world, it is necessary that we develop corresponding perspectives, from Buddhist points of view, to comprehend, evaluate and handle their consequences on human welfare (and living beings). We also need to take into account ideas and actions developed by others in their attempts to tackle with the effects of extreme modernism.

These underlying aspects include:

1. Science;
2. Industrial technology;
3. Capitalism;
4. State power;
5. Nuclear-age conflicts;
6. Mass info-communications systems;
7. Education; and
8. The status and roles of women.

Let us deal with these aspects respectively.

## Science

What exactly is science? This supposedly simple question seems to puzzle people from top circles of theoretical scientists, philosophers and historians down to technical practitioners and laity who consider themselves men and women of science alike. Recently an association of scientists and academicians from all over the world gathered to put down in a paper an accurate and agreeable definition of science. They ended up with an almost 300-page paper filled with

inconclusive discussions and pending conclusions. In order to finish the task for the association, a smaller group of people tried to summarize and reduce the extent of the debates. They then came up with an acceptable thirty-page version.

This incident is another one pointing to the complication of the matter. Here it suffices for us to recognize the difficulties involved in the attempt to arrive at a clear-cut definition of science. What concerns us more, I think, is the value and worldview inherent in scientific assumptions and endeavors. It is what is generally called 'scientism' or the idea, amounting very close to a form of belief, that science itself can provide answers to life, existence and the cosmos. And if the findings of science, at least in its current development, show no clue or proof of any purpose or meaning beyond the discoveries of the physical and chemical relationship of known entities, then we may as well do away with the very ideas of purpose and meaning altogether.

All forms of religions and traditional beliefs entering into the modern world have to confront with this scientific worldview, which Albert Einstein lucidly described in the following remark.

I cannot conceive of a god who rewards and punishes his creatures or has a will of the kind that we experience in ourselves. Neither can I nor would I want to conceive of an individual that survives his physical death; let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egotism, cherish such thoughts. I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the Reason that manifests itself in nature.<sup>21</sup>

It is indeed untrue that science does not deal with the questions of value. To hold a position, like Bertrand Russell, that "whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know,"<sup>22</sup> is inherently a choice of value, or, perhaps, an act of faith. A (one-sided) believer of science simply choose to place his conviction on certain methods, techniques, bodies of knowledge, and communities of practitioners, while disregarding all others. Therefore, even though much of Buddhism may not be in explicit antagonism with science, as many Buddhists believe to be so, the choice of scientific conviction implies a tacit exclusion of some of the crucial means of attaining knowledge commonly held by Buddhists.

Science, like Buddhism, relies on experiment and proof. But the extent of things one could consider reliable and could take as acceptable forms of experiment and proof differ greatly. Science depends on and even demands evidence accountable only to sensory perceptions. Buddhism, on the contrary, transcends the limitation of sensory perceptions and depends on an inner proof developed through the training of the mind in order to be free from them. With the exception of the ideas generated by some physicists of the last century, scientists in general separate the knower from the known. Buddhist paths to enlightenment, on the other hand, emphasize the interplay of the two entities.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Carl Sagan, *Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death at the Brink of the Millennium* (London: Headline, 1997), pp. 225-6.

<sup>22</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 243.

There are also many other aspects of science, which are inherently incompatible with Buddhist teaching, such as a strong emphasis on mathematics to the point of admitting nothing but measurable units, the total separation of mind and matter, and the claim to be value-free in all of its endeavors. Of course, many scientists at present, particularly those who deal with cognitive sciences, have discarded many of these assumptions, and, in so doing, have displayed strong interests in comparable Buddhist doctrines. But their arguments and orientations may be considered marginal when compared to the mainstream of contemporary science.

The reason why I have pointed out these differences is not because I want to antagonize Buddhism against science. Undoubtedly there are many significant similarities between scientific quest and Buddhist practice such as the emphasis on rational thought and experience, an aversion to superstitions particularly de-humanizing ones, and the notion of non-personified laws of nature. Yet we have to recognize their major differences in order to be able to generate a meaningful understanding and, if need be, a dialogue and exchange.

Buddhism and *Ariyavinaya* were conceived in environments where spirits inhabit mountains, rivers, trees and stones. The culture of awakening was closely tied to a belief in an afterlife and rebirth. But how could an *Ariyavinaya* be formulated on the basis of a worldview, which holds that nothing but endless and purposeless interactions of purely physical units, be it at the microscopic or macrocosmic level, constitute the total reality of the world, and that consciousness is no more than an evolutionary outcome of chemical reactions in the brain? This worldview itself, along with many related ideas, also represent a set of criteria for conviction, morality, learning, relationship and welfare differing in many ways from Buddhist perspectives. In order to suggest an idea of human development in Buddhist terms, we cannot ignore these underlying differences. Moreover, they would, in turn, bring us to the encounters of many considerations on the values of scientific preoccupations themselves.

Take for example, genetic engineering. Science has now reached a stage where (some) human beings are able to encroach upon the most basic substances and structures of life. This new passage of science, as it is generally claimed, can open new ways for us to cure sickness and to provide more supplies of foods for all. In its more daring, sci-fi like version, it will even make us capable of designing preferable traits of our offspring. What would a Buddhist standpoint be in response to the following question posed by a scientist to His Holiness the Dalai Lama at a conference on "mind science?"

If, at some future time when our ignorance is not so great, you could make by genetic engineering, with proteins and amino acids, or by engineering with chips and copper wires, an organism that had all of our good qualities and none of our bad ones, would you do it? Would this not be an interesting form of incarnation?<sup>23</sup>

To me, a Buddhist standpoint on science needs not be one of total affirmation or total negation. As a system of thought based on the rational capacity of the human mind to comprehend the laws of nature and their implications for human practice, Buddhism undoubtedly agrees with the basic approaches and methodologies of science. As a spiritual tradition, however, a Buddhist standpoint would emphasize the dimensions of human actualization unrecognized by science, at least as the latter is generally understood and practiced nowadays. In terms of many of the scientific

<sup>23</sup> See H. H. the Dalai Lama, et. al., *Mind Science: An East – West Dialogue* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), p. 35.

quests dealing with the origins of life and the universe, a Buddhist standpoint would maintain its central doctrine of dependent co-origination. It would simultaneously contend that, with regard to the attempt of human beings to be freed from suffering, an absolute answer to such questions is nonetheless dispensable.

As for the underlying value-laden premises of science and the actual and possible outcomes of scientific endeavors, we may rely on *Ariyavuddhi* or the five criteria of development discussed above. This would, however, entail concerted efforts among Buddhists to come up with a guideline for an orientation toward present aspects of science. I suggest that an appropriate orientation toward science would be one which could help us see the light on these crucial questions:

- How can we maintain a conviction in the spiritual potentials of human beings in the midst of scientism as seen above? Can we develop an alternative view on the basis of science itself to confirm the significance of spiritual attainment?
- What kind of morality do science and scientism imply? Is it compatible with Buddhist principles of morality? Can a culture of *Ariyavinaya* be established so as to contribute to a morality related specifically to scientific development?
- Can scientific learning be related to spiritual goals? Can there be a well-balanced kind of learning in which the searches for truths, both in their material and mental aspects, are properly designated?

How would an attitude of tolerance and sharing be realized in the present world in which science has become an indispensable and major source of knowledge and power? How would the quest for knowledge be linked with the virtues of generosity and sharing (among human beings and other living beings)?

What is wisdom? What is the position of science within a gradual scheme of human wisdom? How can we make scientific enterprises become beneficial to all levels and scopes of human welfare?

## **Industrial Technology**

Buddhism was born and developed in agricultural societies. The creations and spreads of *Ariyavinaya* in the past corresponded to ways of living close to the cultivation of land and natural surroundings. Behind these ways of living was the idea of nature as an unending cyclical process. Livelihood depended on the ability of human beings to adjust themselves to natural cycles. Man was regarded as a small part of a larger natural scheme.

Modernity came with industrial technology. The advent of industry relied on centralized sources of power (energy), large-scale manipulation of natural resources and mass production. This did not require only a change in the ways human beings deal with their surroundings but also a change in the ways they view themselves in relation to nature. Industrial technology is not simply a set of tools; it is a mindset, a set of views toward life, nature and prosperity. "Like all great changes," thus argues Lewis Mumford, "the introduction of the machine was essentially a change

of mind, and it no more depended upon any single invention, like the steam-engine, than it depended upon any special industry.”<sup>24</sup>

This “change of mind” was characterized by a strong dividing line between human beings and “the other” in natural surroundings. We are humans; and the rest is there for us to utilize for our needs and wants. Developments and adoptions of industrial technology rely on a view, which turns everything into a “resource”—to be manipulated with the fastest pace of efficiency. At present, even human beings themselves are termed “human resources” and invariably regarded as instruments for more efficient industrial outputs.

The impacts of industrial technology on human beings, societies and environments need no elaboration in this paper. More and more people are now well aware of problems and crises resulting from myopic pursuits of industrial efficiency. These include, among other things, the depletion of non-renewable natural resources, the effects and limits of fossil-fuel utilization, the danger of nuclear power plants, the ecological imbalance at the global scale, the reduction of bio-diversity, and ever-increasing forms and amounts of waste and pollution.

The present situation also raises a serious question about sustainability—the problem of how future generations will be able to cope with the outcomes caused by on-going industrial production, consumption and waste. It is evident that the present rate of industrial expansion and growth throughout the globe cannot be sustained by ecosystems. Under these deteriorating ecological circumstances, even the next generation may find it hard to realize many of their basic needs.

Obviously to confront with industrial technology, we cannot and do not have to hark back to “the good old days.” If industrial technology has relied much on a set of views, which may be called “industrialism,” we may as well begin with a “change of mind,” which understands the intricate interrelationship between human beings and ecosystems, and attempt at an innovation for the situations and problems of the present. This will result in a new approach to more appropriate forms of production, consumption, energy use and waste reduction.

The idea of sustainability is central to Buddhist thoughts throughout the ages. Compassion, in Buddhism, reflects the concerns for other human beings, including our future humankind, and other forms of sentient beings. Yet how would we combine wisdom, compassion, and an awakened sense of welfare for all with present ecological ideas and practices? What would be an Ariyavinaya for our livelihood under the pressure of industrialism and its effects?

Viewed from the perspective of Buddhist maturity, the ideas and practices of such a pattern of livelihood should include the following issues:

- We must put our conviction on human beings and their abilities instead of on any technical solution;
- We should devise a set of views, ideas and practices which may enhance a well-balanced relationship between human livelihoods and ecosystems at different levels;

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<sup>24</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922-1972* (New York: Harvest / HBJ, 1979), p. 227.



- An awareness, understanding and knowledge of ecology, in other words, an “ecological literacy” is to be considered an essential part of today’s awakened minds;<sup>25</sup>
- Sustainability is inseparable from generosity; and a system of production and living conducive to sustainability should be sought after as a crucial foundation of *Ariyanaya*; and
- We are highly in need of a relevant understanding of welfare, which could help us go beyond industrialism and its outcomes.

## Capitalism

Buddhist teachings emphasize simplicity. A simple living coupled with an attitude of contentment is highly recommended for practitioners, particularly devoted mendicants. It is, however, significant to note that Buddhism does not unconditionally reject wealth itself. Even during the Buddha’s time, many wealthy persons were extolled for their fair earnings and wholesome uses of wealth. And monks, who received a substantial amount of material supports such as Sivali Bhikkhu were also mentioned with the admiration that their gains and practices of sharing would be beneficial to all.

In terms of wealth, the matters depend on how wealth is gained, on how it is used, on how it is saved or maintained, and on one’s attitude toward one’s own wealth. To be contented does not mean to leave one’s economic life according to unpredictable fortune. Contentment has to do with the results of one’s efforts but has nothing to do with the efforts one put into the maintenance and development of one’s livelihood. Right Livelihood, one component of the eightfold *Ariya* path, implies a wholesome pattern of creation and distribution of wealth. This pattern involves the personal, and the social, as well as the spiritual dimensions of economic activities.<sup>26</sup>

The present world is almost totally dominated by a particular pattern of creation and distribution of wealth, namely, Capitalism. Moreover, it seems to become a common belief nowadays that no other economic system can be devised to rival the ever-expanding globalization of capitalism. With the collapse of the state-controlled economy of the Soviet type, various societies in the world seem to be left with only two choices: either to adopt a full-scale globalization scheme or to be ruthlessly crushed by irresistible forces of capital.

Capitalism proceeds on a threefold process of economic takeover. First, the use of money as a medium no longer functions simply as a choice in social valuation; money becomes, more and more, the sole criterion for value judgment, thus transforming all kinds of values into a monetary value. Second, all forms of relations and transactions are turned into market relations, that is, the relations of commodities. Third, money and the market then reap all forms of values and

<sup>25</sup> On “ecoliteracy” see, Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 289-295.

<sup>26</sup> For a full discussion of Buddhist teachings on wealth see, Phra Rajavaramuni (presently Phra Dhammapitaka, Prayudh Payutto), *Social Dimensions of Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University, 1981). It was published later as “Attitudes towards Wealth and Poverty in Theravada Buddhism” in *CSWR Studies in World Religions*, Harvard University, 1985, and also translated into Thai by Vira Somboon, published by Komol Keemthong Foundation, 1985 and 1990.

accumulate them into its original form—capital. The process then repeats itself in a cumulative and upward spiral, expanding into other social spheres and other societies as well as creating new means and methods for its further expansion.

In other words, things become ‘commoditized’, human relations become market relations, the quality of life becomes utility measured in price terms, and development becomes synonymous with the accumulation of wealth in the forms of money earned through market transactions. Under this extreme process of capitalism, money becomes *the* medium of everything and every form of relationship—the sole criterion for the setting of value on anything. No one has put it better than Karl Marx:

By possessing the *property* of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, money is thus the *object* of eminent possession. The universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being. It therefore functions as the almighty being. Money is the *pimp* between man’s need and the object, between his life and his means of life. But that which mediates *my* life for *me*, also mediates the existence of other people for me. For me it is the *other* person.<sup>27</sup>

While capital and the market progress in an upward spiral movement, we—human beings—as David Korten puts it, “become entrapped in a downward spiral of increasing alienation from living, from our own spiritual nature.”<sup>28</sup> The expansion of priced utility values and the market not only incorporates human beings into an integral part of its operation but also turns the fulfillment of human endeavors into purchasable products. This has resulted in a consumer society and an attitude of consumerism. Obviously, the market has existed ever since human beings began to trade their surplus productions; but the pursuit of human happiness on the sole basis of money and purchase is a recent phenomenon, totally different from market situations of the past. Consumerism implies the idea and practice, which equate human pleasure and happiness with purchasing power. It amounts to an ideology, which equates the life of buying, having, and owning things with the good life.

The ever-increasing concentration of capital and wealth also causes a wider and wider gap between the rich and the poor. Less than 400 billionaires enjoy a combined net worth equal to the net worth of the poorest 2.5 billion of the world’s people.<sup>29</sup> Many gigantic multinational corporations possess more wealth and incomes than most countries in the world. What is meant by a global free trade is rather the freedom of multinational corporations to march in and deal death blows to local competitions. This alarming process of capitalistic self-aggrandizement may be seen as a latest form of economic attack to be followed sooner or later by various versions of “structural violence” in the name of free markets.

As we have seen, Buddhism does not reject wealth per se. But in order for a culture of *Ariyavinaya* to be relevant and meaningful, it must challenge this extreme form of capitalism and provide a viable guideline for Right Livelihood in the present world. On the other hand, it has always been said that Buddhist practices prefer an economy oriented toward socialism. Obviously the kind of socialism, which operates under a strong state monopoly, is not a preferable choice. Yet,

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, “Economic and philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 102. Original emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1995), p. 266.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 83.

from a Buddhist perspective, we are in need of alternative economic systems, which can incorporate both competition and cooperation in a balanced way. Here are some of the considerations along the framework of *Ariya-Vuddhi*.

- Buddhists should stand firm against the ideology of consumerism and provide an awakening critique of the total submission of human values to money and market forces.
- What are the ramifications of the present trend of capitalism when it is seen from the perspectives of the five precepts? The deprivation of people's capabilities to lead a minimally self-sufficient living should be seen as a form of violence and harm. Should inequitable acquirement and allocation of wealth be considered an offense against the second precept regarding stealing? How can we re-interpret basic precepts to deal with present economic situations? What are characteristics of good work under circumstances of existing economic systems?
- A *Vinaya* for monks with regard to the use of money is well established by the Buddha. It is, in many senses, hard to practice nowadays. But the form of accumulation has been diversified, and the involvement of monastic lives with money and the market has become a common practice in various places. How are we to deal with this situation? Should monks have savings bank accounts? For how much? Should monks carry credit cards?
- The ideas of generosity and sharing are crucial to wholesome relationships among human beings. What do they mean in the present situation, in which absolute poverty of billions of people exists alongside strong concentrations of wealth in the hands of hundreds? What should a Buddhist do to alleviate this trend? What would be the principles of Buddhist economics, which can take into account the problems and prospects of globalization? How can compassion, generosity and sharing be effective in the present world of extreme competition and acquisition?
- The world is in need of a kind of wisdom, which can make people differentiate and realize their aspirations and happiness without having to succumb to the blind force of consumerism. What would be an appropriate attitude toward a world flooded with objects of desires and promises of material enjoyment? How can economic welfare be linked with other levels of human welfare?

## State Power

Buddhist teachings provided a number of *Ariyavinaya* for different kinds of politics and political regimes in the past. In *Agganna Sutra*, the Buddha's explanation concerning the origins of private property, politics and ruling power was probably the first account of politics on the basis of what has later come to be known as 'social contract' theory. In *Cakkavatti Sutra*, the description of wholesome, generous and wise governance of "world rulers" became the foundation for the codes of conduct of Buddhist kings in various Asian societies. In *Vajji Sutra*, the Buddha explained and gave recommendations on the principles for pluralistic government, contemporarily characterized by *Licchavi* rulers. His teaching for this nascent form of "demo-

cracy” also corresponded in its essence to the principles he laid down for the governance of the *Sangha*. Moreover, Buddhist societies have looked to the *Vinaya Pitaka* as a major source for the establishment of government and legal systems, adopting the process of consideration, judgement and law enactment practiced by the Buddha and the *Sangha* of his time.

Yet there is a crucial distinction to be made between traditional and modern politics. Power in the past relied mostly on persons or groups of persons. The state and the exercise of its power significantly depended on personalities and individual morals. The solutions to good governance thus were founded mostly upon regulations, prescriptions and recommendations for personal behaviors. The scope and extent of state power were also generally limited due to physical or geographical barriers and means of communication and control. As a consequence, the sphere of state control and sanction existed among and alongside other forms of social relationship and domination. Even when and where the state had attempted to exert its control over the rest of social spheres, it could do so only to a certain extent and could rarely maintain the situation for long.

Modern states, on the contrary, possess the capability to transgress all other forms of human relations, replacing other types of leadership, identity sharing, social coordination, and conflict resolution. The structure of the state, thanks to industrial technology, has enlarged in both its scope and extent to become a large technical and bureaucratic entity engulfing an abstract collection of individuals void of community bases. Its power to centralize has also increased manifold. The structure itself has thus evolved into a system in its own rights with its own moral justification. Personal decisions and behaviors become secondary to the end and process of the structure, which seems to possess a self-sustaining life of its own.

There have been a variety of moral justifications of the state; but the most prevalent one at present is an economic one focusing on allocation of resources. “Who gets what, when, where, and how” to put it in its well-known maxim concocted by Harold Laswell. This approach undoubtedly reflects the political aspect of the emphasis on materialistic values. Public life is seen for the most part as the contention for material ownership and gain. The state becomes an apparatus of power for the ownership, allocation and use of resources. The task of the state is mainly to mobilize all sectors within a society for the highest output of resource manipulation to be measured by the growth of GNP. A ‘nation’ and its ‘gross products’ become two sides of the same coin.

Politics and public life can be based on a set of diversified aims and means. Despite freedom of expression, guarantees of basic rights, and other liberal institutions, the reduction of the public sphere into instruments for narrow and short-term economic ends, and the total replacement of other forms of social coordination with a centralized state apparatus, are by themselves obstacles to political freedom. The so-called “national agenda,” i.e., the range of topics deemed crucial for citizen’s attention, under this regime, is biased from the very beginning; and the processes of publicity, discussion and decision-making are severed from other sources of social goods. It would not be surprising then that other dimensions of human beings would be increasingly restricted and confined to the private sphere. In other words, “the public sphere” in the forms of political institutions has been reduced to a stage for the shows and promise of economic performance. Other concerns and values, if not suppressed or marginalized, would need to be communicated in the forms of outrageous expression and protest.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For the concept of public sphere, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Thomas Burger trans. (Polity Press, 1989), p. 181 ff.

Having said all this, it should be clear that I do not suggest a total fusion of political and spiritual life. Particularly in the present world, a religion would fare better by drawing a clear-cut line between state power and ecclesiastical structure, between power struggle and doctrinal teaching. However, this does not mean that people or communities with certain spiritual inclinations should be totally separate from public life. In fact, politics and government nowadays need contributions in terms of ethical, moral and spiritual discussion more than ever before. And although some basic principles and precepts should be held as firmly as possible, Buddhists' suggestions, criticisms, and solutions in terms of politics and government need not be clear-cut or conclusive.

As we may see in the Sutras mentioned above, the Buddha was highly analytical and careful in his suggestions on politics and governance in various settings. His teachings were evidently based on insights on the nature of human beings as it is related to their social contexts. In order to formulate an *Ariyavinaya* under present political circumstances we need to do likewise. The attempt to develop or maintain a strong civil society, capable of fostering a set of common values and providing an alternative space for public life is, to me, a necessary ingredient and an appropriate starting point. Civil society, in the context of present-day political circumstances, "has the hallmark of a truly successful political ideal inasmuch as it is taken up as a common idea by peoples and institutions with very different cultures, needs and aims."<sup>31</sup> I would also like to suggest that such a political coordination could be a crucial part of "socially-engaged" Buddhist communities (*parisad*) existing in a pluralistic political setting and functioning as a joint effort to reduce social ills and increase common peace. In details, here are some of the considerations.

- Politics presupposes a set of common beliefs and valuations. To what extent should people put their faith in the state, its ideology and bureaucracy? What should a Buddhist do when political demands come into conflict with his conviction? What should be a contemporary attitude of Buddhists toward traditional justification of power using concepts such as merit accumulation in past lives or reincarnations of divine beings?
- The state often demands that citizens put aside their religious precepts in favor of its security or prosperity; are these demands legitimate? What is the Buddhist position on the ideas and practices of civil disobedience? Can the use of violence be legitimized under any circumstance?
- Can and should the state or government be used to propagate religion? To what extent? An aspect of generosity and compassion is tolerance. Would Buddhists support any form of religious persecution? How far should Buddhists tolerate the interpretations of their principles and scriptures as well as the adaptation and change of their practices, rituals and traditions?
- Should politics serve spiritual ends at all? To what extent and in what way can we turn politics and governance into a means of moral and spiritual development? What is "Buddhist Politics"?

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Pusey, "Economic Rationalism, Human Rights, and Civil Society," in Melinda Jones and Peter Kriesler, eds., *Globalisation, Human Rights and Civil Society* (St Leonards, Australia: Prospect Media, 1998), p. 187.

## Nuclear-Age Conflicts

It is unrealistic and naïve to ignore the prospect of a nuclear war, be it a limited or a full-scale one. With approximately 70,000 nuclear warheads around the globe, and an increasing number of nations aspiring to become superpowers equipped with nuclear weapons, the threat of annihilation and catastrophe is far from being over. The problem is currently concealed under the guises and excitements of regional unification, globalization, world trade negotiation and the new information economy. The world has not yet entered a new world order; it is rather in an extension period of U.S. hegemony operating through new stages and frontiers of international relations, particularly in global information economy developments. The situation is rather paradoxical: while a world order seems to be expanding and pervasive, it also creates a “disaggregating” tendency.<sup>32</sup> One may wonder how long it will take for this global situation to reach its breaking point. What will happen then?

This should remind us of the story of King Asoka, whose empire expansion caused at one time the death of more than 200,000 people in the state of Kalinga. It was this incident which prompted him to turn to “*Dharmavijaya*” or victory based on the Buddhist principles of peaceful coexistence and relationship. Although these principles, including nonviolence, compassion and skillful dialogue have rarely been prominent in the relationships of Buddhist states, it is high time that such principles be reinterpreted and elaborated on for the present world. Buddhists will contribute much to the world by following the standpoint of His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences and clashes of interests, whether between individuals or nations, is through dialogue. The promotion of a culture of dialogue and nonviolence for the future of mankind is thus an important task of the international community. It is not enough for governments to endorse the principle of nonviolence or hold it high without any appropriate action to promote it.<sup>33</sup>

In order to develop such an *Ariyavinaya* or “culture of dialogue and nonviolence,” the following points should be included.

- Buddhists should not discard their hopes on nonviolence and peace, no matter how difficult their realizations may be. Of course, to adopt these principles, one needs not be naïve or impractical; but it is a totally different thing to lose faith in them and become a supporter of the doctrine of the rightness of might.
- Patterns of relationship, conflict resolution skills and nonviolent methods as well as training schemes, based on Buddhist ideas and practices, should be further developed.
- A reorientation of the studies and understandings of human history is highly needed. It seems that we have learned too little about experiences and lessons of peaceful coexistence and nonviolence.

<sup>32</sup> Edward A. Comor, “Governance and the Nation-State in a Knowledge-Based Political Economy,” in Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair, eds., *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 117-136.

<sup>33</sup> H. H. the Dalai Lama, “The True Source of Political Success,” in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambala, 2000), p. 169.

- Buddhists must promote the “dialogue of civilizations” and take a stand against the “clash of civilizations.” Human beings are fellow bearers of sufferings alike.
- Buddhist wisdom concerning the interdependent welfare of all is highly relevant to the present interdependent world of nations. How can we develop it into a vision and a practical guideline for dialogue between nations and cultures?

## Information and Mass Communications

No single technology has ever affected the human mind as pervasively and substantially as electronic technology. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the radio brought with it the capacity of political personalities to mobilize masses of people, telling them the “truths” of economic depression and urging them to endure hardship and march into war. From the early 1950s on, the television has become an indispensable part of the lives and homes of people around the world, shaping their perceptions of events, news, dramas and cultures in an unprecedented way. And with the advent of the personal computer during the early 1980s, the capability of human beings to retain and process information has been enhanced manifold both in terms of quantity and speed. The Internet then highlights the achievement of electronic media with its capacity to connect and transmit sources of information worldwide within seconds. We do not have to wait for long to see the developments and combinations of all forms of info-communications technology into more powerful media.

A medium is nothing but an extension of human sensory perception. While it extends our capability of reception, interpretation, retention, creation and recreation of “information” in various forms, it simultaneously shapes our inclination and state of mind. “The medium is the message,” as a philosopher of the media succinctly puts it; “the personal and social consequences of any medium... result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves.”<sup>34</sup> In this sense, information and communications technology should be seen as instruments which “introduce new scales” of sensory perception into our minds by means of their extensions of our “selves.” Simply imagine the sensory contacts occurring while watching a television variety show to be followed immediately by commercials and news of wars and famine. The scale of contacts, feelings, emotions, desires, reminiscences, attachments leading finally to different mental states is almost unthinkable.

The focus of Buddhist teaching is the human mind. Developments of Buddhist cultures have grown, in substantial parts, out of the attempt to turn existing media (writing, symbols, paintings, sculptures, chanting, songs, dramas, etc.) into means of mental and spiritual growth. From a Buddhist perspective, it is obvious that info-communications technology and various forms of electronic media exert direct and deep impacts on people’s minds. These impacts have rarely been studied and understood. In the past, precepts and admonitions concerning singing, drama and dancing were clearly established for monks and serious practitioners. At present, we are still in need of Buddhist considerations and guidelines for wise uses of new forms of media; an *Ariyavinaya* with regard to mass info-communications, so to speak.

One of the most powerful trends of media technology is entertainment. In the United

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<sup>34</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 7.



States, entertainment now “ranks ahead of clothing and health care as a percentage of household spending,” and expenditure on entertainment amounts to four times higher than the rate of savings. The United Kingdom now employs more workers in entertainment than it ever did in its coal industry at the height of its empire.<sup>35</sup> Entertainment is no longer what occurs in a special occasion; it is now a necessary part of everyday life, permeating all kinds of activities resulting in oxymora such as ‘infotainment,’ ‘edutainment,’ and others. While the media can be useful in various senses, their uses for the sole purpose of entertainment can be detrimental to formations and habits of the audiences.

As we have seen, wholesome “learning” or “hearing” form an important component of maturity, it is highly crucial that a culture of awakening be developed with relevance to information and communications technology. Here are some of the points, which need to be addressed.

- In what way should Buddhist monks and nuns deal with radio, television, the Internet, etc.? What would be an appropriate precept or guideline?
- To what extent can mass communications media be used as means for propagation and teaching of Buddhism? How can they be accomplished? What would be the appropriate sorts of ownership, production and broadcast organization?
- Should Buddhists abstain from listening to or watching certain kinds of programs or web sites? Or perhaps they should abstain from these media altogether for a certain amount of time? What is moderation in terms of media use?
- Would a devout Buddhist support censorship of any kind? How would Buddhists react to the abuse of media in various forms?
- What is a Buddhist psychology in relation to mental states caused by forms of media, their contents, and the extreme tendency toward entertainment?

## Education

Buddhism is indeed a religion of education in its broadest sense. For centuries, Buddhists have played major educating roles in various Asian societies, ranging from literacy training, transmission of traditions, preparation for certain occupations, to cultivation of behaviors and characters. Monasteries have long functioned as institutions for learning, teaching, study and research; and religious practices have been devised and applied to enhance people in their intellectual and moral developments.

The rise of modernity has brought with it modern educational institutions, particularly schooling and compulsory education. It may as well be said that, without its forms of secularized education, modernity could not have accomplished its present-day dominating position. And extreme modernism is the direct result of the expansion of modern education in ways, which totally sever people, particularly the young, from surrounding traditions, local cultures and other

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<sup>35</sup> These figures are from Michael J. Wolf, *The Entertainment Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

sources of learning experiences. With very few exceptions, schooling and compulsory education on the whole tend to operate as indoctrinating institutions by turning all spheres of learning into preparation for extreme modernism. Children and young people are less and less exposed to spiritual faiths and mental development; their hopes and aspirations are shaped to fit in with only material successes; and their learning is overly geared toward technical accomplishment and narrow specialization.

The problems of present-day education should also be examined under a wider context of social and cultural conditions surrounding our youths. Most of us, who grew up during the time when modernization had been slow and limited, were lucky enough to be raised in a family with strong parenthood and ties of relatives, and to have the opportunities to experience a sense of community and neighborhood. We were less bombarded and threatened by commercialized cultures, drug abuse, sexual misconduct, harmful religious cults, and other types of social dangers. But the young in today's world are facing a very detrimental situation. Familial and social ties are also breaking down, turning more and more of them into isolated individuals vulnerable to increasingly subtle, pervasive, and ever-advancing forms of allurements leading in the end to insatiability, violence and ignorance.

Our societies thus need well-rounded schemes of education, which can lay down wholesome grounds of development for people, particularly children and youth, in order for them to be capable of dealing with aspects of extreme modernism and its social outcomes. From a Buddhist perspective, education should awaken people's minds and help them attain higher stages of maturity. Some of the issues concerning an education towards *Ariyavinaya* are as follows.

What would be a balanced mental attitude, which can incorporate curiosity, skepticism, free thinking, conviction and trust? What would be an appropriate method to cultivate such an attitude?

How can education combine ethical and moral traditions with the abilities to analyze social situations and, in certain cases, to readjust old precepts or, in some other cases, to devise means for social change?

- What would constitute the basic learning of the Dharma? What should be appropriate approaches and methods for such learning?
- How can generosity, tolerance and compassion be taught and cultivated in modern educational settings?
- Is the teaching of Buddhist concepts of welfare compatible with modern educational goals? How can it be implemented?

### **The Status and Roles of Women**

It is well known that the Buddha put the tasks of upholding and continuation of his teachings in the hands of all four groups of Buddhists, comprising monks (*Bhikkhu*), nuns (*Bhikkhuni*), laymen (*Upasaka*) and laywomen (*Upasika*). During the time of the Buddha, it was

evident that members of these four groups shared the responsibilities in propagating doctrines, setting up and maintaining communities, administering monasteries and institutions as well as supporting necessities. Unfortunately, the status and roles of women in performing such tasks were later on diminished or eradicated due to historical circumstances and social conditions. Strong patriarchal tendencies in many societies one-sidedly emphasized the roles of men and turned down participation and contribution of women in important activities. In some traditions, women were confined to perform only minor and marginal tasks.

Modernity has certainly offered women more opportunities to take part in various crucial matters. It has also brought and forced women out of private and domestic spheres, while changing gender relations in many respects. These processes have brought about many beneficial results. Some disadvantages, however, have occurred, particularly in terms of family life and motherhood; and the exploitation of women has changed its form from social relationship to economic one. In some cases, economic injustice is simply added on top of worsening social subordination.

Under these circumstances, Buddhism would certainly need to address the issues concerning the status and roles of women as well as gender relations, be it in general or in relation to Buddhist institutions themselves. To me, we do not have to adhere steadfastly to old beliefs and practices; neither do we need to follow the logic of Feminism to its extremes. (I admit that some would say this is a male chauvinist position in disguise.) Exploitations of women and unjust relationship must be done away with; but I strongly doubt if we can properly think of the roles of women and gender relations simply on the basis of equality, which has been much confused with similarity. In general, I would agree with Ivan Illich that sexual equality goes hand in hand with the domination of industrial economy; and analyses and standpoints based on the ideas of asymmetry and complementarity are more helpful in understanding gender and in attempting to outline a system of gender relations.<sup>36</sup> In relation to our discussion here, we can consider the coordination of the four Buddhist groups mentioned above in terms of networks of participation resulting from differences in potentials and contributions. Here are some of the issues.

- What is a Buddhist perspective on differences between men and women? Should we still maintain any conviction on inferiority of women? How should Buddhists perceive themselves as men or women?
- How should we reinterpret or expand the third of the five basic precepts? What would be proper relationships between men and women under present conditions?
- What should Buddhists in the Theravada tradition do with regard to the absences of Bhikkhuni and Samaneri?
- Should there be any difference at all in terms of access to moral and spiritual teaching and training between men and women? If so, to what extent?
- What are the ideas of compassion and sharing in terms of gender relations? Are they compatible with women's rights and Feminism?

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<sup>36</sup> See Ivan Illich, *Gender* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

- What would be a scheme of human welfare (three types and three levels as discussed above) with regard to gender relations?

## Conclusion

In discussing various aspects of modernity and extreme modernism separately, I would like to stress that this is done as a matter of convenience for discussion. All these respects are closely interdependent and causally interrelated. The same is obviously true with the five dimensions of maturity or *Ariyavuddhi*. Of course, we would need to focus and elaborate on an aspect or a dimension at a time; but this must always be done with a view to relate it to a broader picture.

We should take heed in Phra Dhammapitaka's warning about the two detriments Buddhists would find themselves in, if they fail to revitalize the *Vinaya* side of Buddhist teachings and to reformulate a framework of *Ariyavinaya* relevant to conditions and changes in the present world—namely, *passive seclusion and potential limitation*. Without proper patterns of living, institution and culture, Buddhism would be much impoverished; and its contributions to human beings and all sentient beings would be very limited in scope and extent. As a result, we would have to live in two alienated worlds, one of which lies in a solitary quest for mental peace depending merely on meditation as a technique, and the other consisting in an external world full of agonizing competition, relentless domination and mutual harms.

We should not hope either for a perfect past, which has never existed, or for an ideal future, which may never come true. To be awakened is to face the present as it is, and to work out, both individually by oneself and jointly with others, for the best and most viable in each particular circumstance. And as many have understood and practiced it—change has always been and will always be initiated by a small number of people.



# Everybody needs Vinaya: Reflections on Buddhist Lifestyles

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Bhikkhu Santikaro

*Vinaya* is a term well known in Buddhist countries as the discipline or extensive set of rules that monks follow, or are supposed to follow. As with many aspects of mainstream Buddhism, this common sense understanding is neither wrong nor sufficient. It forgets important perspectives found in the Buddha's teachings and consequently diminishes our ability to live out a Dhammic life, whether as lay practitioners or monastics. In this essay, I will explore some of these lesser known aspects of Vinaya that I believe will clarify and help fulfill important aspects of modern life for Buddhists in both Asia and the West, lay students as well as monastics or "nunks."<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, I will explore the meaning and importance of Vinaya more broadly within Buddhist tradition, emphasizing its applicability today within Western societies among "convert Buddhists" coping with modernity and post-modernity, and in traditional Buddhist societies among those who are struggling to come to terms with rapid modernizing change. This discussion will give importance to lay Vinaya, a customarily obscure concept. I will begin by looking at the limitations of how Vinaya has been understood traditionally, although we don't really know how far back many "traditions" go. Some are less than a hundred years old and others were a response to European imperialism. Very few actually go back to the early centuries of the tradition. Next, I will propose a new way of understanding Vinaya, one that is well-grounded in original Buddhism and the Pali Sutta teachings. This opens up the possibility that we must out grow some "traditions" in order to return to "the tradition."<sup>2</sup>

Then, I will suggest guidelines for how this perspective on Vinaya can be put into practice by both lay trainees and nunks. A central part of this essay will discuss the areas of our

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<sup>1</sup> "Nunks" is a playful gender-inclusive neologism. Below, I will write of "monks" when discussing the traditional contexts in which nuns (bhikkhunis) have largely been left out of developments and most of the official record. When writing of alternatives for our times, I use "nunks" to refer to all fully ordained Buddhist monastics, that is, bhikkhunis and bhikkhus equally. Here, I won't directly discuss the ambiguous forms, such as *Maechi* in Siam, to which women have been limited in most Buddhist countries.

<sup>2</sup> Here, while writing of tradition, my personal background is relevant. I am a bhikkhu ordained within Thai Theravāda Buddhism. Most of what I write is based on my experiences within Siam and is most applicable there and in other Theravāda countries. However, I have many contacts with Buddhists from other countries and hope that most of these comments are generally applicable to them as well. As I am involved in the foundation of a new gender-inclusive, non-sectarian monastic community in the United States, the applicability of Vinaya in the West and for lay practitioners is now an important personal concern.

lives with which a comprehensive Vinaya must deal. To demonstrate the suggested perspectives and approach, I will expand on one of these areas, that concerning modern digital technology. Due to space constraints, I won't be able to explore the other areas in any depth. Some criteria for evaluating the efficacy of this approach will also be given.

The main thesis of this paper is that Vinaya is necessary, for the Dhamma requires its protection, support, and structure. This applies to everyone, not just monastics. I am hopeful that lay Buddhists will accept the challenges posed by lay Vinaya and that nuns will update their understanding and reform their practice of monastic Vinaya. Below, I will not indulge in telling other Buddhists how to live and what to do. There is far too much diversity for anybody to do that. We must work this out with our families, colleagues, and fellow practitioners according to the circumstances of our lives. These reflections may aid us in doing so. As I hope to expand on this essay at a later date, readers are invited to consider the ideas and perspectives found here to be evolving. Your active participation, comments, suggestions, and references will be most welcome.

### Some “Traditional” Limitations

Originally, there was no need to spell out a “Disciplinary Code” (*Vinaya-paññati*) because the first batches of monks were highly motivated to follow the wandering spiritual life honestly, maturely, and simply. Many attained realization quickly. When some senior monks suggested that the Buddha lay down rules, he first refused. It wasn't until the monastic Sangha grew in quantity and geographical spread that the quality of monks began to deteriorate. As some riff-raff got in and were soon misbehaving — for example, the infamous gang of six — the Buddha started to spell out “rules” (literally, “trainings,” *sikkhāpada*). These trainings have an important place in the lives of sincere practitioners, especially for the less settled and mature, but is this all there is to Vinaya?

Understanding Vinaya as merely a set of rules, some of them legalistic or out-of-date, if not downright sexist, is again not quite right. While the individual trainings (*sikkhāpada*) can be seen as rules that monks must follow, they are always expressions of deeper principles. And this is the point that is so often missed. Blindly following “rules” can never be the Buddha's liberating way and can even put one into conflict with the Dhamma, for it is merely *silappatapāramāsa* (foolish fondling of precepts and practices), one of the Ten Fetters that bind us to cyclic existence. We all need a Vinaya that expresses the deeper principles coherent with Dhamma.

I will spend some time belaboring this point for the following reasons:

- I have heard monastic Vinaya most often spoken of as “rules to be followed,” though actually following them is often downplayed.
- Oftentimes, Vinaya is taken seriously only when the “rules” are enforced by social pressures and sanctioned by withholding of approval and material support. When, for example, monks live in foreign countries and the usual contexts for keeping these rules are absent, they tend to fall away, unless the principles and rationale behind the trainings are internalized by each monk.
- Conversely, society can use these “rules” to control monks and use them for un-Dhammic purposes, such as, to legitimize corrupt regimes and launder (“bless”) ill-gotten gains.

- Having more rules is one of the most common justifications for the superiority of monks over lay people, an attitude more suited to the feudal societies of the past than modern democratic societies.<sup>3</sup>
- The Vinaya as rules perspective generally leaves out lay practitioners, implying they have neither Vinaya nor the need.
- When following rules causes stress or suffering, they are often abandoned. Then, the baby is thrown out with the bath water.
- When the necessary supportive structure is abandoned, forgotten, or ignored, the more subtle Dhamma practice is weaker and more difficult to sustain.
- Whenever Dhamma and Vinaya are weakened, Buddhist training struggles and more suffering persists.

The situation summarized here is an important aspect of the deterioration of Buddhist monasticism in almost every traditional Buddhist society. As Buddhist monasticism is only just beginning to put down roots in the West, such a situation has yet to develop there. Yet, the cultural soil there is different from that of when Buddhism first entered Southeast Asia, China, and Tibet. The West no longer has the village-centered cultures, agrarian economies, and feudal politics that nurtured Asian Buddhism since its inception. Nowadays, educated lay people have more overt teaching and leadership roles within Buddhist groups, yet generally lack the unwritten Vinaya of Asian Buddhist tradition. What they do have is often drawn more from Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. Monks, with less influence, often find themselves sticking out like sore thumbs in a culture that doesn't yet, if ever, know what to do with them. For their well-being of both, a suitable understanding and practice of Vinaya is essential.

Understanding what has previously occurred in Asia is necessary for Western Buddhists seeking their ways through modernity. Asian Buddhists need to understand how Vinaya has been trivialized (superficialized) so that this can be corrected in order to better adapt the ancient Vinaya tradition to the complicated changes that are transforming all Asian societies and the Buddhist institutions within them, even when the monkish hierarchies try to stick their heads in the sands of the past.

### **Vinaya and Dhamma Inter-Exist**

In order to reappraise the meaning, purpose, and value of Vinaya, especially in modern and post-modern times, it is worth recalling that the Buddha himself spoke more often of “this Dhamma-Vinaya” than of “this or my *sāsanā* (message, teaching, religion).” While we have come to see this tradition as customs, institutions, hierarchies, monastics buildings, beliefs, and the other common constituents of “religion,” the Buddha did not emphasize them and there are good reasons to believe he discouraged many of them. Rather, he encouraged a way of looking into life and consequently living life that he claimed, from his own experience, leads to the quenching of suffering. A life centered in Dhamma.

The wonderful word “Dhamma” is untranslatable. For a start, we can understand it in terms of four primary aspects. Dhamma as “Nature” includes everything created and uncreated. It

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the fact that the bhikkhunis (in Theravāda) have 311 trainings while bhikkhus have only 227 is generally ignored. Wouldn't want the nuns to be superior to the monks, it seems.

is the natural reality in which we live and simultaneously are. Dhamma as “Natural Law” is the natural principles discovered through exploration of our minds, relationships with others, and that natural world. This is the fundamental truth that is always available to us and which governs all of Nature. Dhamma as “Natural Duty” is the corresponding principles and guidelines for living our lives in harmony with these realities and their natural laws. Fundamentally, this is the duty of living without suffering. Finally, Dhamma is the “Natural Fruits” of how that duty is lived out. When lived out wisely and unselfishly, the result is inner peace and pervasive happiness. When they are lived out foolishly or sloppily, the result is inner conflict, tension, sorrow, and emotional affliction.<sup>4</sup>

Dhamma can be compared to the flesh of a sweet, naturally ripened mango. It is very rich and succulent, delightful and delicious, refreshing and nutritious. Yet, no mango would produce its sweet inner flesh without a skin. The skin provides protection for the growing seed and flesh, and structure that helps them take shape. The role of the mango’s skin is akin to the role Vinaya plays in relation to Dhamma. Just as no sweet mango flesh develops without the requisite skin, the Dhamma cannot flourish without an appropriate Vinaya. And just as a mango skin without flesh inside is neither appetizing or nourishing, Vinaya without Dhamma is not Buddhism.

### Much More than Mere Rules

While translating Vinaya as “discipline” may be acceptable in certain respects, something vital is lost. Ajarn Buddhādāsa pointed out that there is a corresponding verb cognate, *vinayye*, meaning “to remove or lead out from.” In fact, this verb has an important place in a number of important Suttas.<sup>5</sup> In the Sutta on *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing) and both of the Suttas on the *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness), which together contain the Buddha’s most important meditation teachings, the clause “removing covetousness and grief regarding the world” appears regarding each foundation of mindfulness. It is also found in many other Sutta passages concerning mindfulness of the body and the four foundations. This clause could also be rendered “leading out from positiveness and negativeness towards the world.”<sup>6</sup>

From this textual fact, Ajarn Buddhādāsa concluded that the ultimate meaning and purpose of Vinaya is to lead us out from under or remove (*vineyya*) the power of negativity and positivity, that is, the power of ignorance, craving, clinging, and their resultant greed, anger, and delusion. Following rules, especially external ones, even more so imposed rules, can never accomplish such a sublime goal. Consequently, Vinaya must be about something more than rules if it is to be a necessary partner with Dhamma.

<sup>4</sup> The “four meanings of Dhamma” summarized in this paragraph were frequently discussed by my root teacher, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. English translations are available on tape and in transcripts, but have not yet been published.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., the *Anāpānasati Sutta* (M.118), *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (M. 10), *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta* (D. 22), *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (D. 16), and *Cakkavatti Sutta* (D. 26).

<sup>6</sup> The opening of the Sutta on the Foundations of Mindfulness begins:

There is this singular way, bhikkhus, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for reaching the Noble Path, for the realization of Nibbana, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.

What are the four? In this training, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating **body** in bodies, ardently, clearly comprehending and mindful (*viharatiātāpi sampajāno satimā*), removing covetousness and grief in the world (*vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*); he dwells contemplating **feeling** in feelings, ardently, clearly comprehending and mindful, removing covetousness and grief in the world; he dwells contemplating **mind** in minds, ardently, clearly comprehending and mindful, removing covetousness and grief in the world; he dwells contemplating **Dhamma** in dhammas, ardently, clearly comprehending and mindful, removing covetousness and grief in the world.



Most simply, the fundamental operative principle that gets us to the heart of Vinaya is non-harming (*avihiṃsā*). This principle is inseparable from the natural law of conditionality, interdependence, and inter-relatedness (*idappaccayatā*) that governs all of nature. Because our lives are fundamentally interwoven with the lives of other sentient beings, and because we all seek happiness and avoid suffering, non-harming is the best principle on which to base moral and behavioral standards. Further, *sīla* (morality) is defined in Pali schools in terms of *pakkhati* (natural normalcy), the ultimate aspect of which is Nibbāna. Thus, non-harming is the natural, normal way to live—viewed from the perspective of Dhamma, rather than modern capitalism—and brings us into a stronger relationship with Nibbāna. This congruence between the fundamental Dhamma principle (*idappaccayatā*) and the fundamental Vinaya principle (*avihiṃsā*) is what naturally binds them together harmoniously.

The most common expression of Vinaya is the *pañcasīla* (five precepts). These amount to five fundamental aspects of non-harming that are the minimum required for healthy relationships in this world and any aspiration towards universal kindness and world peace. Further, the various monastic Vinayas all derive from these *pañcasīla* and, ultimately, the single “precept” of non-harming. Understood in this light, Vinaya and *sīla*, whatever the formulation, are expressions of the wisdom that sees the world as it is and the compassion that motivates us to live in it without causing suffering. This is the Vinaya fit to be paired with Dhamma as Dhamma-Vinaya.

## Organizing Our Lives for the Sake of Dhamma Practice

Here, I would like to offer an alternative way of describing Vinaya. If we reflect on the examples of monks and nuns in the Buddha’s time, the original Vinaya was unwritten and customary. It was based on the Samana lifestyle that developed in the Ganges valley in the century or two before the Buddha’s Great Awakening. When Prince Siddhatta left home and ordained himself by “going forth” (*pabbajā*) as a bhikkhu, he joined this broad movement, in which a number of lifestyle customs and practices were developed to support the spiritual pursuits of the various groups of ascetics, wanderers, and monks. Further, it is crucial to note that these customs and practices made sense within and were therefore supported by the culture of the Ganges valley.

To these historical facts, we may add the observations described in the sections above, in order to reach another perspective on Vinaya. Let me summarize them as follows:

- Vinaya is a necessary container for spiritual practice
- Vinaya is much more profound than mere rules and regulations.
- Vinaya has a direct connection with the highest spiritual goal and is not something to be left aside on higher levels of practice.
- Vinaya is derived from the principle of non-harming and applies to all forms of physical and verbal behavior, including those involved with social and ecological relationships.
- Vinaya may be understood as guidelines for a lifestyle that supports Dhamma study, practice, realization, and sharing.

Now we are ready to re-express the meaning and purpose of Vinaya. My preferred

definition of Vinaya:

Vinaya is the Buddhist lifestyle: the way serious Buddhist practitioners arrange, organize, and structure their lives in order to support Dhamma study, practice, realization, and service. This covers all physical and verbal actions. It involves all forms of relationships: interpersonal, social, economic, political, ecological, as well as with one's own body.<sup>7</sup>

I feel that this “new” expression of Vinaya will make sense to modern Buddhists, and even inspire their practice.

### Applicability for Lay Practitioners

One of the merits of expressing Vinaya in this way is that it is “status neutral”; it applies equally to all mature students of Buddha-Dhamma: to lays and monastics, men and women, and even can apply to children. This is crucial for those of us who seek a less hierarchical, more egalitarian understanding of Buddhist life and practice. Traditionally, the higher status of monastics — de facto, the monks in most countries — has often been justified in that they follow more rules and therefore are more morally pure. I have heard repeatedly, from lays as well as monks, how monks follow 227 rules while lay people only follow 5 or occasionally 8.<sup>8</sup> And with Vinaya traditionally understood as all those rules, Vinaya has been that which justifies the monks' higher status, privileges, etc. If, however, we understand Vinaya in a broader meaning that includes lay practitioners, we can diminish such hierarchical notions. This is necessary if lay practice is to be valued as it deserves. For too long it has been considered a lesser practice, partly because its practitioners have usually had “lesser Vinaya.”

At the same time, this perspective challenges lay practitioners to consider their lifestyle choices in ways that have often been overlooked in the West. In traditional Buddhist communities, lay Buddhists had a Vinaya lifestyle that was developed through the local culture and passed along through custom and community sanctions. In individualistic, modern societies, this aspect tends to be weak or missing. I believe this challenge will be met creatively by Western Dhamma students. Otherwise, Buddhism will never mature in the West. In Asia, this perspective is needed among lay practitioners if Asian Buddhism is to reverse its decline and stagnation.

In order to fulfill the egalitarian vision that appeals to many modern Buddhists, all practitioners must adhere to an equally high standard. We don't want first and second class Buddhists; therefore, we can't have first and second class standards. If Dhamma-Vinaya is an inseparable whole, access to higher teachings and practices previously limited to monastics requires parallel commitment to higher Vinaya standards. Such standards need not mimic those

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that physical and verbal actions, along with livelihood, are covered by the three *sila* factors of the noble eightfold path. Some Buddhists may be used to thinking of *sila* as Dhamma, and it is, as everything is Dhamma; yet, *sila* better corresponds with Vinaya. Thus, we can observe that the noble eightfold path, the three trainings (*sikkhā*), and the Middle Way are equivalent to Dhamma-Vinaya. We again see that Vinaya is necessary for the quenching of dukkha, liberation, and true happiness.

<sup>8</sup> They conveniently overlook that bhikkhunis have more rules than bhikkhus, but bhikkhunis have been suppressed in most Buddhist countries so this contradiction was seldom faced. They also overlook that most monks ignore the majority of the 227 rules.

of monastics in their details, but must uphold the same high standards. In fact, I have known many Thai laywomen and men who have lived according to impeccable standards. Otherwise, sloppiness around money, sex, and power, plus other areas delineated below, will corrupt those teachings and practices. Everyone involved will be harmed, not least those who are careless about this requirement. Higher practices such as Vipassana, Dzogchen, and Tantra will become hollow without the protection of suitable Vinaya. This ancient principle still applies no matter how post-modern we become

Further, we can better see Vinaya as a partnership among all Buddhists. In modern societies, in which lifestyle choices are multifarious and taken for granted, it is necessary to understand Vinaya in a way that encompasses a diversity of lifestyles. Rather, than taking the monastics as the benchmark and considering lay practitioners as watered down or inferior versions, we can ask all Buddhists to consider their lifestyle needs in light of Dhamma practice and realization. Then, we can offer different flavors of the core Dhamma-Vinaya to a grand Buddha-Dhamma buffet. We must learn from each other, especially in today's complex societies in which lay people usually have much more hands on experience with the economic, political, and technological systems.

This also gives us a powerful tool of social critique. Rather than follow the mainstream of consumer self-indulgence, rat-race work, and indebtedness, Buddhist practitioners live out an alternative based on their aspiration for spiritual liberation and the "natural discipline" that this aspiration calls forth. Such a critique will be flexible rather than doctrinaire in order to serve the many living and working situations in which modern Buddhists find themselves. Yet, it can provide concrete standards with which to challenge society in order to flesh out the abstract virtues that Buddhists espouse.

### **Applicability for Monastics**

Monastics, especially the monks, can no longer take for granted that they have more knowledge, practice more deeply, or live more purely. The day-to-day reality of monastic Sanghas in Siam and elsewhere belies this sad fact and screams for a reform of Dhamma-Vinaya education and practice. The respect earned by past generations of dedicated monastic practitioners has largely been spent in most Asian societies and has not yet been accumulated in Western cultures. We can only reclaim such "merit" the old fashioned way: by what the Buddha called "right living" (*sammā-vihāra*). The perspectives offered in this essay can help insure that such reforms are relevant and effective, not mere ritualism or window-dressing. I hope that they will help convince my fellow monks that serious reforms are called for, the first step that has yet to be taken by the majority.

Further, this revaluation of Vinaya can help monastics to re-examine the Vinaya they purportedly follow. Are they merely following rules and losing out on the deeper spirit of Vinaya? Are they on "purity trips" based on superstition and ritualism? Do they accommodate so much to the modern consumer society that they lose track of Vinaya altogether, merely following rules to the degree social convention requires them to? How can they find a Vinaya that is more harmonious with both their spiritual needs and the reality of the society in which they live? Can they relax their higher status and function as partners with lay people in democratic

societies?<sup>9</sup>

When we speak of “monks,” “monastics,” or “Sangha” collectively, we often overlook or forget the diversity found among the individuals, communities, and temples designated by these terms. In fact, a broad range of lifestyles can be observed, just as with our lay friends. This diversity appears to be a consistent fact of modern life; it may increase as post-modernity creeps in. Rather than asserting — not very accurately — that we all hold the same Vinaya, I suggest that it would be useful to recognize and take account of the many different lifestyles that Buddhist monks and nuns are actually living. Some of these are:

- Student monks in the cities;
- Village based monks mainly occupied with rituals and preserving local customs;
- Administration monks;
- Those who keep the rules strictly;
- Those who barely know what the rules are;
- Nuns who live as cooks and janitors for monks;
- Nuns who stay out of the public eye in order to be left alone so that they can practice seriously;
- Development and ecology monks;
- Forest dwelling monks;
- Bhikkhunis in Taiwan who outnumber the bhikkhus seven-to-one; and
- Bhikkhunis elsewhere who are struggling with sexism, discrimination, substandard facilities, and lack of support.

Then, we can acknowledge that these different lifestyles to some degree require that we keep Vinaya in rather different ways. I believe this will provide a basis for thinking more carefully about how we as communities and individuals keep Vinaya, rather than leaving something so crucial to personal discretion, custom, habit, or, as is often the case, lowest common denominators.

## Dimensions of Vinaya

In my own reflections on these issues, I continually go back to the *bhikkhu-pātimokkha*. While this is natural to me as a monk, I think it can provide lessons for non-monastics, also. After all, the monks’ Vinaya code is an elaboration upon the five precepts. Further, as I liberate my own thinking from the rule following approach, I wish to suggest another way of thinking about both monastic and lay lifestyles. I will do so by summarizing the lifestyle issues covered by the monastic Vinaya and wondering how they apply to modern life.

In sketching out the areas that any complete Vinaya approach must cover, I have no intention to stipulate rules or even specifics for those who lead a different lifestyle than mine (celibate monastic). My purpose is to provide a framework for all of us to think about our lifestyles

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<sup>9</sup> That is, when there is such high status to relax. Though taken for granted in some Buddhist countries, Buddhists monastics in China and elsewhere have often been subject to persecution. Nowadays, the political situations in many countries — most blatantly Myanmar and Tibet — both manipulate and threaten monastics, though there may be some trappings of status.

and how we can arrange them to better support our Dhamma practice and the realization of genuine happiness and purpose in life. As a monastic, I hope that aspects of our lifestyle can inspire and creatively challenge others. Thus, this attempt to make clear some of its inner principles.

Although these various dimensions overlap to some extent — just as the path is woven of many factors, so too Vinaya — we can distinguish ten areas or dimensions.

### *1. Sex, Sexuality, & Gender:*

Recognizing and respecting this powerful instinct — all those hormones! — we set clear boundaries concerning gender, sexual, and physical relationships. Acknowledging sexuality but not indulging in it, accepting that we are sexual beings without expressing it manipulatively, we ask how we can foster healthy relationships in the physical, emotional, and spiritual areas of our lives. We are mindful of gender so that it doesn't become a basis for misunderstanding, prejudice, or oppression. How can we use our sexuality wisely and kindly? What do we need to be aware of to avoid using it in a way that harms others physically or emotionally? This discussion covers not only the "opposite sex," but all the sexual preferences and expressions we come into contact with nowadays. It also concerns the many media images used to titillate and seduce.

### *2. Power, Authority, Status, & Violence:*

Whether or not we are in "positions of power" or have truly given up political, economic, sexual, and other forms of power as in the original bhikkhu ideal, we do not escape power and authority. Recognizing and respecting how these prop up the ego's illusions of security and strength in yet other ways, and again noting the violence that so often comes out of this defensiveness, we relinquish political and social control over others. Honestly observing that most institutions, including religious, create their own hierarchies of privilege and power, we disavow such corruption and share whatever authority is given to us. We strive to live according to the principles of non-violence, non-harming, and non-abuse; that is, kindness, compassion, and mutual support. We realize, however, that certain hierarchies may occur naturally and need not cause suffering. For example, our study and practice may give us a certain amount of authority among our co-practitioners and students, so we do what we can to exercise this authority honestly, openly, and Dhammically. The same applies to any moral authority that our lifestyle earns.

Each person has a variety of different positions in life. We need to learn how to use the authority of each position wisely. It's not that leaders have power and followers don't. Leaders are indebted to followers and are somewhat controlled by them. Everyone has some power; there are different kinds of power possessed by the various parties in each situation. Our purpose is to use whatever authority we have wisely and kindly. We may distinguish here between "power" as something held over or against others and "authority" as something freely given by others. The first is coercive and fundamentally violent, while the latter is not. So we ask if our influence is used to control and take advantage of others? Or to nurture their beneficial learning and growth without coercion?

### *3. Basic Human Needs (Four Requisites):*

Recognizing that we all have basic material needs, we resolve to satisfy them without putting loathsome burdens on the planet or society. We are mindful of how our own accumulation can work to deprive others. We practice sharing of the resources that come our way and cultivate a spirit of *dāna* (generosity). Especially in societies that hold personal property to be sacred, we vow to acknowledge that it all belongs to Dhamma and we are merely stewards.

Monastics make themselves vulnerable by depending on alms, that is, the generosity of others. In return, they try to share as much of their material gains as they can realistically do, in addition to the fruits of their spiritual study and practice. The situation is not so different for laics as is generally assumed. Though food and other requisites may be purchased with cash or plastic, they were produced by farmers and workers, packaged and shipped by others, and retailed by shopkeepers and supermarket employees. Nothing comes to us without the benevolence of others. Dhamma students should regularly reflect on this and act accordingly.

#### *4. Property & Possessions:*

In addition to basic human needs, we seek and acquire things in order to achieve and proclaim status, generate comfort and luxury, entertain and distract ourselves, cover up loneliness, and seek to gratify other emotions having nothing to do with the material object involved. Nowadays, consumer capitalism — the engine of globalization — is based on these unhealthy non-necessities or false needs. They increasingly provide the meaning and purpose of our lives, thus determining “who” we are. It is very hard to live without lots of “stuffs” if we live in the affluent segments of the world; things come with birthdays and other passages of life. Noting how much fighting goes on in the world, throughout human history, over limited material resources, we explore a life of simplicity wherein we are very careful about what we own and tend towards less rather than more. How to we keep them from cluttering up our lives and minds? What purposes ought they to serve? How do we take responsibility for them without owning or being owned by them?

#### *5. Wealthy, Money, & Finances:*

We recognize and respect how the accumulation of property, money, and wealth seems to provide the security the ego craves. In addition to everything mentioned in 3 and 4 above, we are mindful of how these bits of paper, metal, and plastic, as well as numbers on a screen, symbolize success, prestige, power, and all the other worldly values that ordinary folks aspire to. We even use it to measure the value of human beings. The illusory power of money easily cultivates the arrogance that overlooks how much we depend on the kindness of others. Given the power of this strange, symbolic — supposedly neutral — stuff, how can it be handled mindfully? What is right investment? Which Dhamma related services can be charged for legitimately and which not? What is the real meaning of “*dāna*”?

#### *6. Language, Communications, & Truth:*

As human beings we live in a world of language, symbols, and culture. Without them we can neither think nor dream. Communication binds us together with others culturally, politically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Yet, language is such tricky business. It deceives us by its very nature even when we are trying to be truthful. In the world, language is used to trick, con, seduce, insult, and hurt, as well as to love, help, advise, teach, console, encourage, and inspire. Formulating our experiences and insights into words, we easily fall into the trap of clinging to views, even when the original insight was profoundly true. Over beliefs and opinions we create countless disputes. There are so many teachings in this area that serious Dhamma practitioners wish to radically alter the way we communicate to be as close to Buddha Speech as we can manage. We strive to practice silence when we are unable to use speech in healing ways. We mindfully endeavor to convey the truth, both in letter and connotation. And we foster communities of right speech around us.

### 7. *Technology:*

Tools are one of the things that make us human.<sup>10</sup> We often measure our “development” in terms of the supposedly “can’t turn back the clock” advance of technological wonders. We are awed by these gadgets and correspondingly honor the scientists, engineers, and other techno-priests who produce them.<sup>11</sup> With the harnessing of coal and steam, petroleum fuels, nukes, and electronics, we have become mighty indeed. Other species and pristine ecosystems have vanished consequently. Human life has been hugely transformed. Liberated from the natural rhythms of the seasons and the sun’s daily cycle, we have increasingly less free time. Even if we don’t have more stress than in the ancient past, we surely have new forms of stress that our biology was not evolved to handle. Increasingly, technology has become an interface between ourselves and others (e.g., telephone), and between our own bodies and minds (e.g., medical scanning equipment). It comes into play with all the topics discussed here: power, wealth, communications, and even sex. How can we use these wonderful tools without being used by them? How do we insure that they serve spiritual needs, rather than merely economic or political ends?<sup>12</sup>

### 8. *Entertainment:*

Ajarn Buddhadasa speaks of “spiritual entertainment” as the fifth requisite. At Suan Mokkh, the Theater of Spiritual Entertainment was built to fulfill this most important human need and in so doing show that Dhamma study-practice need not be humorless or joyless. Yet, most of society humors itself with less meaningful entertainment. A good laugh now and again, mirth, creativity, and the like can be used to support our practice and realization, or to hinder them. What do we do when we want to be entertained or to entertain? How much do we depend on technology for this? How much do we let the content of our entertainment shape our values and behaviors in conscious or unconscious ways? By seeking entertainment to “relax,” do we become more tense by internalizing negative values and behaviors we observe in the entertainment? What really makes us relaxed? Do we neglect our families or the people we live with because we’re too caught up in entertainment?

### 9. *Relationships, Harmony, Cooperation, & Community:*

A few moments’ reflection reminds us of the importance of our relationships with others. Whether the parents and family who nurture us, friends who accompany us, or teachers and mentors who shape us, life would be empty without them all. All that we receive is a free flowing of kindness, love, care, intelligence, and sharing that is naturally reciprocated when we are wise and unselfish. This takes place when we manage the relationships so that obstructions to the free flow are dealt with skillfully and don’t last long. This applies to relationships both at workplace and in living situations, as well as shared community life in all forms. Below, I will say more about how all Vinaya is community-based. Here, we note that community is itself an area for Vinaya and lifestyle choice and responsibility.

### 10. *Ecology:*

The above perspective expands to embrace all life forms; that is, all sentient beings. The rapid expansion of human populations has forced us into awareness of how we perturb other species and the inability of our technological wonders to free us from dependence on the rest of the natural world. Slowly, we are re-learning — after centuries of scientific hubris — how to fit

<sup>10</sup> Of course, no dividing line is sacrosanct. Some chimps are known to use tools, e.g., a branch stripped of leaves can be inserted into an ants or termites nest to retrieve succulent morsels.

<sup>11</sup> I highly recommend David Noble’s *The Religion of Technology* (Penguin).

<sup>12</sup> Below, in the next section, I will explore certain aspects of digital technology in greater detail.

in with other life forms within healthy ecosystems. Buddhist should not be surprised as the principle of non-harming applies directly here. Yet, the lifestyle choices implied by this awareness are profound. Only a true commitment to the welfare of all beings will empower us to make the necessary changes. If the Buddha were alive today, based on the complaints of concerned lay people, he would set up monastic precepts regarding recycling, reducing consumption, carpooling, taking public transport, etc. Many people may consider themselves ecologically concerned when it comes to the acts of multinational corporations, but hesitate when it comes to cutting back in their own lives.

### A Case Study: Email, Internet, & Computer Technology

As an example of how the approach advocated in this essay can be applied, I would like to take a look at one specific area that is both very modern and has a huge impact on many of us. Many people bemoan the amount of time taken up by these new technologies. At the same time, we marvel at the things they allow us to do. Both their *assāda* (delicious charm or bait) and the *adinavā* (nasty penalty or punishment) are strong and pervasive. If we are to manage a healthy Vinaya in these times, surely we must be able to do so regarding computer technology, the Internet, and email.

First, we need an analysis of what is going on with these gadgets and the systems that produce and control them. The chief potential harm of over-using computers, the Internet, and the media in general is distraction. We risk getting overwhelmed with information, thus confusing our minds, lessening our discriminative abilities, increasing attachment and anger, wasting time that could be used more productively, and making us unnecessarily tired through too much sensory stimulation. Some folks trawl the net for amusement, others for information, some for both together — “infotainment.” Information can provide security, power over others, or simply be a way of avoiding unpleasantness in the physical reality outside the room where one is staring at the monitor. It often masquerades as knowledge.

Computer technology, including email and the Internet, can be a useful tool for our Dhamma study and work, whether researching relevant topics, producing books and other teaching media, or communicating with mentors, peers, and students. At the same time, they provide access to vast and practically limitless worlds of data, entertainment, distraction, and delusion. Some of us may choose to do without such technology altogether, partly to show that happiness is still possible in this life without an Internet hookup.

Most of this technology was developed originally for military applications, offensive as much as defensive. It then trickled down to other scientists and the business world. By the time it gets to consumers, it is driven more by the profit motive than the fighting instinct. Nonetheless, both are highly aggressive. Do we know who or what controls these hugely complex systems? Can we know who or what is monitoring our use? Is it the fabled “market place,” corporate boardrooms, or some cabal of military bureaucrats? I suspect we can only guess until each generation of technology is so old as to be deemed safe by whatever mechanisms declare this or that “Top Secret.” I believe it is important to ask what it means to be at the tail end — as “end users” — of this technological pipeline with little control over it, especially if we seek to use it for Dhammic purposes. To what degree is it possible to use this technology in service of Dhamma? What are lines beyond which greed, hatred, and delusion are too much in the drivers’ seat? We



can't just wave a few "Oh Mani Padme Hums" over our keyboard to make the whole system clean.

Next, we can apply guide questions to help us reflect on our own use of this technology. Those who choose to use such technology should reflect on the following points each time they use it:

- Is what I'm doing important for my Dhamma practice or the benefit of others'?
- Have I fulfilled my daily responsibilities towards the Triple Gem, or have I distracted myself and dispersed energy with this technology?
- Have I fulfilled my commitments to Sangha and others, or has this technology taken precedence once again?
- What is my motivation for relating with this media?
- Is this increasing my ignorance, anger, and attachment by exposing me to objects that stimulate them?
- What am I giving up or missing by using this technology? What gets supplanted by it?
- Is my physical health in any way harmed by use of this technology?
- Do the benefits accrued by using this technology justify the psychological, financial, and environmental costs?

Lastly, after reflecting on the technology itself and its social contexts, then considering the above questions, we will begin to formulate guidelines, ideally with friends, for our interactions with these tools. Here are some examples of reminders to myself gleaned from my own experience:

- Don't turn on the computer until after doing morning meditation, prayers, stretching, and other necessary personal duties. If for some reason you get up late, still take care of the above before turning on the computer. Repeat this with afternoon and evening practices. If something is so urgent as to make you skip a basic duty, make up for it later.
- When you are getting sleepy and having trouble staying awake staring at the screen, turn it off and go to sleep. Or take a walk, do yoga, breathe ... Do something healthy rather than imbibe more caffeine or indulge in a game.
- You need not reply to every email message. Sort out what is important and emphasize quality in communication rather than speed.
- Budget computer time among its various uses: writing, reading, record keeping, emailing, and net browsing (mainly news). Keep track of how much time you spend on each and keep a balance.
- Budget the time spent on emails so that other forms of reading and writing, especially non-digital, aren't displaced.
- Go back to pen and paper for letters, outlines, notes, drafts, etc., at least sometimes.
- Take the notebook out onto the porch or work under a tree. At least, open the window to let in some of the natural world, maybe even a few bugs
- Use email for its strengths and avoid its weaknesses. Use it for exchanging information and documents, planning events, and sending reminders. Find better means for expressing feelings, building community, mending wounded friendships, and teaching Dhamma.
- Every time you boot, think of the oil spills, salmon kills in hydroelectric dams, and other costs of all the electricity coursing through these global systems.

- Whenever the urge to upgrade strikes, remember the piles of junk plastic, silicon, chips, monitors, cords, and CDs that accumulate with each new upgrade.

It goes without saying that this approach will only work with sincere, honest, committed students. We've already considered the drawbacks of rules. When there is no easy solution, we fall back on the only one that works — practice and skillful means. If somebody is visiting porn sites or spending hours browsing inanely, something unhappy is at work in him or her. The solution isn't just to say, "Don't look at porn" or "Don't waste your time." The person must understand what's going on inside her or his mind.

## **Vinaya is Part of Community**

For all of us, whether lay or monastic practitioners, Vinaya, our lifestyle choices and ethical guidelines, need to be worked out in community, especially the immediate communities in which we live, work, and practice. To individualistic modern minds, it might seem possible to work out these complex issues on one's own. After all, a central part of modernity is an emphasis on private persons, personal religion, and individual moral responsibility. Yet, another lesson we can draw from the monastic Vinaya is that lifestyles are worked out in community. We are members of communities just as much as we are individuals; we are individuals imbedded within relationships and community. Religion is always received to some degree, and therefore collective. Even the anti-religions of modernity have important collective aspects. Morality and responsibility can never be removed from their social contexts and relationships.

In fact, the Buddha included reasons of clearly collective and social benefit when he first agreed to spell out the Vinaya trainings. These are:

- for the overall excellence, beauty, and unity of the monastic Sanghas;
- for the well-being of and harmonious living within the monastic Sanghas;
- for controlling the disruptions caused by wayward ("shameless") monks;
- for encouraging faith in those who lack it and increasing it in those who already have confidence and trust in the Triple Gem;
- for the long establishment of the Good Dhamma (true teaching); and
- for the support of the Vinaya.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, our lifestyles bring us into contact with others. Thus, they have some right to comment upon our lifestyles to the degree that we perturb them. More importantly, Buddhists who share a body of teachings, values, principles, aspirations, and practices already thus share vital elements of a common lifestyle. We further strengthen our communities, as well as personal practices, when we work out the Vinaya together.

For lay and monastic practitioners, this will include discussions about the contexts and complications of our lives. Serious Dhamma students will need to observe and analyze the forces in their lives that can obstruct Dhamma practice. As things are so complex these days, everyone can benefit from the experiences, insights, and perspectives of other Dhamma students. As the

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<sup>13</sup> Note that the setting forth of specific trainings is explicitly for the support of the Vinaya. Thus, the Vinaya is more than these trainings or "rules."

obstacles become clearer, lifestyle choices can be found to neutralize each obstacle. Some lifestyle practices will help with more than one problem. This will involve experimentation which, again, is better done with the help of others. There will be ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Finally, group support will help us stick to the choices we have made, even in the face of the mainstream culture's materialism, individualism, and self-indulgence.

A Pali term that fits my point here is *sīlasamaññutā* (shared understanding of moral principles and practices). This is the fifth in a series of six dhammas or virtues necessary for living together in harmony. In our freedom loving age, we may overlook the importance of shared moral principles and practices. There is a middle way between moral laxity and individualistic self-indulgence, on one hand, and moralistic imposition of one group's moral beliefs onto others without their full participation in the formulation and monitoring. The other five dhammas in this set are kindness towards each other in body, speech, and mind; sharing material gains; and shared understanding of what constitutes right view.

## Evaluating What Works

As with Dhamma, Vinaya is essentially a matter of practice and realization. To insure that the approach discussed here will be practical, we must ask questions of its results. We can then observe what fruits this approach bears and make the appropriate adjustments. This is especially important in times of transition when experimentation is necessary. We can't just figure these things out intellectually, they must be tested in real life. Dhamma-Vinaya is always a dialogue between the texts that we cherish and our daily practice of what they teach, as well as between tradition and present reality.

To support practical evaluation, here are some questions for reflection:

- What is the effect on one's own health?
- What is the effect on one's family and loved ones?
- What is the effect on one's work and work place?
- What is the effect on one's community, neighborhood, and social groups?
- What is the effect on one's eco-systems — local, bioregional, national, and global?
- What is the effect on one's Dhamma practice?
  - concentration and calmness
  - emotions
  - behavior
  - thinking and beliefs
  - clinging to "me" and "mine"

## Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to raise questions and suggest some approaches through which we can find relevant, effective, and realistic answers to those questions, even as they remain provisional. I have no interest in telling others how they should live. For those who have taken refuge in the Buddha's teaching and way of life, there is an important place for Vinaya and *sīla*. These have become overly formulaic over the years and are now confronted with rapid social,

ecological, and technological change. The need for rethinking is great. I hope that this essay contributes something to the necessary hard, creative work that lies before us and for many generations to come.

As noted earlier, I hope to develop this essay further. Thus, readers are encouraged to consider the ideas and perspectives found here to be open ended, evolving, and in need of your active participation. Please send comments, suggestions, and references that will add flesh, heart, and bones to these ideas and reflections. We especially hope to expand on the sections concerning concrete application of the main principles. Any practical additions based on personal experience will be most helpful.<sup>14</sup>



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<sup>14</sup> A number of the ideas and perspectives expressed in this essay grew out of discussions — in person, by phone, and through email — between myself and Ven. Thubten Chodron. Not only did these discussions contribute some of the material found here, they helped with a major shift in my understanding. They have a very concrete weight for both of us because we endeavor to co-found a new monastic community in which nuns and monks are equal and hierarchy is minimized. For more information about this new community, please visit: <http://www.liberationpark.org>. Thanks also to the Faris family of Weston, Missouri, for food, lodging, friendship, and natural surroundings while this was being written. Finally, thanks to Khun Pipob for his patient reminders to finish this essay.

# Buddha Loves Me! This I Know, For the Dhamma Tells Me So

Donald K. Swearer

I intend no disrespect to either the Buddha or the Christ by my rewrite of Anna Bartlett Warner's 1859 Sunday school song, "Jesus Loves Me." That one might construct the Buddha in the image of a loving Jesus may be more startling or offensive to Buddhists (and also to Christians) than the modern, apologetic view of the Buddha as a rational renouncer. Versions of both can be textually justified; however, each is a reification that reflects the bias of the interpreter. Both ignore the complexity of the figure of the Buddha within the varied and diverse traditions of Buddhism. My starting point in the following essay acknowledges this complexity as well as the inevitable limitations of my personal interpretation of the Buddha, necessarily conditioned by my experience. I propose to structure the essay around two polarities—universal/particular and wisdom/compassion—looking first at the Buddha and then briefly reflecting dialogically at the end of each section on the figure of the Christ.

## *Buddha: Universal and Particular*

In my personal experience in Buddhist Asia, especially Thailand, and my studies of Buddhist traditions, in particular the Theravāda, I have been impressed by the creative tension between the universal and particular dimensions of the figure of the Buddha. Even the modern Western view of the Buddha evidences this tension. Typically the word, Buddha, evokes the story of Prince Siddhattha's renunciation of his royal status, subsequent quest for enlightenment, and eventual realization of *nibbāna*.<sup>1</sup> In the hands of a comparative mythologist such as Joseph Campbell, the detailed embellishments of the Buddha's sacred biography are absorbed into the tripartite, monomyth structure of the hero's narrative—separation, attainment, return. For Campbell, the story of the historical Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, represents a rite of passage, a deep psychological truth of self-discovery symbolized by other heroes in world mythology. Despite the anti-structuralist critique by historical and textual scholars as well as the feminist criticism that the heroic journey does not reflect women's experience, in one form or another the Buddha reified as an exemplar of the universal paradigm of the individual's journey of self-realization continues to capture the Western imagination.

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<sup>1</sup> Since my primary referent is to Theravāda Buddhism I have chose to use Pāli rather than Sanskrit spellings, e.g. *nibbāna* instead of *nirvāna*, unless a reference is specifically to Mahāyāna traditions.

A somewhat more sophisticated version of the universal hero motif is the Buddha as “rational renouncer,” an interpretation favored by both Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism who portray the Buddha as an empiricist and pragmatist somewhat on the order of William James. In this view, Prince Siddhattha’s quest was a rational response to the experience of suffering, and the truth he perceived on the night of his enlightenment was nothing more nor less than a direct perception of the universal law of cause and effect obscured to ordinary awareness. De-emphasizing both the ascetical and devotional aspects of the Buddha’s sacred biography, the rational renouncer school of thought places its emphasis on epistemological transformation characterized in Buddhist texts as “seeing things as they really are.”

The Buddha as universal hero and as rational renouncer can be critiqued as modernized, rationalized, Westernized reifications of the Buddha, an example of the “orientalist” distortion that characterized the colonial project. Charles Hallisey has pointed out that such reconstructions of the Buddha were not merely the products of Western scholars but owed much to Asian Buddhists as well.<sup>2</sup> But are we to assume that throughout the history of Buddhism similar hermeneutical moves and debates over the nature of the Buddha did not exist? I find a tension in the Buddhist tradition between two contrasting images of the Buddha: as an exemplar of a universal truth, and as a being defined by the contingencies of human particularities.

Therāvada Buddhists find strong support in the *suttas* for a humanistic interpretation of the Buddha. In particular, they argue that the Buddha of the early Buddhist canonical texts specifically denied that he was a god and that he was a teacher of the truth he perceived at his enlightenment. They find support for this view in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* wherein the Buddha tells his followers that when he dies the teaching and the disciplinary rules he promulgated—the *dhamma* and *vinaya*—will be his successor. They also point to the *sutta* passage where the Buddha says, “Whoever sees me sees the *dhamma*; whoever sees the *dhamma* sees me”<sup>3</sup> to support the position that the *dhamma* overshadows the historical Buddha or that the teachings of the Buddha supersede his person.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, one of Thailand’s most creative Buddhist thinkers, contends that the statement, “whoever sees me sees the *dhamma*” has implications far beyond a portrayal of the Buddha as an historical person:

The Buddha in everyday language refers to the historical Enlightened being, Gotama Buddha. It refers to a physical man of flesh and bone who was born in India over two thousand years ago, died, and was cremated. This is the meaning of the Buddha in everyday language. Considered in terms of *dhamma* language, however, the word Buddha refers to the Truth that the historical Buddha realized and taught, the *dhamma* itself. Now the *dhamma* is something intangible, it is not something physical, certainly not flesh and bones. Yet the Buddha said it is one and the same as the Enlightened One. Anyone who fails to see the *dhamma* cannot be said to have seen the Enlightened One. The Buddha is one and the same as that truth by which he became the Buddha, and

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hallisey, “Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism,” *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 31-61. For an essay on the Western construction of Indian Buddhism, see Gregory Schopen, “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 1-22.

<sup>3</sup> Presumably the Christian version of the Buddha’s claim would be “whosoever sees me [Jesus] sees God [the Father].”

anyone who sees the truth can be said to have seen the true Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

It is equally true that Pāli texts support the view that the Buddha was highly revered not simply as a mirror of the *dhamma* but as a being to be venerated, as a source of merit, and even to be worshipped. It is argued, for instance, that the title, *Bhagavant* (Blessed One) was more than an honorific, and that following his death the Buddha as an object of devotion formed the basis for the cult of relics and images. To be more precise, one finds in the Buddhist *suttas* what can be characterized as a controversy between the philosophers and the devotees over the nature of the person of the Buddha: whether the Buddha should be seen as the mirror of the *dhamma* or as the subject of devotion whose very body radiates supramundane power. The Sutta to Prince Bodhi (*Bodhirājakumāra Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, no. 85) illustrates this controversy. The good prince invites the Blessed One to his palace in order to pay him homage. As the Buddha approaches the entrance, the prince says, “Venerable sir, let the Blessed One step on the cloth, let the Sublime One step on the cloth, that it may lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time.” To this request made thrice, a strip of cloth; the Tathāgata has regard for future generations.” The text implies conflicting opinions concerning the person of the Buddha, giving precedence to the view that the body of the Buddha is not to be venerated as a source of merit.

The main point is that in Buddhist texts and Buddhist practice I have found a tension between identifying the Buddha with a universal truth beyond form and image and the various ways of particularizing the person of the Buddha that range from apocryphal texts designed to promote Buddha *bhakti* (devotion) to veneration of the Buddha’s bodily relics. Currently I am completing a study of the northern Thai ritual of Buddha image consecration. Attending several of these all-night ceremonies—a ritual reenactment of the night of the Buddha’s enlightenment—has been among the most moving experiences of my life. I have been particularly impressed with the ritual’s underlying meaning of making the Buddha present as the image effectively becomes the Buddha’s surrogate. In doing so the image (*buddharūpa*=form of the Buddha) makes the universal *dhamma* present. In particularizing that which is universal, the *Tathāgata* (a thus-gone-one in lineage of the Enlightened Buddhas) becomes the *Bagavant* (Blessed One). Through the chanting of sacred *mantras*, the recital of the story of the Buddha’s enlightenment, the presence of holy monks, and a night devoted to meditation, the Buddha image consecration ritual transforms the Buddha image into a fusion of the universal *dhamma* and the saint known as the Buddha.

In an earlier book on interreligious dialogue, I pointed to several ways in which my study of Buddhism provided insight into my understanding of Christianity. For example, how the Buddhist doctrine of not-self (*anattā*) enlarged my comprehension of Paul’s claim, “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, my attempts to come to terms with the various ways Buddhists have viewed the Buddha through history and currently experience the Buddha in rituals such as the Buddha image consecration ceremony have enlarged my understanding of the paradox of the incarnation, of God becoming Jesus the Christ, of the universal *logos* becoming flesh, of the infinite becoming finite. Though seemingly worlds apart, participating in Buddha image consecration rituals in northern Thailand has given new meaning

<sup>4</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, ed. Donald K. Swearer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 127-128.

For a fuller discussion of Buddhadasa’s interpretation of the Buddha see, Donald K. Swearer, “Bhikkhu Buddhadasa’s Interpretation of the Buddha,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64, no. 2 (Fall, 1996), 134-154.

<sup>5</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).

to Kierkegaard's subtle dialectic I studied nearly forty years earlier, the dialectic of the incarnate God overcoming the dualism of the finite and the infinite and in this fusion transforming the boundaries of ordinary logical thinking that incarcerate the religious imagination. In the expanse of Chiang Rai's Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the far north of Thailand, with the darkness illuminated by altar candles and the silence broken only by the rhythmic chanting of monks seated before newly consecrated Buddha images, it was as though I experienced in the fullness of time not only the instantiation of the universal *dhamma* but the enfleshment of the universal *logos*.

*Buddha: Knowledge and Compassion*

In my study of Buddhism, I have encountered another major tension in the way Buddhists experience the Buddha, a polarity between knowledge (*paññā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). The tension is represented at the very beginning of the legendary life of the Buddha. The well-known story of Siddhartha's renunciation of his family and princely status to search for the supreme knowledge (*nibbāna*) that defined his Buddhahood (*sammāsambuddha*) is taken as the paradigm of Buddhism's valorization of knowledge as the supreme value. Ignorance drives the Wheel of Rebirth (*saṃsāracakka*). Only by overcoming ignorance and mental defilement (*kilesa*) does the Buddha or anyone else realize the wisdom-gone-beyond (*gate gate paragate bodhi svaha*).

One has only to read cursorily in the vast corpus of canonical and noncanonical Buddhist literature or observe Buddhist attitudes and behaviors regarding the Buddha to realize that the Tathāgata represents much more than wisdom (*paññā*). For example, in the *jataka* literature where the future Buddha appears in a variety of human and animal guises, the Blessed One personifies a wide range of moral and spiritual values, not solely the paradigmatic value of wisdom. The last ten of the 547 Pāli canonical tales and their appended commentary represent an amalgam of moral perfections (*parami*) that define the moral prerequisites for Buddhahood. In their various permutations these virtues, ranging from renunciation and equanimity to patience and loving-kindness, play a major role in all Buddhist traditions. Perhaps best known to Western students of Buddhism are the *Mahabodhisattva* perfections delineated in such texts as Santideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Entering the Path of Enlightenment). Above all other characteristics, wisdom and compassion define bodhisattvahood.

Included in the final ten Pāli *Jātakas* is the story of Sāma, the personification of loving-kindness (*mettā*).<sup>6</sup> It is a tale of self-sacrificial, redemptive love. Sāma lives a life of tender, caring devotion to his parents, Dukulaka and Parika who, while living in the forest as ascetics, are blinded by a poisonous snake. One day, King Piliyaka of Benares is hunting in the forest and observes Sāma filling a water jar. Nearby, deer are drinking from the same pool, unafraid because Sāma embodies loving-kindness toward all living creatures. Thinking that the youth must be a *deva* (god) or *nāga* (a serpent divinity), the King wounds Sāma with an arrow so that he will not escape. Sāma falls dying to the ground but bears no grudge or hostility toward the king. When Piliyaka learns Sāma's identity and that he is the only support for his blind parents, the King is filled with remorse. Vowing to protect and care for Sāma's parents the King goes to tell them of their son's death. The parents, like Sāma himself, bear no malice toward the King and ask to be taken to see their son's body. There, they make a solemn Act of Truth (*saccakiriya*) while praying

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of the last ten *Jātakas* see, Elizabeth Wray, et. al, *The Ten Lives of the Buddha* (New York: Weatherhill, 1972). Included in the volume are color plates of Thai temple murals of the tales. This summary is adapted from Elizabeth Lyons, *The Tosachāt in Thai Painting*, Thai Culture, New Series, no. 22 (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 1963), 9-11.



by their son's side. As a consequence, the poison is released from Sāma's body and he is restored to life. At the same time, through divine intervention, his parents regain their eyesight. Sāma then teaches the marveling King the lesson of how *devas* protect those who care for others, in this case his parents, with loving-kindness (*mettā*).

Although compassion and loving-kindness appear to complement wisdom as moral virtues prerequisite to Buddhahood and figure prominently in narrative literature associated with the future Buddha, one also encounters a tension in the tradition between wisdom and compassion. In the canonical story of the Buddha's *nibbāna*, subsequent to his enlightenment the Blessed One debates whether or not to teach the *dhamma* and share with others the supreme truth he discovered. His affirmative decision is celebrated as a prime example of the Buddha's great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*).<sup>7</sup>

When he surveys the world following his enlightenment, the Buddha perceives that few people will be able to understand his teaching. Therefore, he deliberates:

Enough with teaching the Dhamma  
That even I found hard to reach;  
For it will never be perceived  
By those who live in lust and hate.

Those dyed in lust, wrapped in darkness  
Will never discern this abstruse Dhamma  
Which goes against the worldly stream,  
Subtle, deep, and difficult to see.

Fortunately, Brahmā Sahampati intercedes on behalf of the world by pleading with the Buddha: "The world will be lost, the world will perish, since the mind of the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened, inclines to inaction rather than teaching the Dhamma." Upon hearing Brahmā's plea, the Blessed One, "out of compassion for all beings survey[s] the world with the eye of a Buddha," and decides to teach the supreme truth he had attained in his enlightenment. The story demonstrates that although priority is given to the wisdom of enlightenment, the most complete expression of Buddhahood includes the compassion that motivates the Buddha to teach the *dhamma* to a suffering humanity. The Tathāgata's stated mission, that he came to teach the cause of suffering and the way to its cessation, takes on the meaning of an act of cosmic compassion. This story can be seen as an anticipation of the cosmic dimensions of the compassion of the Amida Buddha in the Japanese Pure Land tradition.

The compassion of the Buddha bears a family resemblance to other moral qualities, in particular, empathy (*anukampā*),<sup>8</sup> the ability to identify with the suffering of others (*samvega*),<sup>9</sup> the detachment from self-interest that allows one to delight in the joy of another solely for the sake of the other (*muditā*), and to love others non-preferentially (*upekkhā*). Because these qualities are often associated with both healing and the feminine, it is not surprising that the Buddha assumes

<sup>7</sup> *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (The Noble Search). *Majjhima Nikāya*, no. 26. See *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 253-268.

<sup>8</sup> As the Buddha taught the *dhamma* for the benefit of humankind so should monks be motivated by empathy for the world. *Saṅgīti Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, iii. 213.

<sup>9</sup> For the linkage of *samvega* and acting on behalf of others see, *Saṅgīti Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, iii. 214.

both healing and feminine properties. In the *Lotus Sutra*, for example, the Teacher of the *dhamma* is equated with spiritual healing and other Mahāyāna *sūtras* celebrate healing Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, in particular.<sup>10</sup> In the Tantrayana tradition of Tibet wisdom and compassion are feminized in the form of Prajñāparamitā and Tāra and other female divinities often depicted with male counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

From the standpoint of devotional belief and practice, the Buddha's compassion is often understood not only as the power of the Blessed One to release the devotee from the ontological condition of suffering (*dukkha*), but also to protect and intercede directly on behalf of one's welfare or the welfare of others in mundane, practical ways. When a young teachers college student in Chiang Mai visits the Flower Garden Monastery (Wat Suan Dok) the morning before her afternoon final exam, purchases a small square of gold leaf and after kneeling in prayer before applying the square to the forehead of one of the Buddha images, she is probably motivated less by honoring the Buddha than by hoping the act will improve her chances of doing well on the exam. In other words, she hopes that the Buddha acting out of enlightened compassion will intercede on her behalf.

Virtually all Buddhist ceremonies have as part of their underlying meaning the purpose of protecting those gathered together for a particular occasion, be it an ordination, funeral, or sabbath meeting as well as protecting those not present or deceased. Throughout Theravāda Asia—Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia—the primary texts recited at all meritorious (*puñña*) rituals are found in a handbook compiled in Sri Lanka called *paritta*, meaning “protection.” One example included in the collection is the *Angulimāla Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya*, #86). At the Buddha's request the monk, Angulimala, vows an act of truth that the Blessed One assures the holy monk will guarantee the birth of a healthy child.

The traditional conclusion of merit-making ceremonies in northern Thailand ends with the following recitation by the monks assembled for the meeting:

May all living beings who suffer be free from suffering;  
Those who meet with danger be free from danger;  
Those who are sorrowful be free from Sorrow.

May all divine beings (*deva*) approve  
Of the merit we have accumulated;  
So that by their power we may gain wealth.  
Give generously, observe the precepts faithfully,  
Meditate continuously.  
May I be protected by the powers of the Buddha,  
The *paccekabuddhas*, and the *arahants*.

The words suggest that the compassion of the Buddha refers not only to his teaching about the cause of suffering and the way to its cessation, but also the hope that the Buddha's Act of Truth—an act that defeated the powerful forces of Māra at the Tree of Enlightenment—will protect me and my loved ones in all kinds of circumstances and situations. Indeed, as a sign of

<sup>10</sup> See Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boulder: Shambala, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> See Robert A. F. Thurman, *Wisdom and Means: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (New York: Tibet House, 1991).

that hope, devotees may wear a neck chain from which a Buddha amulet is suspended.

I do not mean to imply that in practice Buddhists in northern Thailand always resolve the tension between wisdom and compassion on the side of compassion reduced to the Buddha's power to protect or guarantee material success. I have been impressed by the high regard with which Thai Buddhists hold meditation not only in theory but also in practice. To be sure, I know Buddhists who meditate with the same apotropaic intention that informs their merit-making rituals; however, I have observed devotees in village temples meditating with a dedication and quiet intensity that suggests a higher purpose, a quest for the Buddha's "wisdom-gone-beyond."

What about Christianity? Is there a tension between the Christ of wisdom and the Jesus of love? Does the Gospel of John exhibit a tension between the creative power of wisdom set from the beginning of time and the redemptive power of God's love in time and space? And does Paul suggest that true knowledge—not seeing-through-a-glass-darkly-knowledge—and universal compassion or agapic love are mutually complimentary much as are the Buddha's enlightenment and his great compassion? Am I reading the polarity of wisdom and compassion that I see in Buddhism into John and Paul and, by extension, the Christian theological tradition more broadly from Augustine to Sallie McFague? If so, am I Buddhasizing my tradition, or, is it rather that my experience of Buddhism has opened new insights and new interpretations that are extraordinarily powerful as I wrestle for personal meaning in my dialogical faith betwixt-and-between Christianity and Buddhism?

I attended a funeral at my home church yesterday. What I heard in scripture and sermon and saw on the faces and in the tears of family and friends was not only the wisdom and love of the universal Christ but the particular assurance and protection seen in the figure of Jesus surrounded by children framed in the stained glass window by the pulpit. "*Jesus loves me! This I know.....*"



# A Christian Critique of Economics

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Carol Johnston

## Introduction: A Word About History

Contrary to the assertions of many contemporary economists, no economic model is “value-free.” Both the major models in the world today, Capitalism (or neoclassical economic theory) and Marxism (or Marxian economics), have a long history in which basic assumptions and value choices were made that govern the models. Those assumptions and value choices have deep roots in Western culture, and were certainly shaped by Christianity as it has been practiced in the West (as opposed, often, to how it should have been practiced!). But in both cases, alternative choices were possible, and, as we shall see, some opportunities were missed. However, it is not my purpose to attempt to determine to what extent Christianity can be blamed or credited with the economics we must live with today. Rather, I hope to examine economics from the perspective of my Christian faith and ask how the economic models so powerful today have missed (or worked against) crucial elements of Jewish and Christian standards of justice and how they might be transformed to create economies that are healthier for human and natural communities and that are ecologically sustainable.

When Adam Smith published his *Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776, he was asking if there could be a better way to run economies than the entrenched mercantilism of his day, which operated through state monopolies to benefit an elite. He and many others in his time were frustrated with mercantilism and searching for alternatives. They never imagined that the ideas they wrote about would some day coalesce into what we now call “capitalism,” and succeed beyond their wildest dreams. They were just trying to make the system more open to more participation by a wider range of people. I believe that today we are in a similar situation. Capitalism has been wildly successful in its single goal: constant growth in the production of “goods”. From a Christian perspective, this is an ambiguous goal and in and of itself cannot be supported. In addition, capitalism also has serious negative effects on both communities and the natural environment that must be dealt with, and it has a built-in tendency to leave many people marginalized—not only unemployed and often unemployable within the capitalist market system, but even worse, stripped of traditional access to subsistence living. Consequently many of us are searching for solutions—for ways to go beyond cosmetic reforms and really transform capitalism to make it a more equitable and environmentally sustainable system. Surely if Adam Smith and others of his day could think their way through to better ideas

about economics than those offered in mercantilism, we can do the same with the economic models available to us today. If they could do it, we can do it.

### Thinking Theologically About Economics and Acting Responsibly

As a Christian I already approach economics with a number of assumptions, value choices, and perspectives that come from my tradition. I hope to be clear about what those are, and compare them with those that are embedded in economics.

First of all, the world (which is both material and spiritual) is created by God, who recognizes it as “good” (Genesis 1). This world then is not something to be escaped (contrary to the beliefs of some Christians), but is to be lived in as fully as possible as the gracious gift of a generous and loving God. From a Christian perspective, science has for the most part focused solely on the material aspect of creation and ignored the spiritual. Insofar as economics has tried to be “scientific”, it has also worked within a narrow framework of “facts”, focusing solely on “natural laws” and how things work at a material level. This is very inadequate from a Christian perspective, but as far as it goes, it is true enough. If economics would carefully stay within its own realm of “facts”, Christians could have little to quarrel with. However, both capitalism and Marxism have gone far beyond the study of how economies actually work, and built economic models based on a *priori* deductive premises. These premises are individualistic, materialistic, and place growth in the production of “goods” as the central aim of societies. Insofar as these models have developed into ideologies that are used with blind faith to attempt to change economies and societies to fit their models, regardless of the consequences to human and natural communities, I believe that Christians must denounce them as idolatrous. But denunciation alone is not enough. We must examine the premises and their consequences in actual economies, subject them to judgment (and to change), and propose better alternatives.

Historically, Protestants have been particularly concerned to judge all economic systems from a biblical perspective, and especially a prophetic one. For my purpose, there are two crucial aspects of the prophetic tradition. First is that of *denunciation*: of denouncing injustice wherever it occurs. This has always been difficult but crucial. In many societies it is dangerous to denounce injustice, and in others it is hard for the people who participate in it to see it clearly. But the second aspect of the prophetic tradition is just as crucial, and in many ways is even harder. It is very tempting to stop with prophetic denunciation, and feel righteous. But the tradition has always included prophetic *annunciation*, which involves calling the people to live up to the best in their traditions—to be the people God created them to be. This requires offering people constructive ways to do better. It is not adequate to keep telling economists and national leaders that capitalism has unjust consequences for many people, or that Marxism is repressive. Responsible Christians must search for constructive alternatives, for practical new ideas that will help move societies in more just and healthier directions. Of course, religious leaders cannot do this alone. For one thing, they do not know enough. The laity who are committed Christians yet are also economists, systems thinkers, political leaders, etc. must work on it.

But whatever Christians do to contribute to alternatives will still be inadequate if we stop with the prophetic side of the Jewish and Christian traditions. To be effective, the prophetic depends on the wisdom traditions—the knowledge of how to cultivate a healthy community over time. Wisdom is about the accumulation of the practical experience of communities about how

to survive, how to relate to the natural world in healthy ways, how to manage conflict, how to keep things going for the long haul. In the wisdom writings and the legal codes of the Bible—in such mundane places as Proverbs and Leviticus—we find a great deal of wisdom that we need to draw on for cultivating healthier communities.

Another source of such wisdom, one that is today endangered, is traditional communities of all kinds—from the hunter-gatherers of the Amazon and other places to small rural farming communities that have hundreds of years of experience in how to live in specific places. Any community where people have lived close to the land for more than a few centuries is a treasure-trove of wisdom. This does not mean that they are somehow “ideal” or free of sin and injustice—they are not. But they still have intricate knowledge of how to live close to nature, and they can help us. We ourselves cannot return to those kinds of communities, but we can learn from them and we must fight to protect them.

Along with drawing on the prophetic and wisdom traditions, Christians also look to discern where and how the Holy Spirit is at work. This is of great importance in a world of constant change. St. Paul assures us that God is at work in everything to bring forth good (Romans 8:28), and if we will open our eyes and our spiritual sight we can find these sources of new hope and draw on them. We should look for projects that have made breakthroughs to new ways of dealing with the intractable problems most of us face, and international organizations should lift up these projects to share the lessons with others. At the same time, we must not forget that every nation and culture is different, and everyone must work out what is best for his or her context.

In addition to bringing forth new solutions in practical projects, the Holy Spirit is also at work in us to bring forth new ideas—new ways of *thinking* that will help us to see the world more truthfully and act in it more responsibly. We must endeavor to participate in this work as well, and search for alternatives that will transform the economic models we have in ways that lead in healthier directions for human and natural communities.

Finally, we must ask ourselves, “What is God calling our particular Christian churches to be doing? What roles do we already play? What else might we do that would make a difference?” For example, it may be that Christians in developing countries cannot do so much to change the economy directly, but they could do more to make sure primary education becomes available to all children, especially poor girls, since we know that the education of girls is crucial to the long-term alleviation of poverty. Or maybe there are a number of universities in which social scientists could work together on economic issues in their locale. (The Christian Council of Cuba is fostering just this kind of work in anticipation of coming changes in Cuba.) I do not know what the right activities are for Christians in any given country—only they can answer that. I only urge them to take an inventory and ask themselves, “What positive impacts have Christians had in the past in our country, and what are we doing now, and what might we do that we have not dreamed of yet?” And pray for the Holy Spirit to open their imaginations.

Now I would like to try to explain why I think the wisdom tradition is so important that it under girds the prophetic. The Protestant churches in my country have tended to ignore the wisdom tradition and concentrate attention on the prophetic on the one side and the pastoral on the other. This has led to a split between the two, with more liberal churches engaging in prophetic witness, and more conservative churches sticking with pastoral care. With neither the prophetic nor the pastoral being grounded in wisdom (in the health of the whole community of faith), they

each have been degenerated—the prophetic into mere denunciation of injustice with little constructive witness, and the pastoral into mere individual therapy, with very inadequate attention to the mutual care of the whole people of God.

Once we begin thinking in the larger frame of Christian Wisdom, we also read the larger society differently. Instead of thinking solely in terms of individuals, we have the criterion of the health of the community as a community, including that of the individuals within it. In biblical terms, the health of the community, especially that of the weakest members of the community, is the test of justice. Now this is quite different from the way Western societies have debated social justice issues. In capitalist economics justice has been defined in two opposing ways: as either social equity for individuals, or as freedom for individuals. Either way, communities as such are invisible. And in fact, capitalist economists (whether social equity liberals or *laissez-faire* liberals) are quite clear that capitalism destroys communities constantly. But when we look to Marxism for an alternative, we find that while the economic model seems very different, the focus is still on *individuals*—only this time on how individuals participate in production. Despite the rhetoric about human solidarity, communities as such are still invisible, and still destroyed by the economic model put into practice. So for over 150 years, the terms of the debate about economic justice have been between liberty and equity, but solely for individuals disconnected from their communities and the rest of creation.

In the Bible justice is understood very differently, in terms of *right relations* between people, between the covenant community and God, and with the rest of the created world.<sup>1</sup> It is understood in the Bible that individuals are inherently part of communities, and justice is a matter that involves the whole community. In other words, individuals, to be healthy persons, need healthy communities in healthy ecosystems. And when we think about justice in this broader way, we realize that *both* individual liberty *and* social equity are important, because healthy communities and healthy individuals need both to flourish. For Christians, then, it is important to look at economic models in terms of what they do for whole *communities*, not just individuals, and especially for the most vulnerable members of those communities.

### Critiquing Capitalism from a Christian Perspective

The model on which capitalist economies are based is called “neoclassical economic theory.” Probably no actual economy embodies neoclassical theory perfectly; nevertheless, its premises and tools are powerful factors in all capitalist economies (including the state-assisted economies of the East Asian “tigers”) and to a certain extent in socialist economies as well. Neoclassical economics is governed completely by one central goal for economics, one fundamental assumption about human nature, and one core value choice embedded in the theory. The central goal is one of *growth in the production of “goods”*—any “goods”. No other goal matters—not economic well-being for all, not health for either individuals or communities, not ecological integrity. Just aggregate economic growth, pure and simple. The fundamental assumption about human nature is that *human beings are independent individuals who naturally act to maximize their own individual “utility,”* which means whatever an individual chooses to value.<sup>2</sup> Techni-

<sup>1</sup> See Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (NY: Harper & Row, 1962), chapter on justice.

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935), excerpted in Daniel Hausman, ed., *The Philosophy of Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 123; and Kenneth Arrow, *Collected Papers, Vol. 1, Social Choice and Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 11-12.

cally, an individual can choose to value community and environment over economic growth, but the economic system never can, and in practice the assumption is that each human being is what came to be called, following John Stuart Mill, *homo economicus*: the wealth-maximizing human.<sup>3</sup> The core value choice embedded in the theory is that *leaving individuals free to choose whatever each wants is good*, and this becomes the mechanism whereby the free market operates to achieve economic growth.

How are Christians to evaluate this goal, assumption, and value? When we look at the results, we have to admit that it works. Capitalism does indeed achieve unbelievable economic growth in the production of “goods”, and does it more efficiently than any other system ever tried. If our sole criterion were economic growth, and if we understood human beings solely individually, neoclassical theory would be judged not only adequate, but highly successful. However, in the words of Jesus, humankind “does not live by bread alone” (Luke 4:4). And human beings do not live as isolated individuals, making decisions apart from their families and communities. Neoclassical theory tries to wave away this concern by asserting that individuals can choose to “maximize” the good of their families and communities, and an “aggregation” of these choices will sway the outcome at the social level. But notice that any social choice, any community action as such, is ruled out of the picture. And any choices, whether individual or social, in favor of other goals than-growth in “goods”, are inherently up against the central drive of the economic system for growth in production. This is the reason materialistic consumerism is so powerful: the economy requires it to keep growing, no matter the real needs of the society.

There are many other unintended effects of the neoclassical economic model that are causing terrible problems throughout the world. In the early development of economics, there were thought to be three unique but related “factors of production”: land, labor, and capital. Over time, capitalism began to treat land and labor more and more as just different forms of capital. This meant that land, and its needs as part of natural systems that must be sustained, became open to abuse and exploitation, and so did labor, which was more and more treated as interchangeable parts of the production machine. Because labor must follow the most efficient use of capital, laborers (including the managerial class) must constantly move with moving capital—and inevitably communities are disrupted and weakened as companies relocate and workers follow. Because family health ultimately depends on family and neighborhood networks larger than a one or two-parent family, and extended families and neighborhoods cannot move together, families are also weakened. In fact, it is more and more the case that family life, the support of which was once the sole purpose of economic activity, is considered a “voluntary” activity which one may do in one’s spare time as long as it does not interrupt one’s work.

The doctrine of free trade exacerbates this problem of community disruption. As long as capital freely crosses national boundaries, firms are free to move their operations to the cheapest sites, and so force nations to bid against each other for the jobs. That is pushing wages down worldwide and as the system is more and more globalized it is driving down manufacturing wages in countries where they once were high such as the U.S. and Germany. It also makes it very difficult for nations to enforce environmental protections and a social safety net because companies can simply pick up and move to a less stringent place.

Another problematic effect of the neoclassical model is the result of the focus on

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<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, “On the Definition and Method of Political Economy,” in Hausman, *Philosophy of Economics*, 52-53.



individual choice in the market, so that everything else is called “externalities”. Air, water, and soil pollution are “external” effects of economic activity, and so is anything else that is not directly done in the market. On one side, this means that the actual social costs of any economic activity is invisible to the market system, which is why the disintegration of communities and families and the destruction of ecosystems, is not seen as a problem in economic theory. In fact, because of the way GNP counts *all* market activity as a plus, such costs as environmental clean-up and the burden of paying for larger police forces as societies unravel, are actually counted as *positive* contributions! This means that a nation’s GNP could be going up while its actual economic well-being, measured in long-term sustainability and social health, is plummeting. It also means that the bottom half or more of the society could be worse off, but as long as GNP is going up, everyone assumes what is happening is good for the country.

This happens especially as people who once fed themselves in subsistence villages lose their land and are pushed into the cities. Since the village economy was not part of the money system, the economic well-being of the people in those economies is not part of GNP. But when the men have to leave and get work in the cities, so that their families, communities, and culture start to disintegrate, and everyone is both economically and culturally worse off than before, GNP actually counts it as good because they are now earning money wages that add to GNP. I had a student from Kenya who said, “We used to name our children *Abundance*, but then the “experts” came and told us we should change from feeding ourselves to growing coffee and tea for export, and we would get rich. So we did, but our coffee and tea don’t pay for the expenses of growing them, let alone feed us, and the trees are gone and the water is now bad and the soil degraded, and our children are hungry.” GNP in Kenya has gone up as a result of this change, but my student’s people are worse off. So an alternative method of accounting should be devised that actually measures economic welfare, and not just monetary activity, and GNP must be abandoned. Luckily, there are some people working on this, and they call their alternative to GNP the GPI: Genuine Progress Indicator.<sup>4</sup>

One way to cope with “externalities” is to make them “internal”—to put a price on such things as the costs of air pollution and force the players in the market to pay for them. This is often the only effective way to deal with the problem, but it exacerbates the inherent problem of the system—the fact that all the pressure in capitalism is to make “scarce”, and so marketable, what once was free and available to all. Worldwide, land, especially arable land, has been almost completely brought into the market system; and the once-widespread “commons” whereby anyone could have access to the means to live, is smaller and smaller. Water is next, as oceans are carved up between fishing fleets and fresh water is made more and more scarce by pollution. Will even air some day draw a cost? Certainly clean air already does, as more and more one must be rich to live in less polluted places.

### **Critiquing the Marxist Model from a Christian Perspective**

Historically, Marxian economics has been *the* sole theoretical alternative to capitalism. Karl Marx worked out a truly brilliant analysis of how capitalism works and what both its positive and destructive effects on society are. His analysis holds up to this day, especially his use of

<sup>4</sup> See Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe, “If the GDP is Up Why is America Down?”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1995, pp. 59-78.

historical-critical method and his observations of the effects of the development of factory labor on employment and on traditional agricultural communities. Marx was well aware that industrial development destroys communities, that capital-intensive farming destroys the fertility of the soil, and that the factory system destroys individual initiative and satisfaction with work.<sup>5</sup> He describes in detail the miseries of factory labor at subsistence wages (and less), and the consequences to family and community life.

Marx also, like Christianity, had high ideals about the importance of social justice, and his economic theory set out to achieve ultimately a kind of utopia of social sharing that sounds (at a material level) remarkably like the Kingdom of God as depicted in the gospels. These ideals of equality and justice have given Marxism great power to attract followers. However, Marx, like those who developed capitalist economics, made several crucial choices that have had negative consequences—and, in fact, have proven fatal to Marxism as an economic model.

The first choice Marx made was to follow Ricardo, Smith, and Locke in affirming the labor theory of value: the idea that all economic value comes from the labor that goes into producing a commodity. Consequently, while capitalism treats land and labor as forms of capital, Marxism treats land and capital as forms of labor. Unfortunately, this means that the natural world is as much a candidate for misuse in Marxism as in capitalism. In fact, the labor theory of value ended up denying both the value caused by absolute scarcity, so that Marxists tended to ignore natural limits, and the labor of God to create the natural resources human beings use.

Labor itself would seem to fare better, except for the second choice Marx made, which wiped out much of the benefit labor might have had—the choice to affirm economic growth as the central goal of the economy, just like in capitalism. And just like in capitalism, to achieve economic growth through industrialization. So in Marxism just as in capitalism, labor must move to follow capital, and individuals and communities must be sacrificed for the sake of economic growth. It is true that individual workers did fare better in Marxian economies than in many capitalist economies, in the sense that unemployment was kept low and there was a much better social safety net, and often better health care and education available to the poorest. However, families, communities, and the environment have more often fared as poorly as in capitalist economies, or worse.

Along with the high ideals of Marxism came some strong prejudices. For instance, Marx and Engels write in the *Communist Manifesto* of rescuing people from “the idiocy of rural life” and forging the new “socialist man” in the fires of the factories.<sup>6</sup> They encouraged the destruction of traditional communities and the break-up of extended families and clans because they saw these as impediments to achieving true socialism. When implemented—and they were widely implemented in Marxian societies—these ideas caused great destruction and great resistance on the part of traditional communities. In Nicaragua, where Marxism was touted for its “human face”, Marxists nevertheless tried to break up the traditional villages of the Misquito Indians, who resisted fiercely. Similarly, in Romania, it was decided that the classic rural

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. of 3<sup>rd</sup> German edition by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (NY: Modern Library, 1906), 554.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), ed. Friedrich Engels and trans. Samuel Moore (NY: International Publishers, 1932), reprinted in *Marx on Economics*, ed. Robert Freedman (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 17.

agricultural villages must actually be bulldozed to end the resistance of the “backward” peasants to “socialism”.

## **A Word About Socialism**

Socialism must be discussed differently than capitalism or Marxism, because it has never been developed into a comprehensive theoretical model in the same way. In fact, it is more accurate to discuss “socialisms”, because there are so many varieties. Socialisms are really an attempt to find a middle way between capitalism and Marxism, and are usually mixed economies.

Most socialist economies have been much more pragmatic and flexible than Marxism, and less individualistic than capitalism. Their strength has been in their recognition that capitalism does not recognize social and community needs, and so must be regulated for the sake of the common good and social equity. However, where socialisms get into trouble has tended to be the mistake of allowing for central control of the economy by a bureaucracy, similar to Marxism. This has been a mistake because it ignores the central genius of the free market—that local people can make decisions about their local conditions and needs with far more efficiency than distant bureaucrats can. Consequently, socialist economies that have tried to centralize economic decision-making have been notoriously inefficient, while socialist economies that allow for locally free markets have done much better.

## **Alternative Assumptions and Values for Transforming Economics**

Where does our critique of economic models leave us? It seems clear that capitalism is the most successful at producing “goods” for consumption, but that material success comes at a high cost. Marxism is more successful than capitalism at achieving full employment and alleviating the worst forms of poverty, but it also comes at a high cost, and in the end has proven a relative failure at improving material standards of living. While production should not be the sole purpose of any economy, it is certainly of basic importance, and it certainly has been proven that capitalism is much more efficient at it. Socialism that uses a free market as the basis of the economy works relatively well, but socialism that relies on a Marxian-style centralized system works poorly.

From a Christian perspective, whether we live in a nation that is capitalist, Marxist, or socialist, we are looking for ways to make the economy more balanced between efficient production, social equity in terms of employment and real participation in economic decision-making, and care for the environment that all the rest depends on to sustain itself. Christian ethicists like to call these the “middle axioms” of sufficiency, solidarity, participation, and sustainability. In the face of the massive failures of Marxism and the inefficiencies (and lack of political clout) of socialism, the social trend, worldwide, is clearly toward capitalism. Attempts to overthrow capitalism through revolutions have proved to be enormously destructive, even where real gains at the most basic levels have been made. Reforms that leave capitalism intact have helped a great deal in the older industrialized nations, but intractable problems of unemployment, social disintegration, and environmental damage remain, and the frustration of those who have been most damaged by capitalist development, especially in the southern hemisphere, keeps growing.

I suggest that what we need to work on is to go beyond the false choices of revolution versus reform, and look for ways to *transform* capitalism from within. To do that we need alternative goals, assumptions, and values for a transformed economy. That will take a lot of input from a lot of people more expert than I, but I have some ideas that are meant to be suggestive:

What if, instead of growth in the production of goods, we went back to the suggestion of economist Alfred Marshall that the goal of economies should be *growth in the health and strength of the people*?<sup>7</sup> What if, instead of assuming individuals are isolated entities, as in capitalism, or are only social, as tends to happen in Marxism—what if our assumption were that *human* beings are “*persons-in-community*”, as has been suggested by Herman Daly and John Cobb?<sup>8</sup> What if, instead of *homo economicus*, we had *homo salutaris*—the healthy human—as our economic icon? And what if, instead of arbitrarily deciding that the good is what each individual decides it is for themselves alone, we recognized that each entity is inherently good, and that value—even exchange value—must take into account a combination of actual scarcity, usefulness, and basic need, and not be left solely to individual whim?

If *health* instead of wealth were the goal of economics, it would change the way economists measure economic success, and the way all of us think about economics. In today’s form of capitalism, products—the things made—are getting better and better. We have better cars, better cameras, better computers, better clothes—those of us who have access to these things. But do we have better people? If health were the goal, much would stay the same, because under capitalism much has improved, but much would also change. Healthy individuals need healthy families, communities, and ecosystems to stay healthy in the long run. They need healthy relationships, including healthy amounts of personal freedom and choice, and chances to contribute their individual gifts and talents to the larger community.

Health is not an idealistic image. Health is very concrete, which is why it lends itself to economics. It may not be possible to agree on what exactly a single standard of “health” might be, but it is certainly possible to determine if people and their communities are getting healthier or sicker. We also know that no community is healthy that has no conflict, yet too much of the wrong kinds of conflict are unhealthy. Naturally, what is healthy in one culture won’t be so healthy in others. Rather than seeing that as a disadvantage, I see it as a strength, because, beyond the basic needs for subsistence, people should be free to determine for themselves what their communities need. As it is, the prescription of capitalism for every community is to rearrange their society and culture to support continuous and insatiable consumption of products, with no debate about what products for whose benefit.

The main problem I can see in using health as the goal of economics is the inevitable temptation to create a kind of cult of “health” in which healthy people are on top and those judged “unhealthy” are marginalized and denigrated. This could easily develop into a kind of tyranny as bad or worse than the ones that blame desperately poor and starving people for their poverty. We would have to work very hard to avoid this kind of thing, and insist that it is indeed a very unhealthy way to deal with illness and handicaps—for individuals and for society. For the truth is, no one is perfectly healthy for long in our mortal lives, and a healthy acceptance of human

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: MacMillan, 1925), 139.

<sup>8</sup> See Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Economics for Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), ch. 8, “From Individualism to Person-in-Community,” 159-75.

frailty and limitation is important.

The idea of using health as the goal of economics should be debated, and it may be that someone will have a better idea. But even if “health” is not the right goal, there are some fundamental changes that I am convinced we already know must be adopted for a transformed economics.

First of all, economic theories have all relied on Newtonian physics for their basic images of the world. Yet Newtonian physics, which assumes that all entities are individual and unrelated, like parts of a machine, has been surpassed for decades by a contemporary physics that shows how all entities are patterns of energy that are inherently interrelated and interacting—not like a machine at all, but more like a complex living ecosystem. Economics would do much better to return to the early instincts of the French Physiocrats of the 18<sup>th</sup> century like Quesnay, and look to living natural systems for its patterns instead of abstracted ideals about machinery. From a Christian perspective, God’s wisdom is inherent in natural systems, because God created them, while machinery, built by finite and sinful human beings, cannot be adequate.

Second, economics has relied on purely deductive models for far too long. Early on, when we had few tools for examining actual economies and their effects, it was useful to choose a few crucial *a priori* assumptions and build economic theory on them. But two hundred years later we know much more about human beings and their societies than we did, and we know that the assumptions chosen then are inadequate. Not only should economics revise its assumptions, it should use more inductive and historical-critical research to test the assumptions and adapt the economics to changing situations and different places and times.

Third, and following on the second point, we should stop making *ideologies* out of economic models, and trying to change the world to fit them. This has been enormously destructive on both the left and the right—probably the most destructive thing of all. Marxist ideology has led communists to murder millions for the sake of their ideals. Capitalist ideology is not as obvious, at least not to those who benefit from it, but it too has been used to excuse the destruction of communities and cultures, especially indigenous peoples around the world—all in the name of “progress” and never with the consent of those so affected. Ideologies of whatever stripe tend to blind their adherents to what the actual effects on real people are, and provide an excuse for doing evil in the name of the hoped-for outcome. There are many apologists for capitalism who admit that industrial development does indeed destroy traditional communities, and their displaced peoples must suffer terribly both socially and materially. But they justify this with the promise that after the first few generations, the nation will eventually get materially better off, and this makes all the suffering worth it.<sup>9</sup> Yet I have never seen them offer to explain this to the people so affected, and let them decide what sacrifices they are willing to make for the sake of their great-grandchildren’s future! I believe Christianity is inherently anti-ideological, because it is for the well-being of God’s people in God’s world, and asks again and again Jesus’ question about what is being done to the least of these, my children?

Finally, I believe that both Marxism and capitalism are dualistic, and finally exalt the material over the spiritual. Both economic models do make some provision for the spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter L. Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty* (NY: Basic Books, 1986).

dimension, but they do it by treating the spirit, as a practical matter, as separate from matter and unrelated. In Marxism, there is supposed to be a spiritual dimension to work, but in reality it is put off until true communism is achieved, and in the meantime religion is denied any place at all. Capitalism affirms the spirit, but privatizes and individualizes it. Religion is something you do in your free time, and should have no impact on your work, except insofar as such religious doctrines as the Protestant ethic or the Confucian ethic makes you work harder. But the idea that the material should be in service to the spiritual is alien, and even the idea that they should be in balance is effectively denied. For Christians this is impossible. The doctrines of the incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit means that we can deny neither the spiritual nor the material, but must affirm that life is a combination of both. We must work to transform economics to be less dualistic and more holistic.

### **A Word of Encouragement**

The idea that Christians can actually make a difference and help to transform economics for the sake of a healthier and more just world seems impossible. And it is a daunting task that will not be done quickly, easily, or by only a few. But if Adam Smith and his contemporaries could nudge the social/economic trends of their day with their compelling ideas, we can do our best to do the same. And as a Christian I believe that nothing is beyond the transformative power of God, so I labor in faith that God will not let our efforts come to nothing.

When I get discouraged about how hard it is to make a difference, depressed about all the hunger and misery there is in the world, and worried about what environmental degradation is going to do to make things much, much worse in the twenty-first century, I think about those faithful people I know of who faced similarly daunting circumstances, and never gave up, and made a difference that mattered in the end - that matters to us today. Think of the few Quakers of England and America, who began to preach against slavery in the 1700s, when no one had thought to question it. They were ridiculed and even actively persecuted, but they persisted, though most of them did not live to see slavery abolished. Yet it was abolished.

Everywhere there are some who spoke out when it was not popular to do so, and made a difference. Or who worked quietly and persistently for change, and though never acknowledged, also made a difference. It is not for Christians to worry about what difference we can make, but only to follow the leading of God to do the work we are called to do in our own contexts, and be faithful in it—and be as imaginative and courageous about it as we can, for the sake of and in the name of the One who gave his life in an insignificant Roman province 2,000 years ago, and made the greatest difference of all—Jesus Christ.

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# The Nonviolent Struggle for Economic and Social Justice

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Cecil Murray

Nowhere is the struggle for economic and social justice better viewed than in the intense arena of racial and ethnic identity in America. Dr. Claude Anderson, author, former assistant secretary of the Department of Commerce, says: "It is nonsense to talk about equal opportunity for black people in a society in which racial monopolies guarantee that each succeeding generation of whites inherit approximately 98 percent of this nation's wealth and resources at birth. The amount of wealth that blacks own has been frozen at  $\frac{1}{2}$  of one percent. Even following the Civil Rights Movement, blacks earn 54 cents for every dollar that a white earns." That is the economic arena in the non-violent struggle for economic and social justice.

In the arena of social justice, the Federal Judicial Council and The Sentencing Project, both Washington D.C. based agencies, say (1) Blacks are 15% of the drug traffic, yet 50% of the drug arrests. (2) Blacks have a 49% higher sentencing for the same drug related crimes as whites. (3) For a white to get the same sentence as a black for trafficking in drugs, the white must use 100 times as much power cocaine, the white drug of choice, as the black uses crack cocaine, the black drug of choice, and the two are essentially the same. All of this, of course, is seen against the background of adult black males being 3% of the American population, yet 50% of the prison population, and 85% going to prison for drug-related crimes.

Why these disparities? Specifically, 81% of Blacks and nearly half of Whites (49%) believe that "racism continues to be a major obstacle for African American wealth creation and the attainment of social justice."

Please allow me in discussing the non-violent struggle for economic and social justice to pose three questions that underlie the struggle.

## **I. Sword Force or Soul Force?**

Lord Acton reminds us all: "Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely." We know further that power concedes nothing without demand. Demand can utilize the power of the sword, or the power of the soul. Which will it be: sword or soul?



Jesus exalts militancy, soul force, without exalting violence, sword force. Sword force has a big mouth, big voice, and a sharp edge. But will it be the cutting edge? Will we beat our plowshares into swords, or our swords into plowshares? If the latter, beating our swords into plowshares, we are called upon to differentiate between violence and militancy. The cross represents both, and at the same time, the triumph of the one, militancy, over the other, violence.

Militancy, like violence, is disruptive, except that violence destroys the soul and militancy develops the soul, as the struggle to emerge from the cocoon develops the wings and body structure of the butterfly. Jesus clearly calls us to come out of our cocoons: “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”—only he intends a sword of creative division regarding our stance on righteousness and the Word of God. Militancy, soul force, calls Martin Luther King out of his cocoon of safety. In his famed midnight coffee pot conversation, a restless time when sleep escapes him, and he visits the kitchen, he hears the challenge of the voice of God: If you will stand up for righteousness, if you will stand up for justice, lo, I will be with you forever.”

The Buddha, too, is converted on his sensitivity, an inner restlessness of soul occasioned by the sights of the impoverished, the lame, and the needy.

In the Gethsemane experience, Jesus cautions Peter to put away his sword, then in the sensitivity that makes saints, Jesus proceeds from purification to restoration; in this case restoring an ear, in all cases restoring a lifeline. The option is not to go down fighting, (our definition of courage), but to go *up* fighting (our definition of the cross). Thus, our options are threefold: to be Careful, or to be Carefree, or to be Careless. If we choose to be careful, then the higher principle takes over: to present our bodies as living sacrifices as in John 3:16.

Required and implied, is a total commitment. We are familiar with the pig and the chicken that pass an emergency food station, which is feeding free breakfast to the homeless. “Let’s go in and make a contribution,” says the chicken. “Oh no,” says the pig, “for you it’s only a contribution; for me it’s a total commitment.”

Both the Buddha and Jesus have wilderness experiences that somehow call them out of themselves in total challenge of power, prestige, and possessions—wilderness temptations. Their ministries teach us, true survival takes us beyond mere survival—you really cannot live by bread alone, but by the true bread that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Would not it be a boost to our total morality if we used the downsized military installations to convert swords into plowshares, to teach skills that prepare for useful lives, non-violent instruments to bring parity, coalitions of conscience, new age mentalities, and common agendas? And would not this be more economically defensible than the high cost of a year’s confinement in prison, some \$35,000? Sword force?

Both Buddhism and Christianity have much to give, and much to receive. We have much to learn from Buddhism, for example, for even at its early stage, Buddhist *metta* love opposes fighting and war even against cruelty and oppression. Buddhism remains the most peaceful and least warlike religion in the world. This is significant in that in the last 3,500 years of history we have had less than 300 years of peace; and most of our wars have been religious wars. We human beings will fight about anything, and when there is nothing to fight about . . . well, we will fight about that. Sword force or soul force?

*Holy wars* are a contradictory term, a *non-sequitur*. Paul, the spiritual statesman of early Christianity, tells us, of course, there is a price to pay for non-violence: “You have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it (Gal. 1:13-14). Following his conversion, Paul transitions from persecutor to persecuted, becoming what he terms a *zealot*. The day following the zealous attempt of the mob to kill him, 40 of them bound themselves by an oath to continue the effort to kill him (Acts 23:12-14). There is clearly a price to pay for *soul* force rather than *sword* force. Both Jesus and the Buddha paid it all.

## II. Justice or Just Us?

This is our second consideration. Personal salvation or social salvation? Or both? Both seem a pressing requirement. But to be inclusive or exclusive? Here we cannot do both. *Jesus teaches inclusivism, not exclusivism*. To multiply our resources, rather than to add to our woes by dividing our resources between the haves and have-nots. We are steadily dividing: 30 million Americans go to bed hungry every night in perhaps the richest nation in history. Nonetheless 50% of Americans are overweight, and three-fifths of Americans are on diets. Seventy million people will be added to the world this year, and 4 million will die of starvation. One out of four persons has the AIDS virus in parts of South Africa. This seems clearly an unjust situation.

For most of us here, justice remains a universal ideal. We agree that we are not ideal people, but we ought to be people of ideals. Speaking of parity, John Donne says, “No one is an island, no one stands alone.” We are peninsula people, touching each other in all regards. Being touched in all regards. The question of Christianity and of Buddhism is, Inclusion or Exclusion? Palace or Carpenter’s shop? The answer depends on how sensitive you are.

The facts mobilize those who are sensitized to receive them. Take, for instance, the complex economic struggle over welfare. Eighty-eight percent of those on welfare are physically handicapped or children. Only 12% are returnable to the job market, with the average stay on welfare being less than 2 years. Welfare consumes \$250 billion of the national budget, yet that is only 15% of the whole, far less than that spent for defense, which has the largest slice of the pie chart. Both Jesus and the Buddha would agree with the country wisdom regarding the religious emphasis when we consider economics: we should bring three books when we come to worship—the Good Book, the hymn book, and the pocketbook.

Further, you are not converted until your pocketbook starts shouting!

Sensitivity remains the keynote. Recall how both founders, the Buddha and Jesus, experience encounters with the blind, and instruct us:

To see a blind person sensitizes.

To give sight to a blind person socializes.

To ignore a blind person ostracizes—both the blind person and the seeing person.

A yearly job fair at First AME Church attracts an average of 6,000 persons on each occasion. Invariably those who are assisted by the job fair make statements that approach, “I once was blind but now I see.”

We are familiar with the story of how the Buddha came to see how shielded he was from

all unpleasant things. He ventures outside of the shield of the palace, encountering old age, sickness, death: the human fate. He discovers it is not enough to go through life as a consumer. One must also be a producer. On a local level, First AME, Los Angeles, undertakes the task of producing producers—40 task force ministries designed to take the church beyond the walls, including nine ministries that are geared for economic development-producing producers:

1. Venture Capital Fund, \$10,000,000;
2. Revolving Loan Fund, \$6,000,000, with loans to over 150 small businesses, creating some 500 jobs;
3. Entrepreneurial Training Program with some 3,500 business owners trained;
4. Business Assistance Center, having assisted over 1,000 businesses;
5. Temporary and Full-time Personnel Services, finding over 3,000 jobs in 8 years;
6. Business Incubator housing 30 start up businesses;
7. Free Legal Clinic with lawyers from UCLA, USC, Temple Isaiah, and First AME;
8. MTA Transportation Program, serving 50,000 senior citizens monthly; and
9. Environmental Protection Program of oil and water recycling.

In addition, our Housing and Health ministries have 10 housing villas housing 300 families; including sheltering designed for the physically handicapped, AIDS families, senior citizens, and general public housing; plus an Education Center (pre-k through 8th grade); and other service outreach programs.

The challenge is to go beyond the walls, beyond ourselves. Justice can never be Just Us. Following Sword Force or Soul Force, following Justice or Just Us, our third consideration is:

### III. Ritual or Righteousness

In the conversation between freedom and form, the dialogue is between: the preaching, the preacher, and the preached—the content of our proclamation, the one who is proclaiming, and the One proclaimed. That is, living witnesses must have something to witness about, and must not be fettered by form. The Word must become flesh.

Jesus teaches substance over style. Both the Buddha and Jesus downgrade ritual, referring to privileged priests as “the blind leading the blind by means of blind tradition.” Economic and social injustice has become a ritual in America. If you come from ‘the other side of the tracks’, there is a train of thought that says, ‘you are where you deserve to be, rather than where you are thrown.’ The way of ritual, saying, ‘you are where you deserve to be,’ for far too many, is a way of destruction.

Is there a better way? Buddhism means ‘the enlightened way.’ Christianity was once called ‘the way.’ Each maintains the *common way*, each attempts to master the question, ‘How do you overcome the way things are and make them the way things can be, the way things ought to be?’ Martin Luther King posits a way of salvation by maladjustment: “The salvation of the world belongs to the maladjusted.” (Soldier out of step, “the only one in step.”)

Ritual, being in lockstep, can cause blindness. The tradition of holy wars, for instance, is a ritual as blind as the tradition of gaining economic and social justice via the way of violence.

If you are not blind, if your eyes are open, you look to the cross, which instructs, “take the blow for the higher principle of love.” Later Buddhism similarly teaches—one must do good to all creatures, even at the expense of one’s life. Such righteousness ushers in redemption.

The end goal of all is deliverance. Mere complaining is not enough. (Told ya’ll I was sick). We are often that way with ritual—just dying to prove it. Both Buddhism and Christianity avow that fasting and asceticism are worthy, but fasting and asceticism do not bring deliverance. As mentioned earlier, the Buddha and Jesus downgrade sacrifice and ritual.

If our sources are correct, in early Buddhism in the place of a sacred seat of a divine God, there is emphasis on law and order: the law of cause and effect (karma). In later Buddhism, the ethics become more intense: one must do good to all creatures, even at the expense of one’s life.

Christianity says, look to the cross. Take upon yourself the negative of the other self. Take the blow for the higher principle, the love principle. Look to the cross.

Then look *beyond* the cross. See an aroused consciousness, character, morality, consensus, a salvation for the redeemed, a damnation for the lost. The lost suffer the consequences of their own actions. Violence for violence. The redeemed are brought back from the divisive force of destruction and self-destruction.

So in summary, here we are—the holy maladjusted. Different folks and folks who are different making a difference. Making a difference, not making indifference. And what is the difference? It is the difference between *I could care and I could care less*. If you care, there is Someone who cares with you and by you and for you.

No matter by what name that One is called, in the non-violent struggle for economic and social justice, that One’s name is HOLY!



# Toward Proventive Cultural Nonviolence

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Chaiwat Satha-anand

## Introduction

In "Death by Courtesy of Governments, 1945-1990", the late William Eckhardt suggested that throughout history governments have killed by taking the lives of civilians and soldiers in civil and international wars as well as their own dissenting citizens. In addition, government policies which oftentimes engender structural violence are also responsible for the loss of lives among disadvantaged people.<sup>1</sup> Based on his calculation, during the course of 45 years, around 8 percent of the 865 million people killed by governments died in war-related deaths and direct killings.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that "peace" has broken out between the U.S. and much of the former Soviet Union after 1990 and that old foes in the Middle East and Northern Ireland have begun their peace process, direct violence in many parts of the world from Somalia to Bosnia-Herzegovina, from the subcontinent to East Timor stand as a sad reminder that the spectre of violence still hovers above today's world. It seems that potentially violent conflicts in the world center around the problematiques of identity and ecology. In many places people killed and are killed in the names of their identities. In some other, violence erupts when people fight for their land and water, natural resources that their lives depend on. To some extent, I have dealt with nonviolent response to ethnic violence elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Here I will deal with potentially violent conflicts between the state and people, focusing, though not exclusively, on environmental struggles.

This paper is an attempt to put forward nonviolent alternatives in facing the challenges of potentially violent conflict situation *before* it happens. As opposed to the state, cultural power of a civil society can be tapped and used to legitimize nonviolent actions in much the same way that cultures legitimate violence. Based on John Burton's concept of "provention", I would argue that the use of cultural nonviolence is prophylactic in nature and therefore is conducive to constructive social/political relations badly needed if violence is to be neutralised.

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<sup>1</sup> William Eckhardt, "Death by Courtesy of Governments, 1945-1990," *Peace Research*, Vol. 24, No.2 (May 1992), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> See Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "The Politics of Forgiveness: Islamic Teachings and Gandhi's Thought," in N. Radhakrishnan, ed., *Gandhi and Global Nonviolent Transformation* (New Delhi: Gandhi Smriti & Darshan Samiti, 1994), pp. 127-148.

## Cultural Power of a Civil Society

The deputy secretary general of the Thai National Security Council recently maintained in a closing session at Chulalongkorn University that the most pressing problem in Thailand at the moment is the conflict between the state and the people. Villagers in rural areas, whose virtual livelihood are threatened by current development direction, are now fighting back. When ordered to leave conservation areas they have occupied long before it was declared illegal, they refuse. They fight back against state agencies' attempt to build dams in the forests they live. This type of conflict, grounded in the villagers' struggle for natural resources, arise at the time when state legitimacy is being seriously questioned. Violent confrontations have taken place and the likelihood of further violence is dangerously high because it is in the nature of the state, among other things.

Echoing Trotsky's words at Brest-Litovsk that "Every state is founded on force", Max Weber pointed out that the relation between the state and violence is "an especially intimate one" because "The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence."<sup>4</sup> Some theorists believe that Weber does not adequately acknowledge the difference between traditional and modern states. Giddens, for example, argues that "only in modern nation-states can the state apparatus generally...lay *successful* claim to the monopoly of the means of violence..."<sup>5</sup> The actual monopoly of the means of violence of traditional state notwithstanding, but in the Orient, it is the power of punishment (*danda*) which by and large characterises a king's power. It goes without saying that the means of force and the use of violence are essential for a king's power to punish. With security forces at its disposal, violence is seen as natural to the state. Facing popular demonstration, the state has a tendency to meet it with the use of force as evident in Tian'anmen Square in 1989 and in the streets of Bangkok in 1992. It is one thing for the state to believe that violence is natural. It is quite another when ordinary people believe that violence is natural to the state.

Galtung's concept of "cultural violence" can very well explain the way in which violence is naturalised in a given state. In a most important article published two decades after the publication of the influential "Violence, peace and Peace Research" where the notion of "structural violence" was introduced, Galtung advances the idea of "cultural violence" which is the legitimiser of direct and structural violence and renders them acceptable in human society. Using the violence strata image of the phenomenology of violence, he suggests that direct violence (e.g., killing) stands at the top stratum and therefore is most visible. Next came changing patterns of exploitation and repression. This is the stratum of structural violence seen as a changing process. Because it is less visible, it is much more dangerous. The bottom stratum is "the steady flow through time of cultural violence". This stratum can sustain the above two strata because this form of violence is "an invariant, a 'permanence' remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the flow of slow transformations of basic culture."<sup>6</sup>

A particular official working for the Ministry of Interior in Thailand may order the use

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Trans., edited and intro. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 18. (Emphasis in the original)

<sup>6</sup> Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.27, No.3 (1990), pp.291-305. The quotation appears on p. 294.

of violence to evict villagers from their land. At the actor-oriented level, direct violence is clearly at work. But due to a basic understanding that the forest belongs to the state, that villagers are largely responsible for deforestation, and that people and forest cannot live together, any Interior Ministry official will have a tendency to use force at his/her disposal against the villagers. Galtung would say that it is “structure” which dictates the use of violence, not a particular actor. But the acceptance of violence used by the state in a given society is cultural. Through cultures and cultural reproduction, violence used by the state is legitimate while violence used by non-state actors in their struggle against the state is not. What then is the sphere of non-state actor?

Since the enlightenment, the sphere “outside” the scope of the state has been construed in different senses as “civil society.”<sup>7</sup> The meanings of “civil society” vary. If a Hegelian notion is used, then civil society cannot exist without the state which is the “final development in the emergence of a series of ‘ethical communities’ in the course of social evolution.”<sup>8</sup> But if a Marxian understanding is adopted, then civil society includes everything lying outside the immediate sphere of the state apparatus itself. As a result, civil society becomes “something distinct from the state in its origin and nature, to which the state owes its own existence and form.”<sup>9</sup>

A most comprehensive treatment of civil society appears in the work of Cohen and Arato. They maintain that civil society is a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, “composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary association), social movements and forms of public communication.”<sup>10</sup> An antagonistic relation between civil society on the one hand and the state on the other arises only when mediation between the spheres fail. When mediation fails and conflict arises, then civil society will react. It is instructive to note that for Cohen and Arato, a form of noninstitutional political action specific to citizens of modern civil societies is “civil disobedience.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, it can be argued that nonviolent action, with civil disobedience normally understood as a method in its repertoire, is natural to civil society. If nonviolent action is considered the top stratum in the phenomenology of nonviolence and therefore most visible as evident in many of the 198 methods suggested by Gene Sharp,<sup>12</sup> then at the deep cultural level which sustains the top stratum, the legitimiser of direct nonviolent actions should exist. If the cultural repertoire necessary to legitimise nonviolent actions can be identified, then the chance of nonviolent actions being accepted in a given society will be enhanced which will, in turn, increase the likelihood of successful nonviolent action.

What represents the success of nonviolent action?<sup>13</sup> I would say that the success of nonviolent action lies in its violence prevention capability as well as promoting peaceful social

<sup>7</sup> The notion of “civil society” is not unproblematic. Even Anthony Giddens decides against using it because of the difficulties it give rise. See Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1992), p. ix.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 566.

<sup>12</sup> Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action (Part Two): The Methods of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973). It should be noted that Sharp himself does not maintain that there are only 198 methods of nonviolent actions. As a creative endeavour, new nonviolent methods can always be imagined, practiced and added to the list.

<sup>13</sup> This is a section heading in Jan Zielonka, “Strengths and Weakness of Nonviolent Action: The Polish Case,” *Orbis* (Spring 1986), p. 102. For Zielonka, nonviolent action will be successful if its goals and objectives are met and not merely the “success” of organizing street demonstration (p. 103.)

relations between antagonists. If prophylactic nonviolent action is successful, then direct fighting, nonviolent or violent, will not occur.

### **Preventive Cultural Nonviolence: A Brief Example**

On May 24, 1994, a veteran Thai politician cum political activist, Chalard Vorachart, announced in public that he would go on a hunger strike because he wanted the Thai parliament to come up with a democratic constitution drafted by elected members of parliament themselves. The existing constitution is a legacy of the February 23 coup d'état. The coup makers commissioned a group of legal and political experts to draft the 1991 constitution. On June 8, more than 5,000 people took to the street where Mr. Chalard staged his hunger strike. The President of the Parliament announced the setting up of a committee to develop democracy. As the crisis intensified against the background of the bloody May 1992 incident with June 15 set as the deadline given by demonstrators for the government to take the democratic initiative, I wrote a two-part article suggesting a referendum to immediately solve the problem and preventive nonviolent measures should the situation deteriorate.<sup>14</sup>

To prevent violence from taking place in Thai society, it is important that two streams of power are taken into account, state power and civil society power. Although violence is natural to the state as discussed above, state apparatus should try not to threaten demonstrators and be friendly with them. To do so four basic conditions need to be met. First, government security forces need to understand nonviolent actions. Second, the use of police women should be encouraged to reduce the violent male presence. Third, the authorities should clearly announce that they will work in the area unarmed and will not use force against demonstrators. Experiences have amply shown that violence normally results from fear and a lack of confidence and trust. Fourth, no one should be allowed to carry arms into the protest area.

For the Thai civil society, cultural resources need to be tapped and activated. Nonviolent environment needs to be created if the likelihood of violence is to be avoided. First, Buddhist monks should intervene in a potentially violent conflict situation. They should not get involved with politics in order that the neutrality of the yellow robe can be preserved but their presence in such a situation would lessen the likelihood of violence since monks are highly respected in Thai culture. As a legitimate religious symbol, rows of monks calmly walking through the area should have a serene effect on the people involved. Moreover, they could declare the area a forgiving zone where no lives, of both animals and human beings, can be taken. Second, audio tapes recording the sounds of Dhamma and nature should be made available. Near boiling point in a crisis situation, these sounds may bring sanity back to the potentially violent crowd. The sound of sea waves and some religious songs or Buddhist sermons by respected monks should have a soothing effect on the people brought up in Buddhist culture. Third, the smell of incense stick and fresh flowers can sometimes do wonder to human beings while certain colors are more conducive to peaceful behavior than others. Fourth, ample space among the crowds is also important.

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<sup>14</sup> Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "The June Crisis: Solutions and Prevention from Violence," *Managers' Daily*, June 8, 1994. This article was later reprinted as the lead article for *Sekiya-Dhamma*, Vol.22, No.4 (May-June 1994), pp. 19-24. The Thai Buddhist monks are the main readers of this magazine.



There are many ways to prepare for nonviolent action.<sup>15</sup> But what is suggested here is the utilization of cultural resources in a given civil society to prevent violence from taking place by creating an environment conducive to peaceful social relations and legitimize nonviolence.

### **Conclusion: Towards Proventive Cultural Nonviolence**

John Burton's contribution to conflict theory and analysis is enormous.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, he has become increasingly interested in developing conflict theory that aims to terminate conflict by methods that are analytical and that get to the root of the problem and thus solving the problem "permanently".<sup>17</sup> His aim is not only to settle conflict but to resolve it in such a way that the social relationship that led to the conflictual behavior in the first place is transformed. He maintained that an undesirable event can be prevented by removing its causes and by creating conditions that do not give rise to its causes. Believing that prevention has a negative connotation, Burton coined the term "provention" which means "deducing from an adequate explanation of the phenomenon of conflict, including human dimensions, not merely the conditions that create an environment of conflict, and the structural changes required to remove it, but more importantly, the promotion of conditions that create cooperative relationship."<sup>18</sup> In my view, provention requires nothing less than deep cultural patterns that will delegitimize the environment of potentially violent conflict and legitimize conditions that are conducive to cooperative social relations. Perhaps, the task of nonviolence theory is to identify and later energise relevant cultural patterns that would effectively delegitimise the use of violence and at the same time legitimize creative nonviolent actions that would put an end to the use of violence and enhance constructive social relationship between conflicting parties.



<sup>15</sup> See for example Piroshow Camay, "The JOCC Solution: How Joint Operation Communications Centres Defuse Crises," *Track Two: Constructive Approach to Community and Political Conflict*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (November 1993), pp. 16-17. But this South African example is mainly organizational preparation.

<sup>16</sup> See a brief account of Burton's contribution in Andrew Wilson, *The Disarmer's Handbook of Military Technology and Organization* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 248-49.

<sup>17</sup> John Burton, *Conflict Resolution as a Political System*, Working Paper No.1 (Fairfax VA: Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, August 1993), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> John Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 3.

# Remedying Globalization and Consumerism: Joining the Inner and Outer Journeys in "Perfect Balance"

Judith Simmer-Brown

## Preamble

Writing this paper has been a unique experience. When John Cobb first suggested a kind of "joint paper" project, I was flattered and delighted, realizing how very much I would learn. As the actual topics and times were selected, my heart sank. The deadlines coincided with those of several other long-term obligations, and the topic of "Economic Justice" was one I could not face! First, I knew that I had no experience with economic analysis on any level. Eventually, many months later, I realized I did not want to face the daunting, painful reality of the topic.

Since last April, I have done everything I could to avoid the paper, the stages reminding me of the Kubler-Ross' end-of-life stages.<sup>1</sup> First came **denial and isolation**—I simply could not get down to work, and while I collected many sources and notes, they were merely random, with no focus or plan. Next came **anger**. I resented the topic, John, and the committee who had foisted the topic upon me. I could not abide thinking about economic justice, consumerism, and globalization. I could barely keep my eyes open when I opened relevant books or articles. This was not a topic I could address in any significant way. Furthermore, it was not "my" topic, one to which I had devoted time or attention before now. When I met with John in late November, hearing his ideas for the project, I took to scrawling random notes full of exclamation marks and side comments. Verbally, I continued a level of complaint and disclaimer.

Beginning in early October, I resorted to **bargaining**. I called David Chappell, explaining that I had many other commitments and responsibilities and simply could not present at this conference. David listened politely to all my reasons, and then concluded the conversation with a friendly laugh, saying that nonsense, I could write the paper. He suggested that I "call all my friends" asking them to help me, and to regard the project as a cooperative effort. I did call all my friends, finding some helpful ideas, and a few lifesavers. Several months later, after receiving suggestions and a very fine paper from Jose, I tried to convince *him* to write the paper, to no avail. Several times I tried reaching Rita to ask her to write it, but lost my nerve. In the midst of this, I became **depressed**, especially as I sat down to create an outline and approach. Somehow *I* was still the one writing the paper. Somehow I was going to have to say something significant on the

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (Macmillan, 1969).

topic of economic justice. Dreams of boardrooms, shopping malls, sweatshops, glitzy cities, and Bombay slums began to haunt my night-time dreams.

Finally, when the deadline unexpectedly loomed, I realized that I could not get out of it—I had to **accept** the challenge. I would have to settle down and write the paper. No alternative was possible or acceptable. For the first time, I began to examine my own process, my own state of mind, as Exhibit A for a study of economic justice. And once I finally got the point of my own resistance, the paper’s outline unfolded before me. I was able to return to my friends, colleagues,<sup>2</sup> and students who offered help. My previous source notes began to make sense to me. My own practice uncoiled further subtleties of the phenomena I was encountering, and I realized that I had everything I really needed to discuss economic justice.

When all of this occurred, I found, am finding, tremendous gratefulness to all of the conspirators who supported the process. My personal journey of getting to the topic is a model of how each of us can get down to looking closely at issues of globalization, consumerism, and economic justice. The collaborative nature of the product is a model of how we can undo consumerism, working together and individually in each of our small ways. And the ‘work-in-progress’ nature of the paper mirrors the necessity of conducting our experiments with an open-ended attitude, realizing that we need not have all the answers in order to make a significant shift in our understanding and approach. No one person can hold this—together, it is possible to make a change.

I especially want to acknowledge the work of Sulak Sivaraksa,<sup>3</sup> who has personally pioneered much of the “dharmic” critique of globalization and consumerism. Most of what I previously understood on the subject I learned at his feet. And my perspective is that of a first-generation American Buddhist speaking from the context of this hemisphere and country, not from the more pointed perspective of Siam, where the issues of globalization are more obvious and compelling. Out of respect for the work of Ajahn Sulak, I would like to speak of why an analysis of globalization deeply impacts us in the United States especially, and why we must address these issues for the sake of ourselves, our children, our friends in other lands, and all the beings of the planet.

## **From Consumerism to Globalization: Our Current Task**

As our Lilly Dialogues have turned themselves to the political, economic, and social issues which we all share, it is timely that we begin to examine the topic of economic justice, especially globalization. This discussion builds on the 1998 Dialogues on the topic consumerism, in which Stephanie Kaza identified patterns of consumerism embedded in American culture, the details still chilling to the ear and the heart: we Americans each consume our body weight daily in materials extracted and processed from farms, mines, rangelands, and forests—120 pounds on

<sup>2</sup> I especially want to acknowledge the tremendous help of my friend and colleague, Forrest Ketchin, an anthropologist and ecologist who has long been teaching in Naropa’s Environmental Studies program, for the incredible aid and perspective she has brought to bear.

<sup>3</sup> I have here cited none of Sulak’s prolific work on the subject, allowing him his own voice in this Dialogue, and following the discipline of using primarily American voices on the topic of globalization. For the essence of Sulak’s work, see *A Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Inter-Religious Commission on Development, 1988); *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (Parallax, 1992); *Global Healing: Essays and Interviews on Structural Violence, Social Development and Spiritual Transformation* (Inter-Religious Commission on Development, 1999).

the average.<sup>4</sup> Since 1950, consumption of energy, meat, and lumber has doubled; use of plastic has increased five-fold; use of aluminum has increased seven-fold; and airplane mileage has increased 33-fold per person. We now own twice as many cars as in 1950. And with every bite, every press of the accelerator, every swipe of the credit card in our shopping malls, we have left a larger ecological footprint on the face of the world. We have squeezed our wealth out of the bodies of plantation workers in Thailand, farmers in Ecuador, women factory workers in Malaysia.

In this Dialogue, we penetrate more deeply into the phenomena through an understanding of globalization, transnational corporations, and the international economy. John Cobb has made this point<sup>5</sup>—now that communist countries throughout the world are collapsing, the capitalist global economy is all but unchallenged in its growth. As the traditional societies become modern, consumerism is the most alluring path. Global economic interests are now running the entire world. What centers of power remain relatively untouched by this network? Religious peoples and communities have the potential to bring the only remaining challenge to multinational corporations and consumerism. Kaza argued that consumption is a non-sectarian issue, and that responsibility to overcome consumerism cuts across the lines of religion and culture. She roused us to apply all manner of “spiritual insight, dedication, and sheer stamina” in order to do this important task, commenting that “we cannot do this work alone; we need each other’s help to keep going through the many obstacles.”<sup>6</sup> Helena Norberg-Hodge wrote, “As engaged Buddhists, we have a responsibility to examine current economic trends carefully, in the light of Buddhist teachings. I am convinced that such an examination will engender in us a desire to actively oppose the trend toward a global economy, and to help promote ways of life consistent with more Buddhist economics.”<sup>7</sup>

John Cobb has devoted much of the last two decades to the untangling of these issues, and his work with Herman Daly, former senior economist at the World Bank, has forged a penetrating critique of the economic theories which fuel the international economy.<sup>8</sup> In discussing with John an approach to my paper, he asked me the question, “Can Buddhism offer a model counter to that of globalization and consumerism? Or will Buddhist cultures go the way the United States has? What strengths can Buddhism bring to the discussion among religious people regarding these global economic issues?”<sup>9</sup>

As an American Buddhist new to economic analysis, I have little to add concerning the complexities of the global economy or patterns of consumerism. But my Buddhist practice and training have taught me one thing clearly: no fundamental transformation can take place anywhere without the joining of inner change and outer change. As I recognize my inner resistance to examining globalization, I recognize America’s resistance as well. Only by overcoming my inner resistance can I contribute appropriately to overcoming America’s resistance. This is the tradition of the bodhisattva, in which one dedicates oneself to the welfare of others and oneself as

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Kaza, “Overcoming the Grip of Consumerism,” *1998 International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter paper*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Frances S. Adeney and Terry C. Muck, “Economic Growth vs. Human Well-Being: An Interview with John Cobb,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies Journal*, Vol. 18, 1998, pp. 77-88.

<sup>6</sup> Kaza, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Helena Norberg-Hodge, “Buddhism and the Global Economy,” *Turning Wheel*, Spring 1997, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good* (Beacon, 1994); John B. Cobb, Jr., *Sustaining the Common Good* (Pilgrim, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Private conversation, November 1999, Boston American Academy of Religion meeting.

inseparable, and that the welfare of others must come first. Yet we must begin the work. Opening the texts of economic analysis is opening the suffering of the world before our eyes. Listening to the devastating truths of transnational corporate exploitation is encountering the network of suffering, which everyone experiences. And in order to work with these appropriately, we transform our personal horror, despair, cynicism, and powerlessness into effective action.

The informal method of this paper is following the contours of what I understand to be the inner and outer journeys of investigating globalization, facing its implications, and being present to its patterns, its network of suffering, its causes, and its remedies. At the same time, it is an investigation which explores the “perfect balance” at the core of our existence which is the key to unraveling the problem.

### **Penetrating Insight into Outer Causes: The Nature and Causes of Globalization**

In the Tibetan Buddhist perspective, the important first step is understanding the problem of globalization correctly. When we do so, we begin with an examination of the pattern of cause and effect of the global economy. In classical form, the study of cause and effect takes place in two venues: first, one analyzes the external causes and effects, and then one identifies internal causes and effects.<sup>10</sup>

What do we mean by the globalization? The president of Nabisco once defined it as “a world of homogeneous consumption.”<sup>11</sup> It is a world in which everyone, no matter what latitude or longitude, eats the same food, wears the same clothing, and derives pleasure from the same forms of entertainment. It is the world of McDonald’s, Holiday Inn, James Bond movies, Nike shoes, and Coca-Cola. Noam Chomsky, in a lecture late last year at Boston College,<sup>12</sup> described globalization as the “new face of capitalism.” It is a network of power centered in corporate interests and financial institutions which controls the flow of capital in order to promote the financial interests of those in power to the detriment of all others. The strategies of globalization have to do with centralizing all power in financial interest, reducing all value to money, and subsuming governments to the interests of the corporations. According to Chomsky, the strategies employed by the transnational network are designed to consolidate this control:

- 1) Buy the executive branch of the states involved;
- 2) Own the legislative branch through lobbyists, campaign contributions, and term extensions, or whatever else may work;
- 3) Set the conditions in which policy is determined, asserting the power of global capital;
- 4) Control the doctrine and information systems, especially to invent new needs in order to bolster a culture of fashionable consumption.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The basic analysis in this section of the paper is based upon the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan classic, *The Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita*, by the great Nyingma master Jamgon Mipham, Rinpoche. This text is a digest of principle points of the path drawn from the Indian and Tibetan traditions.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Norberg-Hodge, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Noam Chomsky, “Globalization: The New Face of Capitalism,” Address at Boston College, October 1999. See also Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (Seven Stories Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Chomsky, 1999.

The players in this transnational network reside in the wealthy countries of the world, especially the governments of the G-8, and most especially the United States. The global dominance of the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization is funded by US dollars funneled to them by the network. Yet this capital is not really exchange of cash; instead, it is speculation. Chomsky commented,

In the last twenty-five years, there has been a huge explosion of financial institutions and financial capital, most of it speculative, with little actual capital in the economy. The flow of capital is \$1.5 trillion per day; very little of it productive. Ninety-five percent of it is destructive and speculative. The return time on investments is very rapid: eighty percent has a return time of a week, and often it is less than a day. This daily flow of capital in international markets is twice the total foreign exchange of all states together. This concentrated power is interlinked, determining states' decisions.<sup>14</sup>

States are no longer autonomous agents; transnational economic interests have taken precedence over national sovereignty, regional power, and military concerns.

The impact on developing countries and rural economies is devastating. The global monoculture is eradicating cultural diversity, replacing locally adapted forms of production with industrial systems divorced from natural cycles. Agriculture has become centrally managed and chemically dependent, delivering a narrower range of transportable foods to the international market. This, of course, robs the vitality of local communities and moves a greater proportion of villagers into urban life, creating megapolises. Because everyone becomes dependent upon the same resources, "globalization creates efficiency for corporations, but it also creates artificial scarcity for consumers, thus heightening competitive pressures....Globalization means the undermining of the livelihoods and cultural identities of the *majority* of the world's peoples."<sup>15</sup>

Much of Sulak's work has been to point out the devastating effect this system has had on Siam specifically and Asia in general. I wish to point out the devastating effect this has had on Americans. There is a tremendous growth of inequality economically in this country as well. Real wages are lower now; as of 1998, average household income had finally reached the level of 1989, much below the average household level of the 1970's. But this has not occurred without cost; everyone is working many more hours, with an average work-week of 60 hours, 52 weeks a year compared to a much shorter work-week in the 1970's. Even while business and financial journals speak of the "fairy-tale economy," a very small percentage of Americans are experiencing any of these effects. One percent of Americans holds 50 percent of stocks; 10 percent hold most of the remaining 50 percent. Eighty percent of Americans have lost net worth in the last decade, according to 1998 statistics.<sup>16</sup> These are the realities in a rich country like ours. One can only imagine the devastating effect in poor countries like Sulak's. The associated dehumanization happens worldwide.

The overwhelming effect of such an analysis may first be horror, shock, despair, and denial. But this is because there is not sufficient understanding of the phenomenon in question. When such a response arises, it is a signal to go more deeply into the nature of the phenomenon. The central method in Buddhism begins with an analysis of the causes and effects in such a state

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Norberg-Hodge, p. 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> These statistics come from Noam Chomsky, 1999.

of affairs. It is difficult to begin such an analysis because for many, globalization is taken as a “given” of natural law; it is an inescapable result of market-driven patterns. Adam Smith developed market theory which explained how individual freedom might lead to an coherent social order. Academic departments of economics and practicing economists justify market theories based on Smith, claiming that it is the basis of globalization. Margaret Thatcher, for example, summed it up with an acronym: TINA, “there is no alternative.” The ideology of the market, with its supporting ideologies regarding commodification, market success, and consumption, seem to many to be forces which have taken on their own reality, an inevitable development of the natural law market principles.

Consumerism is considered a subset of this doctrine of natural law. In this scenario, human behavior is the basis of the entire global economy, for humans have limitless wants and are willing to exchange and even sacrifice in order to fulfill their desires. Driven by basic needs and invented or “fancied” needs, humans are willing to live meaningless, subordinate lives in corporate settings in order to gain temporary gratification derived from satisfaction of those needs. Worse yet, the doctrine of the market, even in its abstract form, has been supported by theological justification that it was ordained by God, and that God “implanted self-interest in the human breast as the motive force of progress. By following self-interest we follow God’s will. Going against self-interest only inhibits God’s plan.”<sup>17</sup> In this elevation of market doctrine to the level of divine revelation, all who would challenge globalization are to be vanquished.

But in Buddhist analysis when we more closely scrutinize the global economy, we see two things: first, that this system has not arisen without cause, and secondly, there is no single, identifiable cause for this phenomenon. There is no divinely ordained plan. Whatever economic theories exist, all point to a variety of factors which have given rise to globalization; it has arisen based on interdependence of causes and conditions coming together, know as dependent origination (*pratitya-samutpada, tendrel*). In addition, the notion that a conditioned process, made up of a variety of causal factors, has an inevitable course not subject to alteration is nothing short of absurd.

In an early, seminal teaching of the Buddha, he uttered a *gatha*, which served as the basis for awakening for his most able students:

Of things which arise from a cause,  
their cause the Tathagata has told,  
and also their cessation.  
Thus spoke the Great Ascetic.<sup>18</sup>

This teaching suggests the simple and powerful heart of the teachings concerning cause and effect. If things have arisen from a cause, they are not permanently abiding, transcendently ordained entities. No matter how daunting or damaging they may appear, their existence is merely temporary and reliant upon their causes and conditions. If one can properly penetrate these causes, understanding their inner and outer aspects, it is possible to eliminate the causes and

<sup>17</sup> Daly and Cobb, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> *Mahavagga* 1.32.5 *Ye dharma hetu prabhava hetum tesam tathagatah hyavadat tesam ca yo nirodha evam vadi mahasramanah svaha*. Upon hearing this one verse, the great Sariputra is said to have entered the first level of the path. This particular teaching proved so pivotal in the proper understanding of the Buddha’s wisdom that the Sanskrit phrase has been preserved in the Tibetan tradition as a powerful mantra.

to bring about cessation or transformation. The entirety of the Buddhist path can be summarized in this process: seeing phenomena clearly, identifying accurately their causes and conditions, and through eliminating causes bring about changes.

Obviously, one need not be a Buddhist to engage in this analysis. All activism must engage in such an analysis in order to identify effective strategies to overcome social, political, or economic evils. What is important from a Buddhist perspective, however, is to apply the analysis rigorously, thoroughly, to both inner and outer phenomena until one has identified the strategic causes, the elimination of which will truly bring about cessation. Intellectual analysis is important, but it is never enough. One must also contemplate and meditate in order to fully engage with and understand the phenomenon in question.

Much of this outer analysis has already been done. John Cobb and Herman Daly have brilliantly described how Adam Smith's theories have been lifted out of the actual circumstances in which he developed them and become abstract theoretical doctrine endowed with "misplaced concreteness."<sup>19</sup> The doctrine of the market has created principles of supply and demand, "*homo economicus*", measures of market success, and the commodification of land as abstractions from the human realities in the global setting. The result is that the field of economics has "abstracted from everything to which a monetary value cannot be assigned."<sup>20</sup> If one looks only in the abstract realm of theories concerning market doctrines, one cannot untangle the mess. Cobb and Daly recommend the abandonment of "disciplinolatry" in which the fragmentation of knowledge cannot actually solve the problems at hand. Instead, they promote an interdisciplinary collaboration expanding the range of knowledge brought to bear in resolving the stranglehold economics.<sup>21</sup>

Still, the naturalist fallacy is used to screen the way in which the "market" is actually not a market at all, in Smith's sense. Noam Chomsky spoke of the perversion of the "market" in state-protected growth of industry paid for at public expense. According to his analysis,<sup>22</sup> globalization is not a result of the "natural evolution" of Smith's principles of the market; rather it has developed from the explosion of industries, which have grotesquely grown through state-supported capital. Industries such as telecommunications have developed in a successful fail-safe strategy of "cost socialized, profit privatized, and risk socialized." For example, one hundred leading transnational corporations on the Fortune 500 list have benefited directly from state protection and taxpayer subsidy: twenty would not have survived without public bailouts. The poor have no such advantage. They must compete in the market without safety net, and their risk of failure climbs every year. This is why the Third World remains the Third World in these times. Before the poor countries had the market rammed down their throats as "gospel", they had a chance to develop. Now, no such chance remains for them.

How did such state protection evolve? Many trace its evolution from a Supreme Court decision in 1886 which granted to corporations "honorary" individual rights ordinarily endowed to a human person.<sup>23</sup> This set into motion the "entity" status of the corporation, which has insisted

<sup>19</sup> Daly and Cobb, Part One, pp. 25-117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-137.

<sup>22</sup> Chomsky, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> In *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, the U. S. Supreme Court took upon itself to rewrite the Constitution, granting the rights guaranteed a person of equal protection under the law to a corporation. A two-sentence assertion by a single judge elevated corporations in this way, laying the foundation for special protections of corporations which have formed the basis of the global economy, changing the course of history. David C. Korten, *The Post-Corporate World* (Kumarian Press, 1998), pp. 184-186.



whenever possible on special protections for its rights to profit and power. As David Korten has observed, “corporations have become increasingly successful in claiming these same rights for themselves, and they have become increasingly assertive in denying them to living people.”<sup>24</sup> Using this privilege, corporations have extended their control over democratic institutions, communications systems, and commodities to the extent that they would deny the resources upon which people depend for livelihood. Korten observed,

Corporations now enjoy unlimited life; virtual freedom of movement anywhere on the globe; control of the mass media; the ability to amass legions of lawyers and public relations specialists in support of their cause; and freedom from liability for the misdeeds of wholly owned subsidiaries. They also enjoy the presumed right to amass property and financial resources without limit; engage in any legal activity; bring liability suits against private citizens or civic organizations that challenge them; make contributions to individual candidates, political parties, and political action committees and deduct those contributions from taxable income as business expenses; withhold potentially damaging information from customers; and avoid restrictions on the advertising of harmful but legal products in the name of commercial free speech....Step-by-step, largely through judge-made law, corporations have become far more powerful than ever intended by the people and governments that created them.<sup>25</sup>

Reversing these excesses and restoring human rights solely to human persons is an obvious priority, and Korten has devised a specific agenda through which this might be accomplished. The main point is that globalization has not come about through natural law, an inevitable development based upon human demand for goods. It has come about through protectionism, secrecy, and transnational control. In short, it has come about through human institutions and decision-making, propelled by self-interest.

When we look at the global economy, we find it to be a phenomenon which has arisen through a complex set of causes and conditions—none of them alone the key. Even from this cursory look, it is clear that every aspect of the global economy has come about through causes and conditions, depends upon those causes and conditions in order to continue, and will most certainly change because of its dependence upon causes and conditions. The natural approach of an engaged Buddhist is to identify strategic causes which might encourage change, even cessation, of the damaging effects of globalization. But to do so effectively entails several further layers of analysis.

Above all, this recognition kindles a certain kind of optimistic realism. When the causes are identified, we know that they can be eliminated or changed, which means that globalization can be changed. The bodhisattva vows never to be discouraged or to abandon a clear understanding of the nature of reality. In the Zen version of the bodhisattva vow, one daily recites:

However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them;  
 However inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to extinguish them;  
 However immeasurable the dharmas are, I vow to master them;  
 However incomparable the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>26</sup> Joshu Sasaki Roshi, *Buddha is the Center of Gravity* (Lama Foundation, 1974), p. 93.

## The Inner Causes of Human Needs: Finding “Perfect Balance”

An analysis of causes and conditions continues with the inner analysis—how is it that we ourselves contribute to the pattern of economic globalization? What causes may we discover in our participation, and what causes can be eliminated in order to bring the global pattern to cessation?

When we turn to the inner analysis of causes and conditions, it is the phenomenon of consumerism which draws our attention. As we have seen, the global economy thrives through the propagation and practice of consumption, which is the daily practice of each individual in the global market which contributes to its success. From a Buddhist view, consumerism exploits the dual foundations of desire and ignorance, which are the basis for the repetitive round of suffering called *samsara*. All analysis of suffering depends upon an accurate understanding of desire and ignorance. Here, our task is to see the relationship between the fundamental desire and ignorance and the particular way which they are exacerbated in a consumer system.

Within Buddhism, a first level of inner analysis builds upon an understanding of the twelve links of dependent origination, as Kaza demonstrated two years ago. The twelve links of dependent origination has been utilized in analysis by a number of theorists in the fields of “deep ecology” and engaged Buddhism,<sup>27</sup> though classically such an analysis is more appropriate to an inner analysis than an analysis of external factors. Here we will summarize only a few essential points of this analysis. These twelve links identify an inner pattern of suffering built upon the cultivation of desire. Previous links establish the pattern of isolation, solidification of personal identity, and impetus to confirm that identity in relationship with things and others. The expression of that impetus arises as desire (*tr̥sna* or *srepa*). From the earliest teachings of the Buddha, craving or desire was targeted as the cause of all suffering, the driving motivation which seeks to sustain and fortify the fictional notion of a self. In consumptive pursuits, it is craving for pleasure (*kama-tr̥sna*) which is the most obvious motivation; but, when we understand the nature of craving on a more pervasive level, the other two kinds of craving, for existence (*bhava-tr̥sna*) and for non-existence (*vibhava-tr̥sna*), also have their place. Purchases are made to advance one’s desire for pleasure, but also to give meaning and expression to one’s very existence—“I shop, therefore I am.” Hidden within this craving is also the death-wish, the desire to spend to satiation, to bankruptcy, to extinction. Within the very act of consumption is the destructive message which suggests the depth of suffering involved.

An essential insight derived from this teaching is that consumption is painful, inherently painful. Even within the pleasure and driven-ness of the consumer’s impulse is self-recognition of pain. The purchase moment may have a moment of thrill, but the experience is haunted by its fleeting quality (*anitya*, *mi-takpa*), its intangibility (*anatman*, *dakmepa*), and its unsatisfactoriness (*duhkha*, *duk-ngelwa*). Because of its inherent unsatisfactoriness, the true impact of which is not absorbed, the consumer is driven to purchase again and again. In this context, compulsive consumption is truly an addiction which carries the seeds of its own destruction.

We recognize the resonance of the outer and inner patterns of cause and effect, for a number of the core industries of the global economy exploit addictive desire. Alcohol and

<sup>27</sup> Kaza used this in her previous paper, and cited a group of theorists who have used the *12-nidana* analysis: Cook 1988, Devall 1990, Eckel 1997, Gross 1997; Ingram 1997; Macy 1991; Snyder 1995, and of course Kaza 1998.

cigarettes are obvious addictions, but we add to them the craving of the sweet-tooth satisfied and refreshed by Nestle and Coke; cleanliness fetishes satisfied by Proctor and Gamble; entertainment addictions serviced by Universal Studios. Transnational corporations welcome and nurture new “invented” addictions. As Daly and Cobb observed, “if people’s wants are not naturally insatiable we must make them so, in order to keep the system going.”<sup>28</sup>

Another important insight which is contained in the Buddhist teaching is that desire arises from basic ignorance (*avidya* or *marikpa*), the “delusion of perceiving incorrectly and in disharmony with the nature of things.”<sup>29</sup> This means that underneath our desire we have refused to actually witness the pattern of how desire always leads to suffering. We do not see the underlying unsatisfactoriness of consumption, and how pursuing our desires leads to more and more desires, rather than the satiation of desire. The threat of seeing this pattern drives us to greater, more intricate and demanding desires which further obscures our ability to see clearly.

According to Buddhist teachings, it is never enough to address desire. Desire will never cease on its own. When the relationship between desire and ignorance is understood, then we can see that the way to transform desire is to transform ignorance. The classic antidote to the basic ignorance is the cultivation of insight (*prajna*, *sherap*), the clear seeing of the pattern of suffering and the arising of the pattern. When these are seen directly and experientially, there naturally grows the wish to abandon desire and to develop alternative motivations in one’s life. If these patterns are not seen and understood, there is no way to end the desire which fuels consumerism. If the pattern is seen closely, experientially, gradually the realization dawns that all the factors which have dependently arisen, giving shape to consumerism, are themselves dependent upon other factors, and those are also dependent phenomena.

There are special contemporary challenges to such an analysis. The primary challenges are those of scale. Patterns of interdependence in the global economy are so complex that it is difficult to experientially witness the consequences of actions. The global economy is another manifestation of “structural suffering” in which legitimized violence is perpetrated by a large, amorphous system. Alan Senauke, director of Buddhist Peace Fellowship, observed, “No one seems to be directly responsible, because it is moved ahead by governments, corporations, and is seemingly anonymous.”<sup>30</sup> But these structures are not anonymous; they have taken the appearance of anonymity in order to protect those in power from taking responsibility for their actions and the effects of the systems they have in place. It takes a great many skills and perspectives to observe these patterns; this is why Daly and Cobb have recommended an interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving. So many factors, people and venues are involved that it is difficult to develop a panoramic understanding of globalization. Yet, when we examine these patterns in ourselves, it is much easier to examine. It is clear that in ourselves, desire is based on ignorance, and when penetrating insight is cultivated, desire is transformed.

When one takes the analysis of cause and effect to another level, there is another order of realization possible, a realization which is the foundation of the bodhisattva path of the

<sup>28</sup> Daly and Cobb, p. 88. They use the example of Pimples Carson, John Steinbeck’s character in *The Wayward Bus*, who spent half his income on treatments for acne and the other half on candy bars and sweets whose advertisements told him that a working man needed them for quick energy.

<sup>29</sup> Mipham 4.8.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Simmer-Brown, “Speaking Truth to Power: The Buddhist Peace Fellowship,” in Chris Queen, ed., *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Wisdom, 1999), pp. 80-81.

Mahayana. This is the analysis of the lack of inherent existence of the global economy, its emptiness (*sunyata, tongpa nyi*). We understand through outer and inner analysis that the multiple factors which support the global economy, especially consumerism, is extraordinarily fragile. On an outer level, the global economy is dependent upon the factors of law, scale, governmental protection, market principles, and infrastructure. On an inner level, consumerism and our support of the global economy rests upon habitual patterns of desire, based upon all-pervading ignorance. But being so dependent makes this phenomenon vulnerable to change, in fact vulnerable in its very existence. When phenomena are so fragile, it can be seen that there is no independent entity or phenomenon which can be identified as consumerism or a global economy. Its “entity” nature is ultimately false posing to be (as we can see upon further analysis) what it is not.<sup>31</sup> Globalization does not have the status of an ultimate, even if we conventionally give it that status. If consumerism were an existent phenomenon, it would not have a beginning and it could never be dismantled. Consumerism would have always existed, and would exist no matter what other changes in our economy occurred. The global economy would be the only economy, in fact the only reality, of our time and it would be permanent and indestructible.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the ultimate view of reality is just this view. No phenomena have inherent existence, including ourselves. It is not the academic discipline of market economics which has been given “misplaced concreteness;” instead, it is any kind of market, any kind of economy, global anything. This insight, which may be a stretch in conventional thinking, has implications for the approach we may take to understand consumerism. If globalization were to exist, it would be a problem that would seem insoluble. But we have found, upon further examination, that it cannot possibly exist inherently. Therefore, a “problematic” approach is also unsuitable. If we view the world as basically problematic, flawed, we become powerless to change it. If we understand the emptiness, the lack of inherent existence of these problematic phenomena, we take a more balanced and more confident view. This view allows us to see that because suffering does not exist inherently, it can be brought to an end. Ignorance about the ultimate nature of the global economy is the primary obstacle concerning its change and ultimately its cessation.

Seeing this view is not just a matter of analysis, it is a matter of meditation and realization. I remember years ago moderating a public conversation at one of the Naropa Buddhist and Christian meditation conferences between Brother David Steindl-Rast and Eido Shimano Roshi. Brother David was intent upon the importance of activism in solving world problems, and asked Roshi if sitting meditation might be an avoidance of these problems. Roshi maintained, persistently; that the world has been well-balanced from the very beginning. Brother David became increasingly insistent, saying, yes, but do not we have a responsibility to keep the balance, to address the suffering, to prevent the dying of all those who are hungry and poor? This led to the following memorable conversation:

*Eido Roshi:* Brother David, if you start to think that way, you have to worry endlessly.

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<sup>31</sup> While there are classical reasonings which explore this level of understanding of reality, this paper will not engage them formally. In a previous paper I applied the *catuskoti*, or “four alternatives” logical analysis to explicate the classical approach to understanding emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena. I will not do so here, in the interests of time and the patience of the readers. See Simmer-Brown, “Pluralism and Dialogue: A Contemplation on the Dialogue Relationship,” in Roger Jackson and John Makransky, *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Curzon, 1999), pp. 312-330. For a different style of Madhyamaka deconstruction of a social and political issue, see Jose Cabezon,

*Brother David:* Well, there is a way of thinking about it that is not worrying. But there is a way of not thinking about it that is irresponsible.

*Eido Roshi:* No, I really think we are responsible to realize that the work is well-balanced from the beginningless beginning to the endless end. That is our responsibility....

*Brother David:* But what to do is the great question. I would say that the answer is: Do whatever it is time to do. For some people that may be very little. But if we are aware of our responsibility, we will do the little thing that we can do, and that will be our contribution. No more is asked of us....

*Eido Roshi* (sucking in breath loudly): You know, Brother David, I have known you for so many years, and you are so romantic. (Laughter and whoops from the audience.) Whether in front of the public or just between the two of us, our conversation has been this way for the past twenty years. I am not a pessimist. I think I am a realist. Perhaps you are a realist too, but with romantic inclinations. (Laughter.)

*Brother David:* Well, don't you think there must be a way for a realist with romantic inclinations to do the right thing in the world today? (Laughter.) What would you say it is?

*Eido Roshi:* Well, for myself, somehow I am karmically engaged with the practice of intensive *zazen* meditation. I can do without consulting others, making telephone calls, writing letters: I just shut up and sit down. This is what I have been doing, and through this I came to a spiritual conversion, and I realized the fact that I don't need to worry, because the world is well-balanced from the very beginning. And that is why I can talk to you, or to these other intelligent people, with great confidence. Perhaps you have different attitudes or ways or answers, but this is certainly one way. It may sound inactive, but *zazen* is a very active job.

*Brother David:* And I know you well enough to respect that this is your contribution. But it is not the only one. For others there may be other contributions.

*Eido Roshi:* Oh, yes. If all the people in this city were practicing intensive *zazen*, that could be a problem. The airplanes wouldn't fly; the stores would be closed, and so on. That is exactly what I mean: the world is well-balanced. (Laughter and applause.)<sup>32</sup>

This conversation underlies many of our discussions in these dialogues. Are the problems of consumerism and the global economy intractable? What is their nature? Buddhist traditions, especially from Mahayana perspective, observe that no problem of human life is intractable. To conclude that they are is to give them more power and reality than they deserve or could possibly have. For this reason, there is tremendous emphasis in Mahayana Buddhism upon understanding the nature of the problem deeply, clearly, and unflinchingly. The global economy is an apparition, an appearance whose ultimate nature is emptiness.

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<sup>32</sup> Walker, ed., *Speaking of Silence*, 249-251.

## Skillful Means and Compassion: Acting Within Perfect Balance

When a view of “perfect balance” is asserted it appears to fly in the face of social activism or engaged Buddhism. How would Mahayana Buddhism address the inequities, the systemic violence, and the exploitation which arise from consumer culture and from the global economy? How does it respond to the “prophetic voice” found in Christianity and in some Buddhist movements? I would assert that Mahayana Buddhism does not have a prophetic voice, but it does have a clear vision about the problems of human existence. That clear vision leads it to put the global economy into perspective, “avoiding two extremes that in each case reduce religion to something that it can and should not be: social activism on the one hand, and an individualistic, self-centered spirituality on the other.”<sup>33</sup> From the outset, the Buddha exhibited awareness of social issues such as war, caste, abuse of power, and unethical activity. But the root of all such evils, from his view, was a mistaken view about the nature of reality. He remained unconfused concerning his central insight, that these social issues cannot be changed without a concerted focus of understanding of this root. In other words, the Buddhist teachings on compassion begin with personal clear seeing, but they do not end there.

The reason the compassion teachings go further, must go further, is that in Buddhism one cannot have genuine compassion without a direct experience of the lack of inherent existence of all beings. The enormity of serious issues like globalization could be overwhelming, moving one to a sense of urgency. If the urgency, however, is an impulsive response to the unbearable qualities of suffering, the aversion which arises toward suffering could lead one to unskillful acts based on what is called “idiotic compassion”<sup>34</sup> in Buddhism. It is called idiotic compassion for two reasons: first, it is an impulsive response based on insufficient understanding. Second, this impulsive compassion quickly becomes ineffective, causing something like burnout, because continuing endlessly in this way for the benefit of others is exhausting and ill-directed. Good intention is never enough; it risks the dangers of impulsiveness and romanticism. Effective actions must be based upon wisdom.

Seeing interdependence suggests a different, more subtle, sustained, and strategic response. If one understands interdependence, one sees that every personal act of dropping habitual patterns necessarily affects the suffering of every other being, directly, inexorably. And so waking up, even seemingly individually, is a social and political act which affects the suffering of everyone. Compassionate action must be based on insight that solutions must include both sides of the issue. There are no clear enemies. Thich Nhat Hanh writes, “Where is our enemy? I ask myself this all the time.”<sup>35</sup> Sometimes the journey seems ambiguous, for it is not nourished by a clear definition of justice. Justice is always a difficult word for the Buddhist. What is justice, and how does it relate to the experience of suffering? Thich Nhat Hanh replied to bell hooks’ question about justice in this way:

*Thich Nhat Hanh:* How we view justice depends on our practice of looking deeply. We may think that justice is everyone being equal, having the same rights, sharing the same kind of advantages, but maybe we have not had the chance to look at the nature of justice

<sup>33</sup> Jose Cabezon, “The UNESCO Declaration: A Tibetan Buddhist Perspective,” in David Chappell, ed., *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace* (Wisdom, 1999), p. 185.

<sup>34</sup> The term is *anunayadrstikaruna*, or “compassion based on emotionally-tinged views.” VKND V.15.

<sup>35</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, “Please Call Me by My True Names,” in Fred Epstein, ed., *The Path of Compassion* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), p. 33.

in terms of no-self. That kind of justice is based on the idea of self, but it may be very interesting to explore justice in terms of no-self....Is justice possible without equality?

*bell hooks:* Justice is possible without equality, I believe, because of compassion and understanding. If I have compassion, then if I have more than you, which is unequal, I will still do the just thing by you.

*Thich Nhat Hanh:* Right. And who has created inequality?

*bell hooks:* Well, I think inequality is in our minds. I think this is what we learn through practice. One of the concepts that you and Daniel Berrigan spoke about in *The Raft is Not the Shore* is that the bridge of illusion must be shattered in order for a real bridge to be constructed. One of the things we learn is that inequality is an illusion.<sup>36</sup>

What this means to me is that justice is a conceptualization of what compassion might look like in a world where equality is possible. Concern about justice raises the spectre of equality, sameness, as a principle which then gives rise to resentment that justice is not done. But is justice ever done? And how can we know? If we pursue “justice” in the economic realm, we have not yet shattered the “bridge of illusion,” and we are left in a condition of unsettled, unfilled desire.<sup>37</sup> And our suffering and the suffering of others will continue unabated.

Often these mysterious, frustrating discussions with Buddhists end here, with the view which suggests that the nature of the problem about which we are most concerned not being a problem at all. In order to get a balanced perspective, however, it is important to deal with the other important aspect of the Mahayana path. This is the treatment of the relative practice aspect, the way in which we express our skillful means in the world through compassion. If Christians are exposed to the insight (*prajna, sheraṃ*) teachings of Mahayana Buddhism alone, without the compassion or skillful means (*upaya-kausalya, thapla kheṃā*) teachings, an eerie impression is left. Buddhism is a very practical tradition, and insight is always tied with practical action in the world. In fact, in my lineage<sup>38</sup> it is often said that if the practitioner does not manifest a natural leaning toward compassion, it is quite possible that the insight into the true nature may be only theoretical; it is with the dawn of true compassion that the emptiness realization is completed.

There are two specific areas for compassionate action in American Buddhism. The first area is in the realm of spiritual activism. Having identified as directly as possible the multiple causes of the global economy, one must strategically undo those causes. Choices about what one can contribute are very individual, but donate to the “perfect balance.” Perhaps the greatest contribution is a commitment to meditation practice, as Eido Shimano Roshi expressed. Perhaps it is to choose some specific area of activism or education in order to undo the result of transnational corporations which hold power over even governments of the world. Perhaps it relates to hands-on relief from suffering, or in community-building on a small scale within one’s own region or environment. Whatever the choice, these efforts must be developed patiently, with a clear sense

<sup>36</sup> “How Do We Build a Community of Love: Dialogue between bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh,” *Shambhala Sun*, January 2000, pp. 38-39.

<sup>37</sup> Recently, in a conversation with Rebecca French, an anthropologist and professor of law at the University of Colorado, she observed that in law, “justice” is never even discussed for it is found to be a term carrying such layers of meaning and assumptions that it is just not useful. She was astonished to hear that it is a word used in theology, and asked me what it meant. I could not effectively answer, except as I have answered here.

<sup>38</sup> Karma Kagyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism.

of the magnitude of the project, even while recognizing that every single act of clear seeing or compassionate action reverses in some small way the ignorance concerning the basic nature of reality and changes in some small way the entire international phenomenon. Activism based on impatience with results, excess urgency, or romantic clinging to alternative outcomes will always be doomed to eventual failure.

In circles of engaged Buddhists, discussions on constructive steps have focused on the issue of scale and sustainability. The vastness of the problems of globalization have made it almost impossible to witness the patterns of cause and effect. Smaller communities allow for its members to witness the patterns, to take ownership and responsibility for the life of the community, and adjust for change more quickly than large communities—in short, smaller communities are sustainable communities. In the pages of the *Turning Wheel*, the magazine for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, strategies for reduction of scale, localization, and decentralization are proposed. Most notable of these *economic* solutions are the contributions of Sulak Sivaraksa and Helena Norberg-Hodge who report on community initiatives around the world and who reflect a “growing awareness that it is far more sensible to depend on our neighbors and the living world around us than to depend on a global economic system based on technology and corporate institutions. Buddhism provides us with both the imperative and the tools to challenge the economic structures that are creating suffering the world over”<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, there is consensus among engaged Buddhists that there is a pressing need for comprehensive spiritually-based analyses of contemporary systems, whether they be economic, social, ecological, political, or any other kind of institution.<sup>40</sup> What is sought is a kind of Buddhist “liberation theology” which would bring to bear the best of contemporary social and economic theory and practice, focusing on issues like globalization with the full lens of Buddhist teachings. To date, Sulak has led the way on this analysis. In addition, many engaged Buddhists feel that there is a growing need for the development of political skills among American Buddhists, so that coalitions, communities and networks might more effectively support collaboration with counterparts in other religious traditions on these common concerns.<sup>41</sup>

In the meantime, there is a traditional Asian practice that has long been important in the Buddhist tradition which has the potential to immediately contribute to the reversal of consumerism and the global economy. This is the practice of generosity. No practice flies more directly in the face of acquisitiveness and individualism. Any of us who have spent time in Asia or with our Asian teachers see the centrality of generosity in Buddhist practice. “Generosity is the practice which produces peace,” as the sutra says. Generosity can take many forms: physical or monetary gifts which can directly benefit others form the basis of generosity. But there are forms of generosity which have no visible effect on the market<sup>42</sup> and which evade the classification of commodification. Generous acts, words, or thoughts cost nothing, but directly empower others and evoke their humanity as well as one’s own. The ultimate generosity is to dedicate the merit of all our work to the benefit of others.

In addition to activism, a second general area of compassionate action relates perhaps

<sup>39</sup> Norberg-Hodge, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Donald Rothberg, “Responding to the Cries of the World: Socially Engaged Buddhism in North America,” in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *The Faces of American Buddhism* (University of California Press, 1999), pp. 282-283.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>42</sup> This is acknowledged in Daly and Cobb, p.86.



more directly to the inner work of contemporary American life. Compassionate action must address the despair which arises when one contemplates the phenomenon of consumerism in the context of the global economy. When the contemplation is only partial, it despairs of any solution, further reinforcing the basic ignorance which cannot see two things: the patterns of desire that perpetuate consumerism, and the belief in the inherent existence of the phenomenon of consumerism and the global economy.

As I described in my Preamble, contemplations on consumerism and globalization often lead to a growing and deepening sense of despair and avoidance. The more we discover regarding these pervasive patterns, the less convinced we are that anything can be done by anyone, no matter how wise or well-meaning. The anti-consumerism, anti-globalism movement has quickly become fraught with the kind of despair of which Buddhist activist Joanna Macy spoke in reference to the anti-nuclear movement.

If this is...an age of anxiety, it is also an age in which we are adept at sweeping our anxieties under the rug. As a society we are caught between a sense of impending apocalypse and an inability to acknowledge it....Our apathy, however, is not mere indifference. It stems from a fear of confronting the despair that lurks subliminally beneath the tenor of life-as-usual. A dread of what is happening to our future stays on the fringes of awareness, too deep to name and too fearsome to face.<sup>43</sup>

This brings us to the most direct obstacle we have to overcome in dealing with the religion of consumerism. Obviously, we are in every “ding” (“beep”) of the cash register part of the problem. Whatever our lifestyle in the United States, whether we are practicing voluntary simplicity, conscientious recycling, or guilty shopaholism, we are unwitting members of the cult of consumerism. While we may be aware of the damage consumerism is doing to our own culture and to the exploited “supplier” cultures, it is threatening to look closely at the entire pattern and to compassionately act. So much of our contemporary lifestyle has sought a “double indemnity” protection against our own lifestyles that it is difficult for us to honestly identify the actions necessary to reverse the pattern of consumption.

This “double indemnity” often brings us to the dialogue table in silence, the silence of embarrassment, of disempowerment, of guilt. Whether or not we seek solace in the shopping mall, whether or not we are aware of global monoculture, our avoidance makes it difficult to face the situation straightforwardly. How are we to face the fact of our participation in such a damaging system? How are we Americans to sit at the table with our Thai, Taiwanese, Korean, and Japanese friends, recognizing the roles our respective cultures play in the brutal religion of consumerism on the global landscape? How are we to join together in effectively transforming suffering into happiness?

From the point of view of compassionate action, it is important for us to accept our role in consumerism, our resistance to acknowledge that role, and our willingness to express the pain involved in acknowledging that role. If we do this in an atmosphere of judgment or despair, it is difficult or even impossible to reverse the situation. But when we see that globalization is dependently originated, on the absolute level lacking in inherent existence, we know that it can be undone. Then we have the view that the world is always in perfect balance.

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<sup>43</sup> Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (1991), p. 15.

## Inner and Outer Consumerism: A Tibetan Contemplation

As religious people, a critical commitment that we can make is to do the inner work, especially to be fed and nurtured by the authenticity of our spiritual practice to go deeply into the heart of the suffering of the world. My Tibetan teachers have remarked about how difficult it is for American students to practice in an environment dominated by materialism, so different from their Tibetan home. As one teacher observed,

Because Tibet is an untouched and uncivilized country, people are quite happy with the simplicity of life. They do not long for the comforts and luxury of life. As long as there is food to eat and a roof for shelter, they are very happy. With that state of mind, when they go to retreat, their mind is simple and the decision is quite complete. They think, "Even if I die of an illness during this retreat, I will let myself die. Even if I die of starvation during this retreat, I will let myself die. Even if I die from the difficulties and hardship of the vigorous practice, I will be happy to die."<sup>44</sup>

They ask how "consumer mentality" has effected the meditation practice of their American students, shaping our intentions and expectations for spiritual development.

Jose Cabezon suggested in a recent paper that Tibetan concerns about material wealth relates to how it "deflects one from pursuing the true, inner wealth of spiritual perfection."<sup>45</sup> Wealth is viewed as ephemeral and therefore rather than accumulating it, it is more important to spend and enjoy it while it is still available, or to give it away. He quoted Sakya Pandita who reflects that those who have wealth which they neither use nor give away must be either sick or a deprived spirit. "Accumulating wealth without using it is like accumulating the wood for one's own cremation. Those who do so are like bees, who put so much effort into manufacturing their honey only to have it taken away from them."<sup>46</sup> Accumulating wealth accumulate many obstacles, for then the wealth must be protected and one's greedy tendencies are exacerbated. When the accumulation of wealth is an end in itself, it has the power of diverting one from the spiritual path and creating negative circumstances for future awakening.

Twenty-seven years ago, the Vidyadhara, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, wrote one of first popular dharma books in America, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*,<sup>47</sup> identifying what he considered primary obstacles to spiritual development in the west. The relevance of this analysis only increases each year. Trungpa Rinpoche described an acquisitive activity which binds humans to suffering, an activity he identified broadly as "ego". In promoting this core activity, three allegorical "lords of materialism"<sup>48</sup> pursue three levels of acquisitiveness: the lord of form refers to physical acquisition, the lord of speech to conceptual acquisition, and the

<sup>44</sup> Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche.

<sup>45</sup> Jose Cabezon, "Singing Bowls and Power Beads: On the Commodification of Tibet." Paper for symposium, "Representing Tibet: A Symposium on the Representation of Tibetan Culture in the U.S." January 2000, University of Colorado, Boulder, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Bosson 1986: 97, v. 303, quoted in Cabezon 2000, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Shambhala Publications 1974. This view of the challenges of western spirituality came to him while in retreat in a Padmasambhava cave in Bhutan. Rinpoche at that time composed a ritual text called the *Sadhana of Mahamudra* which addressed the way in which contemporary societies are dominated by material concerns. This text was received in a visionary state as a *terma*, a hidden-treasure text, attributed to Guru Rinpoche as a contemporary contribution to the "dark age" dominated by the forces of materialism.

<sup>48</sup> Materialism is a translation of *kla.klo.*, which means barbarian, especially a human being from an uncivilized area unresponsive to the compassionate and wise teachings of the Buddha.

lord of mind to acquisition in the spiritual realm. According to these descriptions materialism must be challenged or it will co-opt our physical lives, our communities, and our very practice.

“Physical materialism” refers to the neurotic pursuit of pleasure, comfort, and security, akin to the desire described in the twelve links. This is the outer expression of consumerism. On the next level, “psychological materialism” seeks to control the world through theory, ideology, and intellect. We create a theoretical construct which keeps us from having to be threatened, to be wrong, to be confused, putting ourselves in control. On the subtlest level, “spiritual materialism” carries acquisitiveness into the realm of our own minds, into our own contemplative practice or prayer.

In all of these areas, our conscious minds are attempting to remain in control, to maintain a centralized awareness from which a fortified position of power might be defended. Through this, our “egos” use even spirituality to shield themselves from fear and insecurity. Rinpoche suggested that even spiritual practice could be used for personal gain and protection, an expression of acquisitiveness. How do we know if this is true? In the *Sadhana of Mahamudra*<sup>49</sup> it is indicated that we are preoccupied with issues of control and power when we become “afraid of external phenomena, which are our own projections.”<sup>50</sup> What this means is that when we take ourselves to be real, existent beings, then we mistake the world around us to be independent and real. And when we do this, we invite paranoia, fear, and panic. We are afraid of not being able to control the situation, and “sadness and depression are always with us.”

These teachings suggest that through Tibetan eyes, even our spiritual traditions are vulnerable to the acquisitiveness, which so dominates our cultural life. The only way to cut this pattern of acquisitiveness and control is to guard the naked integrity of our spiritual life and practice. It is important to nurture genuine open-heartedness, so that there is an authentic core to our concerns not based on self-interest. Our inner work relies on the authenticity of true compassion, which has altruism at its core.

The changes we wish to bring about must join an inner aspect with an outer one. First, we must develop clear understanding of the issues and personal dedication to removing their causes. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama spoke of the importance of inner transformation as essential in worldwide transformation.

But first we must change within ourselves. Our national leaders try their best to solve our problems, but when one problem is solved, another one crops up; trying to solve that, again there is another somewhere else. The time has come to try a different approach. Of course, it is very difficult to achieve a worldwide movement of peace of mind, but it is the only alternative. If there were an easier and more practical method, that would be better, but there is none.... Therefore, although it is difficult to attempt to bring about peace through internal transformation, this is the only way to achieve lasting world peace.<sup>51</sup>

This inner transformation is based on confidence in the “perfect balance” of all the world,

<sup>49</sup> See note 47.

<sup>50</sup> VCTR, *Sadhana of Mahamudra*, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Tenzin Gyatso (HH XIV<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama), “Kindness and Compassion,” in Sidney Pilburn, *A Policy of Kindness* (Snow Lion, 1990), p. 57.

within which each of us has a place. But this must join with the outer aspects to this endeavor, working in collaboration from our various perspectives of contemplative practice, activism, and social engagement.

Whether Buddhist or Christian, it is especially important for those of us who are Americans to understand globalization clearly, intimately, directly. It is not a phenomenon of natural law, it is not an ultimate, and it is not indestructible. It has come about through human decisions, most of them made right here in the United States. These decisions can be exposed, they can be reversed, they can be changed. We uniquely have the choice: to close our eyes and resign ourselves to the situation. Or we can collaborate, strategize, and bring about this change. Americans have unique power to change the system, because the system has been devised, funded, and sustained right here. As Noam Chomsky explained, "Our fate is the fate of the world and of all future generations!"<sup>52</sup>



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<sup>52</sup> The closing words of Noam Chomsky's lecture 1999.

# Contemplative Education and the Three Prajnas

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Christopher Walker and  
Eric Zsebenyi

*“People with high education must be honest. A pundit does not deserve to be called as such after receiving only a University degree, but he should also learn how to apply his knowledge to solve villagers’ problems.”*

Dr. Puey Ungphakorn

What is contemplative education? In the abstract it is a proposal for an alternative to the traditional educational systems around the world, most of which have evolved from the early model of the university established in Europe during the period commonly known as the Age of Enlightenment. This western model of the university is founded on ideals, which can be linked to some aspects of modern society, that are distinctly antithetical to Dr. Puey’s ideals of peace, public participation and truth. One is rationalism or more aptly, hyper-rationalism. This ideal seeks to establish truthful and useful axioms through mental and empirical investigations. Using logical methodology, ideas are formulated as hypotheses, then tested and expanded by inference and deductive reasoning. This methodology culminates in the scientific method, which, although useful in the determination of scientific axioms and their practical implementation, has the unfortunate social consequence of the diminution of less tangible—yet no less valuable—factors which fall by the wayside in the process of establishing social policy. The truism of Albert Einstein still holds: whether or not we implement a given technology should not be determined by our ability to do so, but should we? In this case ‘should we’ implies that there must be a moral and ethical dimension to human progress through technology. The question is predominantly drowned out in the rush to extend technological achievements globally without a careful reflection on the consequences. In short, spirituality, humanism, compassion and equal input among those who will be impacted by a given technology are among the ideals lost in the rush to bigger, better and more profitable paradigms and ways of life.

Contemplative education is an approach that seeks to educate the whole human being physically, mentally and spiritually. A contemplative approach does not wish to supplant or destroy the scientific worldview, but rather to complement it. Dr. Puey himself was involved in the governmental machine, which even during his time as public servant was straying from the idea of government as a form of public service, and establishing itself as an authoritarian entity whose main mission is to protect commercial interests. If Dr. Puey never specifically spoke to the issue of contemplative education by name, he certainly delineated the goals for a society built

on contemplative principles by men and women who were educated in and dedicated to contemplative ideals. These ideals live on today in the writing and work of Sulak Sivaraksa, the prominent Siamese social critic and president of the institute whose name summarizes and honors Dr. Puey's legacy, the Santi Pracha Dhamma (peace, public participation, and truth) Institute based in Bangkok, Siam.

## **Contemplative Education as an Approach to Building Better Societies**

Contemplative education is a very lofty ideal, a mirror to reflect the shortcomings of the hyper-rational worldview while publicizing the injustices that are often committed in the implementation of policies and standards decided upon without considering the human component. Simply critiquing the status quo is a start, but it must be followed up by practical moves to delineate an alternative. Many noble ideas, when not integrated, internalized, and put into action, become merely the window-dressing on political and economic machines, and grow very far away from the ideals that spawned them. In this regard consider the United States, a prosperous democratic nation where prejudice, economic inequality and racial injustice nonetheless run rampant. Consider also the Sangha (the formal order of monks) in Siam, where corruption and lack of motivation have deprived the Siamese people of their most valuable cultural resource; the Christian church, which has often waged holy wars in direct violation of Jesus' maxim to love one another; and the World Bank, which purports to help the poor of the world, but instead institutes policies that by its own admission keep the poor, poor. How does contemplative education propose to remedy the afflictions of these current worldviews, and maintain its integrity over time and the unfolding of history? These are some of the aspects of contemplative education that need to be enumerated, developed and strengthened into positive, tangible action if they are to offer a real alternative to the hyper-rationalistic worldview that lies at the root of this hyper-consumerist 'new world order.'

It is not our purpose in this essay to define and chart the future of contemplative education; that is beyond the scope of this essay. In order to present a limited introduction to one of the many forms which contemplative education may take, we propose to discuss one example of the nascent contemplative education movement, Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado (USA). We will not discuss the curriculum or educational methodology in great detail, but rather the perception of what underpins the activity which goes on there, all of which is aimed at following a model that derives its inspiration from the contemplative approach to education.

## **Naropa University's Inspired Heritage**

Naropa University is named after an Indian *siddha* who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. A *siddha* is a highly accomplished meditation master. Before Naropa was a *siddha* he was the abbot of Nalanda University, which is near modern day Varanasi in India. It was the largest university in the world at the time, with as many as 30,000 monks studying there at its peak. Naropa had a series of visions or meetings with a person who he later realized was a dakini, a female manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom. Dakinis often taught or demonstrated the message they sought to convey through magic acts or other radical means, which invariably shook the foundations of the potential student's beliefs and knowledge.

When Naropa met this dakini, she assumed the form of an ugly old hag. She came to him and asked him what he did. He told her that he was a scholar who studied grammar, epistemology, spiritual precepts and logic. The old hag asked him if he understood them. "Yes," he said. She then asked, "Do you understand the words or the sense?" He replied, "The words." At this she rollicked with laughter. Thinking he might please her further, Naropa added, "I also understand the sense." At this she became very sad and began to cry. Naropa asked her why her mood had changed so. She told him that she was happy when he, a scholar, was able to admit that he only understood the words; she became sad when he lied and said that he also understood the sense. His encounter with the dakini propelled Naropa into a quest for the meaning beyond the words. This legend is pivotal to the way in which contemplative education is viewed at Naropa University. It signifies that there is a meaning that is beyond words.

In the Tibetan tradition, this is related to awareness breaking through the grip of the conceptual thought process that keeps us from enlightenment. In the context of contemplative education, the message is of a balanced approach to education that seeks to educate the body, mind and soul of a student. This stands in contrast to the modern western educational establishment where technological research (funded to an astounding degree by military dollars) overshadows the role the university could play in educating young people to be intelligent, compassionate, moral human beings. The study of business, law, physics and the like has its rightful place. But our full humanity is composed of so much more. So should our society be. We have come to a stage in human development where our technological prowess has far outstripped our level of emotional and spiritual development. The need to reconsider the values and direction of the modern educational establishment has never been greater. At no other time in human history has it been so blithely accepted that we as a species could easily cause our own extinction. Lloyd Dumas describes the acuteness of our situation in detail in his book *Lethal Arrogance: Human Fallibility and Dangerous Technologies*, and succinctly sums up the dire consequences we face: "We cannot allow our fascination with the power of what we can do to blind us to what we cannot. It is no longer a matter of humility. It is a matter of survival."

Technological hubris at the expense of spiritual and emotional development has cost society and the planet too much. Does this mean that the Buddhist prescription is to withdraw from society as flawed and undeserving of our attention from a spiritual point of view? That is not the case. Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche (the Tibetan meditation master who, along with the poet Allen Ginsberg, founded Naropa University in 1973) was asked if Buddhists should vote. In light of the confusion and deception we face in the complexity of interpersonal, inter-religious, transnational relations, and the impediments to our spiritual path that these might represent, should not we instead go to the mountain and meditate? But as to whether or not we should vote Trungpa, Rinpoche replied, "Why not? Add your energies to the country's." Looking at the widening movement, subsumed under the broad heading of "engaged buddhism," we see that many Buddhists are integrating social activism and spiritual progress. Contemplative education seeks meaning beyond words, beyond intellectual hubris, to integrate as much of our full humanity as possible, and to be engaged with the powers that guide, develop and govern society.

The story of Naropa and his search for meaning beyond words and concepts was in a sense a discussion of what constitutes the inspirational backing of contemplative education. Finding the meaning beyond the words requires an engagement with the material one is studying that utilizes more of the students' faculties than simply the conceptual mind. Contemplative education at Naropa University is based on a style of learning that does not ignore traditional

pedagogical schemes, but rather incorporates and honors traditional methods as the first step in a journey of learning. The traditional model of education seeks to find meaning by reading, memorizing, and regurgitating what was studied. By way of such an approach, one gathers many facts and masters many concepts. This can be very useful, but until one has considered to what end these facts and concepts should be used, they have no relevance to us as individuals or as a society. Contemplative education challenges us to ask the big questions about the values we want our lives to embody. And these values are not to be found in concepts but in the meaning to which they refer. To demonstrate how it is that contemplative education seeks to engage the ‘meaning beyond the words,’ we shall use as a model the Buddhist teaching known as the three *prajñas*, a pedagogical tool often employed by Buddhist teachers as a way of getting at the meaning in a holistic manner.

### **The Three *Prajñas***

*Prajña* (Sanskrit: *prajña*; Pali: *pañña*) means “wisdom” or “insight.” In this case, it is best translated as “understanding” or “knowledge,” for here it indicates three progressive stages of knowing about ourselves and the world that includes, encompasses and ultimately transcends conceptual knowledge. The three *prajñas*, or ways of understanding, are the *prajña* of hearing (*sutta*), the *prajña* of contemplating (*cinta*), and the *prajña* of meditating or cultivating (*bhavana*). The framework of the three *prajñas* derives from the classical Indian tradition. It is a kind of counterpart to the better-known triad of moral discipline (*sila*), meditation (*samadhi*) and wisdom (Sanskrit: *prajña*; Pali: *pañña*) taught by Lord Buddha in the *Nikayas*, the earliest Buddhist scriptures. The great Theravadin commentator Buddhaghosa mentions the three *prajñas* in his *Visuddhimagga* (XIV.8 & 14), during a discussion of the twelve kinds of understanding. Likewise, in the *Abhidharmakośa* (VI.5), Vasubandhu, gives the three *prajñas* their classic formulation, which is a favorite heuristic device of Tibetan teachers. The Venerable Dzogchen Ponlop, Rinpoche, director of Nitartha International and an assistant professor of Buddhist studies at Naropa University, summarizes these three stages of learning in a talk given in 1996 at Karma Chöling, a retreat center in Vermont, U.S.A.

### **The *Prajña* of Listening and Studying**

The first stage of the educational journey based on the three *prajñas* is the “stage of listening or studying” which is totally dependent on conceptual mind, on communication, language and form. In this stage of hearing, listening or studying, the student develops a general understanding of the subject at hand. In the Buddhist sense the subject at hand is the *dharma*, the Buddhist teachings. In a contemplative educational environment the subject at hand could be nearly anything. Whether it is psychology, biology or philosophy, the first step is to study, to learn and to listen to the teachers. It would not be right to become overly disgusted with the mess that we may feel has been created by these traditional paradigms and to give them up completely. The problem with the traditional paradigms is not that they are flawed from the outset, but rather that they do not go far enough. In particular, with respect to consumerism and structural violence, these mainstream methodologies attempt to be overly objective, to study the subject from a safe distance. In reality this does not constitute a thorough and realistic look at a particular subject, and from a moral perspective studying from a ‘safe distance’ tends to inure the scholar to the human element. A traditional scholar may feel that this is the best way to gather knowledge—to be objective. In



a very limited way that may be true, but for this attitude to become prevalent, for us to worship objectivity, is to turn a blind eye to the possible uses and outcomes of the knowledge we gain through studying.

Ven. Ponlop, Rinpoche describes this stage on the path as “learning a cookbook. We’re suffering from hunger. We have the basic suffering of hunger in samsara, the cycle of ignorance. We would like to have a remedy for this hunger. At this point, we realize that cooking and eating food would be the best remedy to overcome our pain of hunger. The first step that we have to take is to learn cooking. We have to learn cooking in the most basic sense. In that process we are developing the first *prajña*, which is known as the *prajña* of learning.” This could very easily be construed in a social context. We see problems in the world, such as consumerism, injustice and so on. Perhaps we wish to do something about it, to begin to educate ourselves and others with the aim of improving society. First we must study the root of the problems, and study the social structures that are already in place along with their ideological heritage. Then we may proceed to the next stage in the contemplative process.

Ponlop, Rinpoche quotes the great Tibetan yogi, Milarepa, as saying “understanding is like a patch that could fall off anytime.” Ponlop Rinpoche continues. “This *prajña* is most important at the beginning. But at the same time, we can’t just live with this *prajña* with satisfaction. We can’t just simply say, ‘I have great knowledge. I have great wisdom, great intellect. I have studied all the dharma. I know all the dharma.’ It’s not enough yet, because that simple understanding is a dry understanding. That understanding is a very conceptual understanding, which is like knowing the cookbook very well. You’ve learned the cookbook very well at this point. That doesn’t mean you’re free from hunger. That means you have a great knowledge about cooking.”

### **The *Prajña* of Contemplation**

The second stage of a contemplative approach to learning is the process of internalizing the knowledge we have learned. “The wisdom or *prajña* that we have developed through hearing or studying is, as Milarepa said, like the patch of understanding. This means that, even though it can cover the hole temporarily, it does not mean that the patch has become one with the original cloth. It still stays separate. It still has not become one with the continuity of that fabric, the basic fabric.”

In the second stage, which is called “reflection or contemplation,” we are internalizing the intellectual knowledge we have acquired. From the point of view of the spiritual path this is often approached through analytical meditation/contemplation. From a socially engaged point of view this is the beginning of an element of action. Not necessarily direct action, starting a project or an organization, but taking our knowledge out into the world. In this way we test what we have learned—or it tests us. It becomes ingrained and may even translate into a lifestyle change. The knowledge is becoming a part of the student. This is antithetical to traditional scholarship; the contemplative student might be accused of losing sight of objectivity.

## **The Prajña of Meditation: Internalizing and Applying Knowledge**

The third way of understanding is the prajña of meditation. This is the point at which knowledge is fully integrated and internalized. It is axiomatic insofar as we are guided by this knowledge in our daily activities spontaneously, without the necessity of further reflection. Spiritually, this stage is characterized by resting meditation and penetrating insight. No longer do we ponder a particular point or idea, but these individual ideas melt into the background; we simply rest in a mindful and aware state. This stage of the third prajña of meditation or realization goes beyond what ordinarily falls into the realm of education. No university—including Naropa University—attempts to make a curriculum out of resting in a mindful and aware state. The Buddhist educational heritage of Naropa University is an extremely important part of the atmosphere. It sets the tone and to some extent the content of the educational journey—but enlightenment is not a part of the academic curriculum. Naropa students practice many different spiritual paths. The real meaning of the prajña of meditation in the Naropa context is that there comes a time when the ordinary world of concepts and ideas gives way to a realization that is uncontrived and spontaneous. When knowledge becomes fully internalized it is simply part of one's life; it is a way of life. This, I feel is the relevance of the third prajña to contemplative education at Naropa University.

## **Contemplative Education from the Perspective of Students**

For many years, I (CW) have lectured prospective students and their parents at the Naropa University open house on contemplative education modeled on the three prajñas. I began with the question, what is contemplative education? I answered this question on three levels loosely based on the three prajñas, or the three stages of an educational journey. First, I ask, what does contemplative education mean to me personally? Why am I attending an 'alternative' University and what do I expect to get out of it? Whenever I met new people during the time I was working on a Master's degree in Buddhist studies, the first response was usually, "What are you going to do with that?" I would reply, "Anything." Whereas a lawyer or an accountant has a fairly narrow range of career choices after graduation, a religious studies graduate has an open field. It is in fact difficult to find a job specifically in religious studies. A student who has pursued a broad education aimed at sharpening skills such as critical intellect, flexibility and sensitivity is, however, prepared to meet new challenges and deal with a variety of situations in an intelligent and creative manner. In today's rapidly fluctuating job market this is a bonus for a potential employer. In the real world it is, of course, not quite that easy. Students have to be aware of and account for the need to have specific job skills. Many of the Buddhist studies students do this by undertaking an internship in pastoral counseling, in order to become chaplains at hospitals. Others pursue a license in counseling or hospice care. These practical measures enhance their chances of being able to make use of the contemplative education they have received, and to make a living while doing it. This is the most basic level of what contemplative education is to me as an individual and what specifically it teaches me to do.

What is contemplative education in the context of the Naropa community? What are our common goals? And what are the features of contemplative education that run throughout the University as a whole? Contemplative education means including all the world's wisdom traditions. Naropa is not a Buddhist school. Professors and instructors have a wide variety of backgrounds, and the students study aspects of many spiritual traditions and academic disciplines.

At different times professors have included rabbis, African shamans, scholars from various Christian Orders, Buddhist lineage holders, Gandhian scholars, Native American Elders, and many others. These traditions come together to enhance the academic studies that go on by providing many ways in which the meaning beyond the words of the academic material may be explored. In religious studies in particular this is crucial as we seek to find the commonality, the roots of religious experience, which we all share. We do not seek to draw ever-tighter lines, boundaries and academic descriptions of different religions. To study religion as merely a collection of dogma, historical facts and institutional expressions misses the holistic approach sought by the paradigm of contemplative education. Living spirituality as practiced by open and engaged women and men is at least as important as the doctrines and histories of the world's religious traditions. This kind of inclusive educational approach is related to the second prajñā in which our view is broad and yet sufficiently sensitive to look at the pieces as well as the big picture at the same time, not sacrificing one for the other.

In the broadest context, what is contemplative education at Naropa University in light of its Buddhist educational heritage? It means going beyond conventional learning, going past the first wisdom of studying and listening to teachers. It asks the student to contemplate, to chew on the meaning, to internalize it and to become more completely familiar with its features. This is where spiritual practice plays a role in contemplative education. Spiritual practice is an important part of contemplative education. Many students at Naropa University engage in some form of meditation as part of their education, but many engage in other kinds of practice—such as T'ai Chi, creative writing, Thangka painting, dance and so forth—which enable them to enhance their understanding by looking at things from a different angle. In the end, the goal is to incorporate what you have learned into your life so that you can approach any situation with a measure of intelligence and sensitivity, and apply your skills to create positive action. Contemplative education also asks the student to recognize and evaluate the responsibilities that come with learning. When you leave the University, what will you give back to society? What are you going to do with your education? This is the responsibility of all students.

### **Combining Idealism and Action**

Dr. Puey embodied contemplative education in his life. He was a banker and a technocrat who used advanced kinds of knowledge to do practical things in the world. Yet he never forgot that there was a higher purpose to all of it. We do not grow and develop this world simply for the sake of getting bigger; the intent is to improve people's lives. Tools were invented to help do practical things. Even money is really but a tool, meant to smooth the exchange of goods, services and interaction between people. Tools were never meant to be worshiped. Contemplative education is a way that we can begin to address the problems and shortcomings in the current world order through education and, ultimately, positive action. The activities at Naropa University are one example of how spirituality and engagement with the machinery of society come together for the purpose of creating positive change. Whatever merit is created by these activities and by those in Siam who pursue similar ends, like Sulak Sivaraksa and his constellation of compassionate friends, honors the memory of Dr. Puey as a visionary and a compassionate and wise human being.

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# Concocted Death: A Buddhist Deconstruction of the Religion of Consumerism

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Jonathan Watts

In the last 200 years, mankind has made incredible technological and material strides. Large parts of the world are no longer preoccupied with basic survival. We live in an age of wealth and material prosperity as all sectors of the world are opening up to the “free market” and the material benefits of capitalist society. With such material bounty, however, why does it seem that our psychological problems are increasing? Why is it that Japanese youth, who grow up in one of the safest, cleanest and most materially prosperous societies, are increasingly lashing out in violence? Why do some prosperous Malaysians in fancy cars feel the need to terrorize others in road rage? Why are Europeans and Americans streaming into bookstores in search of titles on inner peace? There is something clearly amiss in our modern consumer societies.

I use the word “consumer” here to point directly to the issue of our present consumption patterns. These patterns have emerged as one of the most pressing issues in the world today, though corporate media have done their best to ignore it. From environment to community development to education to sex and gender issues, if we look deeply into the social problems of mankind today, we see that virtually all of them are somehow linked to the workings of our economic system and the drive by so many to attain material satisfaction. Although so much of this drive seems to be for the material, for a comfortable life or for a luxurious life, closer inspection reveals something in our spirits that is driving us to consume our earth into ruin. Based on the ability of so many to satisfy basic material needs, it must be something more than just a desire for things. There must be something deeper behind them. This is what we can call “consumerism”:

the dominant culture of a modernizing invasive industrialism which stimulates—yet can never satisfy—the urge for a strong sense of self to overlay the angst and sense of *lack* in the human condition. As a result, goods, services, and experiences are consumed beyond any reasonable need. This undermines the eco-system, the quality of life and particularly traditional cultures and communities and the possibility of spiritual liberation.<sup>1</sup>

More simply, consumerism is a way of living in which the meaning of one’s life is the acquisition and consumption of things and experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by the Think Sangha at its 2<sup>nd</sup> international meeting in Hakone, Japan, May 27-31, 1997.

By understanding the word “religion” as that by which we find meaning for our lives, we can see that consumerism now serves as a religion to modern people with “the market” acting as our God. The role of our traditional religions seems to be marginal at best in the modern world. However, as we look at the personal and social dislocations of the modern world, our new “religion of the market” is still unable to “deliver the goods” in our search for the meaning of our lives. Religion in general, and Buddhism in particular, has two important things to offer our modern world. First, it presents a different worldview which can expose and evaluate the hidden moral and spiritual claims of the dominant “secular” ideologies of our age. Second, it offers a praxis of self-transformation. This enables a more conscious search for the meaning of our lives which has been suppressed under scientific and economic determinism. The rediscovery of this conscious practice of self-transformation within our traditional religions is an essential task in expanding our understanding of prosperity beyond our own material and human concerns.<sup>2</sup>

Dependent Co-origination (*paticca samuppada*) is Buddhism’s detailed explanation of how “the angst and sense of *lack*” (Dukkha) in the human condition arise. It provides a specific Buddhist tool for unpacking the claims of our new, modern religion of consumerism. Rooted in direct experience and observation, it also provides a practical, hands-on way to develop a more mindful or conscious approach to our quest for meaning in our lives. In this paper, however, there is only space for using *paticca samuppada* to examine how we move through the structures of consumer delusion. How to use *paticca samuppada* as a daily practice for mindfulness and liberation will have to wait for another time.<sup>3</sup>

### AN INTRODUCTION TO DEPENDENT CO-ORIGINATION (*PATICCA SAMUPPADA*)

*Paticca samuppada* has been called “the heart or the essence of Buddhism”<sup>4</sup> for its penetration of the workings of our human condition of Dukkha. Indeed, the Buddha said, “Whoever sees dependent co-origination sees the Dhamma; and whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent co-origination.”<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the Buddha taught *paticca samuppada* as a more detailed version of his Second Noble Truth, the cause of Dukkha.<sup>6</sup> Simply, *paticca samuppada* is a natural system of the way suffering and delusion arise in the human being which the Buddha uncovered in his contemplations and observations of the ways things work. The system marks out 12 important movements in the rising of the suffering prone ego or “self”. We first begin in a state of unknowing about certain aspects of reality, most fundamentally the natural truths of Impermanence (*anicca*), Dukkha, and Not-self (*anatta*). This Ignorance then forms the basis of the ways we view ourselves and the world. These views then determine the way we interact with the world, giving rise to values, beliefs, personalities and a whole host of aspects that make up our

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed explanation of the “religion of the market”, see David Loy’s “The Religion of the Market” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 65, No. 2, Summer 1997. Also see Think Sangha Journal No. 1 “The Religion of the Market” at <http://www.bpf.org/think.html>.

<sup>3</sup> In the following paper, I will refer to numerous works by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in which he teaches the practical application of *paticca samuppada*.

<sup>4</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Paticca Samuppada: Practical Dependent Origination* (Nonthaburi, Thailand: Vuddhidhamma Fund, 1992), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Majjhima Nikaya, Mahahatthipadopama Sutta : The Simile of the Elephant’s Footprint [Greater] 28:28 (I.191).

<sup>6</sup> Samyutta Nikaya, Nidanavagga - the Book of Causation (II), Nidanasamyutta - the Connected Discourses on Causation (12), The Householder (V), Suffering 43 (3) [72].

identity. When these aspects of our “self”, built on Ignorance, come in contact with the natural law of Impermanence (*annica*) in Aging & Dying (*jaramarana*), there arise conflicts which express themselves in all the types of difficulties or Dukkha we experience as humans.

A number of different ways of interpreting and going into *paticca samuppada* in detail can be used. The traditional method has understood the 12 links cosmically over the transmigration of three lifetimes: past, present and future. Other methods include understanding the system within the split second of a mental moment. In order to use it as a tool for better understanding in our daily lives here and now and the consumer societies we live in, it is perhaps best to look at the system within observable moments in our mental process. Once we gain such a basic awareness and begin to practice in the very real world of our present mind and body, it will become easier to extend an understanding towards larger emotional and mental movements which take place over days, weeks, months and even years. In this way, we can perhaps use *paticca samuppada* in the way the Buddha meant, as a practical tool for understanding ourselves and making our way on the path to liberation.

Finally, it is essential to stress the dynamic, non-linear nature of *paticca samuppada*. As we will see in this investigation, our minds tend to objectify processes as static containers which interact in a linear causality. In coming to grips with *paticca samuppada*, we will encounter the natural truths of Impermanence, Dukkha and Not-self, which when properly understood release the mind from objectifications and allow it to see reality as a dynamic and fluid series of causes and conditions. The 12 links of *paticca samuppada* thus should be seen as markers in a flowing river. The river is not contained within these 12 markers but its essential points are designated. Detaching from a strict linear sense of 12 linked factors, we need to envision a causality that includes not only this linear progression but an interpenetration of all 12 points.<sup>7</sup> This understanding does not espouse a random universe, but it does challenge linear causalities, which create the duality of subject-object or observer-observed.

## THE 12 LINK MANDALA OF PATICCA SAMUPPADA

|                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ignorance ( <i>avijjā</i> )         |                                   |
| Aging & Dying ( <i>jaramarana</i> ) | Concocting ( <i>sankhara</i> )    |
| Birth ( <i>jāti</i> )               | Consciousness ( <i>vinnana</i> )  |
| Existence ( <i>bhava</i> )          | Mind/Body ( <i>namarupa</i> )     |
| Clinging ( <i>upadana</i> )         | Sense Media ( <i>salayatana</i> ) |
| Craving ( <i>tanha</i> )            | Contact ( <i>phassa</i> )         |

<sup>7</sup> The Mahayana simile of Indra’s Net aptly describes this reality. Imagine a spider’s web in which at each node appears a mirror that reflects all the other mirrors and vice versa infinitely. In this way, each infinitesimal part of the universe encodes all of the universe within it.

## Feeling (*vedana*)

### IGNORANCE (*avijja*)

This is considered the starting point of the 12 link chain since Ignorance is the most fundamental cause which conditions human suffering. It must be stressed, however, that even Ignorance cannot be considered an original cause. Rather it is brought about by the interplay of all 12 links. As noted, the non-linear interpenetration of the links makes it so that there is no ultimate beginning nor end in the cycle. It can be entered at any one of the 12 links as witnessed by the Buddha's varied renditions. For convenience purposes then, we begin here.

Simply, Ignorance is the lack of knowledge and understanding about the true reality of things. Such a basic misunderstanding is the foundation for all other types of Ignorance. Therefore, any particular problem or type of suffering can be traced back through the 12 links to its own particular form of Ignorance, which is always based on this original Ignorance. Some of the fundamental forms of Ignorance can be understood as:

\* In strict Buddhist terms, Ignorance of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths or Ignorance of the fundamental truths of reality: Impermanence (*anicca*), Dukkha, Not-self (*anatta*). This kind of Ignorance is related to the false belief in "self" and in propositions about the "self", death and afterlife.

\* Ignorance is the attachment to erroneous worldviews, two of the most principal ones being the belief that things are separate, fixed, enduring OR completely lacking any reality.<sup>8</sup>

\* In more psychological terms, Ignorance is confused thinking based on conjecture and imagination, and conditioned by beliefs, fear, and accumulated character traits.<sup>9</sup>

### **MENTAL STEWING**

**CONCOCTING<sup>10</sup> (*sankhara*)**

**CONSCIOUSNESS (*vinnana*)**

**MIND-BODY (*namarupa*)**

**SENSE EXPERIENCE (*salayatana*)**

The next four links in the system are commonly considered to operate at the subconscious level. As such they involve a very in-depth, experiential consideration much of which requires meditative insight. Most of us have not established a practice deep enough to fully come to grips with this area. Therefore, we will look at these links as a single group of mostly subconscious mental experience. In this way, we may best incorporate them into a meaningful practice of

<sup>8</sup> Samyutta Nikaya, Nidanavagga - the Book of Causation (II), Nidanasmayutta - the Connected Discourses on Causation (12), Nutriment (II), Kaccanagotta (15) [17]; Digha Nikaya, Brahmajala Sutta: The Supreme Net - What the Teaching Is Not 1 (I.1-46).

<sup>9</sup> P. A. Payutto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*, trans. Bruce Evans, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1994), 45.

<sup>10</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, "Buddhism In All Aspects Lecture Series: Talk 3 The Arising of Paticca Samuppada" December, 1988, Trans. Santikaro Bhikkhu, unpublished. This and other manuscripts on *paticca samuppada* by Buddhadasa not available in English are now being translated for publication in the near future.



*paticca samuppada* which remains clear and practical. As our practice develops, we should be encouraged to delve slowly into each of these links for deeper understanding.

Concocting (*sankhara*) is conditioned by Ignorance and is best understood as a dynamic process of mental stewing, which comes from the misconceptions of Ignorance. *Sankhara* is the basic concocting power of the mind and begins the act of conceptualizing, turning *processes* into *things*. This act conditions Consciousness that emerges from the establishment of an object or “perch” (*arammana*) for the concocting power of the mind to hold onto. With the establishment of such a “perch”, the latent duality that arose in the conceptualizing of phenomena at Sankhara becomes a little sharper. Concocting has now formed a concocted object to contemplate. Mind/Body is subsequently conditioned. This is where Consciousness bifurcates into the clear duality of mind and form. With the five basic aggregates (*khandhas*) of form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness now fully present, we can say there is a functioning being, which will come to have Sense Experience (*salayatana*).<sup>11</sup> Since this level of the mind is not ordinarily experienceable, we cannot begin to call this being an “I”. However, this is where mental reality begins to break into conceptions of “self” and other, this and that. There is a growing awareness of the mind as a fundamental reference point or subject that is using the senses to experience various referents or objects.<sup>12</sup> Sense Experience (tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing, feeling, and mental experiencing) are conditioned by Mind/Body. In understanding Sense Experience, we must not simply consider these six bases as the actual bodily and mental forms, but rather as the dynamic interplay between the person who senses and the object that is sensed.<sup>13</sup>

## FULL CONTACT (*phassa*)

This mass of Mental Stewing will condition Full Contact, which begins with what is generally a more conscious and directly observable concocting. As such, it also becomes one of the best places to apply mindful awareness (*sati*) to short circuit the chain reaction leading to Dukkha. We use the word “full” here to indicate that contact must have meaning in order for it to become Full Contact. If some form comes into contact with our senses but our mind does not concoct Craving (*tanha*) into Birth (*jati*), we call this Mere Contact. Yet when some form comes into contact with our senses and our mind concocts Craving (*tanha*) into Birth of self (*jati*), then we consider this Full Contact.<sup>14</sup> Within a multi-media experience, certain senses may go through a process of Full Contact while others may stop at Mere Contact. Concocted from Ignorance, Full Contact will involve the basic misperceptions (*sanna*) of permanence (*nicca*), pleasure (*sukha*), and “self” (*atta*).

## FEELING (*vedana*)

Feeling is conditioned by Full Contact. Feeling is broken down into three basic types:

<sup>11</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, from a private interview with his student and personal translator, Santikaro Bhikkhu, September 17, 1998. See also Payutto, *Dependent Origination*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Bhikkhu Nanananda, *The Magic of the Mind: An Exposition of the Kalakarama Sutta* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1974/85), 31.

<sup>13</sup> Buddhadasa, “Buddhism In All Aspects: Talk 4 Controlling Paticca-Samuppada” and Interview with Santikaro Bhikkhu September 14, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Buddhadasa, “Buddhism In All Aspects: Talk 4 Controlling Paticca-Samuppada”.

pleasant, painful and neither-pleasant-nor-painful. The first two Feelings obviously lead the mind towards greed (a pulling inward) and anger (a pushing outward). The third leads the mind towards delusion in which the mind wobbles and moves in uncertain direction. This delusion may move the mind towards positive ego states (*jati*), which alleviate uncertainty, boredom or fear. Yet the very state of delusion in itself can offer a comfortable, false transcendent feeling from the tension of positive and negative feeling. In this process of concocting Feeling, more detailed perceptions (*sanna*) of color, taste, sound, etc. arise as the mind begins to label and categorize experience. As with Full Contact, Feeling offers an opportune place to discontinue concocting with meditative awareness (*sati*).<sup>15</sup> It is generally considered that when the mind concocts past Feeling, then Clinging (*upadana*), Birth (*jati*) and Dukkha inevitably occur.

## CRAVING (*tanha*)

Craving is conditioned by Feeling. Craving concocts in three different ways. One is Sense Craving (*kamatanha*). Two is Craving for Being, states of being, or controlling and indulging in pleasant feelings (*bhavatanha*). This manifests often as a desire to maintain a deeper condition or identity. Third is Craving for Non-Being or to get away from unpleasant or painful feelings (*vibhavatanha*). As we can see, both Craving for Being and Craving for Non-Being signal the initial identification of the “self” with states of being. These identifications will develop into more detailed forms in Clinging (*upadana*) and in the Maturation of the “Self” (Existence and Birth).

These kinds of Craving enhance the deep mental conditioning of viewing the world in terms of positive and negative, the basic duality which arose in Consciousness-Mind/Body and developed in Feeling. This process of positive-negative mental ping-pong leaves the mind constantly agitated and fixated upon desires. We become unable to sit still in the present moment. The mind constantly plunges forward grasping at pleasant objects (*kamatanha*) and states of being (*bhavatanha*).

This narrowing of the mind also creates a strong undercurrent of delusion and unknowing through the mass of phenomena, which are neither positive nor negative and thus go unprocessed as neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling. As we noted previously, the mind may perpetuate this neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling and avoid that which is actually *transcendent*. As the very nature of the self is to avoid its destruction and death (to deny Impermanence and Not-self), the mind can engage in a form of Craving for Non-Being (*vibhavatanha*) by further shutting down, turning off and perpetuating a state of ignorance as a defense mechanism against less egotistical states of being that threaten its existence.<sup>16</sup>

This Craving for Non-Being (*vibhavatanha*) also tears us out of the present. As the reality of Impermanence and Not-Self cut against the concocted Ignorance of “self”, the mind may more actively move away from them into positive identifications in the future or from the past.<sup>17</sup> An experience of *lack* is thus concocted in the tension between the constant dissolution of the present “self” and the hardened objectifications of a future or past “self”. These objectifications

<sup>15</sup> Digha Nikaya, Mahanidana Sutta: The Great Discourse on Origination, 15:32 (II.68).

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Payutto, *Dependent Origination*, 63-65.

of “self” are a vain attempt to fill in the bottomless pit of the present “self”, which can never be satiated due to its inherently concocted, insubstantial and void nature—that is, the truth of Not-self.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the concept of time takes form in the mind as the period between present desire and past or future satisfaction. This *lack* also concocts the sense of space between the craving self and the object of craving.<sup>19</sup> As the mind becomes more imbedded in this pattern of concocting, reality becomes more objectified and perspective becomes narrower. The comparing mind arises—as “self” is contrasted with the hypothetical “self” of desire. The competitive mind also arises—as “self” is compared with the “selves” of other individuals. *Lack*, alienation, separation, comparison, and competition are therefore key components in this creation of ego and delusive identity.

### CLINGING (*upadana*)

Clinging is conditioned by Craving, its partner in crime. As the mind deepens its concoctions of “self” and “other” in Craving, the next level of concocting in Clinging gives rise to the clearer sense of “I”, “me” and “mine”.<sup>20</sup> This more concrete thinking leads us to form certain values, attitudes, and mental preoccupations about not just material forms but about mental states. In such a way, there are four more specific forms of Clinging coming from this basic Clinging. They are Clinging to: 1) sense objects (*kamupadana*); 2) views, ideas, beliefs, theories, etc. (*ditthupadana*); 3) rules, practices, methods, modes of behavior, etc. (*silabbatupadana*); 4) the “self” which clings to these above forms (*attavadupadana*).

1) Sense Clinging is the preoccupation with related sense objects and trying to re-affirm enjoyment and possession of them.

2) Attitude Clinging is clinging to views and values. They may also refer to attitudes associated with Sense Clinging like that fashion indicates a person’s value or intelligence. This relationship mirrors the one between Sense Craving and Craving for Being. Ultimately, a view is objectified as “something right” that belongs to the “self”, rather than as a tool for learning about and responding to reality.

3) Behavioral Clinging, fed by Attitude Clinging, is Clinging to rules, methods, and modes of behavior associated with an object. Once a view, value, idea, or attitude is objectified, the methods and practices associated with it also become hardened into forms possessed by “me”. As Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explains, “Rather than penetrating the real reasons for these practices, people simply cling fast to them through tradition. This is a kind of Clinging (*upadana*), which is very difficult to redress.... This kind of Clinging fixes on to the actual *forms* of practice, its external applications.”<sup>21</sup> This leads to a loss of true value and meaning when views and practices that are intended as means to higher goals become fetichized symbols of that end. For example, wealth has become a value in itself replacing the higher value of honest and committed endeavor, which makes wealth a wholesome and varied social construct.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of the issue of *lack*, see David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*. (Atlantic-Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, our sense of time and space arises at Craving (*tanha*). Interview with Santikaro Bhikkhu, September 14, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, “Buddhism In All Aspects: Talk 3 The Arising of Paticca Samuppada”.

<sup>21</sup> Phra Ariyanandamuni (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu), *Luk Phra Buddhasasana* (Suvijahn, 1956), 60.

4) Self Clinging is Clinging to the “me”, which has arisen through this Clinging to objects as “mine”. In the four subconscious links of Mental Stewing, we saw the birth of duality with the bifurcation of the mind into subject and object. Here in Clinging, this concocting has attained quite a complexity with Clinging to a distinct sense of “I” and “me” (*atta*) and a corresponding world of clung to objects like sensual forms (*kama*), attitudes (*ditthi*) and behaviors (*sila*).

### **MATURATION OF THE “SELF”** **EXISTENCE (*bhava*)** **BIRTH (*jati*)**

Once again for the sake of clarity and practicality, we can understand a series of links as one. As with the four links of subconscious Mental Stewing, we are invited to investigate these factors more fully as our practice deepens.

Both Existence and Birth mark the development of the concocted “self” into a matured entity with its own internal dynamic. Conditioned by Clinging, this is the place where the hardened images of “self” begin to consolidate into an identity. Here the mind engages in a kind of “self” stewing. It stews (obsessing, dwelling, planning, visualizing, etc.) about clung to material and mental forms (sense objects, attitudes, behaviors), and then projects all these material and mental forms into life situations that contain these factors. Thus, the mind identifies its “self” with the environments and circumstances in which these desires are satisfied.<sup>22</sup> This stewing, as a mental event, becomes literally an existence, a world that is lived in. For example, as the mind stews about obtaining a pair of Nike basketball shoes, it also begins to identify with places and organizations which are closely tied to Nike (“I am a Michael Jordan fan.”; “I like the United States, where Nike is headquartered.”) Conversely, there may be identification with what one is not (“I am not a Lakers fan.”). The initial identifications we saw in Craving are attempts to bridge the fundamental subject-object duality concocted at the subconscious level. These identifications, however, only deepen the gap through heightening the sense of *lack*, separation and comparison. Here in the Maturation of the “Self”, we witness more mature and increasingly futile attempts since such identity building merely exacerbates the gap it is trying to eliminate.<sup>23</sup>

This Birth is, of course, not a physical one but a mental and spiritual one in which “the sense of ‘I’ has grown and developed until it is born into a complete sense of self, of ‘I’, and now dominates the mind in all of its actions, and with it everything that is ‘mine’.”<sup>24</sup> In the creation, reinforcement and attachment to mental objects, attitudes and behaviors, the mind constructs or “gives birth” to what it perceives as an identity or a “self”. “This spiritual birth happens every time there is Craving. This can happen many times a day—dozens of times, maybe even one hundred times, if we have a lot of Craving. Every time there is Craving, there will be this Birth.”<sup>25</sup>

The maturation of such a “self” is most clearly seen in times of crisis, when confronted with Aging and Dying.<sup>26</sup> When our identity or sense of “self” is directly challenged, we often

<sup>22</sup> Payutto, *Dependent Origination*, 53-54.

<sup>23</sup> Nanananda, *The Magic of the Mind*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, “Buddhism In All Aspects: Talk 3 The Arising of Paticca Samuppada”

<sup>25</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, “Buddhism In All Aspects: Talk 3 The Arising of Paticca Samuppada”

<sup>26</sup> Payutto, *Dependent Origination*, 54.

become angry, depressed, afraid and defensive. Such emotions are defense mechanisms which this “self” uses to avoid the reality of its Impermanence (*anicca*). This is a critical point to see. In the way that the “self” seeks out safe environments with which to identify, once the “self” is born it truly becomes like a being that will seek to preserve itself just as an animal will fight to preserve its own life. This is the tragedy of the Birth of “self” since there develops a self-preserving energy. It is very much like a virus with Ignorance serving as its DNA. Consequently, if we are successful in cutting out various constructed “selves” inside of us, there may be quite a lot of grief, like when a close friend dies.

### AGING and DYING (*jaramarana*)

This maturation of the “self” will naturally condition Aging and Dying. Aging and Dying are also spiritual and mental states rather than merely physical ones. Here, the “self” concocted by misconceptions, ignorance and defilement runs into the fundamental nature of reality. We should not get confused here that this critique of “self” is a blanket condemnation of any human construction of identity. This sort of clinging to the complete denial of “self” is an annihilationism, the partner of egoism, which the Buddha also refuted. Rather, it must be emphasized that this is an identity built on the faulty structures of selfishness and an arrogant independence. Thus when we meet one natural truth of Impermanence (*annica*), we suffer pain at the dissolution of what is pleasurable and has been held on to. When we meet a second natural truth of Not-self (*anatta*) and Voidness (*sunnata*), we suffer pain at our dependency on others and other factors for this pleasure. When we meet a third natural truth of Dukkha, we suffer pain at these failed efforts to hold onto pleasure.

This “self” also experiences limitation, decay and suffering in the states of boredom, fear and depression. We often experience boredom with sense objects or states of being which have already been attained. Such boredom leads us on to crave some new sort of sense object or state of being. Fear often arises when one worries that a state of enjoyment cannot be continued or that the sensual object may run out or diminish. Such a negative ego state often leads to even more intense Craving for that sense (*kama*) or state of being (*bhava*) that is denied or requires sustaining. Finally, depression, despair, self-hatred or self-pity arise from boredom and fear as well as when we are deprived of the thing we crave or the state of being that allows us to control these things.<sup>27</sup>

This spiritual death is one that occurs everyday when the mind breaks into concocted pieces in an attempt to manipulate reality towards its own satisfaction merely to be foiled or to have its satisfactions fade like the sun on the horizon. Built on Ignorance, developed through Concocting and manifested through Craving, the “self” is a construction with its own downfall built in. It is inherently unstable due to its co-dependency on various causes and conditions. To build one’s life upon it is to build castles made of sand.

### CONSUMER *PATICCA SAMUPPADA*

With an understanding of the basic model of *paticca samuppada*, we now will apply it to the development of our global consumer culture. Using *paticca samuppada* not only offers

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<sup>27</sup> Payutto, *Dependent Origination*, 32.

another critical tool for looking at consumer culture, but also entails a methodology for leading out of it. *Paticca samuppada* is part of an integrated system of critique and practical problem solving. By using it here we can form a bridge between our critique and our discovery of solutions and a greater mode of living beyond consumer culture.

## **IGNORANCE (*avijja*)**

Generally, we take our sense of “self” as a given. In modern society, we can play around with it by getting a new hairstyle or quitting alcohol, but we tend to see it as this core foundation on which we experience life. Not-self challenges this idea by showing (graphically in the case of *paticca samuppada*) that what we consider this core foundation of “self” or soul, our conventional selves, is a very volatile system constructed by causes and conditions. By showing the infinite malleability of the construction in Not-self, Buddhism instructs us to challenge the depths of our conditioned selves and to not take anything for granted (such as our sense of “self”) as being set in stone. This can be an extremely frightening idea and practice since we have spent so much time building this “self” to protect and entertain us. Without it, it seems we are without a shelter in the storm. Yet on the other hand, it is the most liberating idea and practice since it frees us from the birdcage in which we have constructed and limited ourselves.

This essential truth of Buddhism is key to our consumer culture, because our consumer culture is so rooted in the material. The fetishization of the material conditions us to more deeply objectify the “self” as a concrete form. This positing of a concrete “self” also implies an Ignorance of Impermanence (*anicca*). Consumerism is rooted in what the Buddha saw as the Ignorance of extreme realism and eternalism in which people see things and others as separate, real, fixed and enduring. The consumerist energy towards acquiring goods (and images) as a means towards defining and fulfilling one’s “self” is just this kind of extreme realism and eternalism. The susceptibility of any consumer good to breakdown (Impermanence) reveals the inability to provide lasting satisfaction (*Dukkha*) and the fallacy of trying to fill up a transient “self” with transient things (Not-self).

## **MENTAL STEWING**

**CONCOCTING (*sankhara*)**

**CONSCIOUSNESS (*vinnana*)**

**MIND-BODY (*namarupa*)**

**SENSE EXPERIENCE (*salayatana*)**

This Ignorance conditions a mental stewing that frames reality in terms of materiality. Events and processes that properly would be viewed as unstable and constantly arising and falling tend to get seen in terms of static forms interacting in a linear causality. This concocts Consciousness in which the fluid aspects and interactions between forms are broken down into parts, separated, and placed into static containers (e.g., the multiple dependent causes and conditions of a human are compartmentalized into a single individual; a behavior or way of interacting is objectified in a fashion). The next step is critical in the development of consumer mentality, the arising of duality where now there is a consumer (subject) to consume through feeling, perceiving, thinking and cognizing consumable forms (object). This subject-object construct merges with the senses to concoct Sense Experience. Sight Experience will open the

doors to all the bright lights and dazzling images of shopping malls, media entertainment, and so forth. Sound Experience will enable attachment to walkmans and boom boxes. Taste Experience will open up the world of Coke and MacDonald's, junk foods, and exotic tastes from abroad. Smell Experience will open the doors to the world of colognes, perfumes, after shaves, gourmet foods, and so on. Touch Experience will open up the world of imported silks, cosmetics for the skin and hair, luxury cars, and so on. And most critically, Mental Experience derived through the senses will open the world of consumer identity constructions like fame and style.

### **FULL CONTACT (*phassa*)**

From this mass of Mental Stewing, Full Contact is conditioned. The foundation of Ignorance comes into the conscious mind here when physical forms, personalities, and institutions are perceived as stable (*nicca*), concrete (*atta*) and often pleasing (*sukha & supā*). Watching TV, now truly a worldwide phenomenon, is perhaps the purest form of making contact and concocting consumer Full Contact. When we watch TV, images of events and people touch us, concocting Full Contact mostly through the ear, eye and mind Sense Experience. The speed of advertising and hi-tech media technology are fundamental here. The development of extremely fast image presentation almost always outstrips the speed of the mind to be conscious and aware and then to process the meanings and implications of this contact. As such, almost all forms of contact will push into Full Contact. Aside from that which concocts into pleasant or painful Feeling, the speed and violence of consumer contact will wobble the mind into neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling and delusion. Full Contact is a place where mindful awareness could prevent the further concocting of Dukkha. Yet the hi-tech bombardment of consumer culture makes this possibility increasingly less likely.

### **FEELING (*vedana*)**

This Full Contact overload will condition Feeling. When watching TV, there are lots of pleasant and painful Feelings to be concocted. Perceptions (*sanna*) are heightened and deepened, such as what special effects make a music video great or a horror movie really frightening. In consumer culture, though, neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling is perhaps the most prevalent.

When we watch TV, the hi-tech bombardment of images at Full Contact dull the mind to react to what is only most pleasurable or most painful. As more and more images fail to meet these heightened expectations, it increasingly appears that there is nothing of interest to watch. In the United States, there is a new phrase called "channel surfing" in which one switches through all the channels (sometimes up to 100 with cable television) in a short space of time usually ending with the conclusion that, "Nothing's on." When trying to choose a program from a mass of different programs, the mind wobbles amidst how to find the one we are looking for. There are moments of positive Feeling when an interesting image flashes by and also negative Feeling. Yet in the speed of the "surfing" process, the majority of the images are not processed and end up creating a neither-positive-nor-painful Feeling, leading to a more general numbness towards what is not strikingly positive or negative. This kind of process also happens when we have to make contact with goods at a store or shopping mall. Trying to find the one thing we want among the myriad of stores and brand names forces the mind to block out vast amounts of reality unrelated to our search yet conspicuously trying to grab our attention.

In this way, people in consumer societies spend a lot of time in numbness, blocking out possible negative Feelings while wading through mildly positive ones in the search for peak positive ones. Vast amounts of reality go unprocessed (e.g., the TV is left on without watching, the music in the department store goes unnoticed). What is neither enticing nor threatening is zoned away and the mind develops an inability to pay attention to, focus on or feel what is not increasingly positive or negative. The ever increasing intensity of consumer images deepens the mind's already dualistic nature. Developing from the unconscious perception of subject-object duality, the dynamic of positive-negative Feeling is concocted. As the mind searches for ever increasing peak positive Feeling and in turn experiences deeper troughs of negative Feeling, the ability to focus on subtleties and gray areas devolves as larger chunks of reality go unprocessed in the wobble of neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling.

### **CRAVING (*tanha*)**

As we continue to flip through the channels on the TV, we finally find something that attracts us. On the TV there are numerous images to concoct Craving, and especially Sense Craving. This Sense Craving often happens when we come in contact with advertising which hawks sensual forms (*kama*) as the center of its presentations. There is something for everyone here: shampoos and designer clothes for sister, sports shoes and scantily clothed girls for brother, cars and beer for Dad, and detergents and exotic vacations for Mom. The underlying message behind all these consumer goods concocts Craving for Being in the positive identifications made with the people used to advertise the goods like models, sports stars and celebrities. The TV, however, offers deeper images of Craving for Being in the dramas, situational comedies, and news programs. A good story can be informative to the mind and stimulating to the imagination, but the majority of television dramas paint overly dramatic lives filled with constant positive and/or negative Feeling. These Feelings concoct Craving for Being in the exciting and fulfilling lives of romance and adventure dramas while concocting Craving for Non-Being in horror and crime stories. By showing lives and situations where consumer goods are used and experienced, these programs also deepen the Sense Craving concocted by advertising.

Here the mind becomes conditioned into this ping-pong of negative and positive comparisons. The reality of life when there is no action is not presented and the comparisons one makes, often subconsciously, with their own life creates a sense of *lack*. Our lives seem boring, and daily life has little meaning when held up to the constant action of these programs. On this level, identity is becoming hardened through separation and difference, i.e., what one has or does not have in comparison with others. The more one watches TV, the more our actual lives become one big neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling, neither very exciting nor horribly tragic, and the more we Crave for the forms and states of being which excite us on television. This only deepens the temporal and spatial gap between lives on TV that are observed and Craved and our actual lives that are lived with less and less awareness. Through the powerful advertising and programming images of TV, the mind becomes increasingly alienated from its actual spatial and temporal existence. On this level, identity becomes fluid. This is not in a healthy way by seeing *through* the illusion of forms and "self" while maintaining a sense of social norm. Rather, it is neurotic in the way the illusion deepens through the breakdown of distinction between fantasy and the reality of social norm.



## CLINGING (*upadana*)

From this kind of Craving, concocts a deepening duality in Clinging with the emergence of an “I”. This “I” concocts all sorts of objects (sensual, attitudinal, behavioral) to further define itself.

Our Craving for sensual objects intensifies on this level as the “self” begins to more directly relate to them. “With their new financing plan, we could get a new pick-up truck this year.”; “Hawaii....I really need a break!”; “I really need to get a shampoo that doesn’t damage my hair!” (Sense Clinging)

Our views about these goods, their deeper meanings and the lives of those in programs become hardened objects for the “self” to grasp at. “Those new home video cameras have become really popular. Maybe we should get one too.”; “Jill says Bali is better than Hawaii and that show proves it. I don’t care if it costs more.”; “Why does Tom Cruise’s co-star always have blonde hair? Maybe I should change colors?”; “Boy, I’ll never go to Africa after seeing that news report on Angola. What a backward place!” (Attitude Clinging)

From such hardened views, hardened methods arise. “Jim said we can get a financing plan for the video camera too. Let’s see, pay off the car, insurance, mortgage, credit cards. I think we can do it.”; “If we leave the kids behind, we can definitely afford two weeks in Bali.”; “Those girls got those Esprit outfits and tans abroad by being escorts for business men. Sounds horrible, but maybe.....”<sup>28</sup>; “Just goes to show you our free market democracy is simply the best.” (Behavioral Clinging)

To again emphasize, buying a video camera on installment, taking a private trip to Bali, getting a job for some extra money, championing democracy and the freedom to honestly pursue business are not problems in themselves. The problem arises with a “self” that objectifies them into absolute ends that verify the existence of “self”. As such, questions do not get asked like “How many people are caught in debt from over consumption?”; “How many families have become atomized due to personal consumptive agendas?”; “How many of those well-dressed tan girls are from broken families?”; “How many Americans suffer deeply like Africans from poverty and violence?” When attached to these views and methods, these questions do not get asked and instead help build foundations for national debt, family disintegration, the sacrifice of personal dignity, and paternalistic nationalism. (Self Clinging)

## MATURATION OF THE “SELF”

### EXISTENCE (*bhava*)

### BIRTH (*jati*)

As the mind has now concocted a set of mental objects (sensual, attitudinal, behavioral)

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<sup>28</sup> There is the recent development called “enjo-kosai” in Japan in which young high school girls sell sexual favors to middle-aged businessmen to get money to buy the latest fashionable goods. This is truly a form of *silabbatupadana*. There is such a great Clinging and Craving to material goods and the images they evoke that deeper meanings such as sexual integrity are sacrificed in the pursuit of them. Similar cases of university girls dancing in sex clubs in Bangkok have also been documented. It is ironic that these examples come from Asia, which is considered to have more conservative sexual values and stronger family structures.

to cling onto, it further embellishes the realization of these desires. The obsessing, dwelling, planning and visualizing become deeper and mature identifications with environments and situations take place. “Jim has a Sony camera. I really like their equipment too.”; “Jill has been on two trips this year already. I deserve this trip”; “With the latest outfit, I could make good connections with those girls”; “We are so lucky to be American!” These identifications harden attitudes towards desires, block out very important parts of reality and deepen comparison, *lack*, and alienation. Held up to consumer fashions, the whole family gets lost in their own world of attachments. Dad wants the material trappings of a successful life. Mom wants the rewards of such a life that other wives get. Sister has to get on the inside track of fashion and beauty. Within their minds, their present lives cannot match the images on TV, which bring out selective views of reality. As a family unit, as they become more engrossed into their own “self” projects, they become more oblivious to the feelings and lives of the others. Through the hi-tech images of the TV, our family has concocted these “consumer” selves. Their exciting and entertaining new ideas for a video camera, a trip to Bali, a fast money-making venture, and an assurance of their environment form self-perpetuating energies that concoct onwards yet only deepen the *lack* they feel inside.

### **AGING and DYING (*jaramarana*)**

Impermanence rears its ugly head again as the program ends and the advertisements change. Very quickly their excitement gives way to boredom with the present moment. Dad flips through the channels again to no avail, “Nothing’s on.” Mom trudges back to the kitchen to make dinner and sister returns to her room with all her out-of-fashion clothes. Another great day in America spent in front of the television. From such boredom, fear can concoct. Dad fears that recent layoffs and his debt may cause a sudden financial crisis in the family. Mom fears that if she does not get a good break from all her burdens, she may go back to drinking. Sister fears that her body will not mature the way she wants. In an increasingly violent and economically unstable society, there is a lot to fear. In the uncertainty of their lives, they experience Not-self as the inability to create and maintain desired “self”. From boredom and fear, depression and despair may further concoct. Dad feels down about his failing efforts to achieve the economic success he had envisioned 15 years ago. Mom feels empty in a life of tedium with no concrete rewards. Sister feels despair over the life ahead of her. The real depression here is how the family slides along year after year in front of the television, soaking in *Dukkha* with the images of what kind of life they should have instead and applying themselves to the creative construction of their own lives.

### **THE STRUCTURES OF CONSUMERISM**

I would like to extend some of the implications expressed in the above analysis, which has used *paticca samuppada* within personal mental observation. Such an extension into the larger realm of action and structures is not without basis in the Buddha’s direct teachings. In the *Mahanidana Sutta (The Great Discourse on Origination)*, the Buddha himself departs from his standard explanation of the cycle and offers this rendition:

Listen Ananda, through these conditions depending on feeling there is craving, with

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<sup>29</sup> Digha Nikaya, Mahanidana Sutta : The Great Discourse on Origination, 15:9 (II. 58-59).

craving as condition there is searching; with searching as condition there is acquisition; depending on acquisition there is decision making; depending on this decision making there is lustful desire; depending on this lustful desire there is attachment/infatuation; depending on this infatuation there is possessiveness; depending on possessiveness there is stinginess; dependent on stinginess there is safe-guarding; and depending on this safe-guarding there are the taking up of stick and sword, quarrels, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying.<sup>29</sup>

As we noted in the first section, it is generally considered that when the mind concocts past Feeling, then Clinging (*upadana*), Birth (*jati*) and Dukkha inevitably occur. Thus it is significant to note that the usual sequence of *paticca samuppada* deviates here at Craving. Once we have gone past Feeling, and Craving is concocted, a whole new series of unfortunate events arise. This rendition shows how mental concocting leads to action and how such actions necessarily become social concerns. In such a way, I would like to apply the spirit of the *Mahanidana Sutta* to examine the larger actions and also structures of consumer society. From Craving to Clinging to the Maturation of the “Self” to Aging and Dying, I would like to present an analysis of what takes place when actions and structures are concocted by such mental processes.

## CRAVING (*tanha*)

From all the Full Contact and Feeling stirred up in consumer society, Craving is concocted. In our consumer societies, Craving for sensual forms manifests itself in the Craving for all sorts of consumer goods. These goods include experiential ones in which various senses can indulge. For example, the tourism industry takes the various and often random experiences of travel and packages them into an object of desire. The “vacation” as objectified in group tours and traveler’s guides offer predictable and measurable forms of Sense Craving. In such a way, our market system takes advantage of the mind’s tendency towards objectification by marketing every possible good and experience into a packaged object or “self” to be bought and consumed.

In Craving for Being and Non-Being, the minds starts making initial identifications. As it comes in contact with sensual forms, it begins to Crave for states where firstly, these sensual forms can be controlled and savored like a week in Hawaii at a nice hotel or more simply spending time shopping. More deeply this Craving for Being is craving for the concreteness (*atta*), stability (*nicca*), and freedom and happiness (*sukha*) that acquiring goods represents. Consumerism is like a globally shared theology. It is the hope and desire of an increasing number of beings to realize the fullness of “self” through consumer goods, experiences and identities. These forms show in concrete, quantifiable terms, freedom, stability and happiness. Craving for Non-Being, as the opposite, is the Craving to get away from states in which one is unstable and bound and so unable to experience Sense Craving.

In this constant mode of positive and negative identifications, the mind begins engaging in comparative and competitive thinking, between what we have and want to have, between what we are and want to be. The Advertising industry plays the essential role in this creation of structural *lack*. In consumer culture, the famous American phrase “Keeping up with the Jones” shows how people not only perceive their own enjoyment and deeper well-being through measuring their consumer acquisitions against others but also form their identity around this process. If you have a Mercedes and the Jones’ have a Ford, you feel satisfied with your possession and life. This mentality also exists in non-industrialized communities that are under siege. Through the ever

grander and expensive staging of events like weddings, which put on display modern consumer goods, these cultures participate in the competition for status. This competition creates a structural *lack* where daily life is magnified against a state of ideal consumptive living depicted in advertising media. This deepens fissures in communities and societies where others become subtle opponents in the ideal consumption test.

What has begun to emerge recently is a deeper stage in the fluidity of identity. Here, the mass of consumer imagery concocted by advertising and media and the concreteness of real life have become blurred. There have been increasing cases of individuals not responding to violent crime because they thought it was the making of a TV show or movie.<sup>30</sup> More fundamentally, we are seeing people, especially children, acting out the violence they consume through television, comic books and video games with a lack of distinction between fantasy and reality. As we have noted, Craving (especially Craving for Being) attempts to bridge the “self-other” gap yet merely exacerbates it through the increased development of objects of Craving. This Craving for Being initially manifests itself through a neurotic differentiation and separation in conspicuous consumption. Now, in an attempt to destroy this ever widening gap between the “real self” and the “ideal self”, Craving for Being blurs the distinctions between “fantasy” and objects of socially agreed upon “reality”. Advertising is taking a leading role in this process that has led to a psychotic destruction of moral and social structures, that divide the ocean of mental phenomena from the world of action.<sup>31</sup> When the imagination becomes reality, the “self” is able to satisfy its Craving for what seemed unreachable or taboo. Yet the fundamental subject-object duality that helps to form the “self” has still not been addressed, and so the Craving process marches on (as does the creation of alienation, separation, comparison and competition) as the “self” continues to feed off of what it can imagine. Consequently, advertising and media must continually extend the limits of “reality” in order to have an impact on viewers and create Full Contact.

## CLINGING (*upadana*)

From the deepening of objectification, comparison and competition in Craving arises a concrete sense of “I” and “self”. This consumer “I” subsequently develops views on all the assorted forms that come into Full Contact.

### 1) Sense Clinging

From the concoctions of Sense Craving, our “self” deepens its connections to sensual objects. There is a myriad of consumer objects to Cling to like information, technological goods, nature as resources and entertainment, sex, and money. What is essential about the concocting of Sense Clinging is the blurring between “need” and “want”. By the time our mind concocts Clinging, consumer products have become not only essentials for daily enjoyment but deeper sources of emotional, mental and spiritual gratification. In this way, consumer goods have truly become “needs” –what we need to validate our existence.

### 2) Attitude Clinging

Concocting from Craving for Being, the deeper existential Craving for consumer goods

<sup>30</sup> Gunduz Kalic, “The Death of Reality”, *Adbusters: The Journal of Mental Environment*, Autumn 1997, 29-31.

<sup>31</sup> In order to get through to increasingly numb and cynical viewers, advertising continually pushes the barriers of moral and social norms through commercials that use shock as the primary vehicle for selling a product. Bruce Grierson, “Shock’s Next Wave”, *Adbusters: The Journal of Mental Environment*, Winter 1998.

and experiences concocts into a myriad number of views, values and attitudes.

- *Wealth* and *poverty* arise as quantifiable concepts developed from comparative and competitive consumption.
- *More* and *faster* become important values expressing the quantifiable and measurable aspects of the “self”.
- Intelligence is seen as the accumulation of *factual knowledge* in a specialist field.
- *Freedom* to pursue one’s appetites and desires becomes an essential ideology.

The central delusion of this Clinging is that all these views and attitudes get objectified as absolute ends. They lose their contextual and heuristic meanings as the “self” stuffs them into its growing kit of identity markers. For example, why is *freedom* important? Where does it lead us and how should it be employed to become a better person and to help others? Similarly, *actual knowledge* helps us to do what? *Faster* enables what qualitative life improvement? *Wealth* should be employed towards what end? As clung to attitudes, these ideas all become “good” in themselves. In the development of neither-pleasant-nor-painful Feeling, we saw that such objectification robs our mind of its ability to perceive gray areas, discern emotional states, make decisions based on moral grounds, and reconcile seemingly opposed ideas which coexist, like how can a rich man be unhappy or a poor man not want a television?

### 3) Behavioral Clinging

Attitudes naturally concoct into behaviors with which to realize them.

- The cultivation of *style* and *image* attempt to show a state of *wealth* and well-being.
- *More* and *faster* develop into the need to own faster cars and computers, get a higher salary, take more vacations and never take a slower method of transport.
- Seeking prestigious schooling and high level degrees and amassing information develops from Clinging to *knowledge*.
- Clinging to the idea of *freedom* develops into the mentality to avoid as many responsibilities as possible and to seek to gain the most out of a situation while paying the least for it.

This objectifying of methods further hardens the sense of “self” while leading us farther away from deeper meanings and implications. We act more and more like robots simply following what has been pronounced as “good” or “positive”. This is where the aping of consumer lifestyles takes place—where the mind follows the same methods that others have grasped in searching for well-being. The aping of the American consumer dream throughout the world is a prime example.

### 4) Self Clinging

As we have already noted, the real problem is not the idea of wealth and poverty, quantifiable progress, factual knowledge and personal freedom. The problem arises when a “self” emerges to possess them and turn them into stagnant forms, which lose their meaning devoid of contexts and balances. When this happens on a national and now global level, these ideas become all encompassing epistemologies that blot out useful contributions from societies which have different ideas. Since the ideas are intimately tied to this sense of personal, national and now human “self”, challenging their all encompassing efficacy amounts to attacking the societies that champion them.

**MATURATION OF THE “SELF”**  
**EXISTENCE (*bhava*)**  
**BIRTH (*jati*)**

From the hardening “self” of sense forms, attitudes, and behaviors, the mind develops priorities of needs from “a good pair of running shoes” to “a better job than the one I have now” to “the right kind of relationship” and so on. These “needs” become mental preoccupations that we inhabit for large portions of our day, constantly stewing and mulling over. They become existences, little worlds that we live in.

These needs are conceptualized within terms of *style* and *image*. “A good pair of running shoes” is a brand name, probably Nike, “more than \$60 at least”. “A better job than the one I have now” is at a bigger company with a higher position and better pay. “The right kind of relationship” is someone with a good career, has at least a college degree, and “shares my interests”. On a structural level, this has manifested itself in the image and style machines of advertising and media. These machines exacerbate our Clinging to material forms and engender cultural homogenization by convincing us that mass produced products made by machine can enable one to build a unique and different “self”.

*More* and *faster* has helped us devise this idea for shoes, a better job, and the right kind of relationship even though we already have adequate shoes, a good job, and a promising relationship. *More* and *faster* pushes us to abandon and replace what we had even if it is sufficient. From want getting blurred into “need” in Clinging, “need” gets concocted into greed as the mind goes beyond the bounds of sufficiency. On a structural level, these notions have manifested themselves into the ideologies of “progress” and “development” in which industrialization, technological development, the free market and social engineering promise to bring about a high quality of life all by themselves.

Clinging to *knowledge* concocts into time researching which shoes to get and comparing prices at different stores. It also makes us susceptible to the kind of advertising that makes things look hi-tech and conceptually sophisticated. Further, it concocts plans to get another degree or to get a better job. It concocts attitudes that the present relationship is not good because “she’s not intelligent enough for me”. Finally, it concocts into the addiction for information such as compulsive news consumption and over absorption in “statistical indicators”. This kind of fetishism about knowledge leads to *great wastes of time concerning things which won’t really improve our well-being*. It also stunts our ability to make qualitative and moral decisions that are not in the realm of factual knowledge and information. On a structural level, this has manifested itself into the ideologies of scientism and rationalism so that our educational systems develop the mind only. This leads to a fetishism with expertise and official structures which are “uniquely qualified” to provide answers with statistical analysis. This further concocts debilitating senses of dependence and disempowerment for those not educated in such a way. The mass of mostly indigestible and incomprehensible daily news and information provided by the media perpetuate and reinforce this sense of disempowerment.

Clinging to *freedom* concocts the thinking that having 20 different kinds of running shoes and 10 different malls to buy them at is quality of life. It further concocts planning about what is the shortest amount of time one can commit to one company before marketing himself to another at a higher position and salary. It also concocts a constant “keeping my eyes open” for a

new, better relationship. Fetishized freedom leads us to the delusion that indeed more is better and to avoid commitments and situations which call for duty. The idea of freedom frees the individual to “jump ship” as soon as things become too difficult or unpleasurable. It helps to break down marriages, families and communities and leads towards the unrooted individual. Constantly moving around and uninterested in the commitments of living community life, our alienation deepens as our society becomes filled with a bunch of free, boundless individuals. On a structural level, this manifests in the fetishism of free market capitalist democracy that allows for the greatest freedom with the least responsibility. This sort of system specializes in creating free individuals disembedded from family and community.

What has emerged is consumer man—transient, ungrounded, superficial, vain and greedy. The mind has concocted a “self” which experiences itself in a consumer lifestyle. Physically it is made up of bought goods—TV, car, clothes. It is further constructed around career and relationship, which are both seen as possessions in which to gain and experience pleasure. Beyond the knowledge and philosophies it holds as “self”, things get fuzzy. There is a blind spot, which the “self” knows is there. It is the delusion of this whole concocting spelled out in *lack* and alienation. Consumer clutter will not allow us to slow down to become really aware of it, however, and certainly the constructed “self” will do its best job of self-preservation to avoid any debilitating awareness.

On a structural level, these identified with environments manifest themselves as media conglomerates, sports teams, and tourist destinations (*style, image, wealth*); technological development corporations like General Electric and Microsoft and world financial bodies like the World Bank and IMF (*faster and more*); elite universities and government agencies like the Federal Reserve (*knowledge and expertise*); and all of the above including political-economic alliances like NAFTA, WTO and APEC (*freedom, free market*). Without an awareness of the inherent values and meanings of these environments and our relationships to them, we latch on to them as parts of ourselves. “My team”, “my vacation”, “The World Bank must be somewhat OK, their office is in Washington, the capital city of *my* government.” “General Electric makes good toasters and owns NBC which I watch all the time, I didn’t know they also made military hardware used in the Gulf War. *We* won that one anyway.”

When we just latch on to things as “me” and “mine” based in erroneous projections of ourselves, we end up not only taking part in systems that we would not ordinarily support but actually helping their construction. The development of the consumer world has given corporations, governments and other powers a tool that takes advantage of our dispositions to concoct “me” and “mine”. The distractions and time wasted, the comparisons and competition, the *lack* and alienation are natural developments of this dependent co-origination, which these powers consciously use to further their agendas. Unfortunately, they do not see that they also fall under the natural dynamics of this system, and so our societies and now world are becoming imprisoned in the concoctions of a mega “self” prone now to Aging and Dying.

## **AGING and DYING (*jamarana*)**

In our consumer cultures, we experience Aging and Dying on a number of levels:

Boredom evolves out of the dullness of mind from too much dualistic flipping back and

forth between positive and negative. Boredom comes when things have been consumed to the point that the “self” seeks something new and tires of what it has. This is clearly manifested in the consumer fads and fashions, which with ever increasing speed sweep through our cultures and are gone. Once a form has been acquired and consumed, it is no longer “other” and loses the aura of power that the “other” has in this “self” based dualism. The “self” Craves something because of the power of that other “self” or image. Yet once this “thing” has been consumed to the point that its sensual affects begin to wane, the “self” comes into contact with the fear of loss and more deeply, the fear of Impermanence, Dukkha and Not-self. Consequently, a new thing with power potential must be found.

This sickness of boredom is a key one in that it fuels our modern addiction towards speed. Speed insures that events and forms will move so fast that we will never have to confront for long Aging and Dying, which exposes Not-self. “I’m sick of this kind of food,” but there is another kind to be eaten. “I’m sick of that song (or that band)” but there is another new one. “I’m sick of this TV show” but there is another new one. Such rapid scrambling for the new form that may hold the secret essence to fulfill one’s “self” leads to scrambled thinking and the development of concentration diseases we see in industrialized societies, especially hyperactive young children. Such a mentality also fuels the “throw away” culture that the modern world has become and thus is at the root of our environmental crisis.

This dullness of mind is also expressed in the consumer hyper-self which is the need to display oneself and the things of the “self” (possessions, image, views, status, etc.) to others. The “self” is constantly looking outward in comparison and competition in order to validate itself. This expresses itself in the need for approval from other selves (people, institutions). With the increasing speed and numbness of consumer culture, self-expression has taken on a feeling of hyper-urgency. Louder and more outrageous individuals and society become in competition to be heard amongst other such “selves”. Structurally, these hyper-selves are manifested in our media companies which present higher and higher levels of shock value experience so that they will gain notoriety, popularity and profits from their well-accepted status and “self”. News media is a prime example of this. Only the latest shocking stories of death and the glamorous and compelling stories of celebrity, business and politics make the news. In a nutshell, the news is the display of ego or “self” such as politicians, sports stars, business moguls, or murderers who are louder, stronger and more vital than other ordinary selves. They are all monuments to the “self”, which has successfully conquered other selves and become more real, for they are known by all and will be remembered. These selves may even transcend death in their ability to be remembered, which is surely the hope of so many, to be remembered after death. Here we can see how the delusion of this dullness and boredom link to the positive, greed state of fame.

Beyond the obvious ego state of greed concocted in consumer society is the state of fear. Fear is clearly seen in most people’s need for consumer accumulation expressed as the need for “another one” since what one has is not enough or in case it breaks. It is easy to see how manufacturers play on this fear by making “Buy 10 get one free” offers or actually making products which do not last as long so that this acquisitive fear will be “proven”. This fear further induces our material paranoia for things being stolen, our hyper possessiveness, and our lack of generosity. As we become more possessive, our fear of losing possessions increases, and our time spent defending ourselves and our possessions increases. Such heightened selfishness indicates to others who do not have as much that we do indeed have a lot and merit being robbed, which again leads to “proof” of our fears. As we saw in the *Mahanidana Sutta*, states of greed



(stinginess and safe guarding) lead to states of anger in the taking up of “stick and sword, quarrels, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying.” Is it any coincidence that the world’s consumer model, the United States, is internally racked with the social violence of people striking out in anger, fear, and despair deprived of the material well-being that others are hoarding.

Unfortunately all this experience with Dukkha tends to reinforce consumer patterns rather than lead to their dismissal. For example, there are people who consume even more with a wage cut or job loss. Afraid to show their loss of “self” by not keeping up with the patterns of others in their environment or too fully addicted to the comforts of their life, such people head towards imminent financial crisis, not so much from not having enough money but from being unable to align their consumption with their economic situation. A common way this has become institutionalized in the United States is credit card debt. Individuals are invited by credit card companies to spend beyond their means and pay later in the future (with an increase in interest of course). Surely the future will bring economic growth, which is based in the Baconian myth of continual progress. In the meantime, we must keep our consumption levels on par with others around us so as to not lose our status and our “self” in their eyes. The United States government deficit spending of the 1980s was an even greater institutionalization of this inability of the “self” and the collective “self” to face the reality of Aging and Dying, of the possibility that one has to re-evaluate one’s direction in life and find a way more compatible with reality. The more industrialized governments continue to lay importance on consumer spending and to build their economies around consumer industries such as tourism, entertainment and other sensual services, the more we deny the sand that our castles are built of.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the construction of the “self” contains its own undoing. It is a process that exacerbates what it is trying to cure. The more we fight to preserve our grand illusion of “self” played out in consumer culture, the greater our suffering will be when the whole construction reaches a point of exhaustion and final death. This is the Catch-22 of attempting to transform our own lives and our society as a whole. We have developed economies and societies that mirror the selves we have constructed. Pulling the plug on either leaves us staring down the abyss of Not-self and the collapse of society as we know it. We desire a more peaceful, less harried and superficial way of finding meaning in our lives. Yet when we begin to disengage, we may find ourselves “feeling alone” and empty without the material diversions we have built our identities upon. Similarly, by taking a step away from such a society as a whole, we feel the threat of losing the material achievements we have worked so hard for over the last few hundred years and of plunging back into the Dark Ages.

This is where we arrive at the Third Noble Truth, that there is indeed an answer to our problems and a concrete method to realize this answer. The Buddha taught that the deconcocting of the self by the reverse order of *paticca samuppada* is the end of suffering and thus the heart of the Third Noble Truth.<sup>32</sup> By contemplating and understanding *paticca samuppada*, we begin the important first steps on the Buddhist path of liberation that lead into the concrete lifestyle

<sup>32</sup> Samyutta Nikaya, Nidanavagga - the Book of Causation (II), Nidanasamyutta - the Connected Discourses on Causation (12), The Householder (V), Suffering 43 (3) [72].

explained in the Noble Eightfold Path, the Buddha's Fourth and last Noble Truth.<sup>33</sup> These are the first steps forward in our personal lives towards ending our sickness and lead towards making intelligent and practical steps in changing our societies. Buddhism will not give us structural plans for this society that our scientific spirits cry for. What it does offer us, however, is the practical means to become more conscious of our desires and motivations. This helps us to avoid neurotically funneling these drives into activities that destroy the well being of other peoples, species and life forms. In this way, we can begin to more clearly define priorities in our lives and in our societies, so that the search for the meaning of our lives becomes a mutually supportive endeavor.



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<sup>33</sup> For an interpretation of the Noble Eightfold Path as the Noble Twelvelfold Social Path see Santikaro Bhikkhu, "The Four Noble Truths of Dhammic Socialism" in Watts, Senauke and Santikaro, eds., *Entering the Realm of Reality : Towards Dhammic Societies*, (Bangkok: International Network of Engaged Buddhists [INEB], 1997).

# Creating a Compassionate Society

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Martine Batchelor

Buddhism is based on the dissolution of greed, hatred and delusion. For the Buddha an essential component of the path was the development of wisdom and compassion. From ancient times, practitioners of the Buddha's teaching have tried to live from these essential principles. Some have also endeavoured to influence the whole society in that direction. In that regard the Bodhisattva precepts are a list of ten major precepts and forty-eight minor ones which are a blueprint for building a compassionate society. They are found in the Zen traditions of China, Korea and Japan where they have been an inspiration for both monastics and laypeople for centuries.

The precept number three encourages people to refrain from eating meat and number five advocates refraining from selling alcohol. Number nine asks people to care well for those who are sick and number ten that one does not keep implements for killing and have them ready for use. But in order to reinforce harmlessness and the cultivation of life, number twenty tells us to save the lives of living creatures and to set loose those who are about to be killed.

Number twelve is about right livelihood. It encourages us to refrain from doing business with an evil intent. The phrasing of this precept is particularly interesting. It states that not only must a Buddhist practitioner not buy or sell citizens, slaves or any kind of domestic animals himself but also he should not order someone to do it for him. Number twenty-nine encourages us not to hold an unwholesome occupation. It states that a son or daughter of the Buddha must not engage with an evil intention and for the sake of gain in occupation such as selling the physical charms of men and women, telling fortunes, performing tricks in order to deceive others, preparing any kinds of dangerous drugs or concocting poisons. It stresses that since such occupation are contrary to a mind of compassion and devotion to deliberately engage in them is an offence.

Number thirty-one asks us to pay ransom and rescue people from their difficulties. Number thirty-two states that we should not cause harm to sentient beings. It specifies that a son or daughter of the Buddha must not sell swords, clubs, bows and arrows, nor should he or she keep uneven balances and inaccurate weights and measures. He or she must not use his or her influence with government offices to deprive others of their possessions, with a harmful intention have others bound or shackled or undo the achievements of others. To deliberately commit such deeds is considered to be an offence against the Bodhisattva spirit of compassion and wisdom.

In Korea, these precepts are taken every year by monastics and laypeople as a reminder of their intention to act compassionately. It is also an acknowledgement that people can be weak and make mistakes so they need to take these precepts again and again to deepen their intention. As disciples of the Buddha they are reaffirming that they want to continue to cultivate a wise and compassionate attitude and learn from their errors.

In ancient times in China, these precepts had a certain influence on the Chinese society as a whole. The Buddhist monasteries created a fund called 'inexhaustible treasury' that was devoted to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the destitute in time of famine. During the periods in which special vegetarian feasts were organised the execution of criminals and the killing of animals were prohibited. There were also 'Fields of Merits' which were dedicated to the establishments of fruit gardens, bathing tank and plantation of trees. 'Fields of Dana' were developed to dispense medicine to the sick, to construct sturdy boats to ferry people, to build bridges and toilet facilities and to dig wells along well-travelled roads. All these resemble a Buddhist social welfare programme.

Nowadays in Asia as well as in Western countries, Buddhists feel also impelled to not only practice for themselves but to respond to the needs of others. In Thailand many individual monks are helping to develop a compassionate and caring society by devoting themselves to the well-being of the poor by being creative with their own skills and with what they find in their environment. For example Venerable Chub Suswaroh went to settle in a temple near a village whose inhabitants were reputed to be drunkards, gamblers and robbers. He gained their respect and co-operation by working, learning agriculture and building houses. At the beginning he only helped them materially because he was not sure that they were ready to be helped culturally and ethically. However he found that as they became more prosperous, the villagers became more individualistic and selfish. To counteract that he created a co-operative and a credit union where they had to support and help each other. To start working with them ethically he instituted lower interest rates in the credit union on loans for people who gave up their vices. He also encouraged the villagers to become more self-reliant and to provide for their basic needs. Once he felt they were ready he started to stress meditation and this too had a positive effect on the villagers.

Venerable Nan is another example. He was a meditator monk who returned to his village to find that life was no more abundant because people relied too much on external resources and also due to the amount of their debts. He organised road works and irrigation channels but still the villagers kept becoming poorer and went into deeper debts. He reflected that the root of the problem must be 'man' himself. He decided to teach meditation and organised seven days retreats for the villagers. This totally changed their lives. When the farmers were ready he introduced community development ideas like a rice bank, a co-operative shop, a medicine bank and a credit union he called 'truth group'. In this way the villagers were able to free themselves from private creditors.

Venerable Nan used to be a troublesome young man but he reformed when he became a monk. When he came back to his village after studying and meditating in depth he wanted to help them as they had become so poor. He decided to learn modern technology. He then invented and made trucks and motorcycles in his temple backyard which were extremely useful to the farmers to take their produce to the markets. Following that he helped them develop a rice bank, a buffalo bank, a co-operative shop, youth groups, a centre for production promotion but also health care and housewives groups. For him the increase in income was not necessarily true development as

he felt that one needed to work at three levels — material, ethical and spiritual. For Venerable Nan, Buddhism happens while working. These three cases show that each monk used the three essential elements of material, ethical and spiritual development to help the villagers help themselves.

As Buddhism has entered the West, Europe and America, Westerners too are inspired by the Buddha's message to cultivate wisdom and compassion in their daily lives. They do so in different creative ways, responding to the needs and circumstances of what they encounter and what inspire them to act. In England, prisoners register their religions as they enter jail. A Buddhist monk, Venerable Khemadhammo was struck by the fact that Buddhists in jail had no resources so he created a Buddhist prison chaplaincy organisation. He called his organisation 'Angulimala' by the name of an infamous criminal who was transformed from being a ruthless killer to becoming a peaceful Buddhist monk by an encounter with the Buddha. Venerable Khemadhammo believes that even in the most extreme of circumstances change for the better and enlightenment itself are still possible and that you change others best by persuasion and examples. He has inspired many ordinary Buddhists in various part of the country to visit people in jails all over England. Venerable Khemadhammo even managed to create with the prisoners and the help of the prison service a Peace garden in one jail and a Buddha Grove in another to offer a sanctuary in a difficult environment but also a visual reminder of what was possible.

An essential component needed to create a compassionate society is education. In England, there is a Buddhist-based primary school called the Dharma School. Its motto is "We are educating the whole child for a whole world". It is situated in beautiful grounds in Brighton near the sea. One of its focuses is on the spiritual quality of human life. The Dharma School offers an alternative education to boys and girls aged three to eleven of whatever background, belief or ability. The classes are small in order to develop the full potential of the children, especially their self-esteem and confidence. Teachers who have an understanding of Buddhist ethics in their daily lives provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The school has a strong sense of community. Parents, teachers and children work together to maintain an atmosphere of co-operation, support and goodwill.

The influence of Buddhism in the school is felt through exploring basic principles in a way appropriate to each age group. These include developing honesty, respect for all sentient beings, co-operation, concentration, self-discipline, resourcefulness, and also reflecting on the significance of the Buddha's teaching on impermanence and inter-dependence. There are quiet times when the children can meditate and reflect in a simple way. Children and teachers take turn in leading the meditation sessions. A nine year old boy guided a meditation that started with the infinity of the cosmos, went on to reflect on the empty and spacious quality of the air that we all share and finished with the possibility of life in a tiny seed. A young child also reported that meditation made him feel fresher to go on with the rest of his day. In this way children are able to develop their own wisdom and compassion to provide a healthy ground for their future adult lives.

In America, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, a long-standing Buddhist organisation, created the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement Program in 1995 known as 'BASE'. Groups of approximately ten people meet once or twice a week over a period of six months. The heart of BASE is engaging suffering directly. Participants work or volunteer in social service or social justice organisations including hospices, prisons, soup kitchens and environmental groups. The

cornerstone of BASE is a commitment to Buddhist practice as people participate in work in the world. A participant explains: “as I near the clinic, I remind myself to set my intention by wishing that this work be the cause and condition for liberation of myself and all beings; that I be present; that I non-judgementally notice the mind states that arise”.

BASE participants meditate together in meetings and longer retreat periods and examine how to bring Buddhist teachings and meditation practices into daily life. BASE is also rooted in a community of shared purpose and at the end of the six months many people comments on the learning aspects of this communal programme. They seem to benefit equally from the three elements of this programme: service, meditation and community. At the same time society also benefit from their activities. Someone related this story about a woman she was helping: ‘Annie asked me: “Why do you do this work?” I explained BASE and casually mentioned that I was a Buddhist. When we parted that day, she said: “Thank you so much for accompanying me. It was such a luxury. At least I know that the Buddhists are looking out for me!”’



# III

## Civil Society and Democracy



**We often hear the saying “Idealism cannot be eaten.” Who is crazy enough to eat idealism? Some people also like to say “What you are thinking is idealistic. It is not practical.” To this we must reply that good things are hard to carry out but not impossible to do so. We must endeavor to undertake them. However practical bad things may be, they will never transform into goodness.**

*Puey Ungphakorn,  
On Idealism, 1974*

**I cannot help thinking that adults may help themselves and children according to the way that Buddhism and other religions have taught us. That way depends on love, metta, and exemplary personal conduct. Once children and adults love and are bound to one another there will be less frictions in their discourse. Love is the magical potion that nurtures the world. It does not matter whether we are born into Buddhism or other religious traditions.**

*Puey Ungphakorn,  
Buddhism and National Development, 1971*



# The Spiritual Roots of Civil Society: A Buddhist Perspective

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David R. Loy

Much like today, the emergence of the idea of civil society in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the result of a crisis in social order and a breakdown of existing paradigms of the idea of order. (Seligman 1992: 15)

Civil society has become an urgent topic, unfortunately. We do not usually notice things until they are broken, and the increasing attention of public leaders and scholars<sup>1</sup> is a sign that ours is in trouble. Everyone seems to agree that a strong civil society is essential for healthy democracy, which would be unremarkable except for the fact that (as we shall see) there is no agreement on what civil society actually is. The unsurprising consequence is that there is also little agreement about what must be done to reinvigorate it.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a new perspective on the origins and function of civil society, an approach, which so far as I know has been overlooked in contemporary discussions. Its modern development has been understood as a reaction to the rise of European nation-states in the seventeenth century, initially around absolute monarchs who weakened diffuse feudal centers of authority by concentrating power into their own hands:

[T]he transformation and subdivision of the idea of *societas civilis* was stimulated primarily by a specifically *political* development: the fear of state despotism and the hope (spawned by the defeat of the British in the American colonies, as well as by the earliest events of the French Revolution) of escaping its clutches. (Keane 1989: 65).

Civil society has thus been understood as another result of the *secularization*, which began in the sixteenth century and culminated in the revolutions of the eighteenth century, by enthroning our cherished beliefs in the rights of man and the integrity of individual persons. Elsewhere (Loy 2001) I question this supposed secularization by arguing that the rapid development of nation-states and corporate capitalism may also be understood in more religious terms, as a change of direction which did not so much supplant our spiritual concerns as pursue them in a this-worldly fashion. The Protestant reformation did not just elevate God and free this world for more material

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the other works cited in this article, see for example Robert Bellah (1985), Keane (1988), and Cohen & Arato (1992).

pursuits: the decline of a catholic Church and its ecclesiastical paraphernalia (monasteries, sacraments, pilgrimages, etc.) meant that the social duality between sacred and secular spheres was eliminated (or much reduced) without that resolving our *lack*.

The term *lack* here refers to what, from a Buddhist perspective, can be considered the main problem of our lives: *anatta*, 'no-self.' The Buddhist teaching of *anatta* (in contemporary terms: self-consciousness as a mental construct) implies that our most troublesome repression is neither sexual wishes nor fear of death, but the uncomfortable awareness (or feeling) that 'I am not real'—which we become conscious of (the 'return of the repressed') as a sense of *lack* infecting our empty core. It is the deep feeling we all have that 'something is wrong with me,' or that something is missing. The death-repression emphasized by existential psychology transforms the Oedipal complex into what Norman Brown calls an Oedipal *project*: the attempt to conquer death by becoming the father of oneself, i.e., the creator and sustainer of one's own life. Buddhism shifts the emphasis: the Oedipal project is better understood as the attempt of the developing sense-of-self to attain autonomy. It is the quest to deny one's groundlessness by becoming one's own ground.

Then the Oedipal project derives from our intuition that self-consciousness is not 'self-existing' but something ungrounded. Consciousness is something like the surface of the sea: dependent on unknown depths that it cannot grasp because it is a manifestation of them. The problem arises when this conditioned consciousness wants to ground itself, that is, to make itself real. If the sense-of-self is an always insecure construct, its efforts to realize itself will be attempts to objectify itself in some fashion.

The consequence of its inevitable failure to do so is that the sense-of-self has, as its inescapable shadow, a sense-of-*lack*, which it always tries to escape. The return of the repressed in the distorted form of a symptom shows us how to link this basic yet hopeless project with the symbolic ways we try to make ourselves real in the world. We experience this deep sense of *lack* as the persistent feeling that 'there is something wrong with me,' but we understand that feeling, and respond to it, in many different ways.

The problem with our objectifications is that no object can ever satisfy if it is not really an object that we want. When we do not understand what is actually motivating us—because what we think we want is only a symptom of something else (our desire to become real, which is essentially a spiritual yearning)—we become compulsive.

Perhaps the most important point to be emphasized right now about this Buddhist approach is that such an understanding of *lack* straddles our usual distinction between sacred and secular. Their difference is reduced to where we look to resolve our sense of *lack*; but if that *lack* is a constant, and if religion is defined as the way we try to resolve it, we can never escape a religious interpretation of the world. Our basic problem is spiritual inasmuch as the sense-of-self's lack of being compels it to seek being one way or another, consciously or unconsciously, whether in religious ways or in 'secular' ones. What today we understand as secular projects can be just as symptomatic of this spiritual need. Although our *lack* is a constant, how we have understood it and tried to overcome it have varied greatly throughout history (for more on this, see Loy 1996).

The diminution of Church authority during the Reformation led to a dramatic change

in the way our *lack* was understood, and meant that new ways had to be found to address it. The spiritual concern and energy that had previously been devoted to supporting an ecclesiastical sphere found a new direction in the heightened responsibility of each person for one's own spiritual life and destiny. This also involved increased concern for the worldly conditions which affected that development, for others as well as oneself. One could no longer simply depend upon the established Church to take care of one's *lack*, especially when the *true* church was such a hotly contested issue.

This contributed to the reorganization of political and economic institutions, which eventually took on a life of their own and now subordinate us to their own developmental imperatives. Here we begin by looking at some counter-movements that sought to reform society in a more ostensibly religious direction: so that it would better conform to God's spiritual plan. This eventually led, in particular, to the revolution in mid-seventeenth-century England, which culminated in the execution of Charles I, and Cromwell's religiously based Commonwealth (1649-1660). That social ferment was as much religious as political, since it would be anachronistic to distinguish between them.<sup>2</sup> Such radical political transformation became possible only because it was widely understood in millennial terms, as fulfilling Biblical prophecy about the return of Christ and the events necessary to help establish His kingdom on earth.

Such a religio-political revolution does not fit into the usual 'secularizing' understanding of Western historical evolution, so its importance tends to be neglected in favor of the French Revolution, whose leaders exalted Reason (even to the point of deifying it!). But the legacy of its millennial expectations, and the ways those hopes transformed when they were frustrated by the failure of the Commonwealth, have been vitally important for the development of Anglo-American civil society—and by no coincidence England and the United States are where the distinction between civil society and the state first developed. Hobbes' state of nature is a secularized version of Calvin's 'natural man' without God. Socialist critiques of private property originated in allegorical interpretations of Adam's Fall and God's curse upon him. Locke's theory of individual rights is rooted in a Protestant understanding of man's relationship with God. The unique civic society of the United States evolved in large part out of Puritan millennialist ambitions to create another Holy Commonwealth in a new and still pristine promised land.

In short, English and American civil society has spiritual origins. And I shall argue that those origins survive today as roots still necessary for its nourishment. We cannot understand the development of our civil society without seeing how its current crisis is related to the atrophy of those roots. Does this imply that, in order for civil society to become revitalized, its spiritual dimension needs to be recuperated?

### The Origins of Civil Society<sup>3</sup>

Much of our present confusion about the nature of civil society is due to the fact that its development in the West has been marked by at least three distinct bodies of thought, which offer radically different visions of what it is and should be.

<sup>2</sup> 'When we ask whether those who advocated war with Spain, [a major political issue during the same period] were motivated by religious or economic considerations, our question is unanswerable. Contemporaries could not have answered it, would not indeed have asked it. It is an anachronistic question' (Hill 1994: 35).

<sup>3</sup> This section draws mainly on Ehrenberg 1999, chapters 1 and 2, and Seligman 1992, chapter 1.

The classical and medieval traditions generally did not distinguish civil society from politically organized commonwealths. Civilization was possible because people lived in law-governed states, which had the power to protect them. Classical Greek philosophy emphasized that the public good was discoverable through public debate and organized by public action. Civic decay was a consequence of private calculation and the pursuit of individual interest. This left no room for an *intermediate voluntary sphere* between the citizen and the state. Civil society as we usually understand it today, a countervailing force to state coercion, did not exist, for the need of it was not yet recognized. In the first volume of *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper attacked Plato for his 'totalitarianism,' yet such criticisms are anachronistic: until the modern era the pressing social issue was not protecting subjects from their state, but protecting politically-organized communities from the more immediate threat of barbarism. The problem was perceived as outside, not inside.

For Plato, political power exists to serve the welfare of the city and its citizens, and this requires firm restraints on the greed and ambition which constantly threaten that welfare. The glue that integrates civil society in his *Republic* is the power of reason, employed by philosopher-kings educated to discern the truth that alone can organize the world. Democracy, which had condemned his beloved Socrates, was itself condemned by its incompetence, mediocrity and disorder. Political life must be grounded in moral wisdom and a life devoted to the good, which provided a counterweight to the disintegrative pull of personal interests.

Aristotle was more flexible in his conception of the ideal state, but like Plato he was suspicious of commerce. His teleological metaphysics made him conceive of politics as the moral consummation of all the other, more partial levels of human activity: politics should be morally redemptive. Like Hegel much later, both thinkers agreed that to be a member of a political society involved a life of collective involvement which should transcend private interests, for the state expresses the common moral life of the community. Today we have become more cynical about politics, but our cynicism still reveals, in a disappointed and inverted fashion, those same moral concerns. If our *lack* is a constant irritant and challenge, the political sphere—the stage of collective social decision—cannot be ignored, for no human concern is immune to *lack*'s projection and objectification.

We find a closer parallel to our times in the pervasive skepticism about politics during the declining fortunes of Hellenistic Greece. As the world outside deteriorated due to greed and rivalry, the Cynics, Epicureans and early Stoics redefined 'the good life' in more private terms which offered some protection from a political sphere that less and less reflected Plato's and Aristotle's moral conception of the state. According to Epicurus, we must free ourselves from the prison of public affairs. Politics and civil society are no longer the source of ethical development, and the true self is not revealed in such public activities.

Cicero's Stoic conception of civil society rested on the universal human capacity for a rationality harmonious with the universe. As the Roman aristocracy degenerated into a group of competing and suspicious cliques, however, Rome became an expansionist war machine controlled by a small oligarchy. Curiously, this concentration of political power had some of the same effect as the rise of absolute rulers in Europe much later: it led to a legally acknowledged private realm that stood as a counterpart to the *polis*. The Roman *res publica* was understood to imply the existence of a *res privata*. Public law stopped at the doorstep: a private person was distinguished from the public citizen.

This distinction did not survive Rome's disintegration. What integration did survive was provided by the Church, which was not sympathetic to the humanistic ambitions of the classical world. The optimistic ideal of self-sufficiency—that people could use their own powers of reason to cooperate and create a civilized society—was a pagan illusion and prideful error because it did not recognize our dependence on God as the only true source of justice and mercy. The doctrine of original sin led many Church fathers to conclude that an oppressive state was one of the God-given consequences of our fallen nature, not only caused by sin but one of the remedies necessary to control our sinfulness. Humankind could not redeem itself, for it is too depraved to determine or follow moral values by itself.

The classical veneration of reason yielded to Augustine's unrelenting emphasis on faith and grace. He distinguished the City of Man from the City of God. The 'goods' of the earthly city will always be elusive because of our unbalanced appetites, which drive us into a destructive scramble for power and wealth, leading to insecurity and mutual distrust, rebellion, civil war, and servitude. The institutions of the City of Man can have no sustained moral content, so a self-sufficient civil society as we conceive of it today is not possible. In its place is the Church, God's institution which works with the state to promote the salvation of fallen humanity, by correcting error and punishing sin. In a degenerate world of sinful people, coercion is necessary.

The central aim of most medieval theory was to apply a single Christian ideal to the manifold conditions of life. Since the universe is hierarchical, earthly justice and harmony require human beings to understand and accept their role in God's creation. This left no place for any theory of civil society that could stand independent of theological presuppositions.

Aquinas broke with this by downplaying the Augustinian implications of Adam's Fall. God's scheme of sin-and-salvation does not obliterate the value of human reason and human affairs. On the contrary, social and political life is fundamental to our condition, which revived the possibility that our own civil efforts could themselves serve moral purposes. Following the tentative steps of Anselm, Aquinas contributed to liberating reason from the requirements of faith, understanding it as the faculty that allows us a limited ability not only to understand but to participate in God's plan for our redemption.

Luther challenged the hierarchy of the medieval Christian universe. The social division of labor does not imply a hierarchy of dignity or salvation. Differences of occupation among laymen, priests, princes and bishops do not correspond to differences in their Christian status. We are equal before God—a doctrine that would later reincarnate in secular form as individual human rights. The true church is a 'priesthood of all believers' in a community composed of autonomous consciences. Freeing the conscience, and delinking our salvation from obedience to religious authority, created the conditions that would flower into modern individualism.

At the same time, Luther distinguished this inner life of the free Christian from an outer world of coercion and inequality. This separation between public and private spheres placed matters of conscience outside affairs of state, liberating not only conscience but also secular powers from external restraint. 'Luther's expulsion of politics from religion served to fortify it in the state' (Ehrenberg 1999: 70). He supported the harsh repression of peasant revolts in Germany. What he gave with one hand—spiritual equality and freedom of conscience—he took away with the other—subordinating us no longer to the Church but to secular rulers and the new states that were forming around them.

At this point in the story, histories of political theory and civil society usually jump to Thomas Hobbes and related attempts to theorize the basis of political authority in the idea of a secular social contract. Contracts imply obligations and therefore the complementary idea of an autonomous individual who is obligated to meet them; both concepts provide a more this-worldly basis for social order. Suddenly, we find ourselves in more familiar and comfortable ground for our political thinking, having escaped the otherworldly preoccupations that obfuscate so much of pre-modern social thought—or so we like to think. Yet this overlooks the crucial role of new *religious* ways of thinking in helping to create these novel ‘secular’ understandings of politics and civil society. Rather than being a this-worldly alternative to Christian conceptions, the brave new sociopolitical world of the seventeenth century—which laid the foundations for our world—would have been literally unthinkable without those Christian presuppositions.

### The Revolutionary Bible<sup>4</sup>

Sociological and psychological historians have not got very far in explaining why there was so much despair in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, leading some to suicide, some to atheism, some to conversion. . . . Where was certainty to be found? (Hill 1988: 68-69)

Upon what certainty could a new society be founded in this ‘period of storm and stress seldom equalled and probably never surpassed’? (Haller 1938: 27) The notion of a social contract, which became popular among intellectuals in the late seventeenth century, meant nothing to the vast numbers of people preoccupied with the no-holds-barred death-grapple between Catholic and Reformed Europe (1618-48). This was probably the most vicious war in European history, because nothing less than our eternal destiny rested on the outcome. For Catholics, the challenge of the Reformers was a direct threat to their project to end *lack*: God’s Church, founded on Peter anointed by Christ. Protestants could no longer rely upon that Church to take care of their *lack*. ‘Protestantism retained medieval sin without the medieval insurance policy—confession and absolution. Men emancipated themselves from priests, but not from the terrors of sin, from the priest internalized—in their own consciences’ (Hill 1975: 154-55). The authority of priests and their sacraments had been undermined. Where else could a religious people turn for certainty?

To the Bible, newly translated and printed. ‘The Bible was central to all intellectual as well as moral life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’ (Hill 1994: 20). Christopher Hill makes this claim for England, but much of his argument in *The English Bible* applies to the rest of Protestant Europe as well: for Christian societies in turmoil, lacking any other firm foundation, the Bible, now available cheaply in the vernacular, was widely studied because it was expected to provide solutions for urgent problems—social ones as well as religious, our distinction between them being anachronistic. For a civilization whose *lack* was now running rampant, the Bible became essential as the only secure source of wisdom. It was almost universally acknowledged as the Word of God, hence of supreme and incomparable importance: not just a book, then, but *our sole access to the Ground of being*. For a while, anyway.

The Bible gave confidence and reassurance to men and women who badly needed it. Their times were out of joint; unprecedented things were happening to their world and

<sup>4</sup> This section draws heavily on Hill’s many works on this period, especially Hill 1994 and Hill 1975.

their lives, apparently beyond human control. Some of the more daring of them came to conceive of solutions which were so novel that they could only be contemplated if they were envisaged as a return to purer Biblical days. (Hill 1994: 41)

Nothing that we would recognize as a civil society could have developed without a reading public, which presupposed the printing press and spread of literacy. Less noticed is the fact that, for the majority of people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was only one really important book: literally 'the Book' (from *biblos*, Greek for 'book'). The Bible was the source of virtually all ideas, since it supplied the basic idiom in which men and women discussed all the questions of their day, issues that would have been dangerous to address in any other way. It was accepted as the ultimate authority on economics and politics as much as on religion and morality. For John Milton (1608-1674) the Bible is 'that book within whose sacred context all wisdom is enfolded' and his political tracts are as thoroughly Biblical as his religious poetry. This was so typical of the age that even Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), prophet of the secular state, was not immune: 657 citations of Biblical texts have been counted in *Leviathan*, and a total of 1327 in his six major political works. He denied being an atheist, claiming the authority of Scripture to support the logic of his *Leviathan* arguments, for 'there ought be no power over the consciences of men but of the Word itself' (Hill 1994: 438, 20). Even those who wanted to challenge its influence needed to appropriate the Bible's authority in order to do so!

Its availability in English was a great encouragement to read, and it was how most children learned to read, for the Bible's many exciting narratives did not need to compete with the novel, which had not yet been invented. Immersed as we are today in print and electronic media, it is difficult for us to appreciate its unchallenged influence as the source of almost all the stories whereby men and women understood their own lives and times.

In the censored society of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England those who most wished to communicate, to discuss, were those who knew their Bible best. The Bible was what they wanted to discuss, for its guidance on the form of worship most pleasing to God in a society which had cast off one form and—some thought—not yet finally settled into a better one. Because church and state were one, religion became politics, with the Bible as textbook for both. (Hill 1994: 50-51).

In the fifteenth century merely owning an English Bible had been evidence of heresy, for its inconsistencies and ambiguities opened a Pandora's box. Even if 'the rule and canon of faith is Scripture alone' (Milton), Scripture must be interpreted. Carrying the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers to its logical extreme, Milton declared that 'Each man is his own arbitrator.' In the long run, leaving decisions to individual consciences tended to undermine the authority of the text in favor of human reason and the spiritual 'inner light' of believers. Once Bibles became widely available to the laity, so did theological controversy. 'Error', wrote Joseph Hall during the reign of Charles I, 'that could but creep then [before the Reformation] doth now fly' (Hill 1994: 374-5, 14). The most decisive period was the middle of the seventeenth century, when state censorship and the religious courts collapsed for two decades, leaving no restrictions on free discussion of the Bible, or anything else for that matter. Radical new ideas spread quickly and widely, for printing presses were cheap and portable—an important factor if freedom of the press is restricted to those who own one.

With or without restrictions, the problem of error turned out to be insoluble, because

the Bible was discovered to be 'a huge bran-tub from which anything might be drawn. There are few ideas in whose support a Biblical text cannot be found. Much could be read into and between the lines.' In the revolutionary climate of seventeenth-century England it was easy for both conservatives and radicals to quote scripture for their own purposes, due to the basic fact that 'all heresy originates from the Bible, because the Bible itself is a compilation, a compromise; orthodoxy changes as it incorporates or over-reacts against a heresy—which itself originated from the Biblical text' (Hill 1994: 6).

The Bible is one thing in a stable society, with an accepted machinery for controlling its interpretation. . . . But in the turmoil of the seventeenth century, the Bible became a sword to divide, or rather an armory from which all parties selected weapons to meet their needs. . . . open to all, even the lower classes, to pillage and utilize. (Hill 1994: 5-6)

Those who knew their Bible well could find the answers they desired to most questions. One could find defenses of the status quo ('the powers that be are ordained of God' *Romans* 13:1), but one could also find severe criticisms of kings (*Deuteronomy* 17:14-20, *I Samuel* 8:6-19), defenses of the poor against the rich (*Luke* 6:20-21, 24; *Matthew* 19:21-22; *Epistle of James* 2:5), denunciations of oppression and celebrations of liberation (*Exodus* 2:7-9, *Daniel* chs. 9-11). The New Testament, in particular, is full of libertarian ideas, which could make a deep impression in a time of social oppression. Unfortunately, the Old Testament seems to take slavery for granted, and also the use of force against recalcitrant heathen; anti-semitism could be justified by *Thessalonians* 2:14-16 as well as by the Jews' rejection of Christ; and there were many passages to support the control of women by men, the dominion of mankind over all other living things. Yet scripture did not give any clear direction about religious tolerance of nonconformists, although there is much intolerance in the Old Testament (Hill 1994: 66, 155-6, 179, 398-9, 409).

Unsurprisingly to us, then, but contrary to widespread expectations at the time, the Bible led those who studied it to no agreed political or social philosophy. Instead, it became used as a rag-bag of quotations, which could be mined to justify whatever one wanted to do. In the long term, this had the unexpected effect of encouraging men and women to think what they will, by helping to rationalize the new possibilities they 'found' within its pages. Trying to adjudicate those different ideas led to new confidence in their own reasoning powers. Paradoxically, this led to the eventual decline of Bibliolatry: 'The world the Bible made dethroned the Bible' (Hill 1994: 441). But now we are getting ahead of our story.

The most popular books were *Daniel* and especially *Revelation*, which prophesied a time of great confusion—the present, obviously—to be followed by a Christian utopia. Daniel had a vision of four monarchies: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The first three had been overthrown, and the fourth—the Pope in Rome—would soon be, initiating a fifth and final monarchy, the Kingdom of God on earth. In *Revelation* John saw an angel descend from heaven and cast the dragon of this world into a bottomless pit, whereupon Christ would descend to reign over a new heaven and new earth for a thousand years, with his saints beside him. Countless sermons and pamphlets commented on these themes, and, as the Thirty Years War raged ever more chaotically on the continent, the conviction spread that England had been specially ordained by God to defend His cause against the Antichrist, in this final conflict between Light and Darkness.

The terrible times encouraged this apocalyptic thinking. During the seventeenth century land for the first time began to be widely used as a commodity that could be exploited for profit,



and up to one-quarter of it was enclosed for private use. As the custom of community access was replaced by absolute rights of ownership, large numbers of people found themselves jobless and often homeless as well. Economically, the years between 1620 and 1650 were among the worst in English history; poor harvests meant that many did not have enough to eat. What would save them? 'It is difficult to exaggerate the extent and strength of millenarian expectations among ordinary people in the 1640s and early 1650s' (Hill 1975: 96). In 1658 John Bunyan along with many others declared that 'the judgment day is at hand.'

Millennialism was not restricted to the lower classes. Tycho Brahe interpreted a new star he discovered in 1572 as a sign of the Second Coming; King James agreed with him. The greatest mathematicians of the time, including Napier and Newton, were preoccupied with trying to extract a precise chronology from the Bible. A consensus emerged that the cycle of events which would lead to the end of the world was likely to begin in the 1650s or, at the latest, in the 1690s; some calculations suggested that 1656 or so would see the end of the Antichrist, who after 1640 was agreed to be the Pope (Hill 1994: 300). Milton confidently awaited 'that day when thou the Eternall and shortly-expected King shall open the Clouds to judge the severall Kingdomes of the World [and] shall put an end to all Earthy *Tyrannies*, proclaiming thy universal and milde *Monarchy* through Heaven and Earth' (Haller 1938: 356).

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* Karl Marx noted that Oliver Cromwell and the English people 'borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament.' According to Hill, the key to Cromwell's character as leader was the belief that his successes were due to God alone, for he was led by God. Despite his pre-eminent role Cromwell (1599-1658) remained uninterested in political theory and organization, not only because he was pragmatic but because he was so religious: he preferred to leave such matters to God. All forms of government are 'but a mortal thing,' 'dross and dung in comparison with Christ.' We see this clearly in his role at the crucial turning point, when the execution of Charles I was proposed in Parliament:

When it was first moved in the House of Commons to proceed capitally against the King, Cromwell stood up and told them 'that if any man moved this upon design, he should think him the greatest traitor in the world; but since providence and necessity had cast them upon it, he should pray God to bless their counsels, though he were not provided on the sudden to give them counsel.' (Clement Walker, quoted in Hill 1972: 224-25)

Cromwell's belief that the millennium was imminent, and that God would solve the problems which the Rump parliament had found so intractable, contributed to the final tragedy (or farce) of the Barebones Parliament in 1653, whose inability to agree on a new form of government, in the absence of more direct divine intervention, eventually led to the restoration of Charles II after Cromwell's death.

Then was the English Revolution a consequence of religious belief or political aspiration? Again, it would be anachronistic to project our distinction between them. 'The wrath of God from which some nonconformists decided to flee was demonstrated in the injustice of English society. The millennium, the reign of the saints and the promised land were the names they gave to their hopes for a better society, whether in New or old England' (Hill 1994: 439). Not just a better society: a more *spiritual* society, because it would (or could) bring about the end of *lack*. From a *lack* perspective, our distinction between religious and political aspiration is not obvious

or inevitable, but a contingent result of our own social history, which very much includes the failure of the English Commonwealth. What most dreamt of at the time was not just the recovery of social stability—which offered little except to the elite—but a new social order that would bring an end to the inchoate sense of *lack* felt more immediately in those chaotic times.

My main point in this section is that our Anglo-American civil society originated out of this collective *religious* concern to reform the state and create a new society which (to use my term) would end our *lack*. Their millennial aspirations may have been naive, but we mock them at our cost, if (as I will argue later) the problem with our contemporary civil society is linked to the loss of such a religious dimension. In that case, our secular cynicism may need to recover some of their idealism about working together to reduce the objectifications of *lack* that now endanger our world. Among the Christians who attempted to use Biblical principles for truly radical social transformation, the most important were the Puritans.

According to William Haller's *The Rise of Puritanism* (1938), English Puritanism was nothing new but a deep-seated tendency with medieval roots. What we now identify as historical Puritanism was a movement for religious reform that began early in the reign of Elizabeth, due to disappointment over what many saw as her reluctance to complete the reform of Christianity begun by her father, Henry VIII. Puritanism evidently spoke to some profound need in those unstable times: 'In little more than a single lifetime it led to the founding of New England and the revolutionizing of English society.' According to Haller, Puritanism addressed the psychological problems of a dissatisfied minority by injecting new moral purpose into those who felt lost in moral confusion (5, 213). It did this by offering a persuasive new understanding of what our *lack* is and how it is to be resolved.

Henry's reform had left England dangerously divided into a state church headed by the monarch, recusant Catholics who had to worship secretly, and Calvinist divines who criticized the official church as still too ceremonial and ecclesiastical. Nobody believed in toleration: there could only be one true church, and that church should be supported by the state, which was responsible for the Christian salvation of its subjects. Since her subjects could not agree on the true religion, however, Elizabeth's policy was to maintain a semblance of uniformity without wrecking her government. The Puritans were held in check but not crushed; in fact, they thrived. Their ambitions to reconstruct the official church rebuffed, they created instead a new type of spiritual literature that eventually went far beyond traditional religious bounds.

Puritan sermons and tracts tended to neglect theological abstractions in order to mirror the spiritual stress of the lonely conscience, 'to convince the individual of sin in order to persuade him of grace, to make him feel worse in order to make him feel better, to inspire pity and fear in order to purge him of those passions' (Haller 1938: 6-9, 33). The most important metaphors were life as wayfaring (e.g., Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) and warfaring, the struggle within each of us between good and evil.

Within each of us? Therein lay the problem. The Puritans were Calvinists, who believed in the predestined salvation of only a small number of souls, an elect chosen by God. Calvinist predestination presupposed universal human depravity: everyone *deserves* an eternity in hell. This turned out to have important social consequences, by implicitly challenging worldly hierarchy:

The concept of universal depravity, by leveling all superiority not of the spirit, enormously

enhanced the self-respect of the ordinary man. If none were righteous, then one man was as good as another. God chose whom he would and the distinctions of this world counted for nothing. The concept of free grace still further heightened his confidence. If the only real aristocracy was the aristocracy created by God, then nothing really counted but character and inner worth. (Haller 1938: 89)

Emphasizing an aristocracy of the spirit, over against the ‘carnal aristocracy’ that ruled the world, assumed that salvation would be restricted to a limited number. Whatever we may think of this theologically<sup>5</sup>, it has its attractions — especially for those who believe they are among that elect. One of the main ways we have always tried to fill up our sense of *lack* is to become (or convince ourselves that we are) special, and therefore destined for a better fate than others. The Puritan version of this—to be one of the few regenerated by divine grace—was especially empowering. ‘Practical men in great numbers can be persuaded to commit themselves to a fight for a faith and a program when they can be induced to believe in the inevitability of a favorable outcome’ (Haller 1938: 169). Hill makes the same point with explicit reference to Cromwell: ‘Men who have assurance that they are to inherit heaven, have a way of presently taking possession of the earth. . . . A man who really believed that God had included him among the handful who were saved from eternal damnation rather naturally felt under an obligation to make some voluntary return for this voluntary grace’ (Hill 1972: 213, 216). If our sense of *lack* is not so easily overcome, however, the political (and, after the Restoration, commercial) energy of the Puritans may also be explained by their need to continually reassure themselves that they were indeed one of those entitled to a special destiny. Psychologically, such certainty is not something gained once and for all, but a feeling of grace that needs to be renewed, hence requiring active moral perseverance. Puritan conversion was not the end of *lack*, rather the assurance that one’s *lack* would be ended, although only in the hereafter.

In the middle of the seventeenth century English Calvinism collapsed, an unexpected reversal that Hill (1972: 206) describes as one of the great turning-points in intellectual history. One problem was the obvious failure of many of the ‘visible elect’ to live up to expectations. It has always been difficult to argue that the elect are not saved by their deeds (implied by predestination) without also concluding that they cannot be damned for their deeds (implying antinomianism, which made it difficult to resist temptation). There was also the unseemly haste with which some leaders of the nonconformist movement returned to the established church after the Restoration.

The basic problem was more theological than carnal, however. The assumption that an omniscient and omnipotent God has from the beginning of history condemned the great mass of

<sup>5</sup> Predestination has become an alien and repugnant doctrine to us, but Haller makes it, if not plausible, at least more understandable: ‘As in later times men were taught to follow with patient observation the least workings of natural law in the external universe, men in the Puritan age were taught to follow by intense introspection the working of the law of predestination within their own souls. Theoretically, there was nothing they could do but watch, nothing they could of their own will do to induce or further the process of regeneration. They were only the witnesses of a drama they could do no more than marvel at. But the theatre of that drama was the human breast, and their own fate right up to the deathbed scene hung upon its outcome. They watched its unfolding, therefore, with the most absorbed attention. With the most anxious curiosity, they looked into their own most secret thoughts for signs that the grace of God was at its work of regeneration, and what they so urgently looked for they naturally saw. Seen by the light of the word, as they read it in the holy book and heard it expounded from the pulpit, their own lives fell under their gaze into the pattern set by Paul’ (91). The Puritans kept diaries, and a growing literature of spiritual biographies became popular for its account of internal struggle. The test of true conversion was active and continual perseverance. Does that help to explain our distaste? ‘Perhaps the desire of later generations to escape from Puritanism has been at least in part a desire to do business with less hindrance from a scheme of life so insistent upon keeping the individual forever in mind of his moral responsibilities’ (119).

humankind to an eternity of torment became increasingly unacceptable. 'Orthodox Calvinism leveled all men under the law, made all equal in their title to grace, and then denied to most all prospect of realizing their hopes. It made the individual experience of God in the soul all-important, enormously stimulating individual spiritual experience, and then denied any freedom to the individual will' (Haller 1938: 193). Instead of emphasizing the many who could not be saved, preachers focused on exposing everyone to God's covenant of grace; yet such efforts contradicted their theology, by acting as if every sinner could be converted into one of the saints. It was easy to draw the heretical inference that His grace was available to all who did not reject it, which also encouraged belief in the free will that made the moral efforts to deserve His grace. 'The way was opened to a world in which the protestant ethic, with its emphasis on effort and will-power, survived without the predestinarian theology which had originally accompanied it' (Hill 1988: 345).

What the preachers as a whole believed was that heresy and schism should be firmly suppressed. But what they taught was that any man might be a saint and that the mark of a saint was that he obeyed his conscience at any cost. . . The ultimate effect . . . was to encourage in their followers the habit of going each his own way toward heaven and the notion that it was every man's native right to save himself or not in his own way without interference from anybody. From the very beginning of the movement, therefore, heresy and schism dogged the steps of the Puritan reformers, and in the very day of victory, when prelacy lay overthrown, brought their schemes for the godly Utopia to confusion. (Haller: 1938: 173-74).

Conscience, the voice of God in one's soul, became difficult to distinguish from reason, increasingly seen as necessary to understand the true meaning of God's voice in the soul as well as God's Word in the Bible. The influential *Satanae Strategemata* of Jacobus Acontius (English trans. 1648) argued for two fundamental principles which appealed less to biblical authority than to reason and common observation of human behavior: unless we want to yield to Satan, nothing—learning, tradition, the church, nor any other authority—should be allowed to take precedence over conscience, the voice of God within us; and secondly, no man is immune from error. John Goodwin, who helped to rally the defense of London against advancing royalists during the civil war, came to the radical conclusion that redemption from sin was manifested not by infallible knowledge or absolute righteousness but by our ceaseless efforts to learn more truth and to live more like the son of God. This also had political implications: like almost everyone else Goodwin conceded that kings were divinely appointed, but he argued that in order for justice to prevail the exercise of their authority must be based on discussion and agreement, and should be obeyed only in the light of individual judgment and conscience (Haller 1938: 196, 200).

Baptists were among the first to draw the obvious religious conclusions (retrospectively obvious to us, that is) and advance a claim for general toleration of nonconformity. They conceded the duty of obedience to civil laws, but since all of us are spiritually equal all must be left free to understand the truth for themselves and to convert others as best they could (Haller 1938: 205). This way led to the future, although few could see it at the time, despite the fact that by the end of the century the religiosity of the English people had become so intense and so varied that no church could have enforced any uniformity.

One of the main reasons toleration became inevitable was the Bible itself. If its own attitude towards religious toleration was unclear—well, that just highlighted the problem. Milton and most other radicals had believed that once an English Bible was widely available it would

become the basis for reconstructing social norms and institutions. Yet intense and uncensored discussion in the 1640s and 1650s led to no agreement on what exactly the Bible meant, even among the godly (Hill 1994: 420-1).

The failure of confident predictions about the approaching millennium left even fervent believers skeptical and weary. Even on questions of church government—bishops or presbyters? state church or voluntary congregations? ordination or lay preaching? tithes or voluntary support?—the Bible produced no universally accepted solutions. Once it had been demonstrated that you could prove almost anything from it, the Bible lost its authority as the prime source of political ideas; and once churchly authority could not be enforced, each was free to believe what he wanted. Intellectual and congregational fragmentation was inevitable.

One response was to allegorize the Scriptures, and to stress the spirit within rather than the letter of the Bible—a spirit that became increasingly necessary to interpret God’s ambiguous Word. Quakers and many others found an alternative authority in our ‘inner light.’ The Digger Gerrard Winstanley declared that important questions about our freedom were not to be answered by any Biblical text but by the light ‘which dwells in every man’s heart and by which he was made. . . . We must throw off the tyranny of the Bible.’ The Ranter Jacob Bauthumley opined that Scripture was no better ‘than any other writings of good men’ and added: ‘The Bible without is but a shadow of the Bible which is within.’ (Hill 1994: 224, 234).

The grace provided by that inner light was what enabled believers to understand the true meaning of the scriptures; but since even the godly continued to disagree, reason also needed to be employed to help adjudicate arguments and discriminate truth from falsity: eventually that role became so important it supplanted other aspects of the inner light. At first understood in a more spiritual way, as a function given to us by the grace of God, reason gradually became more calculative and instrumental, as we will see later.

The heretical attitudes of Winstanley and Bauthumley became more widespread after the failure of the Commonwealth, which also severely damaged the acceptance of the Bible as an infallible text that only needed to be applied. ‘In so far as the Biblical Revolution was defeated, the Bible shared this defeat’ (Hill 1994: 40). But this did not mean a return to the orthodoxy that had existed before the vernacular Bible became available. Hill concludes his study by praising the many scholars and radicals ‘whose passionate desire to make sense of the Bible led them into the critical activity which ultimately dethroned it’:

To the extent that England ultimately became a democracy it owes much to the discussions initiated by these scholars—discussions whose ironical effect was in the long run to force men and women to rely on their own intelligence rather than on citations from a holy text. They cut off the branch on which they sat, letting in more light, to the great advantage of those who followed them. (Hill 1994: 441, 442)

This too had unexpected political implications. The decline of Biblical authority undermined the Divine Right of Kings and the divine right of the clergy to collect tithes, ‘which did not mean that kings ceased to rule or tithes to be collected: it meant that different arguments had to be found to defend them. And in the long run these arguments were open to rational criticism’ (Hill 1994: 431).

In the long run. After the Restoration in 1660 most nonconformists decided that Christ's kingdom was not of this world. The Quakers, for example, who in the 1650s had been notoriously belligerent in calling on Cromwell to fight against continental Catholics, became pacifist. Secular powers now must be obeyed except when their demands conflicted with God's, in which case resistance should be passive. Nonconformists accepted their exclusion from political life and turned their attention to commerce and quietist religion. *The Biblical solution to our lack—the infallible Word of God as our mode of access to His Being, and the attempt to help establish its Kingdom of Heaven on earth—had failed.* People began to look for answers elsewhere. Religious toleration became acceptable because for the first time religious commitment became a private matter. It became a private matter because it was no longer the ultimate issue.

The government of Charles II was preoccupied with avoiding the discontent that severe religious persecution had produced earlier. A compromise evolved because the two spheres split: people became free to worship as they wished, and an increasingly secular state became free to do whatever it wanted, without troublesome religious interference or troublesome responsibility for the salvation of its subjects' souls. An important freedom was gained, but at a cost: the loss of the state's moral responsibility has also been the loss of its moral accountability to anything 'higher' than itself. Among individuals, tolerance became the norm, but at the price of our becoming 'morally thin': as our chief social virtue today, such tolerance effectively 'displaces morality' by 'asking you to inhabit your own moral convictions loosely and be ready to withdraw from them whenever pursuing them would impinge on the activities and choices of others' (Fish 1999: 41). In other words, we now have the right to express our religious convictions as long as we do not act upon them in ways that affect other people—leaving the sphere of social interaction religiously neutralized and therefore morally sterilized.

As this suggests, the failed religious revolution in seventeenth-century England left a mixed legacy. Stuart monarchy was restored, although in a weakened condition that survived only for a few decades before the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688-89 imported a more protestant lineage that accepted more limited powers. Parliament, now the deciding force, initiated the path toward an increasingly representative democracy. We tend to view the French Revolution as the prototype for radical social change, but the English were the first in modern times to execute a ruling king, henceforth a possibility that other rulers and their subjects could never forget.

In another way too, the failure of the Commonwealth and the Barebones Parliament has been instructive. Since then we have learned again and again that societies cannot be made just simply by replacing one ruler with another—and this problem is more than the obvious fact that even well-intended people can disagree about what should replace a bad government. The English Revolution was millennial because people expected it to bring about the end of *lack*, but our *lack* cannot be solved in such a way. What lesson can we draw from this? That our *lack* is not something that can be addressed collectively? Yes and no. From a Buddhist perspective, our *lack* is a spiritual (or existential) problem because resolving it requires personal effort to transform one's greed, ill will and delusion into generosity, compassion and wisdom. Such personal transformation cannot be legislated or conditioned into us from outside. This important realization is the foundation of our religious freedom and the separation of church from state.

But that is not all we can learn from England's Puritan Revolution. Its enthusiasm fed on the Protestant Reformation but became something quite original: a concerted effort by people who

tried to reform their own unjust government in order to make a better society.<sup>6</sup> We can focus on the utopian millennialism, or we can focus on their challenge to the entrenched greed, privilege, and violence of the state. If we focus on the latter, we see the origin of Anglo-American civil society in the religious concerns that brought people together to work for a vision greater than their own personal gain. Yes, they were deluded to expect a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and in the end that naïveté was fatal to their hopes, as they expected too much from God's intervention and not enough from their own. As long as there is *lack*, human beings will never be able to create a utopia. Yet (to express it in *lack* terms) I think we today need to rediscover something that their spiritual preoccupations enabled them to see: that our *lack* is not only a personal problem (due to my lack of money, fame, etc., as we now commonly understand it), but something that often takes collective form in social and political institutions. When it does, those structures need to be resisted and transformed.

### The Biblical Foundations of Political Theory

The civil war of the seventeenth century . . . has never been concluded.

—T. S. Eliot, *Milton*

The Bible did more than encourage millennialism. When the civil war began, the case against royal absolutism was most effectively presented by Henry Parker, in a very influential tract that 'showed how impossible it was to keep spiritual warfare within spiritual bounds.' Parker argued that whenever the existing laws of the state interfere with prosecuting the war against the evil one, the Puritan spirit must acknowledge the higher law of conscience. That law now justified parliament to act independently, and even to oppose the crown's commands. Parker supported this by basing a political theory of social contract upon the Puritan myth of the fall of man and his eternal struggle with Satan. Before his Fall Adam had needed no governor but conscience, but afterwards he became so depraved that it was necessary to agree on a temporal ruler. When, however, those rulers themselves became tyrannical, the law of nature (to protect oneself) began to operate again and found a remedy in parliament, which expressed the people's will (Haller 1938: 365-8).

According to Christopher Hill, all serious English political theory dates from the middle of the seventeenth century (Hill 1994: 415), which is when critical and radical social attitudes first gained the freedom to develop alongside their more conservative counterparts. Modern political philosophy is often understood to begin with Thomas Hobbes' social contract theory in the *Leviathan* (1651), which offered a closely argued *secular* alternative to divinely organized hierarchies, including the divine right of kings and popes. The influence of Henry Parker, above, suggests that the line between sacred and secular approaches is less clear than we usually suppose, by offering what to us seems an odd mixture: a social contract deriving from Adam's Fall. Yet it was not so odd to Parker's contemporaries, for whom it served an important role in justifying resistance against the King. Nor should we dismiss it as merely a temporary or intermediate position in the development of a truly secular politics. In this section we will see that the political categories which continue to determine our thinking today are another legacy of the Bible and the spiritual preoccupations of those who turned to it for guidance. The political alternatives that still

<sup>6</sup> There were also local attempts to reform particular communities. One of them is described in Underdown (1992). After a disastrous fire which was interpreted as a providential sign, the largely Puritan gentry of Dorchester, in Dorset, reorganized the town according to Biblical principles of collective welfare.

preoccupy us are grounded in contested notions of our human nature— notions derived from Biblical debates.

Luther had supported the repression of German peasant revolts because he feared what the peasants would get up to once they were free to do what they will. According to Henry Parker, 'man being depraved by the Fall of Adam grew so untame and uncivil a creature that the law of God written in his breast was not sufficient to restrain him from mischief or to make him sociable.' Many others traced our depraved nature back to the Fall. Sir Robert Filmer argued that 'a natural freedom of mankind cannot be supposed without a denial of the creation of Adam.' It was a strong argument for rule by the better sort, and that better sort agreed with Crashaw that 'the greater part [of people] generally is the worst part.' Control by authorities was necessary, for as Pym put it 'if you take away the law, all things will fall into a confusion, every man will become a law to himself, which in the depraved condition of human nature must need produce many great enormities' (Hill 1975: 157, 159). The radical antinomian William Walwyn was warned by seven nonconformist ministers that 'surely a natural and complete freedom from all sorrows and troubles was fit for man only before he had sinned and not since. Let them look for their portion in this life that know no better, and their kingdom in this world that believe no other,' for evidently those who *do* know better will wait with faith, patience and self-denial for their reward in the world to come (Hill 1997: 331). Many agreed with Milton that the elect could be freed from all restraint, which needed to be applied only to the unregenerate, but it was a short step to Hobbes' view that the function of government is to restrain the depravity natural to us all.

For conservatives, who naturally included those with property to defend, the Fall could not be undone: Adam's sin had permanently affected human nature, for it had become an inherited characteristic transmitted by our sexual propagation. Evil is something that lurks in all our hearts, always ready to come out if we relax our grip. Calvin had encouraged the poor to endure their sufferings patiently, since their burden is imposed by God for their sins. The social consequence was to preserve property in the hands of those to whom God had given it. By what right can we sinners challenge His disposition?

On the other side were Ranters, Levellers, Familists, Diggers and many other radical groups who emerged from the debates that occurred when censorship was relaxed. Among the most remarkable of them was a Digger whose forgotten (or censored) writings are once again available, thanks largely to the efforts of Christopher Hill: Gerrard Winstanley. Winstanley read the Bible rather differently from Filmer and Pym, and came to very different conclusions about our human nature, views which rejected inherited sin and the economic inequality that such sin was used to justify.

According to Robert Kenney, Winstanley's final pamphlet *Law of Freedom in a Platform* 'was the first serious and sober attempt in the English language to restructure the whole of society along avowedly radical lines' (in Winstanley 1973: 1). For Winstanley, it was not the Fall that caused private property but private property that caused our Fall. Adam symbolizes the power of covetousness. Men began to fall when self-love arose. 'When mankind began to quarrel about the earth, and some would have all and shut out others, forcing them to be servants; this was man's fall' (Hill 1975: 163). This implied a more allegorical interpretation of God's inheritable curse on Adam when he was expelled from the Garden:

the power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the creation by your



ancestors by the swords; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this successively to you, their children. And therefore, though you did not kill or thieve, yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword; and so you justify the wicked deeds of your fathers, and that sin of your fathers shall be visited upon the head of you and your children to the third and fourth generation, and longer, too, till your bloody and thieving power be rooted out of the land. (Hill 1975: 132-33)

Again, this fable of lost grace made the Fall as much political as religious in its implications. Like many others before and after him, Winstanley appealed to the innocence of children, not yet corrupted by the world: 'Look upon a child that is new-born, or till he grows up to some few years; he is innocent, harmless, humble, patient, gentle, easy to be entreated, not envious.' The Fall happens when we surrender to covetousness in a competitive world. But this is not inevitable, or necessarily permanent. Against it, Winstanley argued that the 'poorest man hath as true a title and just right to the land as the richest man' and 'true freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth.' He had a vision in which he was called upon to announce to the world that 'the earth should be made a common treasury of livelihood to whole mankind, without respect of persons' (Hill 1975: 391, 133, 112).

This metaphorical understanding of the Bible included a metaphorical understanding of Christ's return. In 1648 Winstanley declared the salvation of all mankind, not by a physical descent of Christ from the heavens but by His resurrection within each person: 'Your Saviour must be a power within you, to deliver you from that bondage within; the outward Christ or the outward God are but men [i.e., not divine] saviours.' Those who work and eat together in a communal cultivation of the commons do thereby join hands with Christ to lift up the creation from bondage and restore all things from Adam's curse. True freedom is found in a community of spirit which shares the earthly treasury, 'and this is Christ the true man-child spread abroad in the creation, restoring all things unto himself.' Since sin did not cause property but vice-versa, only abolishing private property can get rid of the coercive state, which exists to protect property, and the coercive church, which emphasizes our sinfulness to the same effect. In an overpopulated land where enclosures were destroying the livelihood of many, this was a hot topic. Winstanley believed that Christ rising in all men and women would convince even the rich that cooperation and mutual help are *natural* (notice that word again), and that everyone would gain from establishing communal property (Hill 1975: 141, 392).

Winstanley eventually came to prefer the word Reason in place of God, 'because I have been held in darkness by that word, as I see many people are.' 'In the beginning of time the great creator, Reason, made the earth to be a common treasury, to preserve beasts, birds, fishes and man, the lord that was to govern this creation', but then 'selfish imaginations . . . did set up one man to teach and rule over another' and thus 'man was brought into bondage, and became a greater slave to such of his own kind than the beasts of the field were to him.'

There is no man or woman needs to go to Rome nor to hell below ground, as some talk, to find the Pope, Devil, Beast or power of darkness; neither to go up to heaven above the skies to find Christ the word of life. For both these powers are to be felt within a man, fighting against each other. (Hill 1975: 141, 132, 143).

Winstanley used this new understanding to transform Joachim of Fiore's apocalyptic vision of the

three ages (of the Father, Son, and Spirit) into a theology of reason that established democracy. God was equated with Reason, and Reason with the law of the universe. In the third age that was now beginning, 'the Lord himself, who is the Eternal Gospel, doth manifest himself to rule in the flesh of sons and daughters.' Our hearts are returning to the Reason that pervades the cosmos, to 'that spiritual power that guides all men's reasoning in right order to a right end.' Every man subject to Reason's law becomes a son of God. He no longer 'looks upon a God and a ruler without him, as the beast of the field does,' for one's ruler is now found within. The Digger's aim was not just to remove 'the Norman Yoke' and recover more ancient customs, but to restore this 'pure law of righteousness before the Fall' (Hill 1975: 132, 148, 134).

From a Buddhist perspective, Winstanley's critique is perceptive in identifying the basic issue as our 'selfish imaginations.' The problem is not that we are naturally—i.e., inevitably—competitive, but that we are deceived by the way our minds work: 'Imagination fears where no fear is: he rises up to destroy others, for fear lest others destroy him'. Imagination 'fills you with fears, doubts, troubles, evil surmisings and grudges, he it is that stirs up wars and divisions, he makes you lust after everything you see or hear of' (in Hill 1975: 389, 143).

The corrective to such imaginings is Reason, which for Winstanley is finally nothing other than Love, Christ resurrected in us His sons and daughters. Today, however, our conception of reason is much closer to Hobbes': the faculty of calculation, 'nothing but reckoning (that is adding and subtracting)' (in Hill 1975: 393).

As this suggests, the contrast between Winstanley and Hobbes is instructive. For Hobbes, a truly civil society could not exist without a coercive state, since such a state is the only remedy to our perpetual desire for ever-greater power. Due to our insecurity, we can never have enough: attaining something is only a spur to seeking something else. We are motivated by:

a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. (Hobbes 1985: 161)

This need to accumulate ever more power is our *natural* condition, intrinsic to the state of nature before a political solution. 'In Hobbes's theory, nature replaces sin and depravity as the cause of humankind's ruin and the turn toward the state' (Ehrenberg 1999: 71).

A civil society becomes possible only with the establishment of a Leviathan or 'mortal God' whose absolute sovereignty subsumes all other sources of power. Hobbes' deductive rationalism enabled him to construct a theory of the state which rested on a theory of human psychology that ignored revelation, the divine right of kings and all other traditional arguments. Neither rights nor ethics exists before the state exists to enforce the sovereign's will. The atomized individuals that comprise such a civil society are linked together only by agreements which they enter into as rational and self-interested beings. These individuals are 'owners' of themselves rather than members of larger communities. The 'common good' can mean nothing except the sum of individual interests. Constituted only by state coercion and protection, society is an artificial network existing only to protect property and maintain an orderly economy. Contrary to Winstanley's spiritual vision of Reason as that which overcomes our covetous imaginations,

reason for Hobbes is not a capacity that harmonizes or integrates our interests: it divides us because it is yoked to our competitive pursuit of our own individual concerns (Ehrenberg 1999: 70-73, 77-79).

Although Winstanley's vision is more attractive to Buddhists, this approach marked Hobbes as the man of the future, to be reincarnated in the philosophy of David Hume, in the economics of Adam Smith, and in their successors down to the cheerleaders of neo-liberal globalization today.

Does this mean that Winstanley's *religious* understanding of property and society has been replaced by more *secular* contract approaches that better acknowledge our individual motivations? The contrast between the two is not so simple. Hobbes did not construct his understanding of human nature from scratch, in an intellectual vacuum. His philosophy is a secularized version of the Christian (especially the Protestant) understanding of our nature after the Fall. Hobbes' man in nature is Calvin's unregenerate natural man without God: a lonely individual dominated by evil, selfish passions. 'Protestantism relied on the sense of guilt, of sin, to internalize an ethic of effort, thrift, industry. Hobbes hoped to achieve the same ends by an appeal to rational science, calculation of profit and loss, expediency, utility: not fear of hell but fear of social disorder' (Hill 1975: 388). According to this tradition, our *lack* is ineradicable because it is built into us. Whether it is due to Adam's inherited sin or evolutionary factors that sociobiology discovers, all we can do is strive to control it.

On the other side, the spiritual perspective expressed by Winstanley (and others in his day) has also reincarnated in more secular forms: most of all in socialism and the social-democratic political traditions. This sees our *lack* as a function of economic exploitation and other social oppression. According to Rousseau, man is naturally good but is made wicked by his institutions. For Marx and Engels, man is born free but everywhere finds himself in chains.<sup>7</sup>

There are many other versions of this claim, down to the 'bleeding heart liberal' stereotype that all bad behavior is due to poor socialization. As Lewis Mumford put it, such 'progressives' believe that human nature is deflected from its natural goodness by external circumstances beyond one's control. 'Having no sense of sin, they discounted inherent obstacles to moral development and therefore could not grasp the need for a "form-giving discipline of the personality"' (in Lasch 1991: 79). In Winstanley's day the better sort were afraid of the antinomianism this seems to encourage ('I myself am without sin, so I can do whatever I will'). Today a consumerist version of antinomianism ('since nothing is wrong with me, I will consume anything I can afford') has become not only socially acceptable but necessary to keep the economy growing (and growth is necessary to keep it from collapsing).

From a *lack* point of view, however, antinomianism of either sort is wrong, not so much for moral reasons but because it is a delusion to think that 'I have no *lack*, so I can do whatever I want.' If social oppression were the only source of our *lack*, removing that external oppression should remove our *lack*; it doesn't. Moreover, an unacknowledged *lack* is more dangerous than

<sup>7</sup> Is Hobbes' understanding of our human nature valid, or was he misled by the particularly chaotic times in which he lived? For a well-known debate on this topic, see Oakeshott's introduction to *Leviathan* (1946) and Macpherson (1962). From my Buddhist perspective, the basic issue is the source of our *lack*. Rather than takes sides in a debate about whether our nature is originally good or bad, Buddhism emphasizes that all of us have unwholesome traits (which should be reduced and eliminated) and wholesome ones (which should be encouraged and developed).

a conscious sense of *lack*, because it is more likely to be projected in a fashion resistant to our understanding. Although *lack* does become collectively objectified into oppressive institutions, those institutions are not themselves the source of our *lack*. That is why violent political revolutions always seem to fail, despite intentions that are often good. For Buddhism, our sense of *lack* ultimately derives from our lack of self-being and our inability to cope with that. There is good reason to fear the antinomianism of one's neighbor, even if we are not afraid of our own: removing the chains that restrict our liberty can allow our *lack* to express itself in some of the very ugly ways we read about daily in the newspapers.

If most of this sounds familiar, that's because it is: this debate about the source of our *lack*, which originated in seventeenth-century controversies about the Fall and how Adam's curse may be rectified, continues in contemporary arguments between conservatives and liberals, the right and the left of an increasingly narrow and sterile political spectrum. Can remembering its source and recognizing this as a *spiritual* issue help us to escape the impasse between them? The problem is not merely a political one about the proper relationship between individuals and the state. Inescapably, the issue is as much religious, for political perspectives wittingly or unwittingly presuppose an answer to the fundamental question: what is our *lack*, and how is it to be overcome? Without an answer to that spiritual question, we cannot really know how society should be organized. We can ignore that basic issue only by falling back into automatized and polarized understandings whose origins remain unknown to us . . .

From a Buddhist perspective, Winstanley's understanding is more subtle than many of the more secular critics who succeeded him. Our Fall is both objective and subjective. Unequal and oppressive social relations are maintained by coercion. But that coercion could not be effective without the cooperation of our own 'selfish imaginations.' The *lack* that makes us unhappy is found both inside and outside.

Then any solution must address both, something that a socially-engaged Buddhism attempts to do. Buddhism begins as a personal path that works to transform our own greed, ill-will and delusion into generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. But to overcome one's own *dukkha* (unhappiness) is to become more aware of the *dukkha* maintained by unjust and unnecessary social arrangements. To overcome that institutionalized *dukkha*, we need to work collectively. So Buddhists need to avoid two extremes. One is a Buddhism that remains preoccupied only with one's own awakening and personal liberation. The other is a socially-preoccupied Buddhism that loses its roots in personal transformation, because it identifies too much with a 'progressive' understanding of our *lack* as due solely or mainly to social oppression. The challenge, of course, is how to integrate these two concerns.

## Commercial Society

Although Hobbes' pessimistic view of human nature still prevails in many conservative circles, his conclusions about the need for absolute state power held little attraction for the English gentry struggling against would-be absolute rulers. They found a more acceptable perspective in John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), which argued that the chief end of human association is to defend private property. Contrary to Hobbes, our rights to freedom, property, labor and exchange are not a function of the social contract; they already existed in the state of nature, which means an absolutist state is not necessary to establish them. Then why do we give

up some of our freedom by entering into a social contract? Because in the state of nature ‘the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others.’

As with Hobbes, however, any notion of a common good is emptied by Locke’s concern to protect personal interest, especially property. The state exists to guarantee the maximum possible liberty to individuals—that is, to self-interested proprietors; ‘individual interest was always clear and compelling in Locke’s thinking, while common matters were derivative, thin, and inconsequential at best’ (Ehrenberg 1999: 87).

If *that* looks familiar, it is because this approach was also attractive to gentry in the American colonies struggling to gain independence and establish a republic. Their constitutional decision to separate church from state does not mean that Locke’s perspective on government was secular. Despite his debt to the natural-law tradition, Locke’s understanding of individual rights remained grounded in a religious vision, in ‘a specific Christian, if not Calvinist, reading of man’s relation with God . . . itself rooted in a theological matrix—rooted, in fact, in the medieval Christian tradition of right reason and Christian Revelation’ (Seligman 1992: 22). God survives on every other page of the *Second Treatise* because Locke’s theory depends on Him for transcendental validation. There is no worldly authority that is intrinsically legitimate, for all authority is ultimately derived from God:

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions. For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker—all servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by His order, and about His business—they are His property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during His, not one another’s pleasure, and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another’s uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours. (*Second Treatise*, Book II, section 6)

Our independence and equality derive from the fact that we are not only God’s workmanship but continue to be His property: an association that serves to *sanctify property*. Our existence remains rooted in a theological understanding of the cosmos that is necessary to justify our calling and our reason. ‘What is Calvinist in this reading is precisely the validation of this-worldly affairs and of the reason that governs them, in transcendent terms’ (Seligman 1992: 24). Our supposedly *secular* affairs are validated by their role within a *religious* soteriology. God places us on this earth and guarantees that by obediently following our calling and employing our reason, our *lack* will be resolved.

Again, this transcendental precondition of civil society was not merely a short-lived relic of some premodern political understanding. *Internalized*, it became essential to the vision of civil society that developed in America, for ‘if the Calvinist community of saints was no longer a viable social model by the end of the seventeenth century, a community of individualized moral agents pursuing the social good in conformity to the “will of God” definitely was, at least in John Locke’s vision of civil society.’ In the next section we shall see ‘just how central this internalization of the salvational doctrine of ascetic Protestantism was to the origin and development of the civil society tradition in the United States’ (Seligman 1992: 25).

Hobbes' *Leviathan* had attempted to combine two inconsistent social tendencies: community bonds (to be fused in the absolute power of a sovereign) and increasing individualism, which makes each person an 'owner' of himself or herself in an atomized society. The emphasis on ownership relations became central in Locke, and set the trajectory for modern social relations—a trajectory whose agenda still drives us today, in the commodification that economic globalization continues to extend to all corners of the earth and all aspects of human life. But Locke's transcendent method for grounding civil society became intellectually questionable as Deism distanced God ever further from human affairs. The commercial relationships that Locke emphasized needed to be justified in a more this-worldly fashion that disengaged our moral concerns from theology. If the validation could no longer be found outside, it would have to be found somewhere inside us, in an inner-worldliness that may or may not actually serve the unifying role we seek from it.

More than ever before, this emphasized the distinction between one's public role and private life. When the source of morality and human bonds lay beyond this world, in some transcendent vision of the social order, their distinction was largely irrelevant for living a good life. When the moral basis of society must be located in this world, however, the distinction between public and private, between the individual and society, becomes the fundamental tension that must somehow be resolved in order to have a truly civil society (Seligman 1992: 24). *This is still our problem with civil society, because that tension between individual freedom and the common good has never been resolved.* Market relations emphasize self-interested freedom often at the price of any common good; largely in reaction to that, fascist and state socialist regimes emphasized what they defined as the common good, at the price of individual liberty to define and pursue one's own good. The political history of the twentieth century is a story of their failure, but we have so far been unable to discover any other social glue to replace the unifying moral bond that God provided.

One notable attempt was made by the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, which tried to revive the classical notion of human interaction as itself an ethical sphere of development. Emphasizing property relations, as Locke had done, made market exchange a neutral arena of conduct, but in fact markets are inescapably moral in their effects on participants. Humans do not become fully human in isolation; our capacities, including our ethical qualities and intellectual abilities, develop only in our social relationships.

The strongest case for this was made by Adam Ferguson in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), which discovers the roots of human sociability (and thus civil society) in our general capacity to see the world through someone else's eyes and put ourselves in another's place. Property and self-interest are an unsatisfactory explanation for social bonds, for people are often motivated by generosity, altruism and group solidarity. Above all else, we are moral creatures: individual competition and instrumental reason cannot by themselves provide us with a truly civilized life. Innate sociability is what enables us to live with others. We naturally want to help them and they naturally want to help us, which leads to mutual benefit. Although selfishness often divides us, there is nonetheless a stronger 'habit of the soul by which we consider ourselves as but a part of some beloved community, and as but individual members of some society, whose general welfare is to us the supreme object of zeal, and the great rule of our conduct' (Ferguson 1995: 51; see also Ehrenberg 1999: 91-96)

Ferguson was skeptical of social-contract theories and refused to speculate on a

prepolitical state of nature. It makes no sense to draw social conclusions from a time when humans were without social bonds, for without those we are not human. We are born into civil society and cannot conceive of ourselves without it.

This approach is consistent with social psychology, which since George Herbert Mead has emphasized how our sense of self forms in our relationship with others. It is also consistent with Buddhism, since the Buddhist refutation of all self-existing individuality similarly emphasizes our interdependence. As expressed in the Hua-yen metaphor of Indra's net, everything (including each of us) is empty of self-existence because each 'hollow' node of Indra's infinite web reflects all the other nodes; I have no life independent of those other nodes, being both their cause and their effect.

So there may be much in Ferguson and the Scottish school to be recovered; but in its day this sort of philosophical anthropology, unsupported by any transcendent grounding, turned out to be a fragile synthesis that could not resist the rapid growth of a new economy based on individual self-interest, accompanied by the spread of a more calculative and instrumental understanding of our rationality. Despite his firm belief that 'bands of affection' were the only basis for a durable civil society, Ferguson saw that such moral ties would not be able to withstand the pressure of markets and their commodification of human relations.

An instrumental understanding of rationality had become irresistible after David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), which sharply distinguishes what *is* from what *ought to be*. This amounted to an attack on the moral sentiments and innate human benevolence that Ferguson would use to found his concept of civil society. Hume posited a strict boundary between what reason could ascertain and what motivated human action, which was our personal 'sentiments and affections.' Although they could work together they could never join together: reasoning has no role in evaluating our motivations, for those are determined by our passions, which themselves have no knowledge of any universal truth about what 'should be'. 'Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our Reason' (*Treatise* Bk III, Pt I, in Hume 1948: 185).

This denied the possibility of any common good. Anything we consider as moral has no foundation in reason, so a common good cannot exist except as the sum of individual goods based on our own individual preferences. The only role for reason is an instrumental one, to help us identify our interests and show us the best way to satisfy them. Transcendent morality and universal benevolence are replaced by habit and empirical experience as the criterion of truth. This philosophically grounds the speculations of Hobbes and Locke: civil society is nothing more than a conventional arrangement for pursuing our own personal goals (Seligman 1992: 37-9).

The power of reasoning that Aquinas had tentatively liberated from theological demands (because confident that it would support such beliefs), and Reason 'the great creator' for Winstanley, become unrecognizable in Hume's narrowed calculative understanding, which today has become our collective understanding of reason: it is something we use to get what we want. The global success of capitalist economic relations would hardly have been possible without this reductive understanding of our mental faculties and their proper function. By devoting ourselves to making and consuming money, then, we are simply doing what it is our nature to do, for that is what our reasoning abilities are for. There is no place here for a different role—Socratic dialogue, for example, or a late-Heideggerian meditative understanding of thinking. We think that our hard-

headed this-worldliness has escaped the futile speculations of metaphysics, but in this way too we unconsciously live according to a diminished philosophical understanding of ourselves, which we now view as natural. This instrumentalization extends the modern tendency to commercialize everything: restricting our thinking abilities to this way of using them subordinates the ‘used’ (calculative reasoning) to the ‘user’ (motivating desires). With Hobbes and Locke we became ‘owners’ of ourselves; with Hume we complete the process by splitting and commodifying our own minds (which today is consistent with our computerized understanding of the mind: reasoning as a kind of data-processing).

The fruit of Hume’s philosophy and Locke’s politics was Adam Smith’s economics. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) we find for the first time our modern conception of civil society as a sphere of self-interested and self-regulating economic activity, apart from the state but sympathetically supported by it. Rational self-interest replaces any shared vision of a cosmic order. Smith’s world is a fully commodified one: civil society is constituted by three components of production—land, labor, and capital—that yield three types of reward: rent, wages, and profits. Contrary to Ferguson, people assist each other only on the basis of mutual self-interest, but it turns out that is enough. Smith’s notion of an ‘invisible hand’ provided ‘a powerful economic and moral argument for the untrammelled pursuit of individual self-interest and announced the appearance of civil society organized around “economic man”. . . . The drive for wealth and economic advantage was now the force behind all human activity in civil society’ (Ehrenberg 1999: 102):

[Every individual] intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. (Smith 1993: 292)

Today this is our great myth, providing the foundation for our notion of civil society by explaining how we live today: why we cooperate and why we do not. Yet Smith’s understanding of this was much more nuanced than that of many modern ‘Smithians’. He never used the term *laissez-faire* and he expected government expenses to increase as civilization advanced (Muller 1993: 2). He believed that only the influence of society transforms us into moral beings, yet he had no illusions that self-interest works to the benefit of everyone, or even the majority: ‘Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. For one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many’ (Smith 1993: 407). The role of a ‘sympathetic’ state includes protecting power and extreme inequality.

In his lesser-known *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith notices how market exchange tends to corrode the very shared community values it needs to restrain its excesses: honesty, thrift, self-discipline, etc. He argues that the moral basis of our existence is the need that each has for recognition and consideration on the part of others. To be noticed with sympathy and approbation are the driving force behind ‘all the toil and bustle of the world . . . the end [goal] of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth’ (Smith 1982: 50). This roots economic activity in something non-economic. As with Ferguson, the marketplace—the realm of civil society for Smith—is not simply a neutral place where already-morally-constituted individuals meet to exchange; it is itself an ‘ethical arena’ in which we become who we are through the perceptions that others have of us (Seligman 1992: 27).



This serves to remind us of something that modern economists (but not advertisers!) tend to forget: today most market exchange is about satisfying psychological needs, not physical ones. Smith's point about our preoccupation with individual recognition and approval can also be understood in *lack* terms: the need of our 'empty' ego-selves to feel *more real*. As we grow up, our sense-of-self develops by internalizing the attention of others, for they name us and treat us as if we are real. Since that sense-of-self remains an ungrounded psychological construct, however, we can never get enough attention to feel real *enough*. The more individualized a person becomes, the more one must cope by using one's 'inner' psychological resources, and the more 'empty' one therefore feels. There are different ways to try to fill up this emptiness, but by no coincidence most of them involve the attention and approval of others.

Smith also has a somewhat Buddhist understanding of the way our dissatisfaction with the present motivates the 'desire of bettering our condition: He sees this dissatisfaction as *natural* to human beings, a permanent feature of our lives experienced even in the womb. It is crucial for economic development and, insofar as it motivates the growth of our character, for moral development as well. This is why the competitive drive for wealth and economic success becomes the force behind all human activity in civil society. As with Hume, reason plays no role in regulating this self-aggrandizement or in balancing the relationship between private desire and public welfare—despite the fact that, as Smith acknowledges, *there is something delusive about our economic goals*. In the 'languor of disease and the weariness of old age' the moral insignificance of worldly goods appears in its true light, for neither our possessions nor even the beauty and utility admired in 'any production of art' prove capable of bringing true happiness in such adversity. However, we seldom look upon the matter in this 'abstract and philosophical light' and 'it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner': 'It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind' (in Lasch 1991: 55).

So the worldly fruit of our economic pursuits brings us no lasting happiness. Rather than seeking happiness in another way, however, this child of the Enlightenment encourages the deception, which is necessary to motivate our social and personal development. In other words, for Adam Smith the economic and civilizing glue of society is ultimately based upon a collective lie, or something we all agree to repress: that our self-interested economic activity can never give us what we seek from it.

If we reflect on why Smith—and we—accept this deception, the answer would seem to be: now that God is dead, or too far away to be relevant anymore, all we can do is distract ourselves from our mortality, and make the best of a bad thing by pursuing our own economic advantage. Our *lack* cannot be resolved, so let's divert ourselves while we can.

Here the contrast with Buddhism is sharp, for the Buddhist path is preoccupied with acknowledging our mortality and using that as our teacher. According to the foundational myth, Shakyamuni's spiritual quest was motivated by his shocked encounter with an ill man, an old man, and then a corpse. 'Does this happen to everyone? To *me* too?' he asked his attendant—precisely the realization of our mortality that nature and Smith conspire for us to forget. But Shakyamuni's quest allows our minds a spiritual role that Hume's and Smith's instrumental reason has no place for.

## The American Religion<sup>8</sup>

Why didn't socialism ever catch on in the United States? Because America had its own civil religion, to use Bellah's term. Its ideology precluded the development of a socialist movement by offering an individualist explanation of what is wrong with us and how to solve it.

By Hegel's time it had become evident that self-regulating markets increased not only wealth but poverty and inequality. His realization that the new economy could not solve this problem inspired his turn toward the state. 'In the end, civil society is an alienated, unfree, and unjust sphere, for a power alien to the individual and over which he has no control determines whether his needs will be fulfilled. . . . The anarchy of a sphere of self-serving proprietors cannot produce integration, rationality, universality, and freedom' (Ehrenberg 1999: 126-8). The only thing that can reconcile the antagonisms created by the new civil society is the state, the locus of our highest collective ends and the final realization of Spirit in history.

Marx rejected this metaphysical fantasy, for the simple reason that the state was being shaped by civil society rather than vice-versa. He looked forward to a future society where non-commodified human relationships would recover the communal bonds of a pre-capitalist past. Yet his alternative vision of civil society is best understood as a capitalist heresy because it shares the same economic presuppositions about what constitutes the social glue. Marx's materialist theory of history left no transformative role either for ideology (religion an opiate) or for civil society itself: they are only effects of the technological developments and economic forces that drive our social evolution.

The communal and group-based cultures of feudal Europe resisted the full development of a civil society based upon autonomous individual agents. That resistance became socialism and syndicalism, which rejected the new class system. But appeals to the universal solidarity of an international working class were not persuasive in the United States, which had no feudal past to resist an identity founded on self-interested individualism. In its place, 'Americanism' provided 'a highly attenuated, conceptualized, platonic impersonal attraction to a handful of notions—democracy, liberty, opportunity, to all of which the American adheres rationalistically, much like a socialist adheres to his socialism' (Sampson 1974: 426). According to Seligman, the components of this core ideology can be traced back to our sectarian Protestant origins—in particular, to the religious vision of the New England Puritans.

The key to understanding this is the question: what created the individual? What empowered us to break away from communal norms and become self-interested, able to decide for ourselves what to value and how to seek it? Again, the answer is found in a *religious* development: in the way that the source of moral (and hence social) order was relocated, from a transcendent God to one's own 'inner light.' This was not a rejection of the transcendent; to become empowered as individuals, people must first be invested with transcendental qualities. As Seligman (1992: 67) puts it, 'our notion of the ethically autonomous individual—upon which the idea of civil society rested—is predicated on the introjection within the individual of a particular dimension of grace which had previously been defined in otherworldly terms.' Luther could stand up to the Church because he introjected God: he was doing what God wanted him to do. This 'individual-in-relation-to-God' (Troeltsch) was the main consequence of the Reformation, and it was not originally a

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<sup>8</sup> This section draws heavily on ch. 2 of Seligman (1992).

secular one. Not only monks but now everyone was called upon to be in the world but not of it, to attain a Grace that transcended this-worldly concerns.

Here we pick up again the threads of the Puritan movement, which failed to purify English society but had another chance in the New England across the sea. Calvinism broke down the traditional solidarities of a corporate Christianity by emphasizing a new kind of tie between people that replaced blood with religious belief. In place of kinship and localized identities, social solidarity became based on shared ideological commitment to the Reformation—literally, to the task of reforming society. It was formalized in covenants that created a ‘community of saints,’ with ‘each standing in unmediated relation to the source of transcendent power and authority.’ This implied a new type of authority: ministry was based on consent, mutual agreement, and the equality of believers and ministers before God (Seligman 1992: 69).

Far from liberating individuals to pursue their own self-interest, this new moral authority involved increased personal responsibility to pursue a state of spiritual perfection within this-worldly institutions. And the inner grace shared by covenanted members must be spread outside, in order to construct a Holy Commonwealth that would realize God’s grace within the world. In place of ecclesiastical rule, however, the New England Puritans distinguished civil from religious institutions, each helping the other for the mutual welfare of both. Only in this way could a pure social order be maintained, uncorrupted by history.

The law of nature was common to all societies, but the law of grace was now taken to be the special promise of New England, which had an ‘errand in the wilderness’: to realize God’s Kingdom in the Promised Land. This presupposed a community of *saints* who had experienced regeneration and the infusion of Grace. Again, however, it didn’t work out as they hoped. Instead of converting the rest of the New World, after 1633 there was a decline in conversion experiences within the communities themselves. The second generation that came of age in the 1650s did not seem to have the same experience of saving grace as its fathers had. Economic growth around that time also contributed to breaking down the group solidarities of the founders. As communal life fragmented, there was a noticeable decline in commitment to the original values.

This led to a crisis that could maintain the old model of social order only by radically redefining its spiritual ideals. By the end of the seventeenth century the normative order, which before had been collectively determined by the covenanted churches of regenerate saints, was seen to reside *within each individual soul*, and this allowed a larger but looser group sense of *national* identity to develop. ‘The Puritan sect as an instance of the “particularism of grace,” defining membership in the “Holy Commonwealth,” gave way to a secularized form of civic virtue embracing the whole of the collective’ (Seligman 1992: 77). Grace was interiorized into individual conscience. The old distinction between Nature and Grace, the World and the Church, the unregenerate and the regenerate, became a distinction within each individual, which meant that the moral order now rested not on the collective Grace of the community but on the moral behavior of each person, who carried within the sources of salvation as well as damnation. The communal approach to overcoming *lack*, in a church of covenanted saints, had not worked, so responsibility devolved upon each person to deal with his or her own *lack* in an inner moral struggle between good and evil. Grace and *lack* became privatized.

In practice, this meant that criteria for church membership in New England came to rest less on an avowed experience of saving grace and more on the moral uprightness of each

individual. The secular consequences of this turned out to be immense, for this invested the individual with an absolute moral foundation unknown in Europe, where personal liberty was traditionally limited by the common good. For the first time in history, the individual as autonomous moral agent became the fundamental component of civil society and the political order.

This implied a new type of community. Early in the eighteenth century this new moral order was modified by adding the more secular principles of reason based on natural law. By the middle of the century politics and government were founded on a new trinity: God, Nature (natural law) and Reason. Together these transformed the 'Holy Commonwealth' into a civil millennial tradition that defined the 'Children of Israel' not in terms of a covenanted church but in terms of civic membership in the nation. In this fashion the millennial expectations of the first Puritan settlers evolved into 'a mode of civil consciousness' (Pocock).

Again, this new consciousness was not really secular: rather, it *sacralized the nation*. 'Enthusiasm,' earlier an abusive term associated with evangelical millennialism, became 'enthusiasm of liberty,' a 'noble infirmity' and a source of national pride, part of the developing discourse of civic virtue. 'It is this unique interweaving of religious and civil traditions that characterized the civil society tradition in the United States, setting it off from those of other nation-states' and leading to Americans' sense of their *exceptionalism*. John Adams declared: 'I have always considered the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.' America's pristine wilderness allowed a new vision of man and nature woven with Biblical images: the New Canaan, the promised land, a new paradigm of a paradise 'emancipated from history' (Seligman 1992: 79-84).

By the end of the eighteenth century American settlers agreed that they were a chosen people, and the destiny of their republic was identified with the course of redemptive history. As the main agent of God's activity in history, 'America had become both the locus and the instrument of the great consummation. The equation of the Kingdom of God with the American nation . . . substituted the nation for the Church' (Seligman 1992: 85-6). The United States would show the rest of the world how to overcome *lack*. In place of the Puritans' Christian story, there was now the foundational myth of the sacred American nation to which Melville (like many others, including Lincoln and Emerson) assigned the task of redemption:

We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the arc of the Liberties of the world. . . . God has given to us, for future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted . . . And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of the earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we can not do a good to America but we give alms to the world. (in Lapham, 15)

How blessed must America be, for even its selfishness to benefit the whole world! Of course, less religious versions of this attitude are not difficult to find today—e.g., in the fervor with which we promote economic globalization, which is really in everyone's best interests, even if some other countries do not realize it yet. We still see it as our duty to export to the rest of the world our model of how to end *lack*: not only democracy and free trade but, increasingly, our consumerist lifestyle.

This new national identity was based upon a new personal identity: the individual's freedom to pursue his own self-interest. Originally this was understood in moral terms, as we saw, but growing emphasis on reason and natural law transformed the grace of a universal God (already internalized as an inner light) into the still-transcendental qualities of a universal Reason that was able to realize our fundamental and *inalienable* rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This too was quite new, for English laws had recognized only inherited rights.

In the closest connection with the great religious political movement out of which the American democracy was born, there arose the conviction that there exists a right not conferred upon the citizen but inherent in man, that acts of conscience and expressions of religious conviction stand inviolable over against the state as the exercise of a higher right. This right so long suppressed is not 'inheritance,' is nothing handed down from their fathers, as the rights and liberties of Magna Carta and of the other English enactments—not the State but the Gospel proclaimed it. (Jellinek 1979: 74-75)

If the individual were to be truly autonomous, the source of all moral value, he [sic] required a more firm foundation in natural law and the rationality that discovers it. That individual became secularized when 'Reason replaced the Deity as locus of universalist values and injunctions in both the ethical and the social (interpersonal) sphere.' To review, the sequence was: God became internalized as an inner light of grace; that inner light became understood in moral terms as conscience; and then that moral conscience became Reason, originally that which enables us to apprehend God, the source of our natural goodness. The individual became secular when that reason became calculative and instrumental. The result was 'a new idea of the universal no longer rooted in a transcendent and otherworldly sphere but in the immanent this-worldly workings of Reason' (Seligman 1992: 92-94).

But what has that development done to society? 'Society itself is no longer a universal but exists only as a derivative of the individual as subject' (Seligman 1992: 95). Or, as Margaret Thatcher famously expressed it, there is no such thing as society. And that, in a nutshell, is our problem. How can we have a social whole that would *be* a whole, that would overcome the particularity of its members without negating that particularity (as, for example, fascism did)? What binding ties are there on a society of individuals whose relationships and contracts emphasize their autonomy and independence over their fundamental communality? In short, how does one get a truly civil society out of a collection of independent individuals?

We have seen that as long as this attempt was carried out in transcendent terms, either with John Locke or in the natural law philosophy of eighteenth century America (which was uniquely tied to a secularized virtue and the traditions of ascetic-Protestantism), such a synthesis was possible. With the loss of the transcendent dimension and its replacement solely by Reason (and thus, in the civil sphere the ties of market exchange and strategic or instrumental action), the moorings of a unified social vision broke loose (Seligman 1992: 99).

The loss of a transcendent religious dimension means there is nothing left that binds us together. *Our individuality means that we now view civil society as irrelevant to our lack, now also understood solely in individual terms.* Hence the overweening importance of my personal success in an increasingly competitive social environment. If my *lack* is now only my own problem, there is no reason for me to cooperate with others, except insofar as that helps me get the things I want.

Morality, reason and value reside within me. This voids all shared public spaces and events of any value in themselves. 'More than anywhere else, America is characterized by a community of absolute subjects, each "ontologically" self-contained, existing in a state of "metaphysical equality" and united only by the logic of rational exchange' (Seligman 1992: 135). De Tocqueville (1945: 338) noticed this even during his 1830-1 visit:

The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men all equal and alike, incessantly endeavouring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of the rest—his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country.

Of course, this type of civil society and market exchange was not what Adam Ferguson had in mind when he referred to human sociability, or even what Adam Smith meant when he wrote about our need for others' attention and approbation. For them, the arena of civil society is where we are morally constituted and validated; in *lack* terms, *our participation in civil society is important for resolving our lack*. But de Tocqueville's society of strangers follows inexorably from Hume's distinction between value and reason: reason in the public sphere is seen as value-neutral and instrumental, while value is restricted to the individual and therefore the private sphere. This works against the very concept of a civil society. 'The whole force of the civil society tradition is in fact aimed against any restriction of reason to what we would now call, following Weber, instrumental rationality' (Seligman 1992: 34). The victory of that calculative rationality has been the slow disintegration of civil society.

As God ascended and disappeared into the heavens, the way was cleared for the United States to conduct its grand social experiment in self-interested 'free enterprise.' But today the question becomes ever more pressing for us: how can such a collection of individuals constitute a civil society?

Seligman's own solution to this involves a new appreciation of social trust as essential. Modern societies have universalized trust in terms of citizenship, welfare entitlements, etc., but these tend to vitiate the mutuality and communality of the interpersonal trust he has in mind: people networks based on ethnic relations, local communities, shared religious faith, and other traditions.<sup>9</sup> He realizes that they will not be easy to revive, for they are 'premodern' and 'pre-contractual' (Seligman 1992: 171-2).

Such networks of trust continue to be eroded by our tendency to commodify everything, including human relationships. What social forces remain today to resist this commodification? We can answer that question by asking another: historically, what institution has done the most to encourage interpersonal trust?

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<sup>9</sup> Against Habermas' idea of 'free and unrestrained communication' to solve our disagreements, Seligman points out that it is precisely these shared affective aspects of the world which cannot be subsumed into the workings of some rational formula for linguistic pragmatics (195).

## Conclusion: A ‘New’ Civil Society?

There is another important strand of thinking about civil society, one not yet discussed but usually the first to come to mind today: civil society as an intermediate sphere of voluntary associations standing between the individual and the state. According to Tocqueville’s conception, these voluntary associations focus on the pursuit of private matters and are not generally concerned with political or economic affairs. Nevertheless, they are essential for the ways they fuse personal interest with the common good. They protect individuals from the state because they are based upon localism and particularism; they also overcome the tendency of self-interested individuals to produce a society of strangers disconnected from each other.

The contemporary version of this is communitarianism (e.g., Etzioni 1995), which Ehrenberg subjects to a scathing critique for ignoring economic issues. He focuses on the negative effects of major changes in work and income. Declining involvement in the political process is due to increasing income disparity; political participation continues to be heavily biased toward the top. The replacement of secure government and unionized manufacturing labor with nonunion, low-wage service and retail jobs has had a profoundly destructive effect. ‘Perhaps the “unravelling of civic America” is due to changes in the nature of work rather than peoples’ television habits or their individualism.’ Many people are too exhausted or busy or frustrated to engage in traditional community activities. Many of the intractable problems in inner-city neighborhoods—crime, drugs, family dissolution, welfare dependence—are fundamentally a consequence of the disappearance of work. Ehrenberg points at widening material disparities due to ‘the largest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in human history.’ Today (1999) nearly half of American families have a lower real income than in 1973 (Ehrenberg 1999: 245-9).

Tocqueville is not particularly helpful in these conditions. Categories derived from the face-to-face democracy of early nineteenth-century New England towns cannot furnish a credible model for public life in a highly commodified mass society marked by unprecedented levels of economic inequality. . . . [But Tocqueville’s] notion of civil society performs a normalizing function by making it difficult to see the economic roots of contemporary problems and blinding us to the political avenues for their resolution (Ehrenberg 1999: 234).

‘In one of the most thoroughly commercialized social orders in human history, civil society is supposed to limit the intrusive state, attenuate the ravages of the market, reinvigorate a moribund public sphere, rescue beleaguered families, and revitalize community life.’ That is just too much to ask. In place of communitarianism’s ‘nostalgic and moralizing infatuation with localism,’ only collective political action can address the deepening inequality caused by gigantic concentrations of private wealth and power (Ehrenberg 1999: 200, 250).

Ehrenberg’s critique is persuasive, but his own political solution less so. Our problem today is not simply that civil society is under attack; more precisely, it is that we have at least three incompatible visions of civil society which seem to be engaged in a life-or-death struggle. One of them is intermediate voluntary associations which, as Ehrenberg points out, have been suffering from the radical economic changes of the last few decades. The second, although far the most successful of all, is more difficult to see, because it has become so naturalized that we are often unaware it assumes a particular vision of how we should live together: the Locke/Hume/Smith understanding of society as bound together by markets, which (for Locke and Hume) are in

themselves morally neutral. Because we think of this as an *economic* system, we tend to overlook its profound social consequences.

The third is leftist or progressive visions derived from socialism, which seek to replace capitalist exploitation and commodification with more just and equal social arrangements. Despite personal sympathies with this third view, I am concerned that the need to reduce income disparities—which certainly needs to be done—may cause us to go to the other extreme (from communitarianism) and focus too much on an economic understanding of civil society. The usual leftist suspicion of entrenched religious institutions is well deserved, given their dismal record of complicity with oppressive economic and political elites. But civil society cannot be healthy unless there is something that binds us together, and, as we have seen, historically that unifying force in the West has been rooted in a religious vision. That particular Christian understanding of the world may no longer be persuasive to us, yet contemporary accounts of society which ignore or deprecate all religious perspectives do so at the risk of not being able to account for the spiritual (or ultimate existential) concerns that still motivate people.

Does that suggest another alternative to these three conceptions of civil society? I have argued that Anglo-American civil society and social thought have religious origins because our sense of *lack* came to be understood in a radically different way. A transcendent, otherworldly solution to *lack* was replaced by a covenanted project to reform this world. This new project was not secular, but its failure eventually led to a more secular understanding of the ‘inner light’ which transformed from grace to conscience and then to a rationality that our self-interest could use instrumentally. In this process, the transcendent social glue dissolved. Where are new bonds to be found today? To what extent do those religious origins survive as unacknowledged foundations that need to be revived if civil society is to be revived?

The point is not merely that Anglo-American civil society has theological origins; our society remains theological in the sense that its values and institutions cannot help being based upon some ultimate view about our human nature—in my terms, about the nature of our *lack* and how that is to be overcome. This bedrock view may be taken for granted, but our self-understanding and life-projects are nonetheless determined by it. Seventeenth-century discussions of the Bible produced the basic alternatives we still debate today in more secularized terms: is human nature evil, in need of restraint? Or does an oppressive society deform our natural goodness? If we want to break out of the stultifying stand-off between them, we need to return to the basic existential issues and rethink them afresh. The most fundamental one, I suggest, is our sense of *lack*. In order to know what to do about it, we need to come to some social understanding of what it is and what causes it. The question is not whether or not to do ‘theology,’ but whether our ultimate commitments are conscious or unconscious. Do we understand our motivations, or are we their victims?

Seligman concludes that the problem of civil society is (re)constituting interpersonal trust, but he has no illusions about this being easy. ‘It is, finally, the intractable difficulties in theorizing any concrete and meaningful criteria of trust in modern, rationalized, and highly differentiated societies that make all contemporary (Western) attempts to reconstitute civil society as idea, or, more pointedly, as ideal, so difficult’ (13). What does trust inhere in? What motivates us to commit ourselves to something greater than our own individual self-interest? English civil society originated in the seventeenth century, out a collective spiritual/moral purpose. The Puritans were willing to sacrifice themselves for His cause because they did not



doubt that they were God's agents on earth.

This suggests that, for civil society to thrive, it must be based on something more than the pursuit of individual self-interest, on something more than intermediate associations that work to limit state power. The widespread assumption that civil society is a morally-indifferent sphere of self-interested cooperation, and that the common good is merely a sum of our private goods, must be questioned. This is something religions are well-placed to do, for it is their role to offer alternative explanations of what our *lack* is and how to address it. Ferguson and Smith understood that the social sphere is an ethical arena where we become who we are through others' perceptions of us; the Puritan version of this emphasized our spiritual and moral responsibility for others. In my contemporary Buddhist terms, civil society must again be recognized as that dimension of our lives where we work together to reform society so that it does not objectify greed, ill-will and ignorance in institutions, but instead empowers us to understand and address our *lack*.

These hopes may be utopian, but, without the nourishment of such 'millennialist' roots, perhaps we cannot expect civil society to revive.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is an obvious and powerful objection to this line of thought. The modern distinction between state and church was hard-won, and many unsavory 'premodern' examples of religious influence on politics survive: the Taliban in Afghanistan, Brahmin sectarians in India, the Catholic Church in fascist Spain, etc. Common to them is a 'fundamentalism' that knows the truth and therefore seeks to impose its moral code on the rest. This has been one of the main reactions of religious institutions to the challenge of 'secular' modernity, but it just highlights the importance of a different response: the need for interreligious dialogue, a need which is becoming increasingly urgent in our shrinking, globalizing world. Such dialogue is necessary to help religions gain the perspective on themselves they need to distinguish what is still essential in their messages from what is historically dated. Those perspectives will be vital for our developing understanding of what civil society is and what it can be.

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# Integrating Spirituality into People's Politics

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Bhikkhu Visalo

During the past decade, Siam has witnessed the rise of civil activism throughout the country in various fields ranging from environment, education, and agriculture, to constitutional and democratic reform. This is not only a middle class phenomenon; peasant farmers have been actively involved in all these forms of activism, utilizing protest marches, demonstrations, hunger strikes, mass sit-ins, and other forms of nonviolent direct action. One of the most important recent examples is the three-month rally in front of Government House organized by the Assembly of the Poor, a large and broadly based movement of people affected by dam construction and other government mega-projects that have robbed them of their traditional livelihoods. Simultaneously, separate protests were staged in key provinces throughout the country against the construction of power plants and gas pipelines, all of which were approved by the supposedly democratic government without local people's approval, not to mention valid environmental assessments and other requirements stipulated by the new constitution.

These incidents represent not only the conflicts between the government and the people; they also reflect the broader conflict between the power of capital and society as a whole. In this age of globalization, the latter conflict is one of the world's most important. From this perspective, different civil actions in Thailand, ranging from protests against global agencies such as the WTO and UNCTAD to campaigns like the one against GMO products to the political reform movement against money politics, are but part of the global response to capital's dominating power in different aspects of peoples' lives, both private and public.

## **The invasion of Capital**

Globalization has been propagated with the promise of better living within a borderless world. What really happens, however, is a world threatened by capital's hegemony. Never before has capital's power been so widespread, able to invade and dominate every level of society and every aspect of life. The recent wave of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation not only decreases the role of the state, it also increases capital's capabilities to weaken and undermine society — simply for capital's own greedy purposes.

Altogether, capital's hegemony undermines three aspects of society: the material (living

conditions), social, and spiritual.

### **Material and Living Conditions**

At the community level, natural and community resources are sacrificed for the unsatiated growth of the business and industrial sectors at the expense of rural areas. Forest and biological diversity are decimated by logging companies, dam construction, petrochemical agriculture, and local infrastructure schemes. Water, now an economic commodity whose life-giving value is increasingly denied to the poor, is diverted to cities of commercial importance. While soil is increasingly degraded and eroded due to deforestation and aggressive farming practices, rural lands are gobbled up by investors and speculators. Once the traditional livelihood of villagers is undermined, for all practical purposes permanently, their all important physical resources are depleted.

Not only community resources, but also state resources (budget, personnel, equipment, and power) are exploited mainly for the growth of capital. Through the state's machinery and systems — i.e. political, economic, and educational — capital power dominates and manipulates infrastructures and policies for its own benefit. A few of the policies that reveal this distortion are the unbalanced development policy that diverts community resources to feed the incessant growth of the business and industrial sectors; the agricultural policy that increases farmer's dependence on world markets; and education plans that transform human beings into trained automatons for the labor market.

The recent policies of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, while destroying the social safety nets that benefit the poor, have allowed market mechanisms to control basic services that were previously provided by the state, e.g., medical care. This makes them less accessible to and more expensive for the poor, thus worsening their standard of living. Thus, the poor are both undermined and excluded by the new economic mechanisms.

### **Social**

Once natural and physical resources become scarce, communities quickly disintegrate as competition tends to increase among the villagers. An "I-for-myself" attitude replaces that of cooperation. The situation deteriorates further when the customs and culture that once unified communities are prostituted through their commodification for the sake of the tourist industry, homogenized through the Bangkok-centered education system, and pushed aside by the new "factory culture." Relationships in the community and family are also affected by the migration of the youth and middle-aged to the cities for better paying jobs, leaving the elderly and children behind in hollowed out villages. On the national level, a widening gap between the rich and the poor increases estrangement among people. Perspectives are now so polarized that people from different socio-economic classes have very few things in common, though supposedly living in the same country and culture, proving the stock politician's phrase "Thai Brothers and Sisters" a lie.

### **Spiritual**

Thanks to a market economy that increasingly dominates local communities, money value has penetrated into the life of the people, paving the way for materialism and consumerism to dominate their minds. Each trying to enrich himself materially as much as possible, everyone tends to regard everyone else as either enemies to compete with or victims to be exploited. Not only is the sense of connection with others weakened or lost, people are isolated in increasingly rootless, self-centered, lonely, and "stressed out" egos.

In the meantime, the rich; the poor, and the middle classes alike are subject to more stress, anxiety, and frustration because of this intense competition. No matter how much we get or accumulate, we still doubt the meaning of such a life and feel overwhelmed by the sense of lack, which is expressed in different forms of dissatisfaction, i.e., inadequate wealth, unacceptable bodily appearance, and disappointing social status, not to mention feelings of loneliness amidst the scurrying crowd. We modern Tantaluses find the meaning of life beckoning seductively but always out of reach.

### **Unsatiated growth of capital leads to violence**

All of the above problems are either manifestations of violence in themselves or lead to violence in different forms. Consequently, violence is multiplying in most of our societies. The economic system and policy that rob villagers of traditional livelihood and natural resources leads to widespread poverty, which is nothing but structural violence. It spills no blood directly, but inflicts suffering to death, not least because of malnutrition.

Structural violence also leads to open physical violence as it stirs up protests by people who are its victims all over the country, because the government and vested interests often times respond to these non-violent protests with violence — police dogs and truncheons, assaults by thugs, arrests, dispossession, and extra-judicial killings — resulting in many deaths, injuries, and the break-up of families.

Simultaneously, the very same materialism and consumerism that undermine human and natural relationships on every level, further lead to crimes such as robbery and domestic violence. Whereas relationships were once imbedded in a common moral sphere, the culture of self-indulgence places few restraints on desires, even the basest ones.

Fundamental to this structural and physical violence, is the peaceless mind that is dominated by greed, anger, hatred, fear, and the individualistic attitude that regards others as either enemies or victims to be exploited. This state of mind is harmful to both oneself and others, and thus is another form of violence.

Violence in society, family, and the mind is encouraged by another kind of capital, namely, illegal or underground capital, such as that found in drug trafficking, gambling, and the trade in women and children. A good deal of crime and domestic violence is not only caused by the organized crime that run these underground businesses, but also by people who are addicted to their products. Further, due to organized crime's pervasive influence on the political system, it often appropriates state power to its illegal ends, such as through military and police complicity in the drug trade.

The growth of underground capital is fueled by the opportunities that legal capital creates. The disintegration of family and community, for example, helps create the demand for narcotics and supplies bodies to the sex industry. Globalization also strengthens the criminal economy. The liberalization of trade and services, for example, enables underground businesses to grow internationally, makes it easier for them to transfer their illegal wealth in support of their activities, and helps them establish powerful connections all over the world. Without the unchecked growth of legal capital, the criminal economy could not globalize and become as powerful as it is now. In other words, growth in organized crime is a natural corollary of economic globalization.

## **Civil activism as politics for peace**

Since the unchecked growth of capital power is a major cause of widespread violence, peacemaking in any society must include attempts to check the power of capital and prevent it from becoming a new tyranny. In this light, civil activism against the invasion of capital is absolutely necessary for a peaceful society. Such activism can be called “politics for peace.”

For civil activism to be a powerful agent of peace and effectively reduce different forms of violence, strategies of confrontation (protest and popular pressure) and constructive programs (development activities and issue-oriented alternatives) are not sufficient. Any civil movement that aims for genuine peace must promote and model alternative structures and systems capable of replacing the existing ones maintained by structural violence. Moreover, an ideology or worldview that is free from capital’s domination, materialism, and consumerism is a prerequisite for civil activism to be a “politics for peace.”

The civil movement’s ideology is characterized by its emphasis on cooperation, egalitarianism, horizontal relationships, and social concern. Though these values make the civil movement’s ideology distinct from its capitalist counterpart, they are insufficient for the former to be a powerful alternative to the latter. Another necessary aspect of the civil movement’s ideology is spirituality. Spirituality is about the inner life on which every social activity is based and provides the most important sources of strength. Spirituality is essential for us to work continuously and energetically for the greater common cause without ending up burnt out, co-opted, or fallen into self-serving ego trips. It also enables us to be inwardly peaceful and happy without much dependence on external wealth or recognition.

Briefly, there are two aspects of spirituality — worldview and values.

### **Worldview**

Spirituality includes our insights into the deeper nature of human beings and the universe we inhabit. It realizes that every human being has the potential to attain the highest freedom, that is, freedom from suffering. It sees that there are many levels of happiness and finds the real source of happiness in the mind that is free from attachment, not in the acquisition of material things. A genuine spiritual worldview not only perceives human beings in their deepest sense but also recognizes their place within the broadest context, namely, in intimate connection with all beings in the universe.

### **Value system**

Spirituality is reflected in and achieved through such values as self-contentment, simplicity, compassion, and nonviolence. In this light, harmony and balance in relationships with other people and the rest of the natural world is emphasized rather than individual aggrandizement at the expense of the others. These values provide the heartfelt stirrings and motivations needed to turn visions, theories, and strategies into genuine action for peace.

Spirituality is the crucial element most often missed in the ideologies of civil movements. It is not surprising, then, that civil movements oftentimes unconsciously and inevitably adopt materialist worldviews and value systems as their own. Such adoption is expressed through the lifestyles of movement members, such as entertaining oneself with brand name products or luxurious consumption. Groups reveal this in how they run their organizations and business; for

example, holding meetings in hotels like the business sector does. Moreover, materialism is frequently integrated within their social vision. Material and physical well-being becomes the primary objective of their activities, programs, and alternative systems and structures. Sometimes, social values and well-being are included in their objectives, such as, promoting civic virtues, strengthening trust, and increasing social capital. Spiritual well-being, however, is almost always ignored.

Yet, any social activity that ignores the spiritual aspect is doomed to failure. Any development project that succeeds in raising incomes or diminishing the poverty of the people but ignores helping them to be free from materialism will end up turning them over to the mercy of the markets or transforming them into good customers of the transnational corporations. In the long run, their livelihood and social well-being will be affected by excessive consumption, indebtedness, competition, and tension within the community. In other words, such development projects risk failure in the long run. They are merely reformist. Radical politics must also be spiritual.

### **Consumerism and spiritual gratification**

Spirituality is so important to civil activism that it determines whether a civil movement's ideology is able to resist or even replace consumerism, which is currently the most powerful representation of capitalist ideology. Consumerism has spread so pervasively throughout the world not so much because it provides physical comfort or convenience, but because it gratifies, or promises to gratify, the spiritual needs of people, albeit temporarily. In other words, consumerism functions as a pseudo-religion in its pretense of meeting the deeper needs of every human being, namely, the desire to have an improved identity, to be a new person, or to recreate oneself. Consumerism succeeds because it makes us feel that we can have a better self and be essentially a better person through possessing brand name products, especially through consuming the image that both sells the product, which may be in itself useless or trivial, and is the main source of value. Consumerism also gives us the freedom to choose the appearance of a new and better self through cosmetic surgery; that is, appearance is equated to spiritual renewal. Consumerism gives us a purpose in life, namely, to accumulate and consume as many "goods" as possible. Such a clear and concrete objective creates the appearance of meaningful lives.

It also promises to reduce the *sense of lack*. We feel something lacking when we sense the gap between the ideal and the reality of our being. By consuming the products, services, or images presented by consumerism, we believe that our reality moves closer to the ideal, and thus reduces this gap. In actuality, the gap will never be closed since the ideal, our expectations, always move further away, mainly because we are constantly exposed to new products through the media. The sense of lack persists because we realize that once the products are consumed, the happiness they bring us is never up to our hopes and dreams. The gap between expectation and reality inevitably maintains the sense of lack and self-discontent. We therefore are motivated unconsciously to acquire and consume more and more with the deluded expectation that the sense of lack will finally disappear if we only accumulate "enough," though of "what" we are never quite sure. It is a game of futility.

From a Buddhist perspective, the deepest sense of lack is the result of our intuitive knowledge that in the depths of our being the self does not inherently exist. Because of this,

fundamental insecurities and fears emerge, disturbing our minds every now and then. Regardless of our attempts to suppress such inklings, they repeatedly come up, though distorted into the sense of lack.\* That's why we try to clutch at anything as our "true self." In this light, consumerism provides products and images of self for us to grasp. In other words, it seems to satisfy the deepest need, which is spiritual, of every human being; though it cannot satisfy in the long run, since nothing that it provides is identifiable as a true self. It works only temporarily, creating more needs later.

### **Spirituality as critical element of civic ideology**

The ideology of civil movements cannot replace or challenge consumerism unless and until it can provide better solutions to the spiritual needs of people. That's why spirituality must be incorporated into civil activism. To begin with, spirituality should be incorporated into the civil movement's worldview so that it can give better answers to the questions of existence: e.g., what is suffering, what are its causes, and how can freedom from suffering be realized? Rather than thinking that unsatiated desire is the problem, we tend to think that failure to fulfill the desires is the problem. We are like the addicted gambler who says that "gambling is not my problem; I like it. The problem is my \$100,000 of debt." One reason for consumerism's popularity is its ability to divert people's attention from their real suffering and its causes; people assume that lacking sufficient money to buy things is the real problem, not limitless desire itself. They therefore try to acquire more money instead of finding out what's wrong with their own minds and the social systems that mirror the greed and delusion structurally.

A spiritually informed civic worldview can provide the broader perspective that there are many levels of happiness. Material happiness is just one level of happiness. Camaraderie and a healthy family life provide emotional happiness. Deeper than that is spiritual happiness, which helps reduce one's dependence on material accumulation and increases one's freedom. No ideology can provide a satisfactory explanation of how to attain deeper happiness, as opposed to the superficial pleasure of unsatiated consumption, unless it incorporates spirituality as part of its worldview.

Apart from being incorporated into the civil movement's vision of life, spirituality should be part of its social vision of as well. Spiritual wellbeing should be the objective of the programs, systems, and structures that are proposed as alternatives to the existing ones that promote structural violence. Spirituality should be part of the civil movement's organizing principles and mode of relationships (e.g., sharing, cooperation, and compassion). Finally, a spiritual worldview should be integrated into the way of life of each member of the civil movement, especially its leaders.

### **Spirituality can save activism**

Since spirituality is an antidote to materialism and consumerism, a civil movement based on spirituality insures itself so that it can challenge the power of capital without being

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contaminated by the materialism and consumerism it is battling. Simultaneously, it can critique and challenge the false religious institutions that betray their spiritual origins in favor of temporal power and wealth. With spirituality, civil activism is no less than politics for peace. It not only resists the unsatiated growth of capital and its structural violence, it also reduces the sources of violence in society—greed, hatred, anger, and fear.

Spirituality is essential for harmonious relationships within society, since it enables people to attain inner happiness and contentment with a simpler life, therefore reducing competition and antagonism while encouraging sharing. Genuine spirituality includes kindness and patience toward others, a willingness to set aside personal agendas, and the ability to sacrifice for the common good. Most of all, the inner harmony of mature spirituality inspires harmony in others.

Spirituality is also the guarantor that civil activism is peaceful and nonviolent. It deepens and broadens the perspective of activists so they realize that the causes of social problems are not the persons themselves but something *within* them (selfishness, illusion, attachment), together with something *beyond* them (unjust structures like the economic system, oligarchic politics, and materialist-oriented education system). This allows activists to be less judgmental and blaming, and more tolerant and nurturing of individuals and groups despite their imperfections.

With spirituality, one realizes that simply eliminating “the bad apples” won’t solve problems. Only by transforming internal worldviews and external structures through peaceful means can problems be solved. Resorting to violence only worsens the situation; old worldviews become more fortified and violent structures are more deeply rooted as they defend themselves with yet more violence.

Ultimately, the real objectives of civil activism are not stopping the dam construction, halting the pipeline project, or gaining compensation for lost lands. More important than all of these is replacing the unjust structures and reducing structural violence, along with changing attitudes and worldviews. All can be achieved only through nonviolence and compassion. Nonviolence opens the hearts of people, while compassion expels the anger, thus enabling people to see the real causes of their problems and suffering. The wisdom that arises is required for one to see alternative solutions to violence. Besides, inner peace from spirituality can restrain the mind from indulging in anger, dwelling in hatred, or reacting out of fear, which are the inner sources of violence.

With spiritual inspiration, one can continue the struggle and retain the ideal of civil activism without getting stuck in the trap of materialism, or falling victim to greed and becoming a turncoat to the powers that be, or ending up burnt out and leaving the movement. Thus, spirituality provides the steady, consistent motivation needed for long-term grassroots peace work.

In brief, spirituality is essential to civil activism in all its phases: from the development of ideology and social visions, to organization of the movement, through staging direct actions and running development projects, as well as the way activists and the people live out their daily lives. Spirituality also forms the basis of peace on every level; personal, operational, and structural. Therefore, contrary to general belief, spirituality is an integral part of people’s politics. Without it, people’s politics is either a short-lived reaction to the powers that be or power politics in disguise.

# Asian Cultural Values and Green Politics: A Buddhist Perspective

Pracha Hutanuwatra and Jane Rashbash

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## Introduction

Green politics in Asia will fail if Asian Greens merely try to copy ideas and practices from Western Greens. This has already happened with our conservative, liberal and socialist political counterparts in the region, often with disastrous results. Any kind of meaningful success for Green politics in Asia can only come from a deep search for appropriate Asian cultural roots combined with a serious attempt to integrate them with selected Green concepts. In this article we attempt to articulate why we need to think about Asian cultural values, what these values are and how they can be helpful in creating an alternative politics in and for Asia.

We are writing from the perspective of socially engaged Buddhists, who have been working for social change NGOs in Siam<sup>1</sup> for the past three decades. Our NGOs under the leadership of Sulak Sivaraksa are part of a social movement aiming at a sustainable and just society. In a way we are not dissimilar to the NGOs that gave rise to Green parties in the West. Whether such NGOs can or should be the basis for a Green Party in Siam is something which we are now considering, and this article is part of our assessment of how appropriate organised Green politics is for our society.

This article is also written from a Thai Buddhist perspective. Siam has never been politically colonised by Western powers. However, we cannot say that we are intellectually and culturally independent. When we look at the present formal education system and the mass media we can see a strong American influence. In our parents' and grandparents' generation it was the British who dominated the educated and elite circles. This trend of Western influence needs to be questioned and challenged radically. A new Asia needs to be an Asia that is proud of herself as she is, with her own cultural values and diversity, not for being able to catch up with the West.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors refuse to use the word 'Thailand' because it implies authoritarianism, chauvinism and irredentism. The country was called 'Siam' until 1939 when her name was changed to Thailand. Then she was reverted to the original name again in 1946. However she has been officially called Thailand again since 1949, two years after the military coup d'etat in 1947. This new name signifies the crisis of traditional Siamese Buddhist values. Removing from the country the name she has carried for all her history is in fact an important step in the psychic de-humanisation of her citizens, especially as her original name was replaced by a hybrid, Anglicised word.

We hope that this article will start a discussion with fellow Greens from East and West, North and South, but especially with Asian Greens, many of whom we know in person. We Asian Greens need the guts to find our own roots for our alternative politics. Therefore apart from a few quotes from Asian thinkers whom we have personally interviewed, we have not referred to other books or articles, although we are aware that there has been much written by Western authors on the relationship between Asian philosophy and Western environmental thought. Here we would like to present a perspective from Asian thinkers and activists whose thoughts have given us the confidence to put these ideas together. We owe a lot to these people, many of whom are not mentioned in this paper. We claim no originality in our thinking. However the “putting together” is our own responsibility.

### Why Asian Cultural Values?

Certain sectors of Asian society are effectively catching up with the West in terms of material well-being and economic and technological development. Some sectors have even been able to achieve a level of social justice in terms of distribution of wealth with a parliamentary political system. These include Japan (very affluent) and Kerala in South India (less affluent). South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan are more affluent than they once were, but are also quite authoritarian.

However, from a Buddhist point of view, these economic achievements are a mixed blessing, for they are based upon the stimulation of the characteristics of greed, competition, violence and individualism. We regard these characteristics as *akusalamula*, the root causes of unhappiness. They are responsible for all other problems. The stimulation of greed and individualism reinforces an existential sense of lack (*tanha*). When in a state of *tanha*, although we have more than we need and want, we still feel something is missing. We are compelled to look for more money, wealth, power, recognition and sensual gratification. The cycle never ends. Hence the high rates of suicide, mental illness, stress, alcoholism and drug addiction in those ‘successful’ sectors of Asian society.

We should also be aware that the well-off sectors in Asia are better off because of the exploitation of and the structural violence against the poor majority and the natural environment. Unfortunately the less affluent people are subjected to heavy pressure, from educational institutions and the mass media, to look to those success stories as the model, and to look down upon their own way of life. Generally speaking, the natural environment is seen as a resource to exploit in the interests of economic growth. There is some concern amongst certain sectors at the extent of the damage, but this is a mere scratch upon the surface. Most people do not make the connection between de-forestation and the mainstream development policy that promotes greed.

We believe that the mentality of ‘catching up’ with more developed countries is the key issue that must be addressed if we are to see Green change in Asia. By the time Asia gained independence from Western colonisation most of the Asian elites had lost confidence in their own cultural values. The elites are educated in the West or receive Western-style education in their own countries. They come to feel that they belong to a type of society that is intrinsically inferior to the West. They believe that have to catch up with all the latest fashions of the West. This includes even the progressive elites catching up with progressive Western thought.

When we walk around Tokyo, Bangkok, Seoul, Manila and the other Asian capitals, we see many youngsters dying their hair blonde or red. They eat at Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's. Their hairstyles and eating habits are not just a temporary fashion of young people, but also represent a vivid and deep cultural and spiritual sickness in the whole society. Their society has become one where people cannot be proud of who they are and have to try to be someone else. From a Buddhist perspective this is a basic form of alienation. The *vibhava-tanha* (the existential sense of not being good enough) has been stimulated by Western-dominated international and national media and advertising to the extent that these young people reject the very basic facts of their identity. Helena Norberg-Hodge's book, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* (1999) explains this phenomenon of cultural alienation very clearly and powerfully.

Of course there are other interpretations of this phenomena. Some may think these young people are showing a willingness to embrace other cultures rather than a rejection of their own. Perhaps over time people given such freedom will return to Asian culture through an interesting cultural synthesis. From a Buddhist perspective, and as insiders of Asian society, we simply cannot agree. Firstly, 'such freedom' is not genuine freedom; it is a mass-mediated simulacrum of freedom. Secondly, a healthy cultural synthesis can happen only when there is a genuine acceptance of cultural diversity, and no sense of superiority and inferiority for all parties concerned. It must be based on self respect, mutual respect and open-mindedness. (When Malcolm X described young black Americans dipping their heads in dye to make their hair red and straight like "white" hair it was quite clear that this action was based on self hatred not self-respect. Although Asians may achieve "white" hair less painfully, we have to ask whether they also suffer from a lack of self-respect for who and what they are by birth.)

Once the elite circles accept that a society is backward and under-developed, they feel that the people urgently need to be modernised and 'developed'. Through educational institutions and the mass media this inferiority complex of the elites spreads to the people at large. This is a process of cultural uprooting. People in every strata of society feel that they are not good enough. They have to catch up with those whom they perceive as 'higher'. They look down upon, and in many cases discriminate against, those perceived as 'lower'. This could be their own parents and grandparents, thus causing havoc in societies where respect for elders is a deeply ingrained value. Bangkokians feel inferior to people from Tokyo or London but look down on those from rural Siam. Country people feel inferior to Bangkokians but look down on ethnic minorities or hill tribe people and so on. Among the hill tribe people one tribe will look down on another.

"In Malaysia: certain communities with certain looks or colours just do not feature in our advertisements. We should have advertisements that reflect the realities of our societies..... connection with the self, interpersonal relations, notions of family, of community, they have all been changed and transformed gradually; how one relates to one's elders, the courtesy, the civility, the civilised behaviour that is so much a part of nearly all our traditions." (Chandra Muzaffar, *Alternative Politics for Asia: A Buddhist Muslim Dialogue between Sulak Sivaraksa and Chandra Muzaffar*, 11-13 October 1996, Penang, Malaysia)

Why is this happening? According to a Buddhist analysis, a good society needs a decent social structure that protects the weak and guarantees a decent life for everyone. It also needs enough responsible individuals who live a moral life or a life of principle. These individuals operate the desired social structure. This life of principle is not possible without self-respect (*hiri-ottappa*). In other words, corruption and all kinds of hypocrisy are likely to prevail in a society

where people are uprooted from their culture and spirituality, where people try to escape from who they are.

*We believe that whether you are stupid or clever, man or woman, black, brown, pink, white or yellow, rich or poor, powerful or powerless, believer or non-believer, basically you have intrinsic Buddha-nature within you. So you do not have to be someone else to be valuable. Hence the primacy we place on self-respect. Any society with a structure that undermines this hiri-ottappa is an unhealthy society. You cannot be “more who you are” by rejecting what you are. This does not mean that we have to confine ourselves to the restrictions of traditional roles and responsibilities. It means that we have to reject the notion that we belong to a lesser race, class, gender, religion, culture or civilisation whoever we are, whatever we are. Once we are firmly rooted in self-respect, we can make healthy and critically aware choices from among the options offered by both what we inherit from our past and Western modernity.*

Working for a sustainable future through political and economic structural change alone is not enough; we need a new kind of cultural revolution in Asia to liberate ourselves from Western cultural imperialism and from our own colonised mentality. We have to stop thinking that we are ‘not developed enough’ and have to ‘catch up’ with the West. This applies not just to the things we produce and consume, but also to the concepts we adopt in trying to bring about change. When our Western counterparts talked about socialism, Marxism, the New Left, postmodernism and lately Green politics, we in Asia who styled ourselves as forward-thinking intellectuals and activists felt we had to know and talk about them too. In this respect we are just like our liberal and conservative friends who need to talk about globalisation and neo-liberalism. In many cases we are not only talking about these concepts, but are also putting them into practice by applying them in our societies.

But once a society accepts itself as uncivilised, developing or under-developed, and regards other societies as more developed or civilised, it will be ready to throw away its inherited traditions and wisdom, transmitted from generation to generation, so as to catch up with the ‘developed’ or ‘civilised’. Many countries in Asia, if not all, suffer from this collective loss of self-esteem.

Siam is a good case in point. It is a salient example of how the form of culture and tradition has been preserved at the expense of the practice of core values. Around 150 years ago, when the Siamese elites first encountered the Western imperial powers, they saw the need to change in order to survive as an independent country. On the other hand, they also wanted to preserve Buddhism as the spiritual and cultural base of modernisation. In order to do that, they changed Buddhism to make it more ‘rational’ and less mystical. In other words, instead of making modernisation more Buddhist, they tried to make Buddhism more modern. The result is that nowadays we can hardly call Siam a Buddhist society. It has become a second-rate, crudely modernised society, underpinned by social injustice, with materialism and consumerism as its core values. Of course all the forms and rituals are still there, not to mention the ongoing construction of ugly and expensive temples, all in the name of Buddhism. Yet these now serve to justify the endless greed of consumerism, rather than oppose it. We no longer believe in contentment and a simple life but want to be richer and richer. Even monks are showing off their wealth, competing with each other by having expensive cars and other consumer goods. Thai people have become less and less happy and more and more ugly. Because *tanha* has been

amplified instead of reduced in the modern context, even the rich feel insecure and that they do not have enough. The poor are not only exploited but also no longer contented with a simpler (and more sustainable in many cases) lifestyle. Parents are selling their own children for modern houses and consumer goods. Our self-reliant small farms are replaced by, monocultural farms with pesticides. We have horrendous growth in child prostitution, the AIDS statistics, etc. We ruthlessly exploit our neighbouring countries for natural resources and cheap labour.

Given that Siam had a rich, highly developed and effective society, culture and economy before Western modernisation, it is difficult to think of any benefits which significantly outweigh the costs. In the Buddhist frame of thought *tanha* is the cause of suffering not happiness. This is the point that technocrats who control the decision making mechanisms of society do not understand, both in the East and West

The Thai experience shows that without a critical understanding of one's own cultural and spiritual values, trying to catch up with the West by taking everything Western as universal, or universally good, is like trying to grow an apple tree in a tropical climate and soil. The result is an unhealthy tree that is unable to bear good fruit. Even worse, unhealthy apple trees may come to displace delicious native fruit. We can use this metaphor to reflect upon all the modern institutions adopted from the West in the name of modernisation and lately globalisation. These include the education system, the military system, police system, parliamentary democracy, and the market economy.

Another effect of cultural alienation, also common in Asia, is that of uprooted people falling prey to fundamentalism or extreme ideologies. Such ideologies offer meaning in life and provide some kind of self-respect, both individually and collectively. Yet because they are based on a shaky definition of self, derived primarily from what the believer is not (e.g., not of this or that 'inferior' religion, not of this or that 'inferior' ethnicity) rather than a deep sense of self rooted in a positive cultural tradition, these ideologies invariably promote rather than reduce social conflict. Post-colonial Asian history has many examples of large-scale bloodshed arising from the application of such extreme ideologies. The ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka that have been going on for more than a decade, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India and Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East are contemporary examples. From our point of view, many of these fundamentalist movements are reactions to contemporary Western cultural imperialism dominating other cultures on a global scale. In other words, when Western media and leaders point a finger at Islamic fundamentalism they should realise that more fingers are pointing back to them as a cause of fundamentalism elsewhere. When people lose their sense of identity, fundamentalism is an easy answer to regaining the sense of self.

In pointing out the bad that has come with colonisation, Westernisation, modernisation and globalisation, we hope it is clear that we are not lamenting the so-called good old days and resisting necessary changes. Pre-colonial Asia was not Paradise; we had versions of slavery, we had forced labour to some extent. Some people died too soon from disease epidemics —just as they did in the West before public sanitation measures. There was authoritarianism and hierarchical, non-democratic forms of government as well as meritocratic and accessible forms like the Chinese mandarin state. On balance many valuable ideas and practices were developed that deserve to be retained and incorporated into post-colonial politics. Especially worthy of consideration and retention, we believe, are Asian forms of wisdom about life, the self and relationships that go beyond the capacity of modern scientific knowledge. Buddhism teaches us that change is

inevitable. The points we have to address are what kinds of changes and how we should go about them?

### Whose Asian Cultural Values?

When talking about Asian cultural values, two main camps of thought and practice are apparent. In the first and dominant camp are the 'modernisers', who selectively choose Asian traditions and values that seem to promote their agenda of economic modernisation. Some of these are genuine traditions (such as respect for education), and some are traditions that are re-interpreted to enforce conservative policies (such as the importance of strong state authority). Examples of the 'moderniser' camp include Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Mahathir Mohammed of Malaysia, and the leaders of mainland China. They use 'Asian culture' as an excuse to reject criticism of their violation of human rights and justify their authoritarianism. At the same time they follow the West closely in modernising their countries, while eulogising Western science and technology. Some of these leaders (e.g., the Suharto family of Indonesia, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos of the Philippines) are personally corrupt and criminal. Others follow an honest personal moral code but do not make the connections between the promotion of greed and accumulation they advocate politically and the social and environmental distress and disruption that follows. Many fall in between these two scenarios.

In the other camp are people like Mahatma Gandhi, whose ideas influenced Western green thinkers like E.F. Schumacher and others. He was among the first world leaders who questioned industrialisation. Other like-minded people are Ashish Nandy and Vandana Shiva of India, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa and Sulak Sivaraksa of Siam, Walden Bello and Bishop Labayan of the Philippines, Chandra Muzaffar of Malaysia, Helena Norberg-Hodge noted for her work in Ladakh, and Satish Kumar of the Schumacher College in the UK. Some of these people are less well-known in the West, but they are very well known among activists and alternative thinkers in Asia. The authors of this article have interviewed them all except Vandana Shiva. The interviews will appear in a book called "Alternative Politics for Asia", to come out in 2001. We also interviewed Abdurrahman Wahid of Indonesia, who may be a surprising controversial choice for Greens in New Zealand and Australia. He is hardly understood by Western media, or even the Western educated Indonesian elites. For us he is one of the best politicians, thinkers and spiritual leaders of Asia. He has been genuinely working with the peoples' movement for the last thirty years, and has not changed his standpoint since he came to power. We believe that people who look for alternative politics of Asia need to understand him and his way of operation, which does not necessarily conform to Western norms.

Each of these thinkers articulates Asian cultural values according to the traditions of their respective countries, cultures and religions. Notwithstanding the diversity and variety of those traditions, there is a large amount of overlap (see 'Core Values', below). They also share a questioning attitude towards the fundamental values of the Western modernisation project, such as scientism, the idea of progress, unlimited economic growth, promotion of greed, anthropocentrism, industrialism, militarism, violence, extreme forms of individualism, and consumerism. For them, as well as for many other Asians, these values are antithetical to the core values of their culture and spirituality. To quote Chandra Muzaffar again;

*"To my mind what we need is a third approach. This is not the ghettoish approach, nor*

*is it the total embrace of what is seen as Westernisation and globalisation. It is an approach which is conscious of identity and asserts one's fundamental values, but at the same time remains connected to what is universal and what is fundamental in one's religion and one's culture. This approach would be able to understand the importance of accommodating the whole of humanity as humanity but at the same time would be conscious of the identity that Islam has as a religion and a civilisation."*

It is this kind of understanding, that recognises and celebrates both contemporary diversity and traditional wisdom, that is common to all these alternative thinkers. However, it is crucial to realise that their visions are not about romanticising the past. Rather, they are advocating a vision that is based on a sustainable and diverse approach suitable for different cultures. As Helena Horberg-Hodge puts it:

*"From my experience in Ladakh, I believe it is possible to have small scale hydro electricity, passive solar energy for green house, water heating, wind power and pumps to make it easier to do some things without destroying the community fabric and the relationship with resources. I feel it is vital to use these technologies in a very skillful way. I think they can be introduced for far less money than anything else that is being done. The new direction could be implemented very quickly, would cost less, pollute less and be less socially disruptive."*

## **Core Values**

So what exactly are the core values being expressed and promoted by these Asian thinkers?

Drawing from our interviews and also from their writings, we believe they can be summarised as follows:

- Humans are basically spiritual beings.
- The purpose of human life is not materialism and selfishness (endless seeking after wealth, power, recognition, and sensual pleasure) but spiritual development (becoming selfless and imbued with wisdom and compassion).
- To fulfill this purpose we must develop our personal potential and develop it in such a manner that it can be used to serve all beings in the best possible way.
- To develop in this way we need a personal spiritual practice and a moral code of conduct based on doing no harm to oneself and others.
- The moral code values co-operation over competition, condemns greed and seeks to curb it, condemns violence and promotes non-violence, and balances concern for individual rights and welfare with the promotion of the common good.
- These values cannot be confined only to personal level, but also need to be applied at the structural level for social reconstruction.

Supporting and grounding the expression of these values is a belief in the value of diverse ways of knowing the world and knowing oneself. Western scientific methodology is regarded as only one way of searching for a particular type of empirical knowledge. Attention is given to the many other ways and types of knowing that are just as important, or more important, for leading a moral and fulfilling life. Meditation, contemplation, yoga, T'ai Chi, shamanism, intuition,



dreams, and other ways of knowing can be valid and more important as guides to living life. Knowledge and technology that can be harmful to other beings, such as the production of weapons, should not be allowed. Production and trading of arms is in itself a violation of human rights and a breach of the moral code that states that non-violence should be at the core of all relationships.

What would the 'good life' based on these core values consist of? The oldest Asian religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, and Hinduism) make it clear that the good life need not be lived in an urban setting. In fact the ideal life promoted by these faiths is the simple spiritual life spent living in the forest, close to nature, with all other beings as our friends. The highest forms of culture also need not be urban. Rural life, living close to the land, can be very fulfilling. Contentment and sharing, not greed and accumulation, are promoted by this lifestyle. For Buddhists, liberation from greed, hatred, and self-conceit can in part be achieved by reducing one's needs and wants through living just such a simple lifestyle.

A culture that encourages people to spend their surplus time and wealth in cultivating loving kindness, wisdom of non-self, patience and the practice of meditation, need not be regarded as inferior to a culture that encourages scientists to send satellites to the moon, produce harmful weapons, or manipulate genes.

A society where most villages have their own folk songs, singers, dancers, poets need not be regarded as less 'cultured' than a society entertained by Mozart or Beethoven, not to mention Michael Jackson and the like. A bamboo hut of the Karen people in the forest in Northern Siam need not be considered less 'developed' than a mansion in Berlin, London or New York—for where is it more likely that the core values will be put into practice?

The core values we have discussed here are one way of reading Asian cultural values. They are not, however, the only way. Nor do we say that there are no negative values in Asian culture—but those are not the values we seek to renew for a sustainable future. We are also aware that most of these values are not confined to Asia alone. The point is that they have been with us for a long time, and retain their value and utility.

*When we blindly follow Western modernisation, we are throwing out the baby of social organisation based on principles of reciprocal respect and self-development as well as spiritual wisdom with the bath water of authoritarianism, superstitions, and a fatalistic acceptance of wretchedness.*

## **Core Values and Green Politics**

We believe that being deeply rooted in the core values, and practising them accordingly to one's own culture and spiritual tradition, provides a stable base for looking at the present political situation clearly. It also enables us to analyse its positive and negative aspects, together with their causes. At the same time it allows for the development of tools to synthesise a vision of the desired future, together with the methods for social change needed to move towards the goal.

Having a strong and stable cultural and spiritual base does not close doors to other people, cultures and forms of spirituality. On the contrary, it enables us to be inclusive and open-minded, free from the crippling and distorting insecurity that comes from not knowing who one is.

We are able to learn from other sources, both within and without, and practise critical awareness. Then we can select elements from those sources and integrate and apply them appropriately to our own society. It is on this basis that we are conducting our evaluation of Green politics, and its suitability for Asian societies. The following paragraphs look at the linkages we have found.

The Green critique of anthropocentrism resonates with us. As Buddhists we have a strong tradition of respecting other life forms beyond humankind, so it is not difficult for us to agree that every being has its own intrinsic value. However, we also believe in the inter-changes between different life forms and that there are also other realms of being beyond this empirical world. A human spirit can be re-born as an animal or another being, such as a deva, on different levels. For believers, these are not supernatural beings. They are as natural as we are. The acknowledgement that there are countless rebirths after this death helps us approach this life in a less rigid and self-centred way.

Meditation on non-self in the Buddhist manner can also help us to live more closely to the ideal of the non-anthropocentric view. In this way, we can come to see the forest as an important element for spiritual growth, and in fact a centre of our 'civilisation', rather than as a 'resource' to be destroyed to create urban wealth.

Most spiritual traditions of the East do not regard human history as a linear evolutionary process, always moving for the better, as suggested by the modern Western idea of progress. Societies in each era can be good or bad, better or worse, depending on the conditions of each period. The Eastern belief is that the collective karma of people living in each time is an important factor in determining the quality of that society. If the structure and individuals of a society are geared towards compassion, contentment, wisdom and justice, and greed, violence, and self-conceit are discouraged, then that society will definitely be a happier place to live in. Alternatively, if we promote these unwholesome roots as we are doing in the modern sectors of our society, we are creating hell on earth even as we are living affluently. Thus the Green rejection of unnecessary and environmentally destructive production and consumption is in line with our core values.

With regard to the political processes advocated by the Greens, we can also appreciate the principles of decentralisation and participatory decision making, as the Buddha organised his Sangha in a participatory way, with democratic decision making by small groups of monks and nuns. Although Asian elites, both past and present, have sometimes tried to use Buddhism to justify inequality, dictatorship and violence, they cannot find support for this in the original texts, nor in the practice of the Buddha.

Looking at the present parliamentary system operating in the world we can see a lot of limitations, especially when the business sector and the political sector work hand-in-glove to dominate civil society. Yet we can also see that this parliamentary system is better than other available systems. However, there must be attempts to encourage other forms of direct and indirect participation by the people to supplement it. We also have to bear in mind that the nation-state is not the only form of governance we could or should have. In the present context of South East Asia, where some level of traditional community is still alive, the movement to empower local community is vital for a just, democratic and sustainable society. Most of these villages are still living a green and holistic way of life and can be examples for contemporary greens, both Eastern and Western, to learn how to live a good green life with the land.

Buddhism also provides a model for strengthening civil society. This is based on the tradition of the Buddhist Sangha as a moral power to balance the power of the State. Building on this tradition we can encourage the growth of not-for-profit, non-governmental organisations as a new kind of moral and cultural power to counterbalance the state and the transnational corporations.

What else would be on the agenda of an Asian Green Party? Private land ownership in many parts of Asia is relatively new concept, a legacy from the Western colonisation period. It has become a major source of structural violence. We desperately need some sort of radical land reform. We need to draw a line for upper and lower limits of private land ownership. We also need to encourage a variety of forms of voluntary community land ownership among awakened individuals who support the concept. This idea can also apply to other means of production, so that the strong cannot use the ownership of private or public property to exploit the weak. Co-operative community ownership and labour are traditional in both West and East. The Greens in the West have been reclaiming the tradition as a political programme, and it is also necessary to do so in the East.

Education also needs to be radically changed. The aim should not be to produce technicians and technocrats with individualistic motivations but to help students realise their hidden potential so that they can use it to serve society. The ancient arts and sciences of cultivation of the heart such as meditation, yoga, T'ai Chi, etc., should be used in conjunction with the training of the intellect and the physique of an individual. The relationship between teacher and student should be that of good friends (*Kalyanamittata*) who learn from each other, helping each other to realise one's weaknesses and limits as well as one's strengths and potential. In the Buddhist tradition the teacher/student relationship is a life-long relationship and part of the education itself. Hence the need for a reconsideration of the present school system where students are dehumanised and mass-produced like industrial products.

As part of our policy of promoting real education, we see no place for commercial advertising in the mass media in a Buddhist or a Green society. It is unacceptable both because it violates the precept of telling the truth and because it creates artificial needs or cravings that make people unhappy. No one should use such power to control other people's minds and thoughts.

## Conclusion

To summarise: Asian Greens need space, moral courage and moral support to find their own roots for a politics that considers the need for a sustainable future and questions the present status quo of injustice, excess and greed. Such a politics needs to encompass environment, culture, spirituality, economics and technology in a holistic way. It is no good taking the Western Green solution and forcing it into an Asian context without questioning the core values of modernisation and globalisation, and contrasting them with core values derived from Asian cultural and spiritual traditions. We need a sophisticated synthesis and integration of traditional wisdom and Green ideals in order to build a new culture and new social structure for Asia.

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# Culture and Murder

David Streckfuss

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“Culture” (*watthanatham*) rose to paramount importance for the Thai state in the period from 1939 to 1944, and then from the mid-1970s into the 1980s. Between these two periods, “culture” was transformed. It began as a concept to be defined and a tool of mild compulsion toward particular social and political practices. By the late 1960s, it had become the key component of a national security discourse—the very counter force of communism, and that which set the atmosphere pervading the murderous events of 6 October 1976. These “culture-heavy” periods bracketed two brief democratic interludes—1946-47 and 1973-76. Dr. Puey Ungphakorn is one of the few to have had a significant role in both democratic interludes in which two of the country’s most democratic constitutions were drafted and came into effect and a wide range of previously dispossessed groups were given a voice.

What may not be generally recognized is Puey’s general opposition to a certain understanding of “culture” for its coarseness, its exclusivity, and its narrow-mindedness.<sup>1</sup> The 1946-47 period was largely a response to the repressive “cultural” ethos symbolized by the change of the name of the country to Thailand in 1939 and the barring of the use of ethnic tags. The country’s name was changed back to the inclusive Siam and the most democratic constitution to date was drafted and put into effect.

The democratic period of 1973-76, conversely, came to a bloody end in the name of culture. The Thai jingoism of the World War II period defined “culture” and placed it rather innocuously in the law books. Following the coup in 1947, these “cultural” measures finally insinuated themselves into the anti-communist law and into the rightist body politics where it eventually served as the basis of murder in the events surrounding 6 October 1976. In both cases, Puey represented the forces of freedom and democracy as against those of suppression and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Was Puey more aware and tolerant of these sorts of issues because of his own background and the spouse he chose? One commentator on the career of Puey has said that some attacked Puey for being “unThai” due to “his courage in standing against the current” and charging that “he was alienated from Thai values because of his Chinese lineage or his English wife and foreign education.” See Laurence D. Stifel, “Recollections of Dr. Puey,” in Puey Ungphakorn, *Collected Articles by and about Puey Ungphakorn: A Siamese for all Seasons* (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation, 1981) p. 18.

## Creation of Culture

Just prior to World War II, as the newly named “Thailand” moved toward the Axis Powers, Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram launched an extraordinary campaign aimed at building nationalism.<sup>2</sup> The campaign began with the first *ratthaniyom* or Cultural Mandates in 1939 which did away with the old “Siam,” replaced it with the anglicized “Thailand,” and required that everyone in the country be referred to as “Thai” while barring the use of all other ethnic tags such as “Lao” or “Malay.” These mandates were not quite laws in the normal sense of the word, and yet they were more than merely a government announcement or press release. They intimated the coming of a new age where culture would be dictated, legislated, disseminated, and protected—and its enemies, punished.

Prince Wan Waithayakorn, a prolific writer, journalist, and consummate intellectual of the middle part of this century in Thailand, wrote an article at the time describing what was going on with this newly coined word “culture.” He said that the prime minister “has attached the greatest importance to the development of culture among the Thai people.” The desire of the prime minister, he says, was “to inspire and instill” in the people “the spirit of united patriotic action looking to the greatness and prosperity of Thailand.”<sup>3</sup>

Wan writes that the prime minister wanted “a more systematic and concerted action with a view to securing more effective and uniform results.” Education and patriotism “alone were not complete qualities in themselves,” the prime minister felt, and “they had to be complemented by national traditions, which the Government would notify to the public from time to time.” The first mandate changed the name of Siam and the Siamese to Thailand and the Thai. The next eleven mandates, issued on average every few months until the last was issued in late 1942, among other things, entreated the people to beware of “possible danger to the country” and “not to reveal secrets detrimental to the nation;” to call all the people within Thailand as Thais and not as Lao, Khmer, and so on; to show respect to the national flag and other state symbols; to “buy Thai;” to use newly rewritten words of the “national song;” “to join in the national reconstruction by each having a definite occupation;” to recognize the importance of upholding the Thai language “as a duty of a good citizen;” to dress suitably; to use their time wisely; and to assist the young, old, and infirm in public.

The prime minister claimed that these mandates were “similar to the moral code of etiquette of civilised people, with a further special sanction of the force of public action derived from public opinion,” which Phibun claimed would “compel” observance of “a recalcitrant minority who now escape the arm of the law.” The idea at this point, apparently, was that “the public” would “give a stern warning” to someone not following these mandates. If a person persisted, the public could turn him over to the authorities, Wan says, although it is unclear why they would do so given that this kind of violation, although a crime of sorts, had no punishments attached to them.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The intellectual foundation of what Scott Barmé’s “hypernationalism” is covered to great effect and with good fun in his *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of Thai Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), pp. 138-79. This excellent study describes not only the period, but places it ideologically within the history of Thai official nationalism.

<sup>3</sup> Wan Waithayakorn, “Thai Culture,” *Journal of the Thailand Research Society* Vol.35, Part II (Sept. 1944), pp. 136-40.

<sup>4</sup> Wan Waithayakorn, “Thai Culture,” pp. 136-37.

## National Culture Act of 1942

For whatever reason, the government felt that these innocuous recommendations were not sufficient, and on 15 October 1940, issued the National Cultural Development Act of 1940. In the preamble to the act, it said only that it was “expedient to set up legal provisions for the development of national culture as a factor in fostering and promoting national progress.” In this law, culture was defined as “characteristics showing flourish, development, good order, harmonious progress of the nation and public good morals.” With this law, further legal provisions, sensitive to “local conditions and living conditions of persons in various localities,” were to be provided in the areas of “orderliness in dress, manners and etiquette in public places or in places visible to the public,” “efficiency and etiquette in occupational pursuits,” and, “appreciation of things Thai.” Violation could result in a fine of not more than twelve baht which would be used for “local improvement.”<sup>5</sup>

These measures were combined and rearranged to create two new provisions, one of which, the National Culture Act of 1942, was passed on 28 September 1942. There were three parts to the bill—one that defined culture and correct etiquette in society, one that established an Institute of National Culture, and one that placed associations and societies under the control of the Institute. First, the act defines “culture” as “a quality manifesting flourishing and development (*khwaam jaroen ngaug ngaam*), orderliness or progress of the nation, and good morals of the people.” It was now mandated by law that it was “the duty of every person to follow the national culture and to support and promote the progress in the development of the Nation by retaining culture which is in keeping with good custom to cooperating for its betterment so as to suit prevailing conditions.” What did that mean? Specifically, it meant that everyone had to observe, “orderliness in dress, behaviour and manners in public places,” “orderliness in conducting oneself and in the conduct towards the household,” “orderliness in behaviour which may lead to the prestige of the Thai Nation and Buddhism,” “efficiency and polite conduct in connection with the practice of one’s vocation,” “development of the intellect and morals of the people,” “progress in literature and fine arts,” and “Thai-ism.” Anyone violating these items would be liable to up to one month in prison and a fine of up to one hundred baht.

Second, the act established an Institute of National Culture, which was headed by Phibun Songkhram himself. The Institute, separated into the Office of Mental Culture, Office of Traditional Culture, Office of Fine Arts Culture, Office of Literary Culture, and Office of Women’s Culture, had the following duties:

- (1) to make research on, modify, maintain and promote the existing culture of the Nation;
- (2) to make research on, modify and determine the culture to be adopted or revised;
- (3) to propagate the culture of the Nation so as to suit prevailing conditions;
- (4) to control and find means to instill the culture of the Nation in the minds of the people so as to form a habit; and
- (5) to give opinions, consultation, and carry out the work on the affairs concerning the culture of the Nation according to the intention of the Government.

Last of all, the Institute had control over apparently all associations and organizations

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<sup>5</sup> Wan Waithayakorn, “Thai Culture,” pp. 140.

which had to be registered with the Institute. According to more specific regulations that followed, no organization could “conduct its affairs in any way that would lead to the deterioration of the culture of the Nation, whether directly or indirectly.” On the contrary, each had to cooperate with the Institute in doing everything it could to “maintain, promote, and elevate the culture of the Nation.” Any meeting that would involve any sort of ceremony required prior notification to the Institute; two copies of any speech given to the organization had to be sent to the Institute within seven days. Anyone violating any of these or other related provisions would be liable to up to one year in prison and a fine of up to 2,000 baht.<sup>6</sup>

Accompanying this act was a second law, the Royal Decree Determining National Culture of 1942. I quote the text of this decree in some detail:

**Section 3.**—Every person must keep good and pretty behaviour and manners in public places or in places where they are seen by the public, by:

- 1) not causing boisterous noises without reason, or using sarcastic, obscene, or vulgar words, or to display any ridiculing or mocking actions or words toward those who are conducting themselves in a way upholding or promoting culture of the Nation;
- 2) not using force to shove anyone or seize anything in the community, such as in public transport;
- 3) not causing disturbances by loitering around, or obstructing others without sufficient reason;
- 4) not causing dirtiness or writing graffiti in inappropriate places;
- 5) not taking baths along public thoroughfares where people are;
- 6) not sitting, lying, or standing on bridge railings;
- 7) not sitting or lying along footpaths; and
- 8) not using force in snatching donations or things being passed out.

**Section 4.**—In respect to conducting oneself in the household, every person must maintain order in that which appears to the public, by:

- 1) not hanging up clothes or other things in a disorderly or dirty or impolite way;
- 2) not writing or making any marks or putting up any poster, or impolite picture;
- 3) not allowing things to become disorderly; and
- 4) not making the toilet or the place for garbage look dirty.

**Section 5.**—Every person must maintain the honor of the Nation and country. Within the boundaries of the municipality, especially in public places or in places where they are seen by the public, and outside the boundaries of the municipality in places specified by provincial governors through approval by the Minister of Interior, it shall be prohibited to wear clothes which will cause loss of dignity for the Nation and country...

**Section 6.**—Every person must show proper respect to the uniform, or, according to

<sup>6</sup> “Phraraatchabanyat watthanatham haeng chaat ph.s. 2485 [Act on National Culture of 1942], 28 September 1942, and, Khau bangkhap saphaa watthanatham haeng chaat ru’ang khuap khum samaakhom lae ongkaan taang taang” [Announcement of the National Institute of Culture on Control of Associations and Organizations], 5 May 2486 [1943], in, Fai wichaakaan suut phaisaan, *Phraraatchabanyat watthanatham haeng chaat ph.s. 2485* [The National Culture Act of 1942] (Krungthep: Suut phaisaan, 2532 [1989]), pp. 3-6, 67-68.

custom, namely:

- 1) show respect to the National flag when it is being raised or lowered every day simultaneously at times officially announced;
- 2) show respect to the National flag, the [flag of the army and other official flags]; and
- 3) show respect to the National anthem, the royal song, and other songs deserving respect which might be played in official ceremonies, in social work, or in places of entertainment.

**Section 7.**—In public places or in places which can be seen by the public, Thai people must not beg for anything from aliens, causing them to look upon [Thai people] with contempt.

**Section 8.**—Thai people must have efficiency and display polite conduct in connection with the practice of their vocation by being earnest/energetic and attentive, and using polite behavior and words with customers, their employers, and passengers on public conveyance.

**Section 9.**—Thai people must promote the progress of literature and arts by not doing anything that would cause the loss of honor to the Nation and country or to Buddhism...

**Section 10.**—Thai people must favor Thai by not treating with contempt the Thai Nation or Thai people in a way that would cause the loss of honor to the Nation.<sup>7</sup>

It can be argued that this law is not so much a law as is normally understood, but a code of good etiquette. It basically defines the term “polite,” but it also uses phrasing from much more serious crimes against the state. Sections 5, 7, 9, and 10 all use phrasing that is very similar to the phrasing of anti-rebellion Section 104 of the 1908 code, which forbids acting in any way in public that would cause the people to hold the nation, government, or king in contempt. Could, then, a Thai asking a foreigner along the sidewalk for some extra change be charged with defaming the nation? Could someone loitering on a bridge be found guilty of committing a crime against the state? Or, reversely, in severely castigating the government be charged with violating the National Culture Act and fined one hundred baht instead of being imprisoned for seven years on the charge of rebellion?

These questions are quite difficult to answer because these culture laws successfully, and explicitly, marry a code of public etiquette and ethics with the highly charged language of political crimes. Social conventions and standards of politeness now pervade the realm of law. And, to stretch the logic for instruction, the authorities look for infractions of an internal rebellion by asking themselves, “Were those words insulting to the state or not?” But with these “positivistic” laws that demand action, the authorities would have to ask, “Were those words upholding the nation?” Presumably, the latter is a much harder question to answer, and one which the authorities are not trained to assess.

From the very start, the government did not make any bones about why it was pushing for

<sup>7</sup> “Praraatcha kritsadiikaa kamnot wathanatham haeng chaat ph.s. 2485” [Royal Decree Determining National Culture of 1942], 28 September 1942, in, Fai wichaakaan suut phaisaan, *Phraraatchabanyat*, pp. 25-27.



the passage of these laws. The Cultural Mandates were not strong enough. One committee member makes the point that the true motivation behind the drafting of these laws was “to expand the coverage of *rathaniyom* to the Thai people in general, as well—instead of forcing only government officials to comply, as it is at this time.” Representatives from the Ministry of Interior, who initiated the draft and sat in on the committee’s meetings to provide clarification on the intention of the government, said the law was a matter of having citizens “conduct their everyday affairs to greater result.” At another point, it was explained to the committee that:

having the Nation develop [*jaroen*] a permanent culture necessitates having the Thai people of the Nation have a good culture. Promoting this to success, if there was no tool to use, it would be difficult. So an act has to be enacted to compel Thai people to act in accordance.<sup>8</sup>

As a final point, we should bring up the question of culture. Throughout the deliberations of the Juridical Council on the drafting of culture provisions naturally pervaded the topic of culture. One member, for instance, opposed using the word “efficiency” in the law because it “has nothing to do with culture. Culture is more a matter of the spirit and I see the sections of the act are all legislating results of culture—people wearing clean clothes, they don’t need to have culture.” Another member notes that “efficiency is apt to mean more an ability to find a way to maintain and feed yourself. It is not about culture.” The representative from the Ministry of Interior, suggesting a way to respond to criticisms that the laws on culture do not define the meaning clearly, once again clarifies:

You have to be clean first. Our aim with this culture law is that since it is well understood that the reason people dress nicely, have good behavior, and conduct themselves in good order is because they have culture which is an internal matter that concerns the spirit.<sup>9</sup>

## Inventing Culture

It appears that the Thai term for “culture” (*watthanatham*) was around since the early to mid-1930s, but the ethos and enthusiasm did not reach critical mass until the end of that decade.<sup>10</sup> Wan claims to have coined the term himself, after being unsuccessful in popularizing the term, *phluttitham*, as a word corresponding to the English word, “culture.”<sup>11</sup> It seemed that most of Thailand’s political and intellectual leaders had to make some sort of obeisance to the new word. The Department of Publicity, for instance, published a collection of articles on culture in 1943.<sup>12</sup> Although there seemed to be some flexibility on how it was interpreted, there was absolute and immediate affirmation that there was something out there called “Thai culture” and whatever it was, it needed to be respected, cherished, and preserved. Even a man sometimes called “the

<sup>8</sup> Juridical Council Committee (JCC), “Report,” Meeting No. 121, 6 April 1942, in, Juridical Council Archives, Vol. 359, Part 14, p.2; and, JCC, “Report,” Meeting No.124, 8 April 1942, in, Juridical Council Archives, Vol. 359, Part 14, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> JCC, “Report of Meeting No. 124,” 8 April 1942, in, Juridical Council Archives, Vol.359, Part 14, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Scott Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan*, p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Prince Wan Waithayakorn tells how “one day, as I was writing an article, the Pali form of *watthanatham* came to me and I know that it would catch on, and it did.” See Wan’s “Coining of Thai Words,” in, Wan Waithayakorn, *Collected Articles in memory of H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithayakorn, Kromamun Naradiph Bongssprabandh President of the Siam Society 1944-1949 & 1969-1976* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1976), pp. 329-34.

<sup>12</sup> It is referred to in, Thaemsook Numnonda, “Phibulsongkhram’s Thai Nation-Building Programme during the Japanese Military presence, 1941-45,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol. 9 (2) (Sept. 1978), p. 239.

father of Thai anthropology,” Phya Anuman Rajadhorn, composed a piece for the Institute of National Culture entitled, *Explanation of “Thai Culture.”* A fair amount of this short publication is devoted to explaining the “uncivilized” lives of the small group, the *phii taung lu’ang*, and using them as a foil for understanding what “civilized” is. Toward the end, he addresses some of the cultural policies that were being pursued by the government at the time, such as the mandatory measures on women wearing hats as an important war strategy. Anuman used the issue to explore the meaning of culture:

If it was something that was not passed down for long, then it is not a tradition—it is only what we call fashion, that is, a temporary trait, and it will disappear. Let me raise the example of wearing hats. This is a Thai tradition because it was passed down from the very beginning long ago. If the wearing of hats had not [been a tradition], then there would not be the words, *muak*, *ngaup*, or *kup* and other words which are used by the various local groups of the Thai race... We might misunderstand that the wearing of hats is something new and not a Thai tradition. If a tradition does not change or become altered for the sake of progress, if it is not appropriate to or fits in with the environment, that tradition gets the title of being old-fashioned. If it can fit in with the environment, that is, it does not get in the way of the development of society, then that tradition will probably remain...<sup>13</sup>

In his article on “Thai Culture,” Wan more or less explains what appears to be the official line on what culture is. He quotes Phibun’s speech made on National Day in 1939 in which the prime minister explains that for the sake of continued stability, “the most important” condition was that “the Thai people must cultivate in themselves qualities in line with the new regime.” Stability can be achieved through law, but “development” requires the setting up of “rules of action” which are to be called Cultural Mandates, or *ratthaniyom*. Similar to what kings issued before, says Phibun, but these Cultural Mandates “constitute the opinion of the State formed in conformity with public opinion as a national tradition.”<sup>14</sup>

Of this program, Wan writes, perhaps with a touch of irony:

A perusal of the various Royal Decrees, notifications and appeals reveal a great number of details in what might appear to be small or insignificant matters, and it is not easy to have a clear picture of the trend of the cultural development now taking place. One explanation is that such development is still in its initial stages and those matters are regulated first, in which the need for regulation becomes apparent to the competent authorities concerned. Another explanation is that the domain of culture is so wide and comprehensive.<sup>15</sup>

Not only were publications—usually semi-official—like these being published, the government itself was engaged in a peculiar practice of issuing guidelines, and sometimes quite lengthy ones, on a wide variety of “cultural” activities. In the year following the issuance of the

<sup>13</sup> Anuman Rajadhorn, *Phya, Kham athibai “watthanatham thai”* [Explanation of “Thai Culture”] (Phranakhorn: Sapha watthanatham haeng chaat, 2486).

<sup>14</sup> This kind of phrasing seems a bit murky without an explanation. As Barmé describes it, Phibun’s own “Goebbels,” *Luang Wichit*, explained that in the democratic system, the prime minister, by virtue of not having a no-confidence vote against him, became the very embodiment of “public opinion.” See, Scott Barmé, *Luang Wichit Wathakan*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>15</sup> Wan Waitthayakorn, “Thai Culture,” pp. 137-43.

National Culture Act in 1942, the prime minister's office made official announcements on such items as the "Relations between Husbands and Wives," "Determining the Marriage Ceremony of Thai People," and on "Regulations of Women's Clothing," while the National Institute of Culture issued official announcements on funeral ceremonies, the "Wearing of Polite Clothing concerning Carrying out of Vocation," and on "Riding on Public Conveyances." To give one of the shorter examples, below are the "Regulations on the Consumption of Food":

As the National Institute of Culture considers that the consumption of food is a daily task of Thai people and that at present there is still no order [in this matter] as appropriate to the culture of the Nation, the Institute sees as fitting to stipulate the following regulations:

- 1) The Thai people shall consume food on time, with four meals per day.
- 2) Before consuming food, the Thai people shall bathe their bodies, or at least wash their hands and put on proper [orderly] clothing.
- 3) The Thai people shall consume food with other members of the family.
- 4) The Thai people shall use utensils, such as a clean fork and spoon, which will be set for use especially for those in consuming food.
- 5) When consuming together, the Thai people shall use a common spoon or fork to dish out food for each serving.
- 6) The Thais people shall use table and chairs at the time of consuming food.
- 7) The Thai people shall maintain politeness and order when consuming food, not making themselves a nuisance or a bother to those consuming food together.

The National Institute of Culture hopes exceedingly that the Thai people will be interested in conducting themselves according to these regulations harmoniously by showing cooperation in further maintaining, promoting, and raising up the culture of the Thai Nation.<sup>16</sup>

What is the intent of these laws, anyway? Were they intended to compel new, "civilized" practices upon an uncouth population? Were they part of an urban hegemony over rural life? Were they merely an affirmation of already accepted practices? Whatever the case, many of the values and practices highlighted in these laws still, without active enforcement, have become habitually followed in Thai society. The fact is that most Thais do eat lunch at exactly the same time. People do stand up for the national anthem when it is played at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. And even the conceptual principle lying behind the laws—that Thai culture is unique—is ever repeated by members of Thai society.

For the most part, these laws and announcements were not punishable. Many were followed; some were not. Why have a law if it is not to be enforced? If it was in fact such an all-

<sup>16</sup> "Prakaat saphaa wathanatham haeng chaat ru'ang rabi'ap kaan bauriphok aahaan" [Announcement of the National Institute of Culture on Regulations on the Consumption of Food], 15 May 2486 [1943], in, Fai wichaakaan suut phaisaan, *Phraraatchabanyat*, p.71. This period in Thai history makes clear that much of what is considered as "Thai culture"—assumed here to reach back into antiquity—is of a much more recent vintage. It makes quite transparent "the invention of tradition." Eric Hobsbawm speaks of traditions that are "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted... within a brief and dateable period" of perhaps just "a few years." He defines "invented tradition" to mean "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." See, Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-14.

engrossing aim of the Thai state to instill this concept of culture in the population, then why were the laws apparently never enforced?

There is no doubt that a regular function of Thai political regimes, whether monarchical, dictatorial, or democratic, has been to issue mandates like these. It is a practice that is part a simple display of power, part a ritual of a theater state, and part a simple tendency of the elite to offer pedagogical instruction to the masses.<sup>17</sup> But the long-term effects of these laws were significant.

“Culture,” according to these cultural mandates, created such an encompassing conformity within Thai society that later generations would come to take such behavior as perfectly natural and “traditional.” Moreover, it transformed an ethnically diverse kingdom into a nation with apparently a single ethnicity. It also transformed “culture” as something which describes various practices deeply embedded within ways of life into a urban monoculture that sought political passivity, that could just as well be separated from the way of life of people as not, and that could also be defined, dictated, analyzed, and manipulated.

Puey spent much of World War II involved with the Free Thai who fought alongside the Allied Powers against Fascism. But while the other Axis Powers were defeated and their militant and often racist “cultural” policies were dismantled, in the new Thailand, they remained. Puey opposed them as well, and years later, he discussed, with a good deal of verve, both the conformity and the view of Thailand as being ethnically and culturally homogeneous.

He was one of the few to point out the obvious fact that Siam is a very multi-ethnic kingdom, and hence his preference for Siam over Thailand. He claimed that the country had originally been open to immigrants, and that “this ethnic variety enriches our national heritage and enables each of us to adopt wider and wiser outlook on life.” This was lost, however, he says in reference to Phibun’s World War II policies, “with the advent of militarism, nationalism and chauvinism.”<sup>18</sup>

Puey also writes that Thai society remains “excessively conformist, superficial and contemptuous of ideals.” One cannot but help to think that he was striking out at Phibun’s cultural mandates when he complains of the “obsessive conformity” involved with “housing, clothing, drinking and eating habits, golfing, etc.”<sup>19</sup>

Conformity and ethnic suppression were not simply irritating; they went to the very core of the social conflicts of the 1970s. Puey claims with a clear-sightedness uncommon for the time

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<sup>17</sup> A connection between culture and conflicting concepts of “development” can clearly be seen in the “Village Development Competition” promoted by the government every year. According to Ratana Boonmathya, the government has established these competitions for the purposes of “emphasizing the improvement of the material conditions; establishing group work for market production; and promoting body docility, order, and hygiene.” See her treatment of the competition as part of the government’s attempt to popularize its “state development ideology” among local people. Ratana Boonmathya, “Contested Concepts of Development in Rural Northeastern Thailand,” (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1997), pp. 131-45.

<sup>18</sup> Puey Ungphakorn, *Best Wishes for Asia* (Bangkok: Kled Thai Publications, 1975), pp.27-28. It might be argued, though, that it was during what Puey calls “the good old days” of Siam under the monarchy that the ideological and “anthropological” shifts necessary for the nationalism of the late 1930s were set by the Bangkok royal elite at the turn of the century. Please see my “The Mixed Colonial Legacy in Siam: Origins of Thai Racialist Thought, 1890-1910,” in, Laurie Sears, (ed.), *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), pp. 123-53.

<sup>19</sup> Puey Ungphakorn, *Best Wishes for Asia*, p. 29.

that much of the “communist” insurgencies were simply ethnic groups struggling for their rights. At the same time, any citizen who dared to go against the “culture”—again, quite often practices created anew during World War II—were “ridiculed, attacked, cut from the inheritance, or deemed to be a communist, which is thought to be the worst insult imaginable.” As a result, society’s intolerance for “others” deprives it of “a chance for fresh ideas and inventiveness.”

Somehow between World War II and the 1970s, Thai political society had become inhospitable to a majority of its citizens who were ethnic “minorities” and were frequently subject to charges of being communists. It had also built up a way of condemning as communists those within “Thai” society who challenged the structures imposed by decades of military dictatorship. Indeed, Puey himself openly declared himself an “agnostic”<sup>20</sup> —a claim that could provoke communist charges. How did obnoxious but largely innocuous cultural mandates become the heart of the anti-communist law?

Phibun’s cultural mandates were perhaps the first time that what is essentially a code of etiquette and ethics, defined as culture and detailing a sort of code of acceptable practices—What is polite? What is orderly? What is the duty of a good citizen?—became the subject of state power through coercion, either direct or indirect. In a sense, it provided for ethics and etiquette to be politicized, and for politics and things political to be etiquette-ized. These laws provided a bridge that linked the political with the private, the polite with the political. The structure of the bridge here is merely more visible; in fact, the crossing from one side to the other had been going on all along. From here on, however, the process was quite conscious.

In this sense, these laws are not anomalies whatsoever. These are not bizarre and laughable measures that were taken up by a nationalism-mad dictator during World War II. These essentially court-based attempts to homogenize were standard practice; but bringing “propriety” into the purview of politics allowed for a widening of what was seen as political crime. Political crimes not only threatened the state *and* broke standards of propriety—they threatened the state *because* they violated such standards. These culture laws were not simply related to national security violations such as anti-communism; they were an integral part of their conceptual foundation.

## Communism as Political Crime

The first anti-communist law in Thailand was passed in 1933. To break this law, it was very straightforward: anyone attempting to “advocate communism or any communist doctrine” could be subject to ten years in prison and a fine. Communism was defined as “the economic system or theory” which advocates abolition of private property and transference to state or community. Communist doctrine referred to advocating “nationalization” of land, capital, industry, or labor.<sup>21</sup> In 1935, the law was revised to define “communistic doctrine” as any which aims “at forcible overthrow of the existing social order as the only means” of transferring private property over to the state or community.<sup>22</sup> This law was repealed in 1946 during the brief democratic

<sup>20</sup> Puey Ungphakorn, *Best Wishes for Asia*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth P. Landon, *Siam in Transition, a Brief Survey of Cultural Trends in the Five Years Since the Revolution of 1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

<sup>22</sup> “Phraraatchabanyat waa duai khawmmiewnit kaekhai phoemtoem ph.s. 2478, [“Act Concerning Communism Amendment Act.” 20 August 1935], *Raatchakitjaanubeksa* [Royal Gazette] (1 Oct. 2478 [1935]), pp. 1120-21.

period.

In the early 1950s, the Juridical Council was asked to draft a new anti-communist law. An early draft used the word “subversive activities” to describe attempts to overthrow the economic system based on private property, seize power and overthrow the democratic parliamentary system by setting up a dictatorship, or to deprive political rights of the classes overthrown. Two months before the bill became law, the cabinet of ministers asked the Juridical Council to redraft the law so it “directly opposes communism.” Under this version, “communist activities” meant any attempt to bring about “transformation in the economic system” through uncompensated confiscation of private property. It also defined “communist activities as “... instigating children not to respect their parents;...or advocating [for] the people not to believe any religion, with such purposes of adherence to help, support or attaining” such aforementioned economic transformations.<sup>23</sup>

The phrasing, “bringing about hatred between different classes of people” is similar to what was at the time in various versions of Section 104 of the Criminal Law Code of 1908 on sedition, but this was surely the first time in a draft of Thai law that “instigating children not to respect their parents” or persuading “the people not to believe any religion” appeared with the possibility of such severe punishment. Certainly similar measures were mentioned in the National Culture Law of 1942, but the maximum punishment for any cultural violation under that act was a fine of 100 baht. Here, the penalty was imprisonment from ten years to life!

Not only did these measures clearly violate the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, one can only wonder how broadly they might have been interpreted by the courts. Could a father report his rebellious son to the police as a communist? Could playing “devil’s advocate” in a discussion of religion bring a charge of communism? Were these laws really set out just to suppress communism? Or were they also intended to impose a certain kind of vision upon Thai society?

Although the Juridical Council claimed it was the cabinet of ministers that had “directed” that these additional provisions—concerning religion, parents, and hatred between classes—be put into the draft of the act, it seems probable that given Phibun’s Cultural Mandates of just a decade earlier, that the prime minister himself was behind the move.<sup>24</sup> For whatever reason, Phibun removed the cultural items just before the bill became a law, although the final version’s definition did include “communist activities” as something not necessarily communist: “the overthrowing of a democratic form of government of which the King is the Head.”

## Marriage of Culture and Communism

Phibun may have consoled himself with the knowledge that in the same year, the

<sup>23</sup> Letter 11738/2495 lap chaphau’ [confidential] from President of Cabinet of Ministers to the Secretary-General of the Juridical Council concerning letter nau. 631/2495 of 13/03/95 proposing a draft of control of subversive acts act [ph.r.b. paungkan kaankratham an pen phai tau chaat], 5 September 2495 [1952], and “Draft submitted by Nai Yut,” n.d., in, Thailand, Juridical Council, “Kotmai paungkan khaummiewnit,” in, *Ru’ang set* [Finished Matters], Vol.452. From the order of the documents in this volume, and from the discussions at the Juridical Council as will be clearer below, this draft was submitted to the council sometime between 5 September and 9 October.

<sup>24</sup> JCC, Meeting No.61/2495, 14 October 2495 [1952], “Agenda: law preventing Communism,” in, Thailand, juridical Council, “Kotmai paungkan khaummiewnit,” in, *Ru’ang set* [Finished Matters], Vol. 452.

government had created a new Ministry of Culture *and* elevated the status of the National Culture Institute (created during World War II) to a ministerial level. In effect, 1952 saw the creation of the anti-communist law and the elevation of the importance of “culture,” as two ministries became responsible for its maintenance and propagation.<sup>25</sup>

During World War II, the attempts by Phibun to link power and culture unraveled after his government fell, or at least seemed to go into abeyance. It was a small victory for Phibun to elevate the status of “culture” by creating a ministry to oversee it. But the marriage of power and culture was truly consummated with the *coup* of Sarit Thanarat in 1958. As Sarit and his minions swept away all vestiges of democracy, they did so largely in the name of culture and its relation to subversion.

I can think of no better way of expressing this than by pointing out the appropriateness of the government’s appointment of the first director of the newly-created National Security Council in 1959—none other than *Luang* Wichit Watthakan. Here was the man who served as the major architect for the cultural provisions under Phibun in the early 1940s. Some of Phibun’s cronies, including Phibun himself, fled the country in 1957, or were replaced by Sarit’s people. Not only did Wichit survive the purge, he emerged as Sarit’s principal ideologue, coming to popularize the terms, *kaan phatthanaa* (development) and *patiwat* (revolution), in much the same way as he had done two decades earlier with *watthanatham* (culture). Although the National Security Council was to concern itself with all matters of “national security”—military and otherwise—the appointment of Wichit as its first director—a man known for his literary and cultural talents more than military acumen—indicates that the military government saw some sort of connection between security, power, and culture.<sup>26</sup>

In 1969, this same marriage was legally consummated with the revision of the anti-communist law. In this version, “communist activities” referred to “infiltrating, propagandizing, mobilizing, spying, engaging in sabotage, using force/violence” in order to, beyond the usual mention of changing the economic system, also to “undermine national security, the institution of religion, the institution of the monarchy, or the democratic form of government with the King as Head of State.”

The 1969 revision, though, introduces a great number of vague terms, such as “infiltrating” or “propagandizing.” The rather clear “overthrowing of government” of the 1952 version is lost to the decidedly vague act of “undermining” and to the equally vague entities of “national security,” the institutions of religion and monarchy, or “a democratic form of government.” All of these vague terms lend themselves very easily to a more cultural interpretation. However, it is in Section 9 of the law that the cultural aspects could not be made any more explicit. Below is first the 1952 measure, and then its revision from 1969:

**Section 9.**—Whoever shall provide support to a Communist Organization or Member in any of the following ways,

(1) provide lodging, residence, or meeting place,

<sup>25</sup> Office of the National Culture Commission, *Organizational Structure, Office of the National Culture Commission, Ministry of Education, Thailand* (Bangkok: United Production Press, n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> This point is clearly made in the excellent study of the Sarit regime made by Thak Chaloeontiarana in his work, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*. See especially Chapter Four, pp. 172-220.

- (2) induce any person to become a member of the organization or group,
- (3) give money, or provide any other type of equipment, shall be punished with imprisonment from five to ten years.<sup>27</sup>

The 1969 revision leaves unchanged the first two items in this provision, but adds an entirely new third clause and a revised fourth, which outlaws anyone attempting:

- (3) to encourage any other person to lose their faith in religion, or any act which destroys the traditions and customs [*khanop praphenii*] of the Thai race [*chon chaat thai*], or encourages any other person to lose their doctrine which has principles and practices [*latthi thii mii lakkaan ruu' kaanpatibat pen kaan tham hai*] in causing people to lose their faith in religion or the traditions and customs of the Thai race.<sup>28</sup>

We can see here just how important the “cultural” groundwork done in previous decades was to defining the terms of this provision. What religion? (The ones officially sanctioned by the state.) Which traditions and customs? (Those defined by the state.) Whose customs? (Those of the “Thai race”—i.e. that of the primarily “central Thai” ruling elite.)

Of course, questions abound. Would someone like Puey be in danger of being called a communist were he to openly speak of the reasons he was an agnostic or if he encouraged his part-Thai children to think critically rather than by rote? Would lack of adherence to the clearly invented traditions from the World War II era such as not standing at attention during the national anthem twice a day put someone at risk? Would encouraging other “degraded Thai” traditions such as the more “Lao” practice of eating sticky rice or using fermented fish be worthy of a communist charge? Would the Baukayau (Karen) teaching their own traditions and language to their children be a violation? Could a doctor who advocated the use of modern medicines over traditional herbal ones be charged as a communist? Even more interestingly, it could be argued that this law violates itself. It at once outlaws advocating the idea of “collectively owned property” which is in fact probably the best way of describing the traditional system of land tenure of the “Thai race.” It would seem that the government, by advocating capitalist development, was the greatest violator of tradition and religious values.

## Events of 6 October and its Aftermath

Although thousands would eventually be charged with being communist, it might be that the law had a more important role than merely harassing and suppressing a wide variety of opponents and critics who challenged the power of the state. In the final analysis, the law created an atmosphere of distrust, fear, and viciousness that fed the brutality of 6 October 1976 and sent Puey and thousands of others into exile or into the jungle to fight with the Communist Party of Thailand. The students were murdered on that day for reasons of culture—they were “burdens” to the country, Vietnamese, communists, etc., intent on bringing a change to the culture. And in fact

<sup>27</sup> Thailand, Government, “Phraraatchabanyat paungkan kaankratham,” in *PKPS*, Vol. 65, pp. 365-67.

<sup>28</sup> *Phraraatchabanyat paungkan kaankratham an pen khaummiewnit ph.s. 2495* [Act on prevention of Communist Activities of 1952] (Krungthep: Suut phaisaan, 2533). A related Section 12 of the revision specified that it was against the law for anyone to “hold a training or instruct any person” or “to propagate through advertising, persuasion, advise, or influence the thinking” in an effort to have another person “agree with or approve of communism” or to become a member of any communist organization. The penalty for doing such was imprisonment from two to five years.



culture once again, just as during World War II, went hand in hand with armed conflict.

As the fight of army and police against “communist” insurgents peaked in the late 1970s, so did the concern over culture. In 1979, an act of parliament created the National Culture Commission. In describing its own history, the Commission claims that it was only during World War II that “the Government began to view culture as a key dimension in the process of nation building and decided to assume a more active role in cultural development.”<sup>29</sup> The creation of the commission was necessary “because culture is something which shows the specific characteristics of the nation, and the uniqueness of the people in the nation which is the important root of the steadfastness and stability of the country-nation.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the commission was the result of “the rediscovery of the interest and need to preserve, develop and strengthen Thai culture.”<sup>31</sup>

A “priority list of activities” for the “revitalization of five basic social values” is:

1. Self-reliance, diligence, responsibility
2. Moderation in spending and saving
3. Discipline, law and order
4. Adherence to religious teachings
5. Love of King; country and religion<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, this commission’s booklet states that:

Culture as embodied in the people of any nation is a most precious commodity and a priceless resource. Thailand in particular has a rich and diverse cultural heritage to draw upon. Thai people are not averse to assimilating new ideas and ways of life in its effort towards modernization. What makes Thailand unique in this respect is the demonstrated ability to uphold and maintain tradition amidst the onslaught of technological development.<sup>33</sup>

What is quoted here could have just as easily come from 1942 as 1979. “Culture” as such has never been the goal as much as something more akin to “thought control.” If the culture had been in need of preservation and promotion in 1942, there is no reason to believe that it was simply overlooked from 1958 to 1979. Instead, “culture” has always been the key component in any of the severely repressive programs conducted by the Thai state. The only question has been whether threats to “thought control” would be “negatively” punished—as under the military governments from 1958 to 1973 and 1976 to the mid-1980s—or whether they would alternatively or sometimes concurrently be “positively” promoted, as through the activities of this commission.

<sup>29</sup> Office of the National Culture Commission, *Organizational Structure*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> “Phraraatchabanyat samnakngaan khana kammakaan watthanatham haeng chaat ph.s. 2522” [Office of the National Culture Commission Act of 1979], in, Fai wichaakaan suut phaisaan, *Phraraatchabanyat watthanatham haeng chaat ph.s. 2485* [National Culture Act of 1942] (Krungthep: Suut phaisaan, 2532 [1989]), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Office of the National Culture Commission, *Organizational Structure*, pp. 4, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the National Culture Commission, *Organizational Structure*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> For a complete text of the act which created the Commission, see, Office of the National Culture Commission, *Organizational Structure*, pp.28-31. For the text of the act in Thai, it is included as part of the National Culture Act of 1942. See, “Phraraatchabanyat samnakngaan,” in, Fai wichaakaan suut phaisaan, *Phraraatchabanyat watthanatham*, pp. 7-10.

It is not hard to discern the approach in deciding what Thai culture was to be. Common to all Thai government policy on culture is that it strengthens unity and national sovereignty, and preserves peace and order. Whatever led to these outcomes was a desirable part of culture. Whatever led to disunity, chaos, agitation could not be culture. Instead, it was rebellion, communism, sedition, or defamation of the king.<sup>34</sup>

Although the guidelines attempt to make culture somehow seem to be the natural result of people living in a certain time and place, it should be noted that there has been in fact a great deal of disunity in “Thai” history, and a number of attempts at creating a diversity of visions for society. But Thailand has been held together in unity by force and a fundamental lack of freedom. Thus, the unity that has been maintained has been anything but natural. Anyone who has attempted to fight for the rights of farmers, of the Northeasterners, of the Muslims in the South, of the numerous mountain peoples, of newspapers, of free speech has been seized under the national security laws and put away. Because those who use massive force and thought control can create unity, murderers like Sarit Thanarat are celebrated while peasant and student leaders are labeled as troublemakers and shot. Thailand thus has historically lost its best to execution or exile such as Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, leaving power-seekers to lead the country. Historically speaking, the Thai state has ironically taken the intellectual, social, and political silence it has created through the application of the national security laws as some sort of proof that the culture has in fact created unity.



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<sup>34</sup> “Naew thaen nai kaan raksaa songsoem lae phatthanaa watthanatham ph.s. 2529 taam nayobai watthanatham haeng chaat” [Guidelines in the Maintenance, Promotion, and Development of Culture of 1984 according to the National Culture Policies], in Fai wichaakaan suut phaisaan, *Phraraatchabanyat watthanatham*, pp. 54-60.

# 'Stacking the Chips': Rethinking the Origins of the Thai-US Special Relationship

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S. Jayanama

Historians tend to argue that Thailand's decision to forge a "special relationship" with the United States at the end of the Second World War was wise and prudent, if not inevitable, in the light of the pervasive threat of international communism. They stress the mutual interests (ideology included) of the Thai and American leaders. On the one side, the Truman administration was attempting to contain the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia. On the other side, to protect their country and people, the anticommunist Thai military leaders sought shelter under American security umbrella.<sup>1</sup> The durability of the warm Thai-US relationship during the Cold War spoke for itself, so we are told.

In retrospect, this disarmingly simplistic analysis needs a major reassessment. For too long, the mainstream approach has determined the scope and nature of discourse on postwar Thai-US relations. Contrary to popular beliefs, the Thai government's decision to embrace the United States after World War Two might have been based on reasons other than national security and Cold War considerations.

"Thailand's involvement with the United States after the Second World War could be viewed as one prompted by domestic political concerns of the Thai [military] leaders," a leading Thai historian has asserted.<sup>2</sup> The state is not a unitary actor, and therefore there is no consensual national interest. This is especially true when it comes to the perception of external pressure and national security: Different domestic actors perceive international pressure differently. Thus national security may be easily transformed into a "convenient pathology" that is used to legitimize a foreign policy course that serves the vested interest of particular domestic actors. After all, there are always winners and losers in every policy choice.

Here it suffices to say that the Thai military leaders aligned themselves with the United States because they saw the US as a milk cow for squeezing out military and economic aid, which

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Wiwat Mungandi, "The Security Syndrome (1941-1975)," in Wiwat Mungandi and William Warren, editors, *A Century and a Half of Thai-American Relations* (Bangkok, 1982), pp. 63-113; R. Sean Randolph, "Thai-American Relations in Perspective," in Karl D. Jackson and Wiwat Mungandi, editors, *United States and Thailand Relations* (Berkeley, 1986) pp. 25-38.

<sup>2</sup> Thak Chaloemtiarana, ed., *Thai Politics, 1932-1957: Extracts and Documents*, vol. 1 (Bangkok: The Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978), p. 803.

was necessary for consolidating and legitimizing their power and positions vis-à-vis their political rivals. Although the Thai military leaders were concerned about the dangers of international communism, their immediate interest was augmenting their political power and guaranteeing their political survival. Furthermore, since Thailand's resolve to embrace the United States was largely the product of the decisions of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram [hereafter Phibun] and a handful of military leaders, the special relationship that emerged after the Second World War should be seen as one simply between the US and the Thai military elite. Many Thais did not agree with such policy. Despite realizing the threat of communism, many capable Thai officials and citizens at the time believed that Bangkok could maintain an independent, pragmatic, and (perhaps even) nonaligned foreign policy.

Field Marshal Phibun's decision to recognize the Bao Dai regime of South Vietnam in early 1950 marked the watershed in postwar Thai foreign policy. It not only reflected the Cold War in the international arena but also contributed to the arrival of the Cold War in Thailand. It was the first of many moves that transformed the kingdom into an unequivocal supporter of US foreign policy. Put another way, it signified the shift in Thai foreign policy from the traditional middle-of-the-road approach to one being uncritically pro-American, reducing Thailand's elbowroom for pursuing more independent foreign and domestic policies. The decision helped buy US trust in Thailand as an anticommunist bulwark, making Bangkok a recipient of American military and economic largesse. Most important, it marked the beginning of a close relationship between the US government and the Thai military elite, one that lasted for several decades. By early 1953, as the American ambassador in Bangkok rightly observed, "Thailand has in effect assumed some of the characteristics of a protégé."<sup>3</sup>

Phibun's decision to put all his eggs in the American basket and the subsequent support he obtained from Washington contributed to the polarization of Thai society and the strengthening of the military and undemocratic elements at the expense of civilian sectors (e.g. the Foreign Ministry)—with all the negative sociopolitical ramifications they implied to the Thai people. This tragic feature was characteristic of American satellites in East Asia. To a large extent, the American empire in East Asia was equivalent to the Soviet one in Eastern Europe. Both relied on military interventions to suppress dissent or independent nationalism, supported and/or installed repressive single-party dictatorships, and so on.<sup>4</sup> Put differently, it was an empire *for* liberty, not an empire *of* liberty: politico-economic pluralism, diversity, or self-determination that did not strengthen American hegemony and facilitate the maintenance of a type of liberty in the US was not tolerated.<sup>5</sup>

## I The Setting

By autumn 1949 United States policymakers concluded that the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan (hence of international capitalism) could not be achieved without

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Stanton, January 23, 1953. Cited in Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), pp. 20 and 96; also *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, David Ryan, "By Way of Introduction: the United States, Decolonization, and the World System," in David Ryan and Victor Pungong, eds., *The United States and Decolonization: Power and Freedom* (St. Martin's Press, INC, 2000), pp. 2,3, and 10.

creating ‘stability’ in peripheral areas such as in Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> The communist victory in China, the Soviet explosion of the atomic bomb, the Berlin Blockade, the economic weakness of Western Europe and Japan, and the upsurge of intense nationalist and anti-colonialist sentiments in Southeast Asia heightened the importance of East Asia in American strategic and politico-economic calculations. On the one hand, the US, as recommended by NSC 48, had “to contain and where feasible to reduce [i.e. rollback]” Communism in Asia. NSC 48 is widely seen as the NSC 68 for Asia. Through the lens of what is later known as the domino theory, US officials increasingly saw communism as a malignant cancer that could easily spread. For example, NSC 64 argued that the fall of Indochina to communist control “would undoubtedly lead to the fall of other mainland states of Southeast Asia.” On the other hand, and inextricable from the first point, a non-communist Southeast Asia was necessary for the economic recovery of Europe and Japan (the non-communist “grand areas”). Britain’s economy was partly dependent on the Malaya rubber trade and France’s was tied to Indochina. The principal planning to hook up parts of Southeast Asia with Japan occurred in the summer of 1949. Japan was seen as the jewel of the “Great Crescent”<sup>7</sup>, the “workshop” of Asia, the “superdomino.” A communist-dominated Southeast Asia would deprive Japan of markets for its goods and sources of raw materials. Therefore, US planners feared that Japan, out of desperation, might be compelled to accommodate communist interests, might be blackmailed by Beijing and Moscow or, worse, might reincarnate into a rabid anti-Western power attempting to reestablish an exclusive Pan-Asian bloc.<sup>8</sup> To sum up, Southeast Asia figured prominently in postwar US policy agenda not so much because it was considered a vital American interest but because the region was vital for important American allies and for the revival of international capitalism—to which American hegemony and political economy of freedom at home was tied to.

By late 1949, in part because of the need to contain communism, maintain a preponderance of power and credibility (containment and expansion were essentially the two sides of the same coin), integrate core and peripheries, revive international capitalism, and preserve freedom at home, American policymakers relegated their zeal for liberalism to the back burner when dealing with Southeast Asia. It was selfishly hoped that once the needs of Washington and its main allies were met the Third World itself would benefit. However Southeast Asian “militant nationalism” stood in the way of European and Japanese recovery. As nationalists, many Southeast Asian leaders, among other things, might succumb to the sin of using their resources for their own needs and development rather than subordinating them to the core. Indigenous communism posed the same threat. Therefore, Washington, to cite just two examples, ultimately supported the reimposition of French colonial rule on Indochina and the autocratic Phibun regime in Thailand

<sup>6</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, ideas for the following three paragraphs are from Robert McMahon, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-46; Thomas D. Lairson, “Revising Postrevisionism: Credibility and Hegemony in the Early Cold War” in Allen Hunter, ed., *Rethinking the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 63-90; Thomas McCormick, *America’s Half Century: United States Policy in the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1995); Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford and New York, 1982); Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1980* (New York, 1988); Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca and London, 1987); Bruce Cumings, *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, 1992); Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: US-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York and London, 1997); Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York and Oxford, 1985); William Appleman Williams *et al.*, eds., *America in Vietnam, A Documentary History* (New York, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> For example, in a conversation with British diplomats, Secretary of State Dean Acheson explained that “the US conceived its interest in [the Far East] as an arc which stretched from Japan through India and that [American] interest was not merely a line so to speak drawn from California through Japan to China.” *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*), 1949, 7, p. 930.

<sup>8</sup> Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the US Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), p. 45.

to restore ‘stability’ in the region. As George Kennan succinctly warned in 1948 that for the Far East the US “should cease to talk about vague...and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization.” Kennan went on to predict that the “day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts.”<sup>9</sup> This more or less coincided with the view of the influential Secretary of State Dean Acheson. In one of his more candid moments, Acheson confided, “I was always a conservative.” “I sought to meet the Soviet menace and help create some order out of the chaos of the world. I was seeking stability and never had much use for revolution [read, self-determination].”<sup>10</sup>

Following this logic, to postwar American architects, Thailand was simply a domino whose capitulation to communist control or flirtation with independent nationalism might jeopardize American credibility, the viability of international capitalism, and postwar ‘stability’. The US’s ultimate objective was not so much to promote freedom and democracy in Thailand or to help the Thai but to protect itself from the perceived communist threat and foster American hegemony. In other words, a non-communist Thailand was not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Premier Phibun represented the “moderate nationalist” type who would allow American economic and political penetration, who would not embark on radical policies that ran counter to American interest. If Washington needed Phibun’s cooperation and support to contain communism and to buttress the political economy of the Far East, Phibun needed the Americans for political survival. Phibun was certainly not an American puppet, but he lacked widespread support and was autocratic, and his shaky tenure was threatened by numerous disgruntled elements in the society—e.g., the military, liberals, aristocrats, leftists, and communists. He was a nationalist, but his nationalism warred with his ambition and political opportunism. Washington aligned itself with and was increasingly dependent on an unreliable and unstable regime.

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Economically, in late 1949, Thailand was still the most prosperous and peaceful state in Southeast Asia, if not in Asia.<sup>11</sup> Politically, however, the Phibun regime was still unstable.<sup>12</sup> The country’s postwar politics had been by and large a struggle for power between the various political and military cliques rather than a conflict over ideological issues. Promoted and supported by the Coup Group<sup>13</sup> Phibun returned to power in 1948 by toppling the government of

<sup>9</sup> Top Secret, PPS 23, February 24, 1948. This document can be found in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment, Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950* (New York: Columbia UP, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Lloyd Gardner, *Spheres of Influence* (Cambridge: John Murray, 1993), p. 264.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum by the Office in Charge of Economic Affairs, Office of the Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, 16 March 1950, *FRUS*, 6, p. 60. Also see the observations of the journalist Andrew Roth, “Siam: Tranquility and Sudden Death.” *The Nation*, October 1, 1949, pp. 317-18.

<sup>12</sup> Facts and ideas for this and the following paragraphs are from: Frank Darling, *Thailand and the United States* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1965), pp. 71-73; John L. S. Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1981), pp. 124-25; Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand’s Durable Premier, Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957* (Oxford and Singapore: Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 195-96; Thak, pp. 803-04; Surachart Bamrungasuk, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule, 1947-1977* (Bangkok: Edition Duangkamol, 1988), pp. 47-48; Gary Hess, *The United States’ Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), p. 348; Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Kusuma Snitwongse, and Suchit Bunbongkarn, *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive* (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, 1990), p. 20; Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 82-83; David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1982), pp. 266-75; Anand Phibunsongram, *Marshal Phibun Phibunsongram* (Bangkok, 1989), pp. 236-61.

<sup>13</sup> The Coup Group itself was divided into four factions. The first was led by Lt. Gen. Phin Choonhavan, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Police Major General Phao Sriyanon, who controlled the tank and cavalry forces. Lt. Gen. Kach Kachsonggram, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Army, led the second faction. Colonel Sarit Thanarat, Commander of the First Division, who controlled most of the infantry forces in Bangkok, headed the third faction. The General Staffs Officers formed the fourth faction.

the democratically elected Pridi Banomyong. He was not as strong and as popular as he was in 1938 however. He lacked direct control over the military, and many of his trusted friends and advisors had been purged from the armed forces since the end of the war. In large part, the Coup Group also determined the composition of the Phibun Cabinet. The Coup Group and armed forces themselves were divided into various factions, all vying to create their own economic and military base in order to increase their political leverage in the country. At the same time, a sizeable number of high-ranking military officers and aristocrats supported a constitutional government and wanted to limit the role of the armed forces merely to defending the country. In an unsuccessful feat, they attempted to overthrow Phibun and the Coup Group in October 1948; the plotters were subsequently arrested, branded as communists, and executed. At the end of October, a separatist movement in the northeastern part of Thailand threatened the viability and cohesion of the country. A few months later, the precariousness of the Phibun regime was again highlighted. Aided by the Navy, ex-premier Pridi launched a comeback coup, which is widely known as the Palace Rebellion of February 1949. Though the Palace coup failed to materialize, it revealed the government's inability to defend itself and Phibun's unpopularity. (After the Palace Rebellion the Coup Group again purged the armed forces of 'extremists' and opponents.) In sum, Phibun was threatened and challenged politically not only by the liberals, conservatives, and the leftists in the country, but also by the Navy, non-Coup Group military officers, and even the Coup Group members themselves.

The term 'communist' was liberally applied to encompass anyone who opposed Phibun and the Coup Group. For example, sensing the impending October coup, Lt. Gen. Phin Choonhavan (a Coup Group leader) asked the Defense Minister to screen out communists among government officials.<sup>14</sup> The Cabinet made a similar proposal to the Interior Minister on October 1, the day of the coup.<sup>15</sup> Tests were eventually carried out in numerous provinces; no communists were detected however. (Likewise, since the Navy supported Pridi in the Palace Rebellion, they were dreaded by Phibun and were kept under constant surveillance.<sup>16</sup>) Months later, in a special parliamentary meeting, the premier confidently remarked that unlike its neighbors Thailand had stability and faced no internal communist threat. Phibun even broached the possibility of legalizing the creation of indigenous communist parties as in a number of Western European countries.<sup>17</sup>

Phibun's political survival *as a leader* depended by and large on appeasing, purging, and balancing the various interests of the Coup Group members and the armed forces. One of the major aims of the Coup Group was to restore and augment the influence and prestige of the army. Their desire coincided with the American commitment to contain communism and independent or radical nationalism in Asia. Phibun and the Coup Group tapped on and exploited the threat of communism to obtain American aid and to strengthen their pretext for enlarging the role of the armed forces in national affairs. By siding with the "Free World" to fight communism, Field Marshal Phibun hoped to erase the memory of his wartime pro-Axis activity and acquire for his military dictatorship the American support given to anticommunists in other parts of the world.

<sup>14</sup> Phin to Defense Minister, September 21, 1948, MT. 0201.1.1.57/1, Ministry of Interior Papers, Thai National Archives (hereafter cited as TNA).

<sup>15</sup> N. W. 154/2491, Secretary of the Cabinet Office to Interior Minister, October 1, 1948, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, 2438/2492, Governor of Chachoeng Sao province to Interior Minister, March 12, 1949, MT. 0201.2.1.59/1, Ministry of Interior Papers, TNA; 1716/2492, Governor of Thonburi province to Ministry of Interior, March 16, 1949, *ibid.*; 48/2492, Governor of Udonthani province to Minister of Interior, March 9, 1949, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Records of Parliamentary Meetings, Special Sessions, 1949*, Volume 2, Session 11, February 10, 1949, pp. 1218-24, Parliament Library.

Since their loyalty was still dubious, Washington was initially unwilling to provide military aid to any former Axis states—especially to those that belonged to the racial Other. More important, internationalist actors in the US were still unable to gain the upper hand over the nationalists/isolationist forces.<sup>18</sup>

Phibun was by nature devious and opportunistic. The Coup leaders perceived the field marshal as the channel to acquire American aid and international loans, *as their patron*. (Since any influx of foreign military aid and funds was for the most part outside parliamentary control, the Coup Group and military elite could use it according to their whims.)<sup>19</sup> In other words, Phibun needed aid to strengthen his political leadership vis-à-vis other Coup members, particularly Police Major General Phao Sriyanon<sup>20</sup> and Colonel Sarit Thanarat—two unsavory figures who served as Phibun's power base. Therefore, on the one hand, he needed to be accepted by the West as the only reasonable and moderate Thai leader—i.e., he had to monopolize access to the West. On the other hand, he had to bargain hard to obtain the greatest amount of aid. Phibun manipulated Thai foreign policy to achieve these ends.

## II

### Scurrying for Aid: October 1948-June 1949

Since Phibun's position was still precarious, the request for American military aid may be interpreted as the government's attempt to secure the support of the armed forces, to guarantee its political survival. Also it probably had little to do with Cold War considerations because Thailand faced no internal communist threat as the premier admitted. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan (and later Point Four) helped inspire the Thai leaders to request for aid. Having weathered a coup on October 1, 1948, the Defense Ministry asked the Foreign Ministry to act as a conduit for acquiring American military assistance later that month. The coup was described by propagandists as "an attempted Communist uprising" although a significant number of coup members were discontented army professionals and aristocrats.<sup>21</sup> The fact that the ruling elites focused on a capital-intensive modernization of the armed forces highlights their tenuous position. If they had had popular support from the masses they might have opted for the cheaper labor-intensive growth instead.

Despite the assurance of US military attachés in Bangkok that Washington would consider granting military aid to any state that applied for it early on, aid was slow to come. In mid-February 1949 the Defense Minister, who was handpicked by the Coup Group<sup>22</sup>, informed Field Marshal Phibun of Defense's decision to modernize the army, navy, airforce, and the police.<sup>23</sup> Again, this coincided with the secret arrival of Pridi Banomyong in Thailand early that month. The military elites knew about the planned Pridi coup; the Pridi-led Palace Rebellion was quickly crushed by Colonel Sarit Thanarat in late February. A victim of numerous attempted coups, the

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<sup>18</sup> See Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of US National Security Policy, 1949-51* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Wyatt, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

<sup>20</sup> After the Palace Rebellion, the Police was empowered to protect government buildings and to maintain peace and order in Bangkok. 4/92, Government order, February 27, 1949, MT.0201.2.1.59/2, Ministry of Interior Papers, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Roth, "Fact and Fiction in Siam," *The Nation*, December 25, 1948; Darling, pp. 71-72.

<sup>22</sup> Suchit Bunbongkarn, *Karn Patana Tang Karn Muang Kong Thai [The Evolution of Thai Politics]* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn UP, 1988), p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> N. 2429/2492, Defense Minister to Phibun, February 14, 1949, [2] SR. 0201.99/33, Box 2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.



government's political survival appreciably depended on the support of the Coup leaders. If Phibun and his government had nothing to offer the Coup leaders, could they still rely on their vital support? In a Cabinet meeting in May, some ministers voiced their concern that it was taking too long to obtain US military aid. They blamed the Foreign Ministry for dragging its feet on this issue. Pote Sarasin, then serving as deputy foreign minister, defended the ministry, arguing that the delay was due to the bureaucratic and congressional procedures in the US.<sup>24</sup>

Many internationalists in the US State Department and Foreign Service recognized the importance of Thailand in Washington's strategic and politico-economic thinking. PPS 51, the State's initial position on Southeast Asia that served as the basis for successive policy papers, suggested that the US should "seek to strengthen Siam."<sup>25</sup> Throughout 1949 the American ambassador to Thailand, Edwin Stanton, lobbied strenuously to extend US aid to Bangkok, insisting that the provision of aid would bind Thailand firmly in the American camp and that the withholding of aid would result in Thailand's "fatalistic acquiescence to Communist domination."<sup>26</sup> At the same time, however, many of them were also suspicious of Thailand's intention and foreign policy. Thailand could not expect US military aid unless it had explicitly shown that it was unequivocally committed to US anticommunism. For example, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, W. Walton Butterworth, feared that "the Siamese were inclined to continue the habits they had formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of playing off one great power against another, and that they had not fully understood" the threat of Russian imperialism and communism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> The influential Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, echoed this attitude: "[T]his general indifference or lack of understanding may prove to be disastrous for [Thailand]. It is impossible for the United States to help [Southeast Asian states] resist Communism if they are not prepared to help themselves."<sup>28</sup> American internationalist policymakers were waiting to elicit an important 'gesture' from Thailand. Equally important, they were having problems at home. Throughout 1949 the politico-economic faction advocating a small defense budget (e.g., limited expansion abroad) was still a tremendous force, and it was strongly supported by the powerful Nationalist Republicans in the Senate.<sup>29</sup>

Although Premier Phibun ritually denounced and demonized international Communism throughout 1949, his postwar foreign policy still followed by and large the traditional middle-of-the-road approach. In part this was because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still played an influential role in shaping the country's foreign policy. Phibun relied on the Foreign Ministry as an important channel to secure American goodwill and military aid. Allowing civilians to formulate foreign policy would also help Phibun maintain a façade of democracy in Thailand; this was deemed necessary to appease Western public sentiment and to legitimize his role as the protector of constitutional; democracy. The Foreign Ministry undoubtedly despised communism as an ideology<sup>30</sup>, and it desired to obtain American aid. Nevertheless the ministry's attitude towards communism was cautious and pragmatic. It believed that Thailand had to deal with the

<sup>24</sup> N. 7295/2492, Pote Sarasin to Phibun, May 21, 1949, [3] SR. 0201.13.1/2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> PPS 51, March 29, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7:2, p. 1132.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see Stanton to Secretary of State, June 14, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7:1.

<sup>27</sup> Top Secret, Memorandum of Conversation by Butterworth, September 9, 1949, *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>28</sup> Acheson, December 1949. Cited in Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Fordham, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-35 and 111 but also *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> Aristocrats and individuals from well to do families populated the Foreign Ministry. They had a lot to lose from a communist takeover of Thailand. In other words, their personal economic and financial interests might have also influenced their anticommunist attitude. See Fineman, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

world as it existed, and therefore it had to avoid taking sides in the ensuing Cold War that would limit future liberty of action. As a magnanimous state, the US would provide unconditional aid to Thailand and would rescue it from communist invasion the ministry seemed to believe. Phibun ultimately realized that this policy was not conducive to obtaining American aid.

After a meeting with W. Walton Butterworth in June the Thai ambassador to the United States, Prince Wan Waithayakon, informed the Foreign Ministry that Thailand must continue to pursue an anticommunist foreign policy but implied that this objective was realizable only with American military assistance. Prince Wan made it clear to Butterworth that Thailand was waiting for large-scale US military assistance in the form of grant as opposed to arms sales. That was why, Prince Wan continued, Thailand turned to the US, not Britain, for aid; London was only willing to sell arms to Bangkok not grant them.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Ministry of Defense, American military aid was not forthcoming because Washington downplayed the communist threat facing Thailand. Therefore, Defense proposed that the Foreign Ministry strove to make the United States “understand” (i.e. strove to exaggerate) the communist threat that was menacing Bangkok. The Cabinet perceived Defense’s proposal as sound and ordered the Foreign Ministry to work even harder to secure American military aid.<sup>32</sup> Pursuant to this mandate Ambassador Wan informed Dean Rusk that Thailand was the only country in Southeast Asia that had enough stability to transform itself into a staunch anticommunist bastion. Prince Wan assured Rusk of Thailand’s anticommunist policy, citing its cooperation with London in crushing insurgencies in Malaya as an example. Aid would definitely be used to support US containment policy, he implied. Though there was no Thai communist, Prince Wan insisted that the large Chinese community and the approximately 20,000 Chinese communists operating in Thailand posed a formidable threat to the country. As a result, Prince Wan requested for immediate US military aid. At the end of the meeting, Rusk queried Wan whether Premier Phibun had popular support, and the ambassador replied affirmatively.<sup>33</sup> As usual, the Thai government believed it could exact military aid from the US without making any concrete commitment.

### III

#### **American Military Aid and the Bao Dai Recognition: July 1949-January 1950**

The Thai request for American aid would ultimately intertwine with the Bao Dai issue and the evolving American containment/expansion policy in Asia. Phibun would soon realize that to obtain US aid, more was required from Thailand than sharp anticommunist rhetoric and vague promises. He had to abandon Thailand’s flexible foreign policy and aligned the country firmly in the US camp, to move in sync with the developing American policy of “hard” containment. The recognition of Bao Dai not only marked the shift in Thai foreign policy but also the gradual waning power of the Foreign Ministry and civilians in shaping and molding the country’s foreign policy.

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<sup>31</sup> N. 10332/2492, Foreign Ministry to Phibun, June 13, 1949, [2] SR. 0201.86/21, Box 5, Cabinet Papers, TNA. Thailand, however, bought a force of Spitfire fighter aircraft and a large number of light infantry weapons from Britain in September 1949. See “Thailand to buy fighter aircraft to bolster armed strength,” *Liberty*, September 23, 1949.

<sup>32</sup> N. 11322/2492, Ministry of Defense to Secretary of the Cabinet, June 24, 1949, SR. 0201.99/33, Box 2, Cabinet Papers, TNA; N. 5498/2492, Secretary of the Cabinet to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 29, 1949, *ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> N. 10537/2492, Pote to Phibun, July 16, 1949, SR. 0201.86/21, Box 5, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

On March 8, 1949, the French government signed the Elysee Agreement with emperor Bao Dai, transforming Vietnam into one of the Associated States in the French Union. In pursuance of agreement terms, Vietnam would be allowed to have its own government, but the French would still control its foreign and defense policy and maintain economic dominance. Bao Dai accepted these terms and created the State of Vietnam on the first of July 1949. The State Department of the US found the agreement gratifying and felt that it had no alternative but to support it.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs closely monitored the situation in Indochina and was in full control of the country's Indochina policy.<sup>34</sup> The ministry informed Field Marshal Phibun that although Cochinchina was granted independence, the French still had substantial influence in the country. Moreover, France, the ministry continued, would not give up its military commitment in Indochina. Responding to the independence of Vietnam the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' American advisor, Kenneth S. Patton, wrote a brief policy paper that initially served as the backbone of Thailand's stance toward Bao Dai.

The American advisor insisted that Bao Dai lacked real popular support by the indigenous people and that there was "every reason to believe" that he was only a French puppet. Hence the Bao Dai regime would not be able to maintain itself in power for long. The advisor concluded, "Certainly, there is no positive action which Thailand can take to support the Bao Dai regime, the failure or success of which will not, in the slightest degree, depend upon the attitude of this Kingdom which may, however, by unwise measures incur the displeasure of the racially kindred people of Indo-China." As a small state, the policy of Thailand "should be directed to the wholehearted cooperation with the United Nations and not against any particular state." This would help guarantee "freedom of action essential to the furtherance of the best interests of the Kingdom."<sup>35</sup> Sensing that the attentive public seemed to disapprove of the recognition of Bao Dai and because his tenure was still shaky, Phibun closely followed the advice of the Foreign Ministry.

From mid-1949 onward Marshal Phibun stepped up his campaign to assure the Americans of Thailand's anticommunism. Since June 1949 the US aid bill to Thailand (on a reimbursable basis) was waiting for congressional approval. In late August 1949 Phibun announced his intention to convene a special conference in Bangkok comprising of representatives from Southeast Asian states to discuss the growing communist menace in the region. This was a direct challenge to the Philippine's proposal for a conference in Baguio in order to organize a Southeast Asian union without military commitments; the Thai premier had earlier expressed his desire to participate in the Baguio conference.<sup>36</sup> The change of mind might have been due to Phibun's intention to flaunt his anticommunism. Secretary of State Acheson noted a remarkable shift in Thai foreign policy from its traditional strategy of trying "to play both sides" to one being anticommunist and pro-West. Yet Acheson remained skeptical of Phibun's intention. He queried the US ambassador in Bangkok Stanton whether Phibun's act had more to do with internal

<sup>34</sup> N. 3524/2492, Foreign Minister to Phibun, March 11, 1949, [2] SR. 0201.86/48, Box 13, Stack I, Cabinet Papers, TNA; T. 1047/2492, Thai ambassador in France to Foreign Minister, April 4, 1949, *ibid.*; N. 5662/2492, Foreign Minister to Phibun, April 21, 1949, *ibid.*; N. 8483/2492, Foreign Minister to Phibun, June 10, 1949, *ibid.*; N. 11304/2492, Pote to Phibun, June 29, 1949, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum by Kenneth S. Patton, July 21, 1949, File 2.1.2.3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Library (hereafter cited as MFAL).

<sup>36</sup> The Philippine Representative to the UN (Romulo) to the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Butterworth) and the Ambassador at Large (Jessup), August 15, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7:2, pp. 1186-87; Memorandum of Conversation by the Chief of the Division of SEA Affairs (Charles S. Reed II), August 17, 1949, *ibid.*

political considerations than his real Cold War concerns. Stanton (incorrectly) replied that he did not believe internal politics had much to do with Phibun's recent act.<sup>37</sup>

In a parliamentary meeting, Phibun promised an MP that he would consider toning down his fierce anticommunist rhetoric, especially when meeting with foreign news correspondents, in order to avoid coming into open conflict with the communist world.<sup>38</sup> In the end, this proved impossible and impractical. On the one hand, the premier genuinely despised communism. On the other hand, he wanted to maintain the momentum of his political offense. In an interview with an UPI journalist, Phibun declared that he was willing to allow the deployment of Anglo-American troops on Thai soil. Since his remark caused uproar in Thai political and intellectual circles, the premier was compelled to qualify his statement, suggesting that Anglo-American troops would be welcomed in the case of a communist attack. Phibun's statement surely was not a slip of tongue for in numerous other occasions he declared that "the Thai are willing to fight Communism till the last drop of blood" and that "Thailand is always ready for war once attacked by Communism." The premier also made it clear to a Reuters journalist that the Cabinet was in the process of legislating a new anticommunist act that would make communist gatherings illegal and would empower the government to close any newspaper company deemed a mouthpiece of communist movements.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, in spite of Phibun's persistent efforts, Congress dropped the aid bill to Thailand in September. The premier realized that his rhetoric wasn't enough: he had to send a stronger signal.

In early October 1949 the Foreign Ministry informed Field Marshal Phibun about the Military Assistance Program (MAP) fund made available by the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) in the United States. (The MDAP was in part designed to placate internationalists in the US State Department who wanted to increase foreign aid—i.e., so that they would not attempt to sabotage the proposal for a small Pentagon budget.) The United States, the ministry told the premier, would provide military assistance to any state that was willing to enter into a "common defense arrangement" with Washington. The Thai ambassador to the US, the ministry continued, wanted to know whether the government was ready to arrange a common defense agreement with the US. Additionally, the ambassador wanted the government to depict clearly to Washington that Thailand was under an "imminent Communist danger" since this feat could facilitate the influx of US military assistance.<sup>40</sup> Since the government was uncertain what the Americans meant by a "common defense arrangement," the Cabinet asked the ambassador to seek further information from Washington. Ambassador Wan replied that the MAP fund was for countries in the "general area of China" and that a recipient state would have to use the military assistance to buttress the overall objectives of US containment policy in Asia. In other words, Thailand would have to convince the US and the West of its anticommunism—i.e., dropped its flexible foreign policy.<sup>41</sup> Quite interestingly, Prince Wan notified the ministry that American

<sup>37</sup> Secretary of State Acheson to Embassy in Thailand, September 1, 1949, *ibid.*, p. 1195; Edwin Stanton to Acheson, September 3, 1949, *ibid.* In the end Phibun's proposed conference failed to materialize.

<sup>38</sup> *Records of Parliamentary Meetings, Ordinary Sessions, 1949*, Volume 1, Session 3, July 6, 1949, pp. 132-44.

<sup>39</sup> See for example, "The Premier is planning to borrow 500 million baht from America to modernize the armed forces," [in Thai] *Thai Mai*, September 14, 1949; "The Thai political crisis" [in Thai], *Kiattisak*, September 18, 1949; "An interview with a Reuters journalist: Phibun plans to issue a new anti-Communist act" [in Thai], September 24, 1949.

<sup>40</sup> N. 14977/2492, Pote Sarasin to Phibun, October 4, 1949, [3] SR. 0201.13.1/2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>41</sup> Many officials in the West doubted Thailand's resolve to fight Communism. For example, in their conversation M. E. Dening of the British Foreign Office agreed with Butterworth that Thailand had the bad habit of playing one great power against another. Dening cited a recent conversation with the Thai ambassador to London which "had led him to conclude that at least that official was inclined to assume that Siam could have the best of both worlds in the event of USSR-Western conflict as it had after the Japanese War." Memorandum of Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Butterworth, September 9, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7:1, pp. 77-78.

officials raised the recognition of Bao Dai as an issue when discussing about the MAP fund with him. Prince Wan insisted that the US probably wanted Thailand to recognize the Bao Dai regime because it was pursuant to the US's policy of containment.<sup>42</sup> Prince Wan's assessment was probably the first time that the recognition of Bao Dai became linked to the acquisition of US military aid, became an important key to obtain American trust—or so the Thai perceived it as such.

Concomitant with Phibun's endeavor to win substantial US military aid was his non-recognition of communist China; America was unwilling to recognize Mao's China. Another partial explanation for this policy may be the fear of a communist diplomatic representation in Bangkok that might influence or incite the local Chinese community—whose loyalty was dubious. This fear was reinforced by the series of diplomatic notes sent by the Chinese Communist Party complaining about the Thai maltreatment of the Chinese community.<sup>43</sup> Surely, Phibun did not want to increase the number of his domestic opponents. Interestingly, less than a year earlier, Phibun declared to an American journalist that the local Chinese were not “very radical” like those in China because “when they come here they are industrious, acquire land, and become richer than the Siamese. Most of them eventually become capitalist.” In China, on the other hand, they were “poor, hungry, and landless.”<sup>44</sup>

On the recognition of Mao's China, the premier closely followed the lead of the Foreign Ministry for it served his purposes. Unlike Field Marshal Phibun, the Foreign Ministry argued that it was not in the ‘national interest’ to grant immediate recognition to the PRC. Realizing that Bangkok had limited power and that it could not in any way contribute to the demise of communism in China, the ministry proposed a wait and see policy. Bangkok had very limited commercial interests in China, and therefore there should be no rush in recognizing communist China. Thailand should de facto recognize Mao's China only when a significant number of other states, especially the great powers, had done so. De jure recognition should be granted when communist China had sufficiently proven that it was not hostile to Thailand.<sup>45</sup> The Cabinet voted in favor of the Foreign Ministry's proposal in mid-November 1949.<sup>46</sup> In early December the Foreign Ministry informed Thai embassies and consulates worldwide of the official policy towards communist China.<sup>47</sup>

Despite diplomatic pressure from Britain, which was in the process of extending de jure recognition, Thailand maintained that it would not grant immediate recognition of communist China.<sup>48</sup> Thus on China Thailand and the United States had a similar policy. In numerous meetings with the Ambassador Stanton, Phibun and Pote reiterated the Thai position.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Wan to Pote, October 10, 1949, File 2.1.2.3, MFAL; N. 15556/2492, Pote to Phibun, October 15, 1949, [3] SR. 0201.13.1/2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum by the Thai Minister Counselor to Canton, September 17, 1949, File 2.1.2.3, MFAL; Memorandum by Pote Sarasin, September 30, 1949, *ibid.*; Anuson Chinvanno, *Thailand's Policies Towards China, 1949-1954* (Oxford: MacMillan, 1991), pp. 61-62.

<sup>44</sup> Roth, “Fact and Fiction in Siam,” p. 724.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum by Luang Patrawathi of the Department of the Far East, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 17, 1949, File 2.1.2.3, MFAL; N. 17257/2492, Pote Sarasin to Phibun, November 15, 1949, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> N. 18282/2492, Pote Sarasin to Phibun, December 3, 1949, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Letter by Pote Sarasin, December 7, 1949, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, the aide-memoire sent by the British Embassy in Bangkok to the Foreign Ministry on December 2, 1949; the conversation between Phibun and Malcolm MacDonald and other British officials; and the letter from British ambassador G. H. Thompson to Pote on December 30<sup>th</sup>. All are from *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Ambassador Stanton to Secretary of State Acheson, October 21, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 9, pp. 140-41; Stanton to Acheson, August 23, 1949, p. 63, *ibid.*; Stanton to Acheson, November 7, 1949, *ibid.*; Stanton to Acheson, December 3, 1949, *ibid.*

Ambassador Stanton had previously warned Acheson that if the United States was the only country not to recognize China, Thailand “fatalistic and inclined [to] take [the] line least resistant unless fully assured [of] foreign support” might be compelled to recognize China and accommodate communism. Thus to make the Thai “stand with us” Stanton proposed giving them a large dose of military and economic support. Indeed Phibun was standing with the US in order to obtain American military aid. But, contrary to Stanton’s assessment, it seemed that as long as the American aid was not forthcoming, the Thai premier was willing to bind the country even closer to Washington.

Field Marshal Phibun also launched a new propaganda blitz. He accused the Russian Legation in Bangkok of corrupting and flooding the Thai minds with communist propaganda and lies. He told a journalist that “If the Bangkok Russian Legation does not watch its step it is going to run into trouble too [i.e. it might be closed down].” The premier went on to insist that he might consider limiting “the number of Russians allowed here.”<sup>50</sup> At that time, the Soviet Legation numbered only twenty-nine, including men, women, and children. Moreover, it was situated on a broad avenue, which was patrolled by Thai police, right across from the American embassy. Phibun’s zealous determination to get-tough with the Russian Legation impressed many Western diplomats. In their meeting, Britain’s high commissioner to Singapore, Malcolm MacDonald, told US Ambassador at Large Philip Jessup that recently Premier Phibun had “been showing more courage and determination.” The premier’s insistence that he might close down the Soviet Legation “was in line with this new policy.”<sup>51</sup>

On the recognition of the Bao Dai regime, however, the United States was at odds with Thailand. Washington wanted Thailand to support Bao Dai while the Thai Foreign Ministry and (initially) the Cabinet opposed such a move. In the end it was essentially Phibun who ultimately determined the orientation of Thai foreign policy.

As mentioned earlier, the Foreign Ministry’s American advisor had laid out the Thai position on Bao Dai in mid-1949. The Foreign Ministry reaffirmed this position in November. The ministry argued that the French-supported Bao Dai regime lacked stability and the emperor did not have popular support from the indigenous population. In fact, the Vietnamese masses seemed to be supporting the Vietminh and Ho Chi Minh. Thus the ministry surmised that France would soon pull its troops out of Indochina, and the Bao Dai regime might subsequently fall. If Bao Dai fell and if Bangkok had granted the emperor recognition, Thailand would unnecessarily invoke hostility from the Vietnamese people—i.e., have a hostile neighbor. The Foreign Ministry therefore (again) *proposed a wait-and-see* policy.<sup>52</sup> Thailand would be in a better position to decide on the Bao Dai issue when the dust had settled. Taking into consideration the above reasons, the ministry continued, the United States would understand that the Thai government could not immediately recognize Bao Dai and *would not* try to link the aid issue with the recognition. In early December the Cabinet voted in favor of the Foreign Ministry’s proposal not to immediately recognize both Mao’s China and Bao Dai’s Vietnam.<sup>53</sup>

Since autumn 1949 the United States had incrementally pressured Thailand to recognize

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<sup>50</sup> “Thailand won’t recognize Mao,” *Bangkok Post*, February 6, 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Memorandum of Conversation by Philip Jessup, February 6, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Note that the Foreign Ministry merely opposed the immediate recognition of Bao Dai.

<sup>53</sup> N. 17257/2492, Pote to Phibun, November 15, 1949, File 2.1.2.3, MFAL; N. 8282/2492, Pote to Phibun, December 3, 1949, *ibid*.

the Bao Dai regime. Thailand and other Southeast Asian states “should take the first steps, otherwise recognition by the United Kingdom and the United States in advance of other countries would make the Bao Dai government look like a Western ‘front’,” Western diplomats and policymakers concluded.<sup>54</sup> Secretary of State Acheson wanted Ambassador Stanton to probe the possibility of a Thai recognition because “some form of recognition by South Asian nations [would] be most helpful in attracting to Bao Dai true nationalists now neutral or following Commie Ho Chi Minh.”<sup>55</sup> At the same time, some American diplomats doubted the ‘boldness’ of the Thai government in taking the leading position in supporting Bao Dai.<sup>56</sup>

In early January 1950 the United States had by and large made up its mind to (de facto) recognize Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as associated states within the French Union.<sup>57</sup> However Washington still desired that recognition by the “UK, Commonwealth, and as many South Asian and other nations as possible precede[d] US recognition.”<sup>58</sup> Premier Phibun’s position on Bao Dai resembled that of the Foreign Ministry until early February 1950. Foreign Minister Pote kept the prime minister well informed of the situation in South Vietnam—e.g. that Bao Dai lacked mass support and real authority and autonomy.<sup>59</sup> In a series of meetings with Ambassador Stanton Phibun reiterated the Foreign Ministry’s position. Despite realizing the grave situation in Indochina and the threat of communism, the recognition of Bao Dai could not be granted until France granted the emperor full control of the government and until he received widespread support. Thailand could not lead the pack in recognizing Bao Dai because the situation in Vietnam was still unclear and because many Thais saw Bao Dai as essentially a French puppet. Thailand along with other Southeast Asian states strongly opposed colonialism and imperialism.<sup>60</sup> Deep down, the US ambassador shared a similar view on Bao Dai and sympathized with the Thai position.<sup>61</sup> Thailand’s refusal to immediately extend recognition to Bao Dai and unwillingness to take the American side in the Cold War infuriated Secretary of State Acheson. Acheson felt that Bangkok downplayed the communist threat posed by Ho Chi Minh. Bangkok unacceptably viewed Ho as a “patriotic nationalist” rather than as a communist stooge. The Thai finance minister had even callously told Butterworth that “Ho Chi Minh is your problem, not ours.”<sup>62</sup> Hence Acheson bitterly concluded, “This apparent indifference to the possible success of one of the strongest Commie leaders in Southeast Asia raises doubt in the Department of the desirability of strengthening the Thai against Commie aggression if the Thai are actually unaware or indifferent to the approaching menace.”<sup>63</sup>

Phibun well knew that the Americans supported Bao Dai and that they wanted the Thais

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum by James L. O’Sullivan, Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, Preliminary talks on Indochina, September 28, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7:1, p. 89.

<sup>55</sup> Acheson to American Embassy in Thailand, December 23, 1949, *ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>56</sup> The Charge in the United Kingdom Holmes to Secretary of State Acheson, September 9, 1949, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>57</sup> Memorandum by Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Butterworth to Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Rusk, January 5, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 690-91.

<sup>58</sup> Circulated Deptel 18 to US embassies in Southeast Asia, January 7, 1950, *ibid.*, p. 692. The State Department “Problem Paper” of February ultimately served as the basis for supporting the French military pacification in Indochina. See, *FRUS*, *ibid.*, pp. 711-15.

<sup>59</sup> For example, see N. 1118/2493, Pote to Phibun, January 23, 1950, [2] SR. 0201.86/51, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>60</sup> Ambassador Stanton to Acheson, December 28, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, p. 115; Stanton to Acheson, January 19, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, p. 697; Stanton to Acheson, January 12, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 693-94; Stanton to Acheson, February 8, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 724-25.

<sup>61</sup> Edwin F. Stanton, *Brief Authority: Recollections of China and Thailand* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1957) p. 238.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Rotter, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>63</sup> Acheson to American Embassy in Thailand, January 17, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, p. 697.

to do likewise.<sup>64</sup> His obduracy on this issue was probably not because he agreed with the basic principles of the Foreign Ministry. In early December 1949, Phibun told Pote that “we should not rush” the Americans to grant aid to Thailand, insisting that doing so would irritate Washington and that Thailand’s prestige would be undermined if it looked too desperate for aid.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, Phibun wanted to preserve his nationalist credentials and the honor of his country. More important, it seemed that Phibun wanted to show the US the political difficulty of recognizing Bao Dai. He wanted to be seen by the Americans as the only ‘voice of reason’—i.e. anticommunist. In so doing he could use the recognition issue as a bargaining chip to obtain more aid. As he told a newspaper, “[T]he government would be neither left nor right, but I am personally anticommunist.”<sup>66</sup> Also Phibun could not be sure whether the United States would reward him with aid if he recognized Bao Dai early on in late 1949. Equally important, he had to show the Coup Group the difficulty of obtaining American aid. This would make the Coup Group increasingly dependent on him as a channel for aid.

After Congress declined aid to Thailand in September 1949<sup>67</sup> it was only in early January 1950 that the Thai ambassador in the US handed a note of request for military aid and the list of armament required by the army, the navy, and the airforce to Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Livingston Merchant.<sup>68</sup> On January 20 this note was transferred to the Defense Department for consideration.<sup>69</sup> By early February, pursuant to the overall objectives of NSC 48/2, the US government was planning to set up an emergency fund totaling some \$75 million for the “general area of China.” As part of the general area of China, Thailand should receive \$10 million, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed.<sup>70</sup> Through Ambassador Wan Phibun was informed of the American aid. The local English newspaper also confirmed this report.<sup>71</sup> Aid was sure to come from the US, but its size and speed largely depended on how well he managed the present situation, Phibun reasoned.<sup>72</sup> Phibun probably believed that the time was now ripe to reveal his trump card: the recognition of Bao Dai.

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In late January 1950 General Kach Kachsonggram, a Coup Group member, allegedly schemed a coup against the Phibun government.<sup>73</sup> Police Major General Phao Sriyanon discovered the coup plot before it materialized, and Kach was exiled to Hong Kong. Subsequently, the armed forces were again purged. It was widely speculated that Kach’s monumental corruption

<sup>64</sup> N. 18479/2492, Pote to Phibun, December 9, 1949, [2] SR. 0201.86/48, Box 13, Stack 1, Cabinet Papers, TNA. Phibun underlined the sentence that stated that Washington backed Bao Dai and that it wanted Thailand to do so too.

<sup>65</sup> N. 18249/2492, December 2, 1949, [3] SR.0201.13.1/2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>66</sup> *Standard Weekly Newspaper*, Bangkok, January 14, 1950. Cited in Wiwat Mungkandhi, “The Security Syndrome (1941-1975),” in Wiwat Mungkandhi and William Warren, editors, *A Century and a Half of Thai-American Relations* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn UP, 1982), p. 85.

<sup>67</sup> It is possible that some senior US policymakers might have used Congress refusal to grant aid to Thailand as a lever to help pressure Phibun to promote US anticommunism—i.e. if you want aid you have to impress Congress by joining our crusade.

<sup>68</sup> Ambassador Wan to Pote, telegram 9/2493, January 7, 1950, File 2.1.2.3, MFAL.

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum by the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Merchant to Acheson and the Undersecretary of State Webb, February 3, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson to Acheson, February 1, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>71</sup> “US studying military aid to Thailand,” *Bangkok Post*, February 18, 1950.

<sup>72</sup> Fineman, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>73</sup> “Kach seized, sent abroad as coup plot uncovered,” *Bangkok Post*, January 28, 1950; *ibid.*, “Kach planned to succeed Phibun, Oust Phin, Phao,” January 30, 1950; *ibid.*, “Coup ‘key figures’ held, Kach successors debated,” January 31, 1950.



and personal rivalry with other Coup Group members might have been the real reasons for his expulsion. Although Kach's expulsion strengthened Phibun's position, it also bolstered those of Phin and Phao, two influential Coup Group members whose support the premier relied on. American military aid was an indispensable means to consolidate Phibun's political leadership.

#### IV

#### 'Stacking the Chips': the Bao Dai Recognition, February 1950

Although, in a meeting on the fourth of February, the premier still told Ambassador Stanton that Thailand would not recognize Bao Dai,<sup>74</sup> he abruptly changed his mind five days later. On February 9 (the day the United States recognized Bao Dai) Field Marshal Phibun declared that it was "urgent and essential"<sup>75</sup> that Bangkok recognized Bao Dai and that he would ask the Cabinet to recognize the emperor on February 13. It seemed that Phibun's recently gained political security and his desire to obtain American aid dictated this brusque policy shift. Lest the Americans might still miss this point, Field Marshal Phibun asked his Cabinet to vote on recognition the very first day Ambassador at Large Phillip Jessup held the Bangkok Conference of United States Chiefs of Mission in the Far East.<sup>76</sup> Ambassador Stanton had previously informed Phibun of the Jessup mission.<sup>77</sup> The main objectives of the Jessup mission were to assess the situation in the Far East, to reevaluate vital US interest in the region, and to come up with an aid plan for a country to country approach. By seconding US foreign policy objectives in the Far East, the premier probably hoped that Bangkok would be listed as a country vital to US interest. Besides the US had already 'tempted' and 'teased' Phibun by holding the conference in Bangkok.

The premier's decision to recognize Bao Dai caught the Foreign Ministry by surprise. In an important memorandum dated February 11, 1950, Konthi Supamongkol, Director General of East Asian Division, weighed the pros and cons of recognizing Bao Dai. Among the positive factors he cited the following. It would help improve relationship with France, facilitate the procurement of American military aid, and foster the stability of the Bao Dai regime. The costs of recognizing Bao Dai would far exceed the benefits, Konthi contended—and thus rebuking the premier's position. He asserted that France showed no sign of granting greater authority and autonomy in self-government to Bao Dai. Thus recognizing the emperor would not be consistent with Thailand's proclaimed anti-colonialism and the United Nations policy of self-determination. Furthermore, Konthi argued that the emperor lacked support from both the Vietnamese masses and the elites. He questioned the durability of Bao Dai. Even if the situation in Vietnam was interpreted as a struggle for power simply between Bao Dai and communist Ho Chi Minh, Thailand, pursuant to the principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of other states, should maintain a low profile. Konthi also highlighted an important point raised by British High Commissioner to Singapore, Malcolm MacDonald: only about 20 percent of Ho Chi Minh's supporters could be categorized as communists; the rest were nationalists. Indochina was becoming an arena for the United States and the USSR to wage the Cold War—Washington supported Bao Dai while Moscow backed Ho. Being a small state and a neighbor of Vietnam, Bangkok could not afford to pursue a rigid anti-Soviet policy and thus should not immediately recognize Bao Dai. Thailand's security was more at risk than the US's. Moreover, Thailand had

<sup>74</sup> Stanton to Acheson, February 8, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 724-25.

<sup>75</sup> "Premier favors immediate Indochina recognitions," *Bangkok Post*, February 9, 1950.

<sup>76</sup> *FRUS*, 1950, 6, p. 18 (ff. 1).

<sup>77</sup> Stanton, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

no immediate interest to pursue such a policy. Konthi concluded that the nonrecognition of Bao Dai would not worsen Thai-American relations. Hence he proposed a patient wait and see policy, waiting for the dust to settle so that Thailand could pursue a policy that best further its security interest. At most, Thailand could only send its 'sympathy and understanding' to Bao Dai.<sup>78</sup> After a crucial meeting, the Foreign Ministry seconded Konthi's proposal and prepared a memorandum for the Cabinet meeting. Illustrating the ministry's pragmatic approach, it also opposed the recognition of Ho Chi Minh.

In the end it was Marshal Phibun who had the last say. After three arduous Cabinet meetings<sup>79</sup> and strong opposition by Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Industry, Communications, Public Health, and Justice and Deputy Prime Minister, the Phibun government declared that it would recognize Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as associated states in the French Union on February 27, 1950.<sup>80</sup> The remaining ministers and, more important, senior military officials supported immediate recognition.<sup>81</sup> The next day Thai embassies and consulates worldwide were informed of the government's decision and a telegraphic official message was sent to each premier of the three Indochinese governments.<sup>82</sup> Phibun's personal insistence to recognize the three Indochinese governments signified the shift in the locus of foreign policymaking from the Foreign Ministry (i.e. civilians) to the military. It probably dawned on Phibun that he did not have to be a democrat to be a worthy recipient of US military largesse. As long as he remained firmly anticommunist and refused to pursue an independent foreign policy, he could rule heavy-handedly and could still rely on US support.

Two days after the first Cabinet meeting on the question of Bao Dai, Foreign Minister Pote informed Phibun of the meeting between Ambassador Wan and Kenneth Landon, Director of the Southeast Asian Office. Landon told Wan that the prospect of Thailand for obtaining American military aid was bright.<sup>83</sup> At that time, as the local newspapers made it abundantly clear and the Americans probably knew, the Cabinet was split on the Indochina question. If American aid was very likely to come anyway, why bother to recognize Bao Dai? In 1949 the US Congress dropped the aid bill to Thailand at the last minute. Field Marshal Phibun would not allow American military largesse to slip away again this time. He probably believed that the Bao Dai recognition was the net to secure the American chest of gold. Publicly, however, the government denied the widespread rumor that there was a link between the recognition of Bao Dai and US military aid, dismissing it as a subversive communist propaganda intended to weaken the Free World.<sup>84</sup> US ambassador Stanton called the rumor a "fantastic story," arguing that the recognition

<sup>78</sup> Memorandum by Konthi Supamongkol, February 11, 1950, File 2.1.1.2, MFAL; idem, *Thai Foreign Policy, 1940-1952* (Bangkok: Thammasat UP, 1994) pp. 406-08. The Thai ambassador to London also expressed the view that Vietnam was becoming a Cold War theater, implying the need for Thailand to stay out of the conflict. Thai ambassador to Pote, February 9, 1950, *ibid.*, MFAL.

<sup>79</sup> The Cabinet met on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> of February. "Cabinet split on Indochina question," *Bangkok Post*, February 13, 1950; "Lost provinces discussed as FIC action deferred, government may give only sympathies," *ibid.*, February 14, 1950; "Government delays Bao Dai action definitely won't accept Ho," *ibid.*, February 21, 1950; "Government recognizing Bao Dai. Accept Phot's resignation," *ibid.*, February 28, 1950.

<sup>80</sup> N. W. 34/2493, Secretary of the Cabinet to all Ministers, February 27, 1950, [3] SR. 201.9/17, Box 2, Cabinet Papers, TNA; Ambassador Stanton to Acheson, March 1, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 747-48; N. W. 34/2493, Secretary of the Cabinet to Pote, February 27, 1950, File 2.1.1.6, MFAL; "Government recognizing Bao Dai, accepts Phot's resignation," *Bangkok Post*, February 28, 1950.

<sup>81</sup> The unexpected opposition raised by some ministers in the first Cabinet meeting worried Phibun. In subsequent meetings, Phibun asked his allies from the Coup Group and armed forces to join him, undoubtedly intending to pressure the dissenters to change their minds.

<sup>82</sup> Pote to Thai embassies and consulates, February 28, 1950, File 2.1.1.6, MFAL.

<sup>83</sup> N. 2370/2493, Pote to Phibun, February 15, 1950, SR. 0201.13.1/2, Box 2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> Government declaration, February 23, 1950, [3] SR. 201.9/17, Box 2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

would be “solely and exclusively” determined by the Thai government. Foreign Minister Pote added that the Indochina issue had nothing to do with the Thai request for the loan from the World Bank.<sup>85</sup>

In order to augment the impact of the recognition, the prime minister wanted a unanimous Cabinet decision; such an act would prove the unequivocal anticommunism of the Phibun government.<sup>86</sup> Unanimity on the recognition issue would also help disprove *Izvestiya*'s assertion that Thailand's reluctance to recognize Bao Dai reflected the unpopularity of the emperor in Southeast Asia.<sup>87</sup> That was probably one of the reasons why the Cabinet meetings dragged on for three sessions. In the end, when reaching unanimity proved impossible, Phibun rammed the Bao Dai issue down the throats of the opposing ministers. The impact of Bangkok's recognition remained electric however. Thailand was the first Southeast Asian country to recognize Bao Dai. If one excludes Jordan from Asia, Thailand was the first country in the continent to recognize Emperor Bao Dai. Even Syngman Rhee's South Korea, whose survival in part depended on the US, recognized Bao Dai weeks later.

The Phibun government raised pious and benevolent principles when explaining the decision to recognize Bao Dai to the Thai public. The recognition of Bao Dai, the government declared, was in accordance with the country's good neighbor policy. It would help foster democracy in and help bring peace, stability, and prosperity to Indochina. Stealing a leaf from Washington's book, the government also conjured up the image of falling dominoes. The fall of Indochina to communist control would lead to the fall of, for example, Malaya and Thailand. Since Southeast Asia served as the rice bowl of and markets for the Free World, the fall of the region under communist domination would tilt the correlations of power in favor of the Kremlin.<sup>88</sup> The government appealed for the support and understanding of the Thai masses.

Many individuals in the attentive public and many government officials and politicians were not impressed. Despite its lofty and sweeping rhetoric, the Phibun government was not a democracy and the premier was a conservative autocrat. Field Marshal Phibun well knew that the rush to recognize Bao Dai might trigger far reaching negative consequences to Thailand's security such as having Vietnam as a hostile neighbor should Ho Chi Minh ultimately win in the civil war. He also realized that Bao Dai was incompetent and illiberal and lacked mass based support from the indigenous people. Moreover, he was aware that France, despite its promises, was not willing to grant full independence to Vietnam. And the decision to recognize Bao Dai was explicitly opposed by the Foreign Ministry, a number of ministers, and a significant segment of the Thai public. Liberals, radicals, conservatives, and communists in Thailand all opposed the recognition. In retrospect, Phibun might have even welcomed the dissension. The greater the political opposition, the more he would be seen by American policymakers as the voice of reason, as the 'moderate' nationalist they could deal with and support.

Khuang Aphaiwong, leader of the opposition party, contended that the Thai recognition of Bao Dai would not help legitimize the emperor and stabilize his regime. Nor would the recognition help halt communist expansion in Vietnam, he continued. Thailand had only limited power. Khuang insisted that initially the government said that it was compelled to recognize

<sup>85</sup> “Factfinders going to Saigon, ‘US loan’ story ‘fantastic’” *Bangkok Post*, February 23, 1950, pp. 1-8.

<sup>86</sup> T. 177/2493, Thai Ambassador to Manila to Pote, February 23, 1950, File 2.1.1.6, MFAL.

<sup>87</sup> 59/2493, Charge D'Affaires in Moscow to Pote, February 16, 1950, *ibid*.

<sup>88</sup> Government declaration, February 28, 1950, *ibid*.

Vietnam because recognition was tied to American military assistance. Now that the government had publicly declared that there was no link between the recognition and US aid, why rush to recognize the emperor, he asked. In other words, if Bangkok would receive American aid no matter what it did, the government must pursue the course that would be least harmful to the country.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, ex-premier Seni Pramoj queried why Thailand should lead the pack in recognizing Vietnam. He proposed that the government should adopt a patient, wait and see policy. Seni argued that the Phibun government should recognize the emperor only when Thailand was under direct communist aggression. In the mean time, if the government feared the communist menace, it should focus on strengthening the country in various other ways.<sup>90</sup>

Some opponents of the Bao Dai recognition feared that it would incite unrest among the local Vietnamese who were mostly sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh. Defending his position, Marshal Phibun airily told reporters that if Thailand did not dread an uprising of the millions of Chinese in the country, it should not be afraid that the local Vietnamese would rebel. At best, this was a boastful statement. Phibun probably did fear an uprising of the Vietnamese in Thailand resulting from the Bao Dai recognition. A day after the recognition, the Interior Minister, a close friend of the premier, ordered the governors in all provinces to vigilantly observe and control the activities of the local Vietnamese community. Of particular importance, the local Vietnamese were to be denied arms possession.<sup>91</sup> Eventually, the Vietnamese were restricted to reside in only eight provinces and were forbidden to fly the Vietminh flag and to hang photos of Ho Chi Minh. Their houses were also regularly inspected and they were prohibited from convening political gatherings.<sup>92</sup> Hanoi deplored the Thai treatment of Vietnamese residing in Thailand.<sup>93</sup> The Foreign Ministry noted a negative shift in Vietnamese attitude towards Bangkok. In sum, Phibun extended recognition to Bao Dai even though he knew that there was a high probability of uproar by the local Vietnamese community.

All things considered, Premier Phibun's act may be interpreted as influenced by the immediate desire for American military aid and by domestic politics. It seemed that he was willing to do almost anything to win American trust and aid, to bind Thailand firmly in the US camp, to consolidate his power and position. Indeed he also wanted American security guarantees against the communist menace, but that was like a bonus to him.

Phibun often cited the threat of international and especially Chinese communism when justifying the decision to recognize Bao Dai. If this was really the case, why did he choose to recognize Vietnam in February 1950 and not earlier? Since spring 1949 the Foreign Ministry informed Phibun that the Vietminh collaborated with PRC troops in attacking several cities in northern Indochina.<sup>94</sup> In a front page article the *Srikrung* newspaper, a government mouthpiece, even alarmingly declared that the "Communists are now preparing to attack Thailand."<sup>95</sup> If

<sup>89</sup> "The recognition of Bao Dai will bring harm to the country," an interview with Khuang Aphaiwong, *The Siam Nikorn*, February 28, 1950, pp. 1, 10.

<sup>90</sup> "Getting ready for the Bao Dai Case, Seni warns the government not to invite the enemies in," *ibid.*, March 1, 1950.

<sup>91</sup> 78/2493, Interior Minister to High Commissioners and Director General of the Police, March 1, 1950, File 2.1.1.6, MFAL; T. 3223/2493, Interior Ministry to Foreign Ministry, March 2, 1950, *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Liberty*, September 14, 1950.

<sup>93</sup> *Ho Chi Minh News*, November 10, 1950.

<sup>94</sup> N. 5368/2492, Foreign Minister to Phibun, April 16, 1949, [2] SR. 0201.86/48, Box 13, Stack 1, Cabinet Papers, TNA; N. 5638/2492, Foreign Minister to Phibun, April 21, 1949, *ibid.*; T. 24/2492, Thai Consulate in Saigon to Foreign Minister, April 7, 1949, *ibid.*; French Legation in Siam to the Foreign Ministry, April 13, 1949, *ibid.*; N. 6733/2492, Pote to Phibun, May 10, 1949, *ibid.*; N. 491/2493, Pote to Phibun, January 12, 1950, [2] SR. 0201.86/51, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>95</sup> "Communists are now preparing to attack Thailand," *Srikrung*, September 2, 1949.

Marshal Phibun really feared the communist menace, he did not take any drastic steps to augment the security of his country. He even admitted to the US ambassador that he knew little about Communism and did not consider the communist guerilla campaigns in the countries surrounding Thailand serious.<sup>96</sup> It is likely that, although Phibun genuinely despised communism, he might not have perceived it as posing the primary threat to his regime. Or he might even have believed that Washington would take care of it for him. For instance, elite divisions of the army were kept in Bangkok to protect the government from any future coup rather than situated along the Thai border—e.g. to protect the country from Chinese communist penetration. Furthermore, in spite of warnings by, *inter alia*, the Foreign Ministry that the Bao Dai recognition would catapult Thailand into the Cold War Field Marshal Phibun seemed unprepared for or unconcerned about its potential harmful impacts on Thai security. In fact, it was only in early March 1950—i.e. well after his decision to recognize Bao Dai and join the ‘Free World—that Phibun began devising an anticommunist defense strategy. In a letter dated February 28, 1950 Foreign Minister Pote told Marshal Phibun about Dean Acheson’s National Press Club speech in the previous month. Pote informed Phibun that the secretary of state said that the United States would militarily and economically assist a country against the communist peril only if that country would first help itself. For example, that country should have its own anticommunist politico-military strategy before applying for US aid. In the margin, Marshal Phibun wrote that he wanted a comprehensive anticommunist strategy so that the government could forward it to the US, asking for military aid.<sup>97</sup>

On March 1 Ambassador Stanton informed Acheson of the Thai resolution to recognize Bao Dai and the governments of Laos and Cambodia. He observed that the Thai Cabinet was split over the recognition issue and that Foreign Minister Pote Sarasin had resigned in protest. Stanton also notified Acheson that since the recognition issue was a matter of controversy at every Cabinet meeting, it was essentially Phibun who gave the green light. The ambassador found Phibun’s decision “gratifying” but lamented that it was “most unfortunate that unanimity was not possible.” Further, the extent of the controversy in the Cabinet and the newspaper publicity it received disturbed Stanton. Stanton told the secretary of state that the Thai Cabinet, armed forces, and newspapers believed that the United States linked military assistance to Thailand with Bangkok’s recognition of Bao Dai. However the ambassador assured Acheson that both Phibun and him had publicly denied this allegation.<sup>98</sup> In sum, Stanton implied that unlike the majority of the Thai public Phibun was a tough Cold Warrior and hence worthy of American support. Many American officials viewed neutralism or the unwillingness to side with Washington in the crusade against Communism as a sign of weakness and effeminacy.

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Secretary of State Acheson forwarded a military aid request totaling \$25 million for both Indochina and Thailand to President Truman on March 9. Truman approved it on the next day. An annex to the memorandum justified aid to Thailand in the following terms: Thailand’s security was being jeopardized by the communist threat along its borders (e.g. Malaya and Indochina) and by the local Chinese community whose loyalty was dubious.<sup>99</sup> In early April, Worakarn Bancha, the

<sup>96</sup> Stanton, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>97</sup> N. 3079/2493, Pote to Phibun, February 28, 1950, [2] SR. 0201.86/40, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>98</sup> Stanton to Acheson, March 1, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 747-48.

<sup>99</sup> Memorandum to the President by Acheson, March 9, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 40-43.

new foreign minister and one of the premier's henchmen<sup>100</sup>, informed and ensured Phibun of the forthcoming US aid—that Thailand would get \$10 million.<sup>101</sup> Satisfied, senior officials of the armed forces leaked the news of the US aid to the press as if to imply that without the recognition of Bao Dai Thailand would not have received aid. The US ambassador felt “embarrassed” because the news of the aid was revealed before the appropriate time.<sup>102</sup>

By the end of 1950 the US Department of State, evaluating recent acts by the Phibun government, confidently noted that “Thailand has...irrevocably severed its ties with Communists countries and committed itself to the causes of the free nations.” DOS pointed out that the Thai government “undertook a departure from its traditional policy of balancing political forces” when it decided to recognize the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in February. DOS also rejoiced over the Thai firm commitment not to recognize Mao's China and participation in the Korean War on the side of the United States and United Nations. DOS however hoped that Phibun would be able to create widespread internal support, the most effective antidote to Communist subversion.<sup>103</sup>

Ambassador Stanton did not fully share the DOS's assessment of the political situation in Thailand and the basic orientation of Thai foreign policy. Stanton argued that “It will be a great mistake to regard [the recognition of the three Indochina states] as a genuine indicator of the feelings of the Thai people, or even of the Thai Government, toward the French-supported states.” He reminded DOS that the Thai foreign minister resigned in protest of the recognition and that the “majority of the thinking populace,” “the bulk of the press,” and “a majority of middle to high level officials” opposed the decision. The decision was largely because of Phibun's personal insistence. Stanton noted that although the Thai were not communists, they supported Ho Chi Minh's quest to drive out the French imperialists. Most important, the ambassador related the present Thai foreign policy to the role and influence of Phibun and his military cohorts. He argued that as long as the Phibun government remained in control of Thai foreign policy, Bangkok would “stick by the United Nations and the United States.” Stanton raised a warning flag: a shift in Thai foreign policy might result from a domestic power shift. The American ambassador perceived the Thai prime minister's recent unequivocal pro-West policies as “the bets of Phibun, who in his position as official spokesman for Thailand, *successively adds chips to a stack which he has placed on the United States.*” Stanton believed that the major reason why Phibun supported the US was because he wanted US/UN protection against communist aggression.<sup>104</sup> Here the ambassador's analysis was only partially correct. More important, Phibun needed the US for his political survival as a leader, his immediate interest.

## V

### Conclusion

The five major themes threaded throughout this paper offer clues to why the Thai government recognized the three governments of Indochina and, subsequently, forged a special

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<sup>100</sup> Suchit, *Karn Patana Tang Karn Muang Kong Thai* pp. 87-88.

<sup>101</sup> N. 4987/2493, Foreign Minister Worakarn Bancha to Phibun, April 4, 1950, SR. 0201.13.1/2, Box 2, Cabinet Papers, TNA.

<sup>102</sup> N. 5660/2493, Worakarn to Phibun, April 19, 1950, *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> “United States Relations with Thailand,” Policy Statement prepared in the DOS, October 15, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, 6, pp. 1529-39.

<sup>104</sup> Stanton to Acheson, March 15, 1951, *FRUS*, 1951, 6:2, pp. 1598-1603.

relationship with the United States. In some respects, they help refute the prevailing arguments in mainstream discourse on Thai history of this period.

First, the Thai application for American military aid after the Second World War was largely based on domestic concerns rather than Cold War considerations. It also predated the arrival of the Cold War in Thailand. Since Premier Phibun's tenure was still tenuous, his immediate postwar concern was his political survival as a leader. Accordingly, the premier had to appease the key members of the Coup Group that brought him to power with military aid and international loans in order to guarantee their continued support and to maintain a modicum of influence over them. Phibun was inclined to blur the distinction between his personal interest and the 'national interest.' *L'état c'est moi*, Phibun assumed. In retrospect, Phibun was quite successful in advancing his personal interest and was an effective power broker.

Second, Phibun and his military cohorts—although genuinely anticommunist—inflated the dangers of communism in the hope of reaping American military aid promised to anticommunist regimes worldwide. Initially, the premier believed that he could secure American military aid and support without making any concrete commitment to American containment policy. Put differently, he surmised that Thailand could maintain a flexible foreign policy and yet remain a recipient of American aid. However it seemed that American policymakers were reluctant to provide military aid to an uncommitted, nonaligned Thailand.

Third, the recognition of the government of Bao Dai became intertwined with the desire to obtaining American military aid. Since mid-1949 Washington diplomatically pressured Thailand to recognize Bao Dai. In late 1949 the Thai ambassador to the United States, Prince Wan, informed the Phibun government that in order to obtain the Military Assistance Program fund set aside by the US, Bangkok must enter into a common defense agreement with Washington. Prince Wan insisted that the US tied military assistance to the recognition of Bao Dai. Phibun realized that a flexible and independent foreign policy was not conducive to securing American military aid.

Fourth, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civilians, on the one side, struggled to determine the orientation of Thai foreign policy with Phibun and his military cronies, on the other side. On the Bao Dai issue, the Foreign Ministry, despite realizing the dangers of communism and desiring American aid, proposed a wait and see policy. (Furthermore, populated by aristocrats and land owners Foreign Ministry officials would have the most to lose from a communist takeover.) The ministry warned that the Bao Dai recognition might, *inter alia*, bring the Cold War to Thailand and might jeopardize its national security. The Thai attentive public and many government officials shared a similar view. At first, the premier abided by the recommendations of the Foreign Ministry. He probably wanted to use the Bao Dai issue as the bargaining chip with the US to exact military aid. In early February 1950, Phibun was informed that the prospect for American military aid was bright. Its size and speed however largely depended on how he managed the present situation, the premier believed. Hence, the premier threw a bombshell, the immediate recognition of Bao Dai. Phibun's decision sealed the fate of the Foreign Ministry. The locus of foreign policymaking shifted to Phibun and the military elite, and the Foreign Ministry by and large became a rubber stamp institution.

Fifth, the most immediate and the most long-term of the effects of Phibun's decision to recognize Bao Dai (and of the US support for the Thai military government) was the arrival of the Cold War in Thailand and the polarization of Thai society. Phibun placed all his eggs in the

American basket. Both his political survival and his country's national security were largely in the hands of Washington. In terms of foreign policy, the Thai military elite forged a special relationship with the US and unequivocally supported the US anticommunist crusade—Korea, Vietnam, SEATO, etc. Thailand refused to take part in the nonaligned movement (NAM). Domestically, the military elite purged their opponents and entrenched their power and influence in the society, deterring democratic reforms in Thailand. In the mid-1950s, perhaps regretting the consequences of his decisions, Phibun experimented with some democratic reforms, greatly irritating the military elites and the US. He even broached the possibility of recognizing Communist China. A Coup Group leader, Colonel Sarit Thanarat, subsequently toppled him. Military dictatorships dominated the Thai political scene for the next two decades, safeguarding Thailand's place as a satellite in the American East Asian empire.





is an interesting dream.

It is paradoxical that the collapse of party-led state systems based on the principle of democratic centralism has not led to the flowering of democracy. Rather it is the transnational corporations that have been successful in good measure to sell the idea of (American) consumer paradise to ex-communist states especially the central-Asian republics.

The entertainment and TNC-controlled electronic media has successfully concealed the socio-political-economic-ecological and cultural pathologies created by the neo-liberal thrust of the American polity, which is assisted by the World Bank, IMF and WTO in Northern societies, particularly the U.S. itself.

The Nordic democrats, having the advantage of their geo-political-economic situation where they are part of the North and still on its margins, can grasp the negatives of the neo-liberal thrust more clearly than either the ex-communist countries or the oppressed humanity of the majority of countries (usually known as Third World countries). Both the latter segments of humankind have been denied the natural and legitimate urge for freedom and dignity, the former through colonial rule and the latter through ideological totalitarianism, and were never educated about the satanic dimensions of modern industrialism. A small handful of elite in these countries enjoyed all the material fruits of modern industrialism and the majority of the populations were deprived of minimalistic dignified consumer rights. So, for the commoners, the fascination for the consumer paradise dished out through the global electronic media is understandable.

The democrats have to understand this historical context. They should not be cowed down by PR agents of TNCs that there is popular legitimacy for the Americanization of our societies. Only the top crust of the American polity wants to globalise its sickness to the rest of the world. The popular will, even in USA, may not be for this kind of globalisation of pathologies.

It is a painful paradox that the growing green consciousness has been given a short stint/ breathing space in the American society. Hopefully before the neo-liberals embark on any insane adventure, there will be a new assertion by the authentic democratic forces lead by an alliance between the Blacks, Browns, Women, Greens and the Progressive Elite committed to the goal of a better and more humane world order.

**Globalisation:** Our leader (and a follower of Mahatma Gandhi), Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, used to talk in the 1950s-60s about the following 'seven revolutions' as integral to any basic transformative political action. According to him, there were many simultaneous struggles in the twentieth century: (i) between classes, (ii) against the injustice created by the caste system and practice of untouchability, (iii) for gender justice, (iv) for equality amongst the nation-states, (v) between races, (vi) for disarmament, and (vii) for individual freedom against encroachments on privacy by the state.

Even a cursory look at these issues will make it obvious that these political battles can be carried on only by those whose worldview permits a universalistic-humanistic outlook. Any narrow, sectional, parochial or chauvinistic, anti-people, narrow nationalistic, outlook cannot allow the above revolutionary struggles to be conceived.

The clear implication is that commitment to values of a genuine globalisation is part of

# Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: A New Alliance for Democracy in the Era of Globalisation

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Vijay Pratap

I see this as an opportunity to initiate a dialogic relationship with friends at the workshop on an enduring basis. I am very happy that I got this opportunity to introduce some of the ideas that I have been discussing since 1989 with some of my Finnish friends, especially the Kefa-India group, to the others.

I should clarify that although the ultimate responsibility for what I write or say is entirely mine, these ideas are in no way my original ideas. It is a declared 'piracy' of the ideas of friends, peers and 'adversaries', all of whom I am an organic part of, whether I realise it or not. There is a continuous process of mutual learning in which we borrow, share and own each other's ideas, consciously or unconsciously.

## The Background

**Democracy:** I have been trained in the Lohiaite sub-stream of the Indian Socialist tradition, which was organisationally at its peak from the mid-60s to the late-70s. Our movement used the self-description of a revolutionary socialist movement. The term used was simply socialist, not 'democratic socialist', the assumption being that there can be no socialism without democracy. Therefore, the commitment to democracy is the central mooring for any of the actions or ideas I am committed to. However, democracy is not merely defined as a system of governance in which legitimacy is derived through the electoral process and political parties. Conventionally, the use of the word 'democracy' has only referred to the nature of various instrumentalities of the state—such as separation of powers of the various wings—Judiciary, Executive and Legislature; sources and mode of legitimacy of the state; and relations of the state with the people through parties and elections. However the praxis of new social movements embodies a much deeper and comprehensive meaning of democracy than what is reflected in the statements of mainstream political leaders. We need to restate the content of our dream as embodied by a much more comprehensive concept—a dream or a world-view which humankind has evolved over thousands of years. However, I shall come to a detailed discussion on the various facets and essential features of democracy at a later stage in this paper. I am well aware that there is a long road ahead before the totality of humankind is able to realize the goals of comprehensive democracy. Yet, dreaming is the first step to making our lives more wholesome and meaningful. And democracy

our ideological tradition. It is only the present form of hegemonic globalisation that is viewed as a satanic force.

The dynamics of globalisation have been discussed by Franck Amalrick in a report to SID as follows: “One dynamic springs from the structural problem of over-capacity of production, which leads private actors to seek political solutions to their economic predicament. The other dynamic is the use of state power to ‘externalise’ the problem onto other countries in the absence of strong democratic deliberation”.

The present form of globalisation is full of deceit. For example the trinity of globalisation (W.B./IMF/WTO) insists upon the free play to market forces by removing all state controls and subsidies in favor of the ‘consumers’ of goods and services, but it does not mind the market using the state to subsidise itself. The case of Enron (Dabhol Power Corporation) in India is illustrative. Enron produces electricity more inefficiently than our ‘inefficient, corrupt’ provincial electricity undertakings; that is, it does so at a much costlier price. Then, when it is unable to sell its produce and rake in the requisite returns on its investment, instead of folding up, the Enron company demands taxpayer’s money to be paid by the provincial/central government, invoking the counter-guarantee clauses of the initial agreement! Should not ‘the trinity’ insist on the same free market principles with Enron? Why should it be subsidised by the state for its inefficiency? The same trinity also talks about reducing the role of the state in economic matters. When our provincial governments express their reluctance to subsidise Enron, the representative of the American state in India gives a veiled threat on FDIIs if we do not continue to subsidise Enron. Enrons of the world along with their fellow traveler political elite, often talk about transparency and accountability in governance and corruption-free economic transactions. Yet Enron got its contract by ‘legitimately’ paying thousands of dollars of corruption money in the name of ‘public education’. What could be more deceitful than this? Even with these ‘education fees’ the agreement was not signed by a regular government but was signed on the last day of a 13-day government, which was on its way out for want of adequate support for a confidence motion on the floor of the house.

Till the mid-1960s, there was some semblance of separation among the global oppressive elite and the national oppressive elite, at least as far as a big democracy like India was concerned. But now, since the beginning of the nineties, a nexus between the satanic forces within the nation state and the global elite is becoming stronger every day. All exploitative, oppressive and hegemonic structures and tendencies have been using the respectable term called ‘globalisation’. In fact, it should be called ‘satanisation of the globe’. And all the authentic universalistic humanistic forces (the authentic globalisers) have to resist this monsterisation of the earth with all the moral, spiritual and material strength at their command.

The process of economic globalisation has created new and serious challenges for the democratic decision-making processes in every part of the world. However the most important aspects of the crises could be described, in a nutshell, as follows.

First, the transfer of decision-making power into the hands of transnational institutions like the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, has severely reduced the sovereignty of national governments, and resulted in a very serious drift undermining the whole party political system.

As shown by Franck Amalrick's study, "Influencing national institutions and policies becomes openly one objective of development co-operation policies.... The World Bank and IMF intervene at the national level under the banners of 'sound-macroeconomic policies' and 'good governance'—technical banners that fit well the technical nature of these organisations—while bilateral donors intervene under the banners of 'democracy' and 'partnership'. This trend is particularly visible in the European Union's policies: it is at the core of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreement with countries around the Mediterranean Sea,<sup>1</sup> of the Partnership Agreement with ACP countries,<sup>2</sup> and of the accession procedures that Eastern European countries must follow in order to join the Union.<sup>3</sup>"

In the present situation it does not really matter so much what kind of a coalition of parties has been in power. Subsequent government coalitions have been forced to continue implementing roughly similar neo-liberal policies, including privatisation, the liberalisation of trade and investment policies and the reduction of subsidies. In India the Congress Party initiated neo-liberal policies when it was in government and started to speak against its own policies of privatisation and liberalisation when it had been in the opposition for some time. Similarly, BJP used strong anti-globalisation rhetoric and spoke about Swadeshi and boycott against foreign transnational corporations when it was campaigning against the Congress government and later the 'Third Force' government, which had the Congress Party supporting it from the outside. As the leading party of the present coalition government, BJP has been more neo-liberal and more pro-globalisation than the Congress ever was, which has created a kind of crisis of credibility for the mainstream political parties. When I came to attend the IGRI conference I was shocked by a public debate at the Helsinki University Auditorium: a high official of the economic affairs ministry confided with the audience that they had to accept the neo-liberal policies because Finland wanted capital and technology. I was very pained to see this kind of defeat of democratic dreams. If a society of 5.5 million people with so many natural resources, commitment to humanistic values and human talents is unable to withstand the neo-liberal pressures of TNCs then what will happen to countries like India with half a billion poor people, including one-third of a billion below minimal subsistence level? I was particularly pained because I believe that social democrats have been part of the Finnish governments since independence. I have been with the social democratic movement since 1968. Since when the Nordic countries especially Finland undertook the transition from peasant pre-modern to industrial modern societies they developed social security and taxation systems to smoothen the process and keep the 'satanic' features of industrial society in check. No monstrous disparities were allowed to creep in marginalisation and hardships were sought to be kept in check by high taxation and a sound welfare state. The decision making and governance was reasonably participatory and transparent unlike the new structures created by the EU where new laws are proposed by a small group of people, where national parliaments endorse them without adequate debate and without space for listening to voices of disagreement.

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<sup>1</sup> The first Euro-Mediterranean governmental conference was held in Barcelona in December 1995. It produced the Barcelona Declaration, which aims to set the stage for the emergence of a partnership with political, economic, and cultural dimensions linking together the Northern, Eastern, and Southern shores. The MEDA Program of the EU supports the establishment of this partnership. Information on the process including the Barcelona declaration is available on the Commission's External Relations website: <[http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations)>.

<sup>2</sup> Text of the agreement is available on the Commission's website at <<http://europa.eu.int/comm/development>>. For comments and on-going discussions, see the Euforic web-site, <<http://www.euforic.org>>.

<sup>3</sup> Various documents related to the enlargement process can be found on the Commission's website at <<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement>>.

Given the historical experience of Finland and its geo-political compulsions, the desire of a significant section of Finnish people to become part of the EU is understandable. What is incomprehensible is the suspension of the aspiration for movement from representative to participatory democracy on which there was a national consensus. I have engaged in a dialogue with Finnish friends since 1989. I used to tell my Indian friends that the Finnish polity has no 'dissenters'. What I meant was that all opinions are sacrosanct and there are institutional mechanisms to allow optimal nurturing of all opinions for making the society more beautiful. Unfortunately the new nexus between TNCs and EU structures, civil society organisations and nation-state apparatuses seek to ignore, marginalise and even to discredit opinions opposing the satanic dimensions of TNCs.

One facet of globalisation has been described by Franck Amalrick in the following way: "The economic success in the EU over the last 40 years has rendered more acute problems of over-capacity; these problems are often of a technical nature and of relevance to only small groups, and for these reasons do not raise much attention by the public at large; consequently, decisions are made in a technocratic manner; in the competition for influence, economic interests are much stronger and better organised than groups defending solidarity with the rest of the world; consequently, decisions made often include a portion of 'externalisation' of the problem onto other countries."

This, itself, has amounted to a crisis in democratic decision-making because in most countries the neo-liberal reforms have been implemented against the will of the majority of the voters. For instance many recent opinion surveys made in Finland have highlighted the problem. The Finnish government is going full steam ahead with a number of ambitious projects which, according to the opinion surveys, are supported by only a small minority of the people. This is part of a much wider, emerging global pattern.

Second, the crisis of democracy has been aggravated, in a very important way, by the problem of corruption. According to a leading World Bank official, corruption has increased geometrically during the last decade, and there has been at least a ten-fold rise in corruption during the 1990s. For instance the privatisation of public-owned companies and public services and the entry of the transnational corporations to the national markets have created ample opportunities for corruption and misuse of public offices.

For us in the South, if our Northern counterparts in civil society insulate us from the North-driven corruption (as illustrated by the case of Enron above), we will be able to fight both corruption and communalism domestically. For a more detailed argument, see my paper 'Corruption and Communalism: The Twin Anti-Democratic Phenomena of Indian Polity'. Corruption was a major problem in South Asia even before the present era of globalisation, but the recent deterioration of the moral and ethical basis of political and professional life has proceeded very fast.

In South Asia the social cost of economic globalisation and the neo-liberal policies related to it has already been very high—and could become still worse.

From independence until the beginning of the 1990s, infant and maternal mortality rates in India were in a slow but continuous and steady decline. During the first fifty years of independence infant mortality rates were cut by more than one half, and there was a notable

increase in the average life expectancy of the people. During the first half of 1990s the decline in infant mortality slowed down and stopped, and according to the latest government surveys it started to rise again in 1996-98. As Professor Imrana Qadeer has remarked, this is probably not going to be a temporary flip in the graph but writing on the wall, a clear danger sign of things that are to come if the present policies are not reversed.

The beginning of deterioration of the health care system—and the partial collapse of rural health care—is one of the reasons for the worsening health situation. This is not, however, the main factor. The invasion of foreign companies, modern technologies and neo-liberal policies has wiped out local cottage and artisan industries on a large scale throughout the 1990s. This has reduced the employment opportunities available for the people, and forced a large part of the rural people to subsist on income received from agricultural labor, alone. The dalits (ex-untouchable castes) in India will be the hardest hit. For one, they form a dominant part of the landless laborers. Secondly, there was a slow but steady and welcome process of elite formation among them through reservations in government jobs. Now due to privatisation, recruitment in government jobs has become negligible. This will slow down the process of dalit mobility since the private sector has no commitment to social justice. Thirdly, the retreat of the state from the social sector will affect these sections the most.

The landless or near-landless agricultural laborers have been hit especially badly by globalisation, but the land-owning farmers have also suffered. Indian farmers are more indebted than ever before. The proposed liberalisation of the land market, which would abolish the existing land reform legislation and the rules putting a ceiling to the amount of land that can be owned by any single individual, would be likely to worsen the situation. The situation will be further aggravated if the new round of negotiations in the World Trade Organization leads to more extensive liberalisation of agricultural trade. Farmers in the North represent around 2 percent of the population while worldwide the proportion is around 50 percent. Yet, eventually this 0.5 percent of the world population is the one designing global rules in agriculture through the Northern states. (For more details see Devendra Sharma, 2000). Without quantitative import restrictions and import taxes the Indian farmers will not be able to compete with their heavily subsidized American counterparts. The mere dairy sector provides a major part of the livelihoods of 90 million rural people. If India is flooded with cheap milk products and cheap food grains from the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA the situation in many rural areas could become explosive.

At the same time the forest laws are also being liberalised. Thus far the legislation has, at least to an extent, been able to protect the rights and livelihoods of the 80 million people belonging to the indigenous peoples of India, the Adivasi. Existing legislation has protected the forests that the Adivasis depend on, and has forbidden the forestry and mining companies to enter the Adivasi lands without their consent. It has also guaranteed the Adivasis the right to a number of different minor forest products that are of major importance to their livelihood. These laws are also on their way to being replaced by more liberal and market-oriented policies. In Nepal the legislative measures which formed the basis of the country's successful community forest programs are being reversed because of the pressure from the side of the World Bank.

How can all these problems be addressed?

## The Dimensions of Democracy and the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Initiative

People in South Asia have long cherished values which, in modern times, are best expressed under the rubric of ‘universalism’ and various dimensions of ‘democracy’. Before the colonial interventions of the West, even where there were rulers of foreign origins, the participatory mode of governance from the grassroots to the top, devolution of political power at all levels and cultural plurality were hallmarks of our socio-political system.

We had our own failings such as the obnoxious practice of untouchability or the fact that communitarian principles manifested through the caste system degenerated into hierarchical fundamentalism. But despite all kinds of failings, the sense of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (a Sanskrit concept meaning “The World is a Family”) has been part of our cultural sensibility all along since time immemorial. That is why our socio-cultural diversity is a source of strength and in fact the primary defining force behind our unbroken civilizational identity. There have, of course, been brief phases of ideological or identity polarisations. But soon, the pluralist perspective prevails. No sect, religion, ideological group, class, socio-political formation, not even the state or ‘church’ can claim a monopoly of the truth. All truths have to start with the small letter ‘t’ and depending on the vantage point are able to capture only some aspects of the Truth and not the Truth as a whole.

Contemporary industry, economic organisation or, for that matter any form of modern organisation (given its class configuration and now present forms of globalisation) many a times is at loggerheads with our age-old wisdom, identity and indigenous knowledge-systems. But our traditional universalistic sensibility tells us that the present form of globalisation is creating social ruptures and pathologies of atomisation, aggression and violence all over the world, including at the places of origin of modern forms of social-organisational visions of globalisation. Many critics of this form of globalisation have a parochial vision and they think that it will have an adverse impact only on the erstwhile Third World countries or us. The fact of the matter is that it is fuelling a kind of ‘anxiety syndrome’ even in the U.S. and the EU countries. That is why rightist populist or extreme rightist parties are slowly gaining strength in many European countries. Social Democrats who rule many countries in Europe are not able to face the onslaught of globalism effectively. The present form of globalism has already had a profound negative impact on the people all over the globe, including those of the G-8 countries. If it does not fuel the jingoistic egos of Indians then we would like to put on record that our civil society has yet not lost all that is necessary for a beautiful, aesthetic, prosperous, egalitarian and happy civilisation. In modern times, one of the tallest men of history—Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi—strengthened the civil society in South Asia in a manner that has benefited not only the last person but also created a living example of a vital, robust civil society in our region. In fact due to the success of the Gandhian methodology of broad-basing the Congress Party, many of the political parties influenced by him, behaved more like movement organisations than electoral machines. However, now the scene has become much more complex with many new entrants, especially the peasant and dalit leaders acquiring their own independent play and many parts of the entrenched sections of the rest of the society still not willing and happy to share power with them.

South Asian politics has seen many political upheavals since the region acquired liberation from the colonial masters. Undoubtedly, these upheavals have left many scars and cracks on our civil society and polity. Globally an elusive ‘Consumer Paradise’ is being promised through the electronic media and now through the internet financed by interested stake-holders

without any consideration for issues of economic equity, ecological sensitivity, cultural plurality or dignity of the oppressed. All over the globe one finds a kind of mad rush for this consumerist paradise. Values of austerity, larger good, rights of future generations over our natural and other resources and keeping the interests and perspectives of oppressed communities in mind while (rightly) asserting individual autonomy are considered obsolete. This is resulting in break-ups, fragmentation, fission and polarisation of human collectivities. Extreme individuation and atomisation is resulting in a backlash of identity assertion. This backlash is to be clearly distinguished from the genuine assertions of autonomy of cultural self-definition, issues of ethnic identity or social dignity. So far, the most important political framework for negotiating a society incorporating universalistic-humanistic values is political democracy.

Socio-political forces whose worldviews and dreams are anchored in a doctored view of history (such as Huntington's view on "the Clash of Civilisations") are becoming victims of the prevailing social pathology of a 'mad-race syndrome'. These forces, whose social base normally is of the sections/formations who believe that they are engaged in a survival struggle, have the perception of a crisis in which normal normative principles are considered as impediments—a distinction between conservatism and orthodoxy is lost, moderation is not seen as a democratic trait.

These 'victim' forces and organisations objectively end-up as most amoral and undemocratic forces. They also damage their societies in a very deep and decisive way. The ability of such organisations to learn from negative historical experiences of one's own society or from societies elsewhere declines considerably. Globally, the most important challenge of our times is to respond to this threat of fundamentalism of various kinds. As mentioned earlier, the expansion and deepening of democracy with a comprehensive view of democracy is the only anti-dote against all kinds of fundamentalism.

Leading sociologist Prof. D.L. Sheth, insists that it is very degrading to define human beings as entities with material wants only. They have moral, spiritual and cultural orientations as well. Commenting on an earlier draft of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam statement, Prof. B.K.Roy Burman, a leading Indian anthropologist, had the following to say: "*There is no convergence of opinions of anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers and others about the nature of human nature. Many however hold on to the view that humans are basically homo-sociologicus; warm bio-social entities surviving and seeking fulfillment through social living (Darhendorf 1968). It seems that both Gandhi and Marx held on to this view. There is the other view mainly associated with the European philosopher of the late medieval age, Hobbes, that human nature is reflected in war of all against all and that it is because of the exercise power of the state that humans behave in a manner considered appropriate to the state or constellation of states. It is this Hobbesian world-view that has prompted almost entire social science discourses in terms of power orientation.*

*"My understanding of anthropology impels me to accept the basically social nature of human nature. I draw upon Chomsky that urge for communication is a conditioned fact of the hominid existence. I also draw upon Lamarck and Chomsky that it is this urge that triggers organic adaptation, making articulate speech and symbolic communication, as a species attribute of Homo sapiens. I draw upon my anthropological knowledge that at birth human child is the most helpless creature, requires depending on others for a number of years. Thus sociability on companionate value orientation becomes a conditioned fact of life for Homo sapiens. But there*



are also intrusive factors in the form of natural calamities, like drought, earthquake, pestilence, epidemic, famine and so on. In response to these catastrophic situations, humans are forced to deviate from their basic nature and behave in a predatory manner. It is predatory culture, power oriented culture, antinomous to companionate value oriented culture. In other words, culture is immanent in the nature of human nature. There is a dialectical relationship between culture as conditioned fact of life and antinomous culture as response to contingent situations faced by the humans as collectivities and as individuals. There are cultural variations through adaptation to historical ecological contexts but there is no gradation of cultures apart from binary opposition between culture and antinomous culture. Levi-strauss has spoken about binary opposition almost as a natural law, but I perceive this opposition emanating from two different sources as explained here. There is however a misperception about evolution of culture. Some western scholars root this in the inclusion of material objects, as dimensions of culture. Material objects are accessories to culture but not culture per se. The same skill involved in the production of or access to material objects, may be used by companionate value oriented culture in one manner and by antinomous culture in another manner. Through experience, in the use of the material objects, more sophistication and skill may be acquired. This is evolution of material objects and this adds new dimensions in the dialectical relations between culture and antinomous culture but this should not be perceived as evolution of culture per se. What takes place is not hierarchical upgradation of culture but horizontal expansion of culture.

*“Democracy is the other name of practice of companionate value oriented culture, it is a process in non-stop dialectical relationship with antinomous culture. Commitment to responsible democracy is commitment to the processual dimension and not to any pre-fabricated structure.”*

For the last two centuries or more human civilisation has striven to expand the scope of individual freedom as well as freedom of the Nation States. This expansion of freedom has ruptured many of the traditional collectivities, empowered hitherto oppressed communities, and given rise to new forms of social behavior. This journey of democratic assertions is yet not complete. The fundamentalist onslaught is partly to be attributed to the fear of losing power by the privileged few. With the collapse of the Soviet Union these assertions are sought to be manipulated by vested interests to suit the needs of a unipolar world. In a phase of phenomenal upsurge of democratic aspirations, new norms have to be agreed upon through a process of participatory dialogues even with the adversary (let us say, two neighboring Nation States who are at logger-heads with each other or two ideological adversaries in a single Nation State) globally as well as at various levels of human collectivities, including the Nation State.

In this state of high flux transitional phase one has to consciously avoid being judgmental regarding other's viewpoints. The critical evaluation of other viewpoints has to be in an idiom, which encourages moderation. As analyzed by Azfar Aziz in the *Daily Star* (from Dhaka dated Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2000)

*“It is high time for the idealists to realise that it is all right for them to speculate about the nature of truth as long as they don't impose their beliefs on others. That what exists is real and reality is the lonely truth; all philosophies and ideologies are mere interpretations of it and no single interpretation is good forever. That it is absolutely lunatic to try to distort reality into the scope of a certain ideal, for reality is infinite and ideals are finite. That there are as many interpretations of reality as many individual beings. So it would be better for them to adopt an inductive process in decision making rather than their previous deductive one. That they have to*

*look for and find our common grounds and agreements with their fellow citizens and make them the basis of their strategies and action plans.”*

In this era of redefinition of our identities and moralities we need to evolve quasi-permanent structures of dialogue in South Asia on all the principal dimensions of democracy—Economic Democracy, Cultural Democracy, Social Democracy, Ecological Democracy and Political Democracy.

It is, admittedly, somewhat uncomfortable to discuss democracy—which, as a process of constructive self-engagement of humanity, should be indivisible—in such small bits and shreds. However, if the complexity of what is called democracy is approached from five different dimensions/viewpoints, this should bring forward a wider and richer spectrum of problems and possibilities.

We have been discussing/dialoguing with our friends in various parts of the globe on these dimensions of democracy. There is an emerging consensus that civil society in general, and grassroots groups and NGOs in particular, need some institutional arrangement to clarify their ideas and evolve their perspective on democracy. For this, enduring structures for dialogues on democracy at all levels (from local to global) in all its dimensions are necessary.

In discussions that have taken place in various national and international forums, people have started to develop ideas about building a global network of individuals and organisations sharing similar values and goals. Such an initiative could also be seen as an effort to engage the international civil society in organising global or regional dialogue processes about a number of issues that are, at this juncture, of crucial importance. (Lokayan, together with a number of other organisations, has organized in India several hundred such dialogues about a large spectrum of issues. Lokayan’s approach is culture specific. It should not be seen as a mere “technique” or a method that can be transferred as such to other parts of the world. The approach, however, is universally applicable and could be used to catalyse political and social processes in other parts of the world).

By saying this, we do not intend to claim that we have rediscovered the wheel: we are fully aware that thousands if not millions of people are already actively doing this kind of work. Still, all the forces that have tried to oppose the present hegemonic position of the economic right have had great difficulties in developing a new holistic discourse strong enough to produce a shift from economism to a new moral awakening in politics and culture. We have to continuously explore ways and means of catalysing such a process.

Five basic dimensions, which could form the basis for an international network on democracy can be stated in the following manner:

### **I Empowerment of the *Daridranarayan*, the ‘Last Person’ (Economic Democracy)**

All the greatest teachers of humankind, including Gandhi, Muhammad, Christ and the Buddha, have emphasised the importance of empowerment of the weakest and the poorest of society. In spite of the fact that many people probably consider such a concept either patronising, elitist or naive, perhaps the most important single test for any kind of democracy is whether it

works so that it can protect the needs and rights of the poorest, most oppressed and least influential people in society.

What this means in each society during each historical period will differ because poverty and deprivation will be created and regenerated over and over again through widely varied means. But the issue or goal is clear and remains the same. One of the main problems is how to relate to the needs and concerns of the *Daridranarayan* in a way that is empowering and not patronising.

With the *Daridranarayan* at the center of all thinking, all issues concerning transactions of goods and services, mode and relations of production, and technological choices, have always been part of human engagement. All such issues can be considered as the economic dimension of democracy, called 'economic democracy' for convenience.

## **II Ecological Regeneration and People's Control Over Natural Resources (Ecological Democracy)**

Environmental degradation—pollution of air, water and soil, loss of species and biodiversity, destruction of the ozone layer, destabilization of the climate, loss of tree and vegetative cover, soil erosion and desertification—is one of the most serious issues of our times. It should be a high priority for the movement. However, the discourse used in the West and among the westernized organisations in the South is often very alienating for the majority of the (rural) people, and may result in programs and measures neither understood nor owned by them. In the long run, such programs can backfire. A better approach is to concentrate in people's control over natural resources, and integrate the various environmental and conservational concerns in such an approach. Humankind's relationship with nature as consumer, controller, nurturer, destroyer or as a small component of nature are all issues to be dealt with under the rubric of ecological democracy.

## **III Ensuring Human Dignity (Social Democracy)**

There is no doubt that the neo-liberal economic policies and other measures pursued by the 'New Right' will be causing extreme poverty on a scale that could be unsurpassed in human history. In many cases the problems should be seen in the framework of empowering the *Daridranaryan* and as issues of acute economic survival. However, in most instances, issues like unemployment or underemployment, temporary employment, workers' rights and the meaning and nature of the available working opportunities are, across the globe, issues of human dignity. Even in cases where the crumbs falling from the table of the neo-liberals are more than enough to satisfy the basic material needs of the people, human dignity is sacrificed in a most detrimental way. The hegemonic status of neo-liberal policies and global institutions creates identities of greed. It promotes consumerism and materialism at the cost of more spiritual layers of the being. Neo-liberal policies prevent people from making good moral choices, from pursuing their spirituality; it sacrifices human dignity for profit.

## **IV Strengthening Plural Co-existence (Cultural Democracy)**

The issue of plural coexistence, and of the prevention of communal violence, will have

a profound significance for every part of the world at the beginning of this millennium. When the world's economic and cultural crises deepen, the threat of communal violence increases. In areas suffering from acute environmental deterioration, the undermining of the natural resource base can aggravate such problems. In South Asia there is a living tradition of peaceful co-living of various ethnic and religious groups and of sects within religions. This tradition is under great strain and needs to be revitalised in the present context. A judicial pronouncement in Bangladesh in January 2001 banning *fatwa* (religious edicts) is an authentic illustration of cultural democracy. Among the Hindus, the vesting of adequate dignity to the folk practices not conforming to Brahmanical scriptural norms should be a priority item. Campaign for Cultural Democracy should also be a mobilising act against attempts to distort history in almost all countries of the world, including those in Europe and America. In Europe the denomination of Muslims is being projected as fundamentalist or non-pluralist segment of the society. Probably because Islamic Resurgence has, from the very beginning, been largely directed against the spiritual hollowness and extreme materialism of Western societies. The increasing polarisation between the Islamic countries and the West (the European Union and the United States of America) has been deepened by instances like the Gulf War in 1990, which created anti-West feelings throughout the Islamic world. The European integration—all the old colonial powers being fused to one new super-power—is worsening the situation because it is considered as the potential and powerful adversarial supra-state by the Islamic states. The conflict will be further aggravated if the European Union becomes a real Federal State and if it develops a joint defense policy and a joint army, in which case all the EU member states, including the Nordic countries, will become integral parts of a major military super-power with a large arsenal of nuclear weapons. Plural coexistence, however, should not only be viewed from a negative viewpoint or through the scenarios that need to be prevented: it should also be seen as richness, where new things are being created and recreated continuously through the interaction of differences.

Humankind has organised itself in communities that eventually result in some sort of stratification, differential status, and issues of individual and collective dignity. The issues of gender justice, freedom and dignity within the caste system, of non-whites and marginalised identity groups are all issues which can be attended to under the rubric of social democracy.

## **V Nurturing and Deepening Democracy (Political Democracy)**

Political democracy, if not constantly cared for and defended, can be greatly undermined. All the possible checks that can be built in order to prevent the un-democratising thrust of social systems can only be effective if the people actively guard them. Democracy—defined in terms like participation, representation, rule of law, protection of cultural, linguistic, religious, political minorities and transparency of political decision making—is to be nurtured and deepened. However, at present only one model of democracy—the western liberal or market democracy whose specificities have evolved in a small cultural-historical zone of the globe—is being adopted by all the countries with different cultures, institutions and traditions. The big wave of indigenisation and anti-westernisation—to which belong, among other things, the Islamic Resurgence, the growth of the Hindutva movements and the economic and cultural rise of China—cannot be wished away lightly. If issues like democracy, human rights or women's rights can be labeled as western values by various oppressive forces in the South, there is a real danger that these values will be seriously undermined during the first century of the new millennium.

For a detailed discussion on political democracy see my article titled 'An Internal Dialogue on Indian Democracy: By a Democratic Socialist'.

## Directions of Search

1. Institutionalising quasi-permanent structures/networks for enduring 'Dialogues on democracy and globalisation' can be the most strategic tools for democratising the North-South relations.

As discussed earlier, we urgently need a framework that will coalesce (bring) together the various strivings on earth for a universalistic, humanistic, democratic front. We need to consciously and urgently cultivate peer groups, clubs, institutions, networks, movement groups, and political parties to discuss the positive forms of intervention to deepen democracy.

2. We urgently need to undertake some defensive actions as well, for example organisations like 'Friends of Earth', 'Survival International', 'International Rivers Network', 'Green Peace' and 'Green Parties', must approach all the democratic forces on earth to evolve a defense strategy in preserving what has not been so far destroyed by the hegemonic forces.

In a recent conference of the Global Greens I had put forward a resolution in the form of an amendment to the Global Green Charter. This resolution got 64 votes in favor and 45 votes in opposition. I had no opportunity to understand why this resolution was defeated narrowly for want of two-thirds support for it. I put forward that resolution again to this house to be carried on to the respective organisations and governments represented by the participants in this workshop and was given their feedback.

"Southern civilisations for thousands of years have been practicing a way of life—what is now described as 'green ideals' or 'Green Principles'. A careful look at these livelihood support systems will show that it is not sheer technological backwardness. [Rather] the conservation [and] regeneration of nature and the limiting the wants [were] a conscious choice. Now, the present form of globalisation is destroying these communities at a very rapid rate. Global Democratic Front needs to set up a 'Defense Committee' to defend 'Green communities' in the South. Otherwise, what has been preserved through thousands of years will be destroyed in the next couple of decades."

3. We need an independent information, research and media network to identify the democratic practices, struggles and dreams and dramas being unfolded and enacted in the family called Earth. We need to collect, collate and then disseminate this information, especially to those who are still prisoners of the mirage American Consumer Paradise. We should resolve to (a) set up such media centers all over the world, (b) to disseminate this information in the people's languages as far as possible, besides English.
4. All these dialogues and building up of institutions and networks should culminate into building a global front for defending, deepening and expanding democracy. This front can be built through a combination of intellectual activism and organisation building. But the organization building cannot happen only through intellectual activism. The evolution of ideological framework and building up of networks can happen effectively if we use the

weapon of civil disobedience as evolved by Gandhiji. One of Gandhiji's greatest followers, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, believed that in such acts of civil disobedience sometimes some material damage to property can take place but a strict code of ethics must be followed by the agitating people's organizations as well as the enforcing agencies that there is no loss of human life on either side. The purity of *satyagrah* depends on the purity of attitudes on both sides of the fence. Nowadays governments pay attention only when the movement becomes violent. The responsibility of a peaceful world order is to be shouldered by the totality of humankind, including the managers of the establishment and not only by the struggling leaders of the oppressed and exploited people. After adequate political and technical preparation, including sustainable land use planning, the agenda of boycotting genetically modified food-grains and biotechnology produced edible materials should be adopted and if necessary non-violent civil disobedience should be resorted to. A campaign should be launched against all diversionary moves in the name of cultural nationalism and 'national sentiments' which put the issues of the right to work, and the right to sustainable livelihood at the backburner.

I will end by quoting from a personal communication on 1<sup>st</sup> of May from Mr. M.P. Parameswaran, a leading ideologue of the All India People's Science Network (which recently got the Right Livelihood Award).

"I have gone through your note "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and its annex. I find that there are more things [that] we share than we differ with. The anxiety syndrome is something very real and debilitating. In the early sixties when I was in Moscow one thing that impressed me greatly was the absence of an 'anxiety syndrome.' Many here and everywhere argue that competition is the driving engine of progress. But progress towards what? Anxiety, insecurity, madness!

"Strengthening all the five types of democracies at home in India, in the states, and in the panchayats, is important. This is a real concrete task. Equally important is the task of disillusionment, which progress is not what the capitalists or even the Marxists have been telling us. International solidarity is important. It gives us moral support. But there is something more important in it. I feel that we cannot save humanity without saving 'the West' especially the Americans from their follies, without making them realize that their way of life is unsustainable and unenviable. There are a very large number of groups in the USA who share this view. A project – a programme—to weld all these groups into a single force will be useful and even necessary for us and the rest of the world. Can we think of a concrete plan of action for this? I have been feeling the necessity of such action [for] quite many years."

**A paper prepared for the Workshop on North-South Dialogue on Democracy and Globalization\*, 19-20 June, 2001 Helsinki, Finland**




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\* In the guidelines supplied to authors, besides the words included in the title which are North-South, dialogue, democracy, globalisation; other key words are political, economic, social, cultural and ecological, oppression and dominance, democratisation processes/experiences, global governance and new initiatives. To explicate and inter-link all these words/concepts in a 20-minute or half an hour presentation is a tall order. The general expectation from the authors is "the ambition of the workshop is to get beyond the present jargon of, say, more neo global governance, more civil society and less nation states." The authors are encouraged to go beyond 'any fashionable buzz words or official discourses.'

# On Democratising the Broadcast Media for Santi Prachatham

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Ubonrat Siriyuvasak

This paper pays tribute to the late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn and his ideal of “Santi Prachatham” [i.e., Santi Pracha Dhamma]. Communication and peace walk side by side in his concept of living together peacefully as sisters and brothers, and as humankind who share the joy and the sorrow in communal relations. Communication to build understanding and to see the beauty of differences in a diverse world lies at the heart of modern society. But the complexities of power and arms conflicts, ethnic cleansing and violence in our everyday lives demonstrate how the world we live in is still many steps away from coming close to “Santi Prachatham”. The media have been criticised for cultivating hatred and for exacerbating the existing conflicts. On the other hand, the media and their global conglomerates are seen as the outgrowth of the power struggle for economic and political domination for which the majority of the peoples in the world are suffering from its consequences.

Thai society has had experiences in the past of media abuse. Lies and information distortions were used for political manipulation and state violence against the people in 1976 and 1992. The struggle to ‘free’ the radio and television, controlled by the state and its agencies, in recent years is a strenuous effort in order to reconstruct some space for public communication. This paper attempts to discuss the struggle for the democratisation of the broadcast media in the context of the social and political reform during 1997-2000. A new law to set up an independent regulatory body was enacted in March 2000. The gist of the legislation is to restructure state ownership of the broadcasting media and to re-allocate them into three categories of ownership. These are state, commercial and community licenses. The unprecedented change in the law came about after Article 40 of the 1997 Constitution stipulated that radio spectrum for radio and television transmission and radio communications are national resources to be used for public interests.

As I argued elsewhere (1999) the liberalising process would bring about further privatisation of radio and television since the new commercial license is expected to transfer state ownership right or state property into private hands. In addition, state television and radio stations

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\* “On democratising the broadcast media for Santi Prachatham” is an edited version of “Regulation reform and the question of democratising the broadcast media in Thailand” presented at the International Conference on Democratisation and the Media: Comparative Perspectives from Europe and Asia at Bellagio, Italy (8-12 April 2001).

operated by state agencies will be commercialised. It is evident that economic deregulation is on the reform agenda following the global trend on media deregulation. But the state was cautious in its proposal to liberalise political and cultural expressions. Hence, what is at stake is the public right to communicate. Our discussion below will take up some of the key issues on the democratisation of the broadcast media structure in this reform moment.

### **State and corporate control over the National Broadcasting Commission**

At the structural level, Thai radio and television were situated within various state agencies. The Broadcasting Act (1955) stipulated that private operators must apply for a broadcast license while state agencies were exempted. But throughout the history of radio and television no private license has been granted. Therefore, state stations have been the only type of legal operators and they were able to broadcast without any public rules or regulations. In a sense, the state could operate the broadcast media based on its political power and not by the rule of law. This was particularly true during the regime of absolute military dictators (1957-1973). However, the absolute control of the broadcast media by the state did not survive the popular upheavals in the 1970s and 1990s. The political regulation of the broadcast media was compelled to change when the political leadership was overthrown.

The most recent popular resistance to state control and censorship of news and information erupted in May 1992. During the political confrontation between the government of General Suchinda Kraprayoon, on the one hand, and the Democratic Movement and mass demonstrators, on the other hand, news blackout on the television networks and information distortion on the Army radio sent more people to the streets (Kana Kammakarn Yadwerachon, 2535). The reporters of a couple of radio stations which attempted to broadcast news about the demonstration were threatened. These stations finally closed down when the military started to shoot demonstrators on Rajadamnern Avenue (Laksana Klaikaew, 1994). It was the newspapers that informed the people about the troops and the firing of demonstrators on Rajdamnern Avenue. This incident illustrates that in time of political crisis the state was in complete control of the radio and television and used them as part of its warfare strategy to suppress dissident voices or mobilise support for violence. During the political crises in 1973 and 1992 there were news blackout and the Public Relations Department was set on fire to demonstrate the anger of the people against the suppression of freedom. Each time, a new body of broadcast regulation was formed at the aftermath of the event.

The interim prime minister, Anand Panyarachun, a liberal businessman was quick to respond to the public outcry for more freedom of information and freedom of expression. His move to set up a new radio and television regulator in 1992, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), was well received. Although the bureaucratic position of the new body was similar to the defunct Broadcasting Executive Board (BEB) the composition of the board had a new facelift. Two groups of representatives were invited to join the NBC. These were communications academics and non-governmental organisations on social development, on women and children, and on consumer's rights. But the majority of the board members were representatives from state agencies who owned radio and television stations and leasing them out to private concessionaires. Inadvertently, the representatives from civic organisations, generally seen as "*outsiders*", were placed within the bureaucratic bastion of the NBC.



The National Broadcasting Commission under the political guidance of the interim government of Anand Panyarachun embarked on a two-pronged strategy for media liberalisation. The plan was to initiate some steps towards media liberalisation in parallel with the overall liberalisation of the economy. Firstly, the Anand government took away the censorship authority from the NBC and placed it in the hands of individual stations. Secondly, it initiated the project to set up a new UHF television station by means of open bidding instead of the privileged concession as practiced in the past. The state agency owning the new television station is the Office Attached to the Office of the Prime Minister. With these moves the government believed that the right and freedom of information and expression would be installed. On the contrary, radio and television stations, used to the old convention, were restricting the freedom of expression by way of self-censorship. Self-censorship was carried out by both state stations and private stations. As for the UHF television station (i.e., ITV), the high bidding and low revenue served as a pretext for Siam Infotainment to avoid paying the first year concession fee of 300 million baht. In addition, Siam Infotainment requested the government to alter the Terms of Reference in the concession; that is, to lift the ten percent limit for each shareholder to attract new major shareholders to salvage ITV. In early 2000, only after four years of operation, Shin Corporation, the telecom conglomerate founded and owned by the present prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, became one of the major shareholders along with the Siam Commercial Bank. Despite public criticisms on the political motive of Shin Corp neither the NBC nor the Office Attached to the Office of the Prime Minister was able to regulate the cross ownership of the broadcast and telecommunications of Shin Corp. Nor did they investigate the close relationship between the leading political party and ITV and Shin Corp. The voices of the people remained marginalised while the business and middle classes gained new operation rights over the media. As a consequence, not much reform was achieved during 1992 - 2000 especially on the structural reform of the broadcast media.

Evidently, such a structure as the NBC, a regulatory body bounded by powerful state agencies, could hardly be expected to lead the way to reforming the broadcast media. The ineffectiveness of the NBC to regulate state agencies and their radio and television concessionaires occurred frequently. Two recent examples show how the power to control the operation of television lies beyond the reach of the NBC. The first example is the case of UBC cable television under the Mass Communication Authority of Thailand (MCOT) and the second example is the case of ITV, the newly established UHF television, under the Office Attached to the Office of the Prime Minister.

In 1999, UBC announced an increase in its subscription fee on the gold package. The Foundation for Consumers received complaints from UBC's subscribers that the charge was unfair due to the fact that UBC was a monopoly on cable television service. The new subscription fee was forced upon consumers who had no alternative to turn to. The NBC, however, did not provide any ruling on this case. Finally, The Foundation for Consumers brought the case to the Complaint Bureau of the Council of State and the Trade Competition Committee, Ministry of Commerce. The Complaint Bureau took up the petition and heard the case from both the MCOT and the Foundation for Consumers between October 1999 and January 2000. Due to the organisational change of the Complaint Bureau the case has been transferred to the new Administrative Court and is awaiting due process of the Court. On the other hand, the Trade Competition Committee ruled that UBC was not a monopoly in the television industry. Firstly, because there were other cable concessionaires although they have not started to operate. Secondly, consumers can always switch to the terrestrial stations if they find UBC unsatisfactory.

Nonetheless, the Trade Competition Committee advised that UBC should improve the quality of programmes to supplement the increase in the subscription fee.

The second case in point is the intervention of the editorial independence by the management of ITV station prior to the general elections on 6 January 2001. After the general elections, which the Thai Rak Thai Party won a landslide victory, 23 ITV staff members were fired on February 7 (*Mathichon Sudsubda*, 12 February 2001). Both Thai Rak Thai Party and Shin Corporation are founded by Thaksin Shinawatra, who became the new prime minister. The Office Attached to the Office of the Prime Minister did not investigate into the violation of the editorial independence in the ITV newsroom nor did the NBC provide any ruling to protect the professional ethics of the journalists.

The organising of the journalists in ITV was an unprecedented move that broke with the taboo on self-censorship and corporate censorship in order to report to the audience in the fullest meaning of journalistic professionalism (*Outlook, Bangkok Post*, 3 March 2001). The so-called “23 rebels” who were fired from ITV took their case to the National Council of Lawyers of Thailand for legal consultation. Since they have just organised a union and recently elected the first group of union officers they could fight their case in the Labour Court. But for the infringement of their right to publish freely and without interference by the owner or management of the media corporation guaranteed by Article 41 of the new Constitution (1997) the Council was at a loss for there was no court or any other authority to turn to.

There was widespread public outcry over the firing of the 23 ITV staff. Civic groups, labour unions and the Campaign for Popular Democracy called a boycott on the station as well as a review of the concession given to ITV whose major shareholders are the Siam Commercial Bank and Shin Corporation. But the NBC left the regulatory authority in the hand of the state agency that gave out the concession to ITV. The Office Attached to the Office of the Prime Minister in responding to the public outcry issued a statement saying that it could not revoke the concession given to the corporation since it would violate the terms of the legal contract. On the other hand, the management of ITV reiterated its position that it was merely an internal management matter due to the need to streamline its production staff. In due course, however, the present state of the NBC will be dissolved. A new NBC, which is an independent regulatory body, will take shape in its place according to Article 40 of the new Constitution. The organisation law on the NBC and the NTC enacted in March 2000 has been enforced and new regulators must be set up to regulate both the broadcast media and the telecommunications industry.

But within these socio-political contexts do we foresee a fair and open selection process? Can we now expect a swift change in the direction of media reform that would break up the whole monopolistic structure of state ownership? In the case of ITV questions were raised about the legitimacy of Shin Corporation in being the major shareholder of a television station. It is public knowledge that Thaksin Shinawatra, who owned Shin Corporation, is the founder of the Thai Rak Thai Party. Although he transferred his shares to his son the question of conflict of interest remains. At present, the serious question about ITV is whether the prime minister who holds the highest administrative public office should be owning, albeit indirectly, ITV and the largest telecom corporation. It could be seen that the NBC is unable to resolve the problem nor could it regulate the broadcast media to the benefit of the public. The incident also demonstrates how large media corporations such as ITV could influence the state agency to open the way for corporate expression in the place of democratic expression.

Let us take a close view at the screening process of the NBC selection committee to find out how the new independent regulator is being formulated and whether it differs from the outgoing NBC. In February 2001, the NBC Selection Committee short-listed 61 candidates from 103 applicants. From these candidates 28 were selected after they were interviewed. The Selection Committee would then select 14 candidates for the Senate's final screening. The 7 finalists who are approved by the Senate will form the independent National Broadcasting Commission. The NBC, according to the organisation, is responsible for the allocation of frequencies and assigning the 3 categories of licenses—state, commercial and community licenses. In addition, it must draw up the master plan to reform the broadcast media. It is, therefore, a highly powerful and politically equipped organisation to democratise the radio and television and the people's right to communicate. But so far, the selection process has been criticised by the media and the Working Group on Monitoring Article 40 for being overly influenced by the military and the state agencies that owned the broadcast media as well as by large media corporations. The press revealed that among the top 28 short listed candidates were those from the state agencies holding the largest stake in the broadcast media and candidates who were closely connected to these large media corporations (*Prachachart Thurakit*, 15-21 March, 2001).

The relationship between the state agencies and the candidates for the NBC shows the representation of the power bloc within the state that would take over the organising structure of the NBC. There is, however, a new and highly significant composition added to this structure: the representatives from "*the major entertainment conglomerates*". It appears that at the start of the new phase of deregulation the members of the un-democratic alliance are making every effort to take control of the NBC.

From our analysis of the formation of the NBC it is left to be seen if the new independent regulatory body would function to reallocate the electromagnetic spectrum fairly among the state and the private sectors whilst 20% of the airwaves must be allocated to the people's sector. The path to media reform depends largely on who gets selected and how it is being restructured. But at this particular juncture it seems that reform from the legal aspect alone may not be sufficient to move the old structure towards a more democratic broadcast system.

### **Social movement and public participation**

During the intense struggle for the legal reform of the broadcast media in 1999-2000 the civil society organised itself and participated actively throughout the entire process. They begin to form what White (1995) saw as the social movement in the process of democratising communication. There were groups that campaigned for reform at the policy and institutional level as well as those that worked on a broad basis to mobilize change in public attitudes. This is to enable citizens to have greater control over the processes of public communication. The participatory process would, hopefully, lead to political self-determination in opposing the existing institutional and hierarchical structure of communications in the Thai society.

As Article 40 of the new Constitution spells out "*the electromagnetic spectrum is a*

*national resource that must be shared and used for national and local interests*".<sup>1</sup> This has been the key ruling concept that would change the ownership structure of the state monopoly and the private patronage concession developed over the past decades. In early 1998, a joint committee was set up by the government to draft the laws in accordance with Article 40. From the start, the joint committee did not take up the agenda on media reform but discussed the guideline on how an independent regulatory body should be set up. After eight months, the proposal was to draft a bill for two independent regulators. One regulating the broadcast media and one regulating telecommunications. The guidelines on the number of commissioners, the functions and responsibilities of the regulators was sent to the Council of State to be written up into a full draft bill.

However, the draft did not follow the joint committee's guideline. It proposed a singular independent regulator embracing both the broadcast media and tele-communications. The Council of State took up the line of argument of the Post and Telegraph Department that there would be technological convergence and that the US model of its FCC (Federal Communications Commission) and the Canadian model of CRTC (The Canadian Radio-Television & Telecommunications Commission) were both good examples of successful regulatory bodies that Thailand should model itself on.

At this point, non-governmental organisations that work on alternative media took up the media reform issue as part of a larger social movement on social and political reform. The Working Group on Monitoring Article 40 was formed with 25 organisations as its founding members. It waged a battle against the alteration of the draft bill and the legislation processes of the NBC and NTC Act (Supinya, 2000). Together with the academics, the Working Group on Monitoring Article 40 were opposed to the government's draft bill. They asked that the central organising of the bill should follow the proposal of the joint committee (on two independent regulators) instead of the proposal of the Council of State (on one independent regulator).

When the House of Parliament debated on whether to set up a single regulator or two separate regulators the argument on the different nature of each of these sectors was raised. The pro-two separate regulatory bodies argue that it is the media content and the right of the people to communicate that are at the heart of the matter for the broadcast media and not the telecommunications network per se although it must be recognised that telecommunications infrastructure and modern production and communications technologies are crucial to the efficiency of these services. In addition, there were questions on the absolute power of this new body if the broadcast media and the telecommunications sector were regulated under a single body. The fear was that too much economic interest was at stake if everything was put together. In the end, members of the Opposition Party working with the academics in the House Ad Hoc Committee were able to convince the committee to agree to the two-regulator model. However, the House Ad Hoc Committee proposed that the two regulators must set up a joint committee in order to manage the spectrum together.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 40 reads as follows:

*"The radio frequencies for radio and television transmission, and in radio communications are national resources to be used for public interests.*

*An independent state regulatory agency must be set up to supervise the assignment and licensing of frequencies for radio and television broadcasting and for telecommunications stipulated in clause one of this article.*

*The objectives of clause two must take into consideration the highest public interests at the national and local levels, in the area of education, culture, security and public safety and other public benefits, including free and fair competition."*

The argument from the academics and the NGOs on why there should be two independent regulatory bodies was clearly a social and cultural argument. It was based on the guarantee of freedom and rights of expression and communication of individuals and community as opposed to the proposal on one independent regulator model which employed economic logic as its main driving force for regulating the electromagnetic spectrum. If there were one single regulator the rationale of the telecommunications sector in managing the spectrum would easily dominate the broadcast media sector. Furthermore, the socio-cultural orientation of the broadcast media would completely be subsumed under the technological orientation of the telecommunications sector (*Krunghthep Thurakit*, 7 April 1999). What might follow would be the change of direction of the debate. The media reform agenda would easily be dropped from the legislative forum while the focus of the discussion would be geared towards the notion of technological abundance and economic growth (of telecommunications corporations). The public would be robbed of their communication rights regarding the broadcast media. And public participation in this process would come to a sudden end. Hence, the question of media reform (for public interests) would be left to the experts and state agencies to decide among themselves. The important notion of genuine public ownership of the airwave will be lost in this kind of manipulation. What is at stake, then, is the nullification of the ownership right of the public sector that would provide the balance between the state and private sectors. And here is the key to the entire democratisation of the broadcast media under the joint monopoly of the state and private sectors.

During the legal passage the central question in the House Ad Hoc Committee was how to democratise the ownership right of the broadcast media.<sup>2</sup> There were several suggestions on how the public and the community could have access to the broadcast media. The first one was on assigning an alternative radio station to each province. The second one was on the allocation of 20% of airtime to community programmes. The third suggestion from the academics was to allocate 20% of the radio and television frequencies to the 'people sector'. Representatives from the Army and the Post and Telegraph Department in the House Ad Hoc Committee asked if the 'people sector' actually existed. Do they have professional media skills to operate a station? And finally, are they qualified to have the ownership right in an equal manner with the state agencies and the private sector?

The outcome of the debate was a reluctant confirmation of the third option on the allocation of 20% of the radio and television frequencies to the 'people sector' in addition to the provincial station for development. Article 26 of the NBC and NTC Act stipulated that

*In drawing up the master plan for radio and television broadcasting and in the licensing of stations the NBC must take into consideration the appropriate ratio between operators in the state sector, the private sector and the people sector. By this, the NBC must allocate no less than 20% of the frequencies to the people sector. In the case that the people sector is not ready, the NBC must provide sufficient support so that the people sector could have access to the appropriate ratio of the frequencies.... And that the people sector must operate for public interests and not for profit.*

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<sup>2</sup> For the telecommunications sector the plan to privatise the state telecommunication operators and to liberalise the entire industry has been proposed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications earlier. The plan was to begin internal liberalisation in 2000 and full liberalisation would follow in 2006.

In order for the citizen and the community to actually gain access to radio and television as owners and producers of programmes civic groups in regional towns were networking with one another to form local committees to campaign for reform. In some areas, the civic groups were able to have access to Radio Thailand local stations through their new 'community programme' slot. Both the Public Relations Department (PRD) and the Mass Communication Organisation of Thailand (MCOT) have devised their version of 'community programme' to demonstrate their positive attitude towards reform. The Public Relations Department launched its pilot project in 1999 on community radio programme in 30 provinces through Radio Thailand provincial radio stations. Local committees comprised of station administrators, production staff and members of civic group were set up to form the programming policy and the operation of the community airtime. The MCOT, on the other hand, organised workshop for its staff on media reform and on public and community participation in the broadcast media. These 1-2 hours of allocation time were opened to active civic groups to produce current affairs, talk and cultural programmes in a style accessible to the community (Ubolratchathani, Nakorn Rachasima and Nakorn Si Thammarat, for example). For those programmes in which local vernaculars were spoken, the popularity of the programmes was rated highly by the audience.

The popular current affairs programme format adopted by most programmes was the phone-in programmes familiar to urban Bangkok audiences after 1992. Civic media producers talked about local concerns and daily issues such as the deficiencies of government services to their communities. Gradually, state agencies must respond to these questions or face the issues on the programme. They felt uncomfortable having to answer to public scrutiny. On the other hand, the stations were uptight in a situation whereby some dialogues and communications took place because this kind of open line is starkly different from the one-way and propagandistic format long employed by the state stations. In Nakorn Rachasima, for example, the civic producers took the programme a step further by broadcasting the controversial local district meeting. The transparency of the meeting was able to halt the misconduct of some of the local district members. These are the types of civic programming that gained popularity over a short period of time. But the staff members of the stations were fearful that these programmes would get out of their control.

During this experimental period the independent Children and Youth News Agency was created in 1999. It linked up with a network of children and youth radio in 15 provinces. Media reform for this group meant direct access of radio and television production by children and youth. Their goal is to have their own voices expressed in the broadcast media. Based on Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)<sup>3</sup> the Eyes of the Pineapple, which is the organiser of the Children and Youth News Agency, sought airtime from Radio Thailand and financial support from UNICEF. With the endorsement of the government, the Eyes of the Pineapple has been allotted airtime from Radio Thailand, 918 AM, initially on the weekend afternoon slot. Later, this was extended to the afternoon slot between 13:00-16:00 and 20:30-21:00 on Mondays through Fridays.

The above are some examples on how the civic groups were actively preparing themselves to gain access to the broadcast media once forbidden to public participation. It is

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<sup>3</sup> Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child declares "The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of the child's choice."

clear that the demand for more public access and better quality programming along with the legal stipulation on media reform have put certain amount of pressure on the government and the state broadcast media. But the institutional structures of the state media networks were inflexible for this kind of openness and sharing of resources with the public. They find it difficult to accommodate “outsiders” into the stations as programme producers. Moreover, the members of production staff were conscientious of their station identity as state public relations media. When the civic group criticised the state or government policies the station felt uneasy and stepped in to censor the programme. In some stations, the programmes were terminated due to its hard-hitting commentaries on local issues. It could be seen, then, that there is a large gap on the structural and conceptual understanding of the state media and the civic groups on what is news worthy or what is high on the agenda of the community.

In a broad sense, the social movement has demonstrated how it attempted to renovate and democratise virtually all aspects of the communication process. As White (1995) argued what is central to the question of democratisation is,

*the insistence that ordinary citizens should participate in the administration, policy-making and government of public communication, and that members of the social movement may participate in all phases of the collective communication decision-making process, that members may engage in ‘horizontal’ communication between individuals and groups without being vetted by authorities, that communication be dialogical in the sense that members have a right to reply and expect a direct reply.* (White, 1995, p.93)

But by the mid-2000 the government lifted its endorsement of the pilot project on ‘community programme’ as well as on the children’s programme allotted to the Eye of the Pineapple group. The experiences revealed the conflicting relationship between the state media and civic groups in their style of production and programming. For the part of the civic groups the project was, nonetheless, a great learning experience. They imagined that it would lay the ground for the future operation of community radio guaranteed by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) Act of 2000.

### **Communication rights and the future for a democratic broadcast media system**

Our discussion, so far, analysed how the state perceived regulation reform of the broadcast media vis-à-vis the social movement. The intervention by popular groups such as the Working Group on Monitoring Article 40 or the Voice of the Voiceless, community media groups and children media has opened the question on regulation reform for public debate. As McChesney (1998) has pointed out “*the extent to which there is non-elite participation into communication policymaking may be a barometer for the level of democracy in a society.*” The ongoing legal process seems a good sign towards a more democratic system only that the question on the purpose of reform has not been debated thoroughly. We might, therefore, find a push towards the opposite direction on media reform and communication rights of the people. That is, deregulation purely for the interests of the big businesses.

The future of the communication rights of the people hinges very much on the legislation of a 20% share of the airwaves for non-profit and non-commercial media to be

allocated by the new NBC. There is, however, no guarantee for success at this formative stage. For the most part reform was initiated from above packaged within the Constitutional reform agenda. Secondly, the experience of regulation reform of the broadcast media in the Thai society, although stemming from the discontent with mis-information, distortion and bias reporting of controversial issues, silencing of dissident voices and the rise of commercialism and consumerism, differed from a number of societies. Compared with the experience of Britain, for example, pirate radio took the airwaves in the 1960s before the government started to reform the content of the BBC. These pirate radio broadcast black music, political and community programmes and some eccentric programmes from small roof top transmitters (Hind and Mosco, 1985). These must play hide and seek with the Radio Authority since they were illegally broadcast. In 1984 the new Telecommunications Act was enacted and the Home Office used this to charge illegal pirate broadcasters with a serious offence instead of a misdemeanour. Apart from this kind of direct action there were lobby groups for community radio such as the Community Communications (COMCOM), which was formed to raise public awareness and to lobby for the granting of experimental licenses on community radio so an alternative to the state's public broadcasting service could come into existence. COMCOM lobbied the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting chaired by Lord Annan to recommend the establishment of a Local Broadcasting Authority (LBA) that would encourage new types of radio. But the Home Office, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and the BBC objected to the recommendation on the lack of regulation and the availability of frequencies. The effort to experiment with a new type of community radio, thus, failed to materialise (Barbrook, 1985).

The US experience is also an invaluable learning lesson. In the early years of radio, in the mid-1920s, there were 125 non-commercial stations among a total of 450 radio stations or approximately 27.5 percent of the whole system. But as McChesney (1998) shows in his analysis of the political economy of American radio, the broadcast media reform movement in the US disintegrated after the passage of the Communications Act of 1934. This was the Act that established the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In fact, the struggle against the commercialisation of the airwaves had mobilised civic groups on education, religion, labour, women's issues, journalism, and farmers' groups, civil libertarians and intellectuals to form the reform movement. This was to establish a dominant role for the non-profit and non-commercial sector in the US broadcasting industry. These reformers argued that if private interests controlled the medium and their goal was profit, no amount of regulation or self-regulation could overcome the bias built into the system. Their effort was lost to the influential network broadcasters.

The resurgence of the non-profit community radio went in earnest after World War II. The war resistance movement and the pacifists in the bay area of San Francisco founded the Pacifica Foundation and was able to secure a radio license in 1948 to express their concern on the war and its aftermath (Land, 1999). KPFA led the way for a new era of alternative radio and expanded to New York on WBAI in the 1970s. These were the early models of listener sponsorship station. In 1975, with the organisation of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters community radio stations in the US began to spread out in the eastern and the mid-western states. In order to survive in a highly competitive environment these stations fought for financial support from the federal grant channelled through the Public Broadcasting Corporation. With audience subscription and federal grant as the bulk of their revenue the alternative broadcast of these community radio could provide access to a wide range of political and cultural expressions.

Nonetheless, the existing community radio has been unable to accommodate to all the



needs of the citizens in the community. There are groups finding themselves excluded from the airwaves. Small, low-power radio stations were set up to serve as voices for blacks, gays, etc. This was led by the micropower Free Radio Berkeley. The FCC, however, tried to confiscate the micropower radio stations particularly after the new Telecommunication Act of 1996 was passed. But the pirate operators defended themselves on the ground of the right to freedom of speech on the air guaranteed by the First Amendment. Hence, micropower broadcasting became a campaign of electronic civil disobedience (Dunifer, 1998). The court case goes on and the legal campaign for the right of micropower broadcasting spearheaded by the National Lawyers Guild's Committee on Democratic Communications is moving from strength to strength. This is an example of the reform movement from below fighting against the exclusion of its freedom to put its own voice on the air. The essential problem now is for legalisation to take the form conducive to the realisation of micropower community radio.

From the above experiences of Britain and the US we could see that the problem is how to link the legal lobbying and direct action such as pirate radio and community radio together to form a realistic social movement that would bring about democratic reform. Within the Thai society there is little direct and independent action on the ground. Pirate radio is unheard of except for the People's Voice of Thailand operated by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The station was broadcasting from the south of China and was relinquished in 1980 when the CPT was gradually dismantled. Although the social movement has put pressure on how the broadcast media system should be liberalised and distributed fairly among the state, the private and the people sectors the resistance to reform remains prevalent. Direct access to the airwaves by the people is a global problem shared by community groups, political dissidents, cultural eccentrics, ethnic minorities, migrant groups, women, children and youth of the under-privileged class. The threat from the direct access and participatory media to the capitalist system and the mainstream media within such a system might come from the subversive characteristic of community radio:

*it can challenge the division between broadcasters and consumers in our society. A community radio station seeks to adopt an organisational form which allows a wide variety of people to broadcast - i.e., it can attempt to transcend the capitalist labour process. (Barbrook, 1985, p.72)*

The new legislation for the direct access and self-management of the airwaves of the people sector is a significant legislation for the communication rights of the Thai people. In order to move this legal provision forward the Working Group on The People's Agenda for Independence (2000) has now taken up the issue of the people's media as one of its main agenda. This was put forth to the public in December 2000 prior to the general elections in January 2001. If lessons from comparative experiences are taken heed of the next logical step to democratise the broadcast media depends largely on the direct action of the people; they must start to put their own voices on the air soon. This could well be an integral part of the general transformation of the bourgeois society.

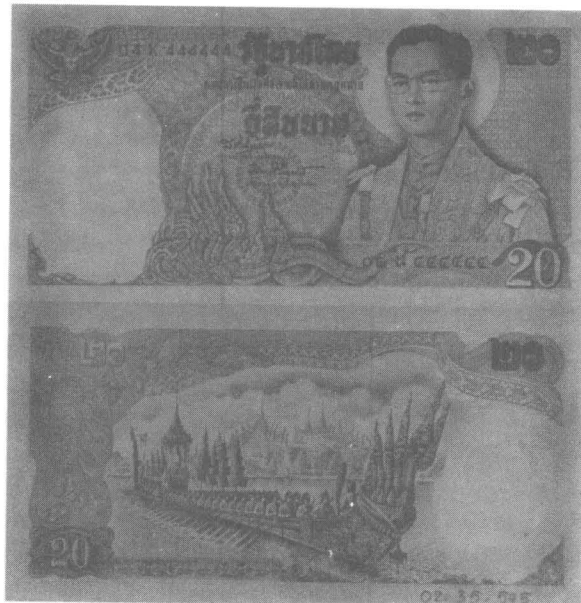
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IV  
Development  
and  
Environmental  
Justice



**Economists like myself—those who are primarily responsible for economics and finance—are indebted to Prince Siddhiporn, a pioneer in the field of new agrarian practices, for raising a touching matter: “Money and gold are illusory. Rice and fish are real.” The future of Thai farmers is an issue that must be carefully nurtured and protected.**

*Puey Ungphakorn,  
A Eulogy on Prince Siddhiporn Kritdakara, 1971*

**National development must also take into consideration the preservation and conservation of the people’s environment...When we discuss about development we must reflect on the environment which is beneficial to the public and subsequent generations.**

*Puey Ungphakorn,  
Buddhism and National Development, 1971*

# The Multiple Crises of Globalisation

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Walden Bello

In a little over a decade, the system of global capitalism has passed from triumph to crisis. As the world stands on the brink of a deep recession, it would be useful to reflect on some of the key dimensions of this historic transition—on the multiple crises wrecking the globalist project.

The last decade of the twentieth century began with the resounding collapse of the socialist economies of Eastern Europe and a lot of triumphalist talk about the genesis of a new market-driven global economy that rendered borders obsolete and rode on the advances of information technology. The key agents of the new global economy were the transnational corporations, which were depicted as the supreme incarnation of market freedom owing to their superior ability to bring about the most efficient mix of land, labor, capital, and technology.

Midway in the decade was born the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was painted by partisans of globalisation as providing the legal and institutional scaffolding for the new global economy. By creating a rules-based global system based on the primordial principle of freer trade, the WTO would serve as the catalyst of an economic process that would bring about the greatest good for the greatest number. It was the third pillar of a holy trinity that would serve as the guardian of the new economic order, the other two being the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which promoted ever freer global capital flows, and the World Bank, which would supervise the transformation of developing countries along free market lines and manage their integration into the new world economy.

## **Multilateralism in Crisis**

Yet even as the prophets of globalisation talked about the increasing obsolescence of the nation-state and the growing irrelevance of national interests, the main beneficiary of the new post-Cold War global order was the United States. Though it was supposedly a mechanism for freer trade, the WTO's most important agreements promoted monopoly for US firms: the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement consolidated the hold over high tech innovations by US corporations like Intel and Microsoft, while the Agreement on Agriculture institutionalised a system of monopolistic competition for third-country markets between the agribusiness interests

of the United States and the European Union.

When the Asian financial crisis engulfed countries that had been seen by many in the US business and political elites as America's most formidable competitors, Washington did not try to save the Asian economies by promoting expansionary policies. Instead, it used the IMF to dismantle the structures of state-assisted Asian capitalism that had been regarded as formidable barriers to the entry of goods and investments from US transnationals that had been clamoring vociferously for years to get their piece of the "Asian miracle." It was less the belief in spreading the alleged benefits of free trade than maximising geoeconomic and geostrategic advantage that lay behind US support for the policies of the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. As Chalmers Johnson has noted, a good case can be made that Washington's opportunistic behavior during the Asian financial crisis reflected the fact that "having defeated the fascists and the communists, the United States now sought to defeat its last remaining rivals for global dominance: the nations of East Asia that had used the conditions of the Cold War to enrich themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Acting to achieve its interests under multilateral cover was the preferred US strategy for most of the post-war period, whether it was the Bretton Woods institutions, United Nations, or the Group of Eight that provided the framework for "hegemonic leadership." Yet when these institutions got in the way of US interests, Washington did not hesitate to act unilaterally. This was increasingly the case in the 1990s, with the removal of the incentives for multilateral behavior posed by Soviet competition.

The instrumental use of multilateral agencies was stark when it came to the UN. While using the United Nations to provide cover for its policy of isolating Iraq, Washington also refused to pay its dues to the UN for not kowtowing wholeheartedly to US policy. Or it simply disregarded the UN when it could not get a mandate and proceeded to work its will through more pliable institutions, as it did when it resorted to NATO cover for the bombing of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict.

The G-8 (then G-7, without Russia) emerged in the 1970s to provide a mechanism for more multilaterally-shared decision-making among the advanced capitalist countries, especially in economic matters. Yet, especially under the administration of George W. Bush, Washington has embarked on a unilateralist course that has brought it to sharp conflict with other members on the burning issues of climate change, missile defense, and reconciliation between the two Koreas. The brusque junking of a painstakingly negotiated agreement, the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, marks a new low in unilateralist behavior, and its contribution to eroding the European Union-United States alliance that has served as the foundation of Western hegemony in the last 50 years cannot be underestimated.

## Legitimacy Crisis

Increasing resort to unilateralism and the brazen manipulation of multilateral mechanisms to achieve hegemony by the United States was a key source of the crisis of legitimacy that began to grip the global order in the late 1990s. But equally important as the erosion of

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), p.206.

multilateralism as a source of de-legitimation was the spreading realisation that the system could not deliver on its promise. That the system could not create prosperity for all but only the illusion of it was something that many observers had known for sometime. However, the realities of growing global poverty and inequality were neutralised by the high growth rates and the prosperity of a few enclaves of the world economy, like East Asia in the 1980s, which were (mistakenly) painted as paragons of market-led development. However, when the Asian economies collapsed in 1997, the follies of neoliberal economics were brought to the fore. All talk about the Asian financial crisis being caused by crony capitalism could not obscure the fact that it had been the liberation of speculative capital from the constraints of regulation, largely on account of pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that brought about Asia's collapse. The IMF also came under severe public scrutiny for imposing draconian programs on the Asian economies in the wake of the crisis—policies that merely accelerated economic contraction, saved foreign banks and speculative investors, and restructured economies along “American lines.”

The IMF's role in East Asia triggered a fresh reexamination of its role in imposing structural adjustment programs in much of Africa, South Asia, and Latin America in the 1980s, and the fact that these programs had, as they did in Asia, exacerbated stagnation, widened inequalities, and deepened poverty now became widely realized—so much so that the IMF, in a desperate effort to exorcise its record, felt compelled to change the name of the extended structural adjustment fund facility (ESAF) into the poverty reduction and growth facility prior to the World Bank-IMF annual meeting in Washington in September 1999.

The Asian financial crisis triggered the unraveling of the legitimacy of the IMF. In the case of the WTO, the situation was even more dramatic. In the last five years of the decade, growing numbers of people and communities began to realise that in signing on to the WTO, they had signed on to a charter for corporate rule that enshrined what consumer advocate Ralph Nader called the principle of “trade *uber alles*,” or corporate trade above equity, justice, environment, and almost everything else we hold dear. Many developing countries discovered that in signing on to the WTO, they had signed away their rights to development. The many streams of discontent and opposition converged in the streets of Seattle and the meeting rooms of the Seattle Convention Center in December 1999 to bring down the third ministerial meeting of the WTO and trigger a severe institutional crisis from which the organisation has yet to recover.

The World Bank, under the leadership of Australian-turned-American James Wolfensohn, appeared to be charting a course that would allow it to escape the damage inflicted on its sister institutions, until it was subjected to fire in early 2000 from an unexpected quarter: the Meltzer Commission. Ever since he took over as chief of the institution in the mid-1990s Australian-American James Wolfensohn had managed to defuse criticism through very skilled public relations work and co-optation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). But when the same criticisms that had been made by people from the left were made by a commission created by the US Congress, the game was up. Headed by conservative academic, Alan Meltzer, the commission concluded that the Bank's performance when it came to addressing its avowed goal of eliminating global poverty was miserable and that it would be better to devolve the task to regional bodies.

Not surprisingly, in the face of criticism coming from left to right, reform of the multilateral system has been prominent in the rhetoric of the multilateral agencies and the G-8 governments that are their most powerful backers. Debt forgiveness, a new global

financial architecture, and reform of the decision-making structures of the WTO and Bretton Woods twins have been among the high-profile issues on which expectations of change were promoted.

These initiatives have, for the most part, proved disappointing, with little in the way of concrete action. The most prominent reform initiative, the G-8's plan to lighten the servicing of the external debt of the 41 highly indebted poor countries (HIPC), has actually delivered a debt reduction of only \$1 billion since it began in 1996—or a reduction of their debt servicing by only three percent in the past five years!

When it comes to the question of the international financial architecture, serious discussion of controls on speculative capital like the Tobin tax has been avoided. An unreformed IMF continues to be at the center of the “firefighting system.” A preemptive, pre-crisis credit line at the Fund (which no country wants to avail of) and a toothless Financial Stability Forum—where there is little developing country participation—appear to be the only “innovations” to emerge from the Asian, Russian, and Brazilian financial crises of the last three years.

Reform of the decision-making structures of the multilateral institutions that serve as the key rule-setting and global management institutions of contemporary capitalism was also supposed to be spearheaded by the G-8. Yet, talk about democratising the WTO has vanished, with Director General Mike Moore saying that that the non-transparent “consensus” system that triggered the developing country revolt in Seattle in December 1998 is “non-negotiable.”<sup>2</sup> And with respect to the IMF and the World Bank, there is no longer any discussion about diluting the voting shares of the US and European Union in favor of greater voting power for the developing countries, much less of doing away with the feudal practices of always having a European head the Fund and an American to lead the Bank.

## **The Corporation under Scrutiny**

By the end of the last decade of the twentieth century, in short, the triumphalism that marked the beginning of the decade had evaporated and given way to a deep crisis of legitimacy of the multilateral order. The crisis of the multilateral system was, moreover, translating into a deepening unease globally with the prime actor of globalisation: the corporation. Several factors came together to focus public attention on the corporation in the 1990s—the most egregious being the predatory practices of Microsoft, the environmental depredations of Shell, the irresponsibility of Monsanto and Novartis in promoting genetically modified organisms, Nike's systematic exploitation of dirt-cheap labor, and Mitsubishi, Ford, and Firestone's concealment from consumers of serious product defects. A sense of environmental emergency was also spreading by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to increasing numbers of people, the rapid melting of the polar ice caps could be traced to Big Oil and the automobile giants' continuing promotion of an environmentally destabilising petroleum civilisation, and, more generally, to the process of uncontrolled growth driven by the transnational corporations (TNCs).

Ironically, in the United States, it was during the apogee of the New Economy that the distrust of the corporation was also at its highest in decades. According to a *Business Week* survey,

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Moore, Speech at UNCTAD X, Bangkok, Feb. 15, 2000.



“72 per cent of Americans say business has too much power over their lives.”<sup>3</sup> And the magazine warned: “Corporate America, ignore these trends at your peril.”<sup>4</sup>

Some of the more enlightened members of the global elite took such warnings seriously, and their annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, became the venue to elaborate a response that would go beyond the bankrupt strategy of denying that corporate-driven globalisation was creating tremendous problems to promote a vision of “globalisation with compassion.” Yet, the task was formidable, for it became increasingly clear that in an unregulated global market, it was even more difficult to reconcile the demands of social responsibility with the demands of profitability. The best that “globalisation with a conscience” could offer was, as C. Fred Bergsten, a noted pro-globalisation advocate, admitted, a system of “transitional safety nets...to help the adjustment to dislocation” and “enable people to take advantage of the phenomenon [of globalisation] and roll with it rather than oppose it.”<sup>5</sup>

## The Strategic Nexus

Corporate power is one dimension of global power. But there is, equally of consequence, strategic power, and this, even more than corporate power, is concentrated in the United States. Strategic power cannot be reduced, as in orthodox Marxism, to simply being determined by the dynamics of corporate control. The US state cannot be reduced simply to being a servant of US capital. The Pentagon has its own dynamics, and one cannot understand the US role in the Balkans or its changing posture towards China as simply determined by the interests of US corporations. Indeed, in Asia, it has been strategic extension, not corporate expansionism, that has been the mainspring of US policy, at least until the mid-1980s. And, in the case of China, US capital’s desire to exploit the China market has increasingly found itself in opposition to the Pentagon’s definition of China as the Enemy, which must be headed off at the pass instead of being assisted by western investment to become a full-blown threat. In many instances, indeed, corporate power and state power may not be in synch.

Having said this, a primordial aim of the US transnational garrison state that is ensconced deeply in East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and projects power to the rest of the globe, is the maintenance of a global order that secures the primacy of US economic interests. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman may be wrong about the benign impact of globalisation, but he is definitely on target when he asserts that:

The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the US Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.<sup>6</sup>

With the growing illegitimacy of corporate-driven globalisation and the growing divide between a prosperous minority and an increasingly marginalised majority, military intervention to

<sup>3</sup> “Too Much Corporate Power,” *Business Week*, Sept. 11, 2000, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> “New Economy, New Social Contract,” *Business Week*, Sept. 11, 2000, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> C. Fred Bergsten, “The Backlash against Globalization,” speech delivered at 2000 meeting of the Trilateral Commission, Tokyo, April 2000 (downloaded from Internet).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990), p. 50.

maintain the global status quo will become a constant feature of international relations, whether this is justified in terms of fighting drugs, fighting terrorism, containing “rogue states,” opposing “Islamic fundamentalism,” or containing China.

One cannot say, however, that the military structure of US hegemony is suffering as profound a crisis of legitimacy as that which has gripped the processes and institutions of corporate globalisation. The US military structure remains solidly rooted in both Europe and Asia, and the reason it remains so is to be found at the level of the ideological: the deep-seated fear of both European and Asian elites that without the US to serve as a “benevolent hegemon,” they would not be able to create by themselves benign regional orders that would ensure the peace among themselves.

Nonetheless, this sentiment is not as strong as before. The collapse of Soviet power created the condition for a reassessment by Washington’s allies of the role of US power. Doubts have increased with the Pentagon’s insistence on building a missile defense system against potential rather than real enemies while preparing the ground for a new Cold War crusade against China. Indeed, these developments have indeed opened the eyes of many of Washington’s allies that the greatest threat to their security may now be Washington itself.

### **Democratic Degeneration**

It is not, however, corporate power or military power that is the US’s strongest asset but, following the thinking of Antonio Gramsci, its ideological power—its “soft power.”

The US is a Lockean democracy, and its ability to project its mission as the extension of systems centred on free elections to choose governments devoted to promoting liberal rights and freedoms continues to be a strong fountain of legitimacy in many parts of the world. The trend away from authoritarian regimes and toward formal democracies in the Third World happened in spite of rather than because of the United States. Yet, especially under the Clinton administration, Washington was able to skillfully jibe to catch the democratic winds, in the process reconstructing its image from being a supporter of repressive regimes to being an opponent of dictatorships.

In the last few years, however, Washington or Westminster-style democracies—or, as William Robinson calls them, “polyarchies”<sup>7</sup> with their focus on formal rights and formal elections and their bias against economic equality achieved through such measures as asset and income redistribution have degenerated into increasingly stagnant and polarised political systems, such as those in the Philippines, Brazil, and Pakistan. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank continually talk about the plague of corruption in developing countries. It is, however, the deeper corruption that is embedded in economic and political structures that are superficially democratic but are perverted by the realities of economic inequality that is the greater concern of the vast masses of people in the South.

This stagnation of Third World liberal democratic systems has been paralleled by the realisation of increasing numbers of Americans that their liberal democracy has been so

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<sup>7</sup> See William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

thoroughly corrupted by corporate money politics that it deserves being designated a plutocracy. Indeed, as William Pfaff notes, “nothing on the scale of the American system of political expenditure and influence exists anywhere.”<sup>8</sup> The fact that the candidate most favored by Big Business lost the popular vote and according to some studies, the electoral vote as well—and still ended up president of the world’s most powerful liberal democracy has not helped in shoring up the legitimacy of the political system in a country that has been described by many observers as already being in a state of “cultural civil war.”

There is also a growing crisis with democratic governance in Europe, brought on partly by the increasing captivity of party politics to moneyed interests, as the case of Helmut Kohl and the Christian Democratic Party illustrated. But there is as well another, related cause of disaffection, and this is the non-transparent process that technocratic elites allied to corporate elites have, in the name of European integration and rationalisation, eroded the principle of subsidiarity by funnelling effective decision-making power upwards to technocratic structures, at the apex of which stands the European Commission, that are largely unaccountable to electorates on the ground.

### The Crisis of Overproduction

What makes the crisis of legitimacy of the key institutions of the global economic and political system so volatile from the point of view of the elites of the North is that it is intersecting with a profound structural crisis of the global economy.

The G-8 came into existence to coordinate the macroeconomic policies of the rich countries in order to prevent the Scylla of inflation on the one hand and the Charybdis of stagnation on the other. However, in the last few years, efforts to synchronise fiscal and monetary initiatives have proven elusive, and what modicum of cooperation was achieved has failed to bring Japan out of a decade-long recession or prevent the onset of a new global recession.

The reason that the economic slowdown seems to be immune to orthodox fiscal and monetary mechanisms, even when coordinated across borders, is that structural imbalances have been building up for some time. The boom of the early and mid-nineties resulted in a burst of global investment activity that led to tremendous overcapacity all around.<sup>9</sup> The indicators are stark. The US computer industry’s capacity has been rising at 40 % annually, far above projected increases in demand. The world auto industry is now selling just 74 per cent of the 70.1 million cars it builds each year. So much investment took place in global telecommunications infrastructure that traffic carried over fiber-optic networks is reported to be only 2.5 % of capacity.<sup>10</sup>

Seen in retrospect, profits stopped growing in the US corporate sector after 1997,<sup>11</sup> leading firms to a wave of mergers, the main purpose of which was the elimination of competition. The most prominent of these were the Daimler Benz-Chrysler-Mitsubishi union, the Renault

<sup>8</sup> William Pfaff, “Money Politics is Winning the American Election,” *International Herald Tribune*, March 11-12, 2000, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> See, among other analyses, Robert Brenner, “The economics of Global Turbulence,” *New Left Review* 229 (May-June 1998) and A. Gary Shilling, *Deflation* (Short Hills, NJ: Lakeview Publishing Co., 1998).

<sup>10</sup> “Too Much of Everything,” *Business Week*, April 9, 2001, pp. 74-76.

<sup>11</sup> John Plender, “Falling from Grace,” *Financial Times*, March 27, 2001, p. 14.

takeover of Nissan, the Mobil-Exxon merger, the BP-Amoco-Arco deal, and the blockbuster “Star Alliance” in the airline industry.

Another avenue that was taken to avoid the crunch of profitability in industry was to push investment to speculative activity, notably to the stock market and the real estate sector, leading to the spectacular boom and bust in East Asia in the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> It was this same hothouse speculation that underpinned the Wall Street-Silicon Valley complex that drove the US economy and the global economy in the nineties. This “New Economy” seemed for a time to defy the laws of economics, with Internet stars such as Amazon.com registering an explosive and seemingly permanent rise in stock values even as they continued to operate at a loss.

But all talk about the emergence of a New Economy vanished when the law of gravity caught up with the speculative sector in late 1990s, resulting in the wiping out of \$4.6 trillion in investor wealth in Wall Street, a sum that, as *Business Week* pointed out, was half of the US Gross Domestic Product and four times the wealth wiped out in the 1987 crash.<sup>13</sup>

Two things about this structural crisis, in short, are increasingly clear: it is no ordinary bust and it comes at an extraordinary time of great popular disaffection with the globalist project and its key institutions.

## The Global Protest Movement

In retrospect, with the deepening crisis of legitimacy of the prime institutions of the global system in the latter half of the 1990s, Seattle was a cataclysm that was waiting to happen. The force of pent up global rage went on to manifest itself in Washington during the World Bank-IMF spring meeting in April 2000, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, during the Asian Development Bank annual meeting in May 2000, in Melbourne during the World Economic Forum gathering in early September 2000, and in Prague during the World Bank-IMF annual meeting in late September 2000.

While the global elite assembled in Davos in late January 2001 to ponder the meaning of the burgeoning “anti-globalisation movement,” some 12,000 representatives of civil society organizations and political movements met in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to declare that “another world is possible.” The World Economic Forum had found its political and ideological nemesis in the World Social Forum. Celebration of the power of the movement was one aspect of Porto Alegre; the other was the gathering of energies for the next move. That move was directed at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in late April 2001, which had been called to push forward a key project of the US corporate elite, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Despite the effort of some of the established media to portray the protesters as either uninformed or anarchists, the confrontation in Quebec, like in Seattle, was a major setback, in terms of legitimacy, for the system of corporate-driven globalisation. So was the massive protest of over 200,000 people against the Group of Eight Summit in Genoa in July 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Ravi Arvind Palat, “Miracles of the Day Before?: The Great Asian Meltdown and the Changing World-Economy,” *Development and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (June 1999), p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> “When the Wealth is Blown Away,” *Business Week*, March 26, 2001, p. 33.

One must not, of course, overestimate the impact of these protests so far, nor gloss over their weaknesses in terms of shared agenda or decision-making. However, neither must one underestimate their consequences. C. Fred Bergsten, one of the most ardent promoters of the Washington Consensus, now admits that “the anti-globalisation forces are now in the ascendancy.”<sup>14</sup> Bergsten is haunted by a “Gramscian” fear: the structures of the system may appear to still be solid, but when legitimacy or consensus goes, it may only be a matter of time before the structures themselves begin to unravel, especially when one factors in the crisis of overproduction noted above, with the recession, unemployment, and increases in poverty and inequality that will come with it.

### **The Future in the Balance**

Yet the crisis of the system will not necessarily result in its replacement by a more benign system of international relations. As Rosa Luxemburg so presciently pointed out before the rise of fascism in crisis-ridden Europe in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the outcome may be “barbarism,” where the ideals and themes of the progressive opposition are hijacked and perverted by demagogic forces that are hostile to freedom, equality, and democracy. Which is why the articulation of the alternative or *the alternatives* is so critical at this point in time. Creating these alternative visions and programs centered on a participatory process to create the institutions that would once again subordinate the market to society, promote genuine equality across gender and color lines and within and among countries, and establish a benign relationship between human community and the biosphere remains the great challenge of the opponents of corporate-driven globalisation.

On the success of this enterprise depends a future that now hangs in the balance.



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<sup>14</sup> Bergsten, “The Backlash against Globalization...”.

# Buddhist Social Capital

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David W. Chappell

As author of a book on peace, democracy, and righteousness (*Santi Pracha Dhamma*) and governor of the Bank of Thailand, the memory of Dr. Puey Ungphakorn challenges us to ask how Buddhist principles connect with the major globalizing force of today, economics.

Buddhists have held a variety of views of economics. Buddhist monastics and hermits make vows to avoid money, but Buddhist monasteries and temples have sometimes accumulated great wealth and used it for the conspicuous display of devotion by building glistening Buddha images and towering Buddha halls (quite different from the economic ethic of “small is beautiful” advocated by Schumacher).<sup>1</sup> In other contexts, Buddhist families are advised to balance spending, saving, and donating,<sup>2</sup> and several successful businesses leaders have developed worldwide businesses using principles that were inspired by their Buddhist practice.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes money is used directly as a tool for relieving suffering when Buddhist groups like the Taiwan-based Tzu-chi Compassion Association solicit money for social and medical services to relieve physical suffering in the world.<sup>4</sup> Yet another model is given by the Greystone Foundation started by Zen Master Bernie Glassman that uses the practice of making money in a baking business as a method for social and spiritual development.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas previous Buddhist economic views have usually worked within an established social system, Acharn Sulak Sivaraksa has organized several groups on development to challenge economic injustice and build visions of a more equitable society.<sup>6</sup> Today economics is not just an individual or national matter, but also a matter of corporate and international law. With the

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<sup>1</sup> See the classic study by Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, tr. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> See Prayudh A. Payutto, *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Marketplace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> See Geshe Michael Roach, *The Diamond Cutter: The Buddha on Strategies for Managing Your Business and Your Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2000) and Shinichi Inoue, *Putting Buddhism to Work: A New Approach to Management and Business* (New York: Kodansha International, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> See the story of the founder and director of Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation in Yu-ing Ching, *Master of Love and Mercy: Cheng-yen* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields, *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life That Matters* (New York: Bell Tower, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> The Thai Interreligious Commission on Development (TICD) in 1979 and the Asian Cultural Forum on Development in 1975. See Sulak Sivaraksa, *Loyalty Demands Dissent: Autobiography of an Engaged Buddhist* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), pp. 155-158.

increased dominance of transnational corporations (TNCs), the media, and the World Trade Organization in determining the quality of life globally, individual Buddhists need to address this larger economic level and not be restricted just to personal and national economic policies.

## Corporations

No one should doubt the increasing dominance of TNCs, but as a new economic life form we may be taken by surprise at how powerful they have become. In order to ensure that we take them seriously, please indulge me when I list some of their recent activity. In 1970 the total number of TNCs was about 7,000, but grew by 1998 to at least 53,607 TNCs who were contracted with at least 448,917 foreign subsidiaries.<sup>7</sup> The six largest corporations in the world (Exxon, General Motors, Ford, Mitsui, Daimler-Chrysler, and Mitsubishi) had combined revenues larger than the combined budgets of 64 nations that include 58 percent of the world's population (including India, Indonesia, Brazil, Russian, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Mexico). Only seven nations have budgets larger than Ford, Exxon, or General Motors: namely, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, China, Japan, Germany, and the United States.

The size of individual corporations in comparison to nations is impressive. However, their growing influence based on their growing number make them even more powerful. In listing the 200 largest financial budgets in the world, Charles Gray found that only 39 were nations, whereas 161 were corporations. The Fortune 500 companies in 1999 consisted of companies that have budgets over US \$9 billion, but only 57 national governments have budgets as large as these 500 corporations.<sup>8</sup> As corporations increasingly "rule the world,"<sup>9</sup> and as Buddhist institutions function as corporations, it is important to discuss what guidelines religious organizations should practice and advocate for others.

Since nations still have important power to regulate TNCs, Carol Johnston in her book *The Wealth or Health of Nations*<sup>10</sup> rethinks national economic goals in terms of health, persons-in-community, and ecosystems rather than the production and overproduction of more goods. Johnston makes many positive proposals to improve our situation. Her main concern is to rethink the goals of economics in terms of **health**, rather than the production and overproduction of more goods. Although the modern media may go to the extreme of glorifying health in a way that can denigrate the weak, poor, and sick, there are various ways to view health that do not restrict it to the young and beautiful. For example, a Buddhist-Christian colleague of mine in Hawaii, Mitsuo Aoki, is leader of a Foundation on Holistic Healing. He spends much of his time working with the dying to make their deaths an act of creativity and a blessing. Even being weak and dying has dimensions for holistic healing.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Renner, "Corporations Driving Globalization," in Lester Brown et al, ed., *Vital Signs 1999* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Gray, "Corporate Goliaths: Sizing Up Corporations and Governments," *Multinational Monitor*, June 1999, pp. 26-27.

<sup>9</sup> See the brilliant and timely work by David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Carol Johnston, *The Wealth or Health of Nations* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998), pp. 2-7.

## Economics on a Biological Model

Johnston challenges Western economic models based on Newtonian physics and mathematics, and proposes instead living natural systems as economic models instead. Her proposal is strongly supported by Michael Rothschild, *Bionomics: Economy as Ecosystem* who makes analogies between biological models and economic behavior. The function of biological cells and business groups is the same: namely, to “use tools and knowledge to turn energy and materials into products. Whatever the product happens to be, the flow of production mimics the protein-building process of organic cells: prepare the incoming materials, rearrange their components into new configurations, and package them into deliverable products.”<sup>11</sup> Each living organism equips each cell with the vital blueprint of the whole organism in its DNA, which also differentiates the function and relationships of each cell:

The entire global economy is comprised of work cells and organizations engaged in the interdependent production and exchange of products. Regardless of size or level of technological sophistication . . . all organizations cope with essentially the same tasks that face a single living cell. Encoded information is developed and preserved in DNA or blueprints. Copies are shipped to ribosomes or assembly sites. After raw materials are prepared, components are reassembled in new configurations. In a series of finishing steps, these objects are packaged into deliverable products. From protein to microprocessor, the essentials of organic and economic production are the same.<sup>12</sup>

Rothschild argues that the discovery of the microchip in 1971 by Intel now makes it possible for the first time for every person in each work cell to have available information about the whole business organization, and also to give each work cell specific information about its distinctive role and relationships. “In effect, a worker/tool combination acts like an organelle inside an economic cell. But unlike organic organelles, human workers can pick up different tools, learn new skills, quit their cells, join others, and change their roles in the life of the economy. The flexibility, along with the rapid pace of technical evolution, endows the economy with capacity for lightning-fast restructuring.”<sup>13</sup>

Western economics relies too heavily on mathematical models, and both Carol Johnston and Michael Rothschild argue that economics needs more inductive and historical-critical research to adjust economics to new situations. Most economic models are not based on, nor tested by, empirical observations. For example, Rothschild refers to Wassily Leontief, winner of the 1973 Nobel Prize in Economics who in 1982 surveyed articles over the previous four years in *The American Economic Review*, America’s most prestigious economics journal. He made the startling discovery that “more than half the articles were mathematical models without any data whatsoever, and nearly one-fourth drew inferences from statistics gathered for some other purpose.” Only one article was empirically based.<sup>14</sup>

The most successful living organisms are not based on a nervous system in which the central brain makes all the decisions—the old command-and-control model of business—but the most successful empowers each work cell with DNA information so that they can more quickly

<sup>11</sup> Michael Rothschild, *Bionomics: Economy as Ecosystem* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.



and effectively respond to local needs and create novel responses in harmony with the larger organism. This management philosophy that empowers small, relatively independent teams to work together for the common good based on horizontal rather than vertical relationships has recently come into vogue, such as in the Saturn automobile section of GM.

The various lessons about social organization and management that Rothschild proposes based on biology have attracted the management of several companies. Some, such as Bank of America in 1998, have attempted to revamp their business methods along more **biological models** as suggested by Rothschild. Buddhist organizations have sometimes been hierarchical, sometimes horizontal, but as we increasingly create our own environments, Buddhists need to discuss which model is best suited to their guiding principles.

## Monitoring

Related to the biological analogy for economics is the criterion of the survival of the fittest. In a recent book by James Collins and Jerry Porras called *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*<sup>15</sup> the role of goals and values expressed clearly in mission statements was emphasized. Mission statements, organizational models, and standard operating procedures for each corporation are created by humans and can be influenced not only by management, but also by consumers, by the media, and by government. While government over-regulation has been a theme in recent years, the development of GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) administered by the WTO (World Trade Organization) has proven more powerful than even the US government to check by legislation. As a result, citizen action committees and street protests in the past two years were needed to stop tools of plunder such as the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment). The wealth or health of corporations and WTO is everyone's business since it is our survival as individuals, communities, and as a global ecosystem that is at stake, not just the survival of corporations.

More promising approaches are new academic programs such as the School of Social Ecology at the University of California-Irvine that attempt to test the impact of various planned communities and economic arrangements on the quality of life and human development. In the past Buddhists have lived in established cultures so that this new opportunity and responsibility to plan communities and guide development has not been adequately investigated.

The notion that "small is beautiful" is a valuable reminder for a Buddhist method of action, but needs to be balanced by a wider horizon of responsibility based on the bodhisattva vow to save all beings. Detailing the nature and number of beings has been the achievement of science and requires our close attention. A crucial role that Buddhists and Christians can and must play is to use their networks to monitor and report on the health of local communities where their membership is employed.

Being mindful of the England of Charles Dickens or the plight of modern Bangkok, we know that hell is not restricted to an afterlife, but includes workers in newly industrializing countries. Religious people are in the field. We need to do our own studies by constantly monitoring local conditions, and then connect them to the board rooms of corporations to share information

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<sup>15</sup> James Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: Harper, 1994).

and concerns to improve the health of everyone. But religious organizations need to increase their networks of information sharing by including in their mission boards a vehicle for being a global conscience.

Reporting on global conditions will require the development of some uniform standards and a quick means of reporting. The present United Nations reports on Human Development statistics from various nations are woefully inadequate (although they do document the lie that the World Bank is reducing poverty). Instead, to measure the real cost of business to the environment and to social wellbeing need new measurements, such as the PQLI (Physical Quality of Life Index) by David Morris, and the ISEW (Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare) of Herman Daly and John Cobb.<sup>16</sup>

Increased monitoring and information distribution is needed for the health of the environment. Several Buddhist meditations are now being developed to assist this ecological mindfulness,<sup>17</sup> but more public resources are needed. In particular, I propose that public broadcast licenses require regular reports on the state of the environment in much the same way that it reports on the stock market and weather, but using better standards such as the ISEW. With all of our science and communication technology, we are woefully ignorant of the state of other beings, or the amount of non-renewable resource depletion, whereas we are constantly reminded of the Dow-Jones and NASDAQ indexes. A simple and inexpensive way for all of us to be more mindful of the actual state of others beings is to pass legislation that requires TV and radio stations to regularly offer spot announcements about the condition of our ecosystem and civil society. I am sure that scientists and conservation organizations would be happy to provide this information free of charge. In this regard, we should provide useful information and new vehicles for networking to such people as John Schilling, head of the Environment and Sustainability Program, Environment Department, The World Bank (1818 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20433; ph. 202-458-2474, fax. 202-477-0565, jshilling@worldbank.org).

## Participation by CSOs

Besides monitoring and reporting, religious communities can also be active workers. Since the World Trade Organization defines IBM, Microsoft, GM, and other TNCs as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Hazel Henderson recommends naming voluntary, nongovernmental organizations as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).<sup>18</sup> The largest CSO in Taiwan is the Buddhist Tzu-chi Compassion Association that collects donations of money and services in order to relieve physical and social suffering. In a similar fashion, the Sarvodaya movement is the largest CSO in Sri Lanka and dedicates its resources to village reconstruction on Buddhist principles. Both organizations understand that their work is not a form of charity, but of spiritual transformation for the donors who are learning how to change their sense of self and their connections to others through the relief of physical and social suffering. Although inspired by Buddhist teachings of personal practice, the Sarvodaya movement also uses modern

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<sup>16</sup> See Hazel Henderson, *Beyond Globalization* (West Hartford: Kumarian, 1999), pp. 10-12, and Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), pp. 377-379 and 443-507.

<sup>17</sup> See the many new Buddhist practices that increase eco-awareness; see Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambala, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Henderson, p. 22 and n2, p. 59.

human development methods pioneered by Gandhi and Christian missions. Similarly, the Tzu-chi uses the latest Western medical knowledge in its bone marrow banks, hospitals, and medical schools.

Since religions are neither government nor business, as CSOs they can serve as networks for community improvement globally. In this regard, I would mention the model of UMCOR—United Methodist Committee on Relief—which works as a coordinator of grants from USAID and their use by local groups in local cultures. (United Methodist Committee on Relief, UMCOR, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10115.) It seems to me that new insights might be emerging among workers for these religious CSOs in trying to assist traditional cultures develop in terms of their own values. Also, members of these religious service organizations need to be consulted more frequently as a resource for checking on the health of nations.

Whereas there is a terrible record of violence to people and indigenous cultures by communist reformers and capitalist entrepreneurs in the past, in our present world order the World Bank also has a bad record of only working through government elites without consulting the people affected. An important point that could easily be incorporated into the World Bank lending strategy is to require that several local and international CSOs participate in each loan process to ensure that the people affected are consulted, provide input, and have their voices heard. The position of those in the World Bank who care about such collaboration, such as Dr. John Schilling, Gloria La Cava (a senior social scientist for Southeast Europe of the World Bank, [glacava@worldbank.org](mailto:glacava@worldbank.org)), and Deepa Narayan would be greatly strengthened if our religious communities actively supported such a policy.<sup>19</sup>

One of the basic lessons from ecology is the inefficiency of the “command-and-control” model of management. The collapse of the centralized communist economies provides one illustration, and the loan practices of the World Bank provide another. Feedback loops are important for learning, and the organizing principles of evolutionary biology are based on constant feedback. Our modern economy also requires constant individual and organizational learning, and puts a premium on knowledge and communication systems. But feedback loops are nonlinear and do not work on a command-and-control model. Since the government elites and the World Bank managers do not individually and directly bear the cost of their bad judgments, physical and cultural resources continue to be plundered. Networks of religious communities can provide an alternative nervous system to give feedback from the people affected by World Bank projects to those who are managing them. Rather than simply calling for the redistribution of wealth, religious communication networks could assist in creatively constructing new working arrangements for the benefit of all.

## Social Capital

Recently the World Bank has recognized the importance of developing social institutions in poor countries as the foundation for national growth.<sup>20</sup> As important voices in civil society,

<sup>19</sup> Deepa Narayan has recently collaborated on two books, *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* and *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear?*, both published in 2000 by Oxford University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Some encouragement in this direction is seen in the remarks of the World Bank Chief Economist, Nicholas Stern, entitled “Overcoming Poverty: A Vision of Good Government” (<http://www.worldbank.org/knowledge/chiefecon/overcome.htm>) and a few weak remarks on “Building social institutions and social capital,” in the World Bank’s *Attacking Poverty, World Development Report 2000/2001* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 128-131.

religious groups need to emphasize to the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and WTO the importance of social capital to enable any economy to function. Social capital requires human development, which requires education and cultural nourishment. Accordingly, I would hope that religious groups would urge the World Bank to require **an educational component** for the workers involved with any loan to move workers toward literacy as a means of future livelihood once the work project was done. This educational requirement would also help to ease the burden on child labor who may be needed by their families for survival, but whose future is being stolen unless an educational component is part of each project funded by the World Bank.

Conflict between communism and capitalism is now past, and almost all G7 governments now function with an integration of various socialistic and capitalistic agendas.<sup>21</sup> However, G7 economies live off the sweat of many other countries in a global network and often impose negative policies on them. If inclusiveness and representation are Buddhist values, then Buddhists should lobby to expand the G7 to at least include major democratic countries such as India, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, Chile, Indonesia, Thailand, and Costa Rica. Jeffrey Sachs, the director of the Harvard Institute for International Development, has proposed forming a G16, for example.<sup>22</sup>

Another way to introduce spiritual dimensions into economics is to elevate our awareness of the enormous capitalistic role of civil society organizations. Recently Yale University joined the Fair Labor Association (FLA) dedicated to buying clothing and materials only from companies that ensured that the people who made the products were working in safe conditions and receiving a fair wage. The FLA rejects forced labor, child labor, abuse and discrimination, and urges companies to allow collective bargaining for employees, overtime pay, and a reasonable workweek. The FLA began in 1996 and has been signed by at least 17 universities, including all the Ivy League schools in the United States.<sup>23</sup> While such agreements do not save all beings, they lessen abuse and work toward improving conditions for others. Perhaps our religious groups should consider joining the FLA.

Another opportunity that relates to the modern economy is to use religious wealth to influence corporations. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) was formed almost 30 years ago and today includes 275 Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish institutional investors worth an estimated US \$90 billion, largely representing pension funds. As a result of the large size of its investments, ICCR representatives can attend meetings of stockholders and request that corporate policies become more socially responsible. For example, in 1998 ICCR representatives presented 209 social responsibility resolutions to 143 companies. Their list of resolutions is circulated as a model for other concerned citizens, and they conduct fact-finding reports on various industries.<sup>24</sup> A few Buddhist efforts to influence corporations have begun, but ICCR is still waiting to have its first Buddhist member.

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<sup>21</sup> See the helpful book by Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw, *The Commanding Heights: The Battle Between Government and the Marketplace that is Remaking the Modern World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, "Global Capitalism: Making it Work," *The Economist*, Sept 12, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> *Yale Alumni Magazine* (Fall 1999), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility is located at 475 Riverside Drive, Room 550, New York, New York 10115, Fax: 212-870-2023, email: info@iccr.org.

## Buddhist Social Principles

Buddhists are increasingly blunt about affirming the primacy of this present world rather than being “world denying,” to use Albert Schweitzer’s old phrase. Among Chinese Buddhists, this idea is connected most commonly to the reformer Taixu (d.1947) who expressed it as Buddhism for human life (*jensheng fojiao*). More recently it is linked to the most eminent living Buddhist teacher, Master Yinshun (b.1906), who uses the phrase “Buddhism in the human realm” (*jenjian fojiao*) in contrast to emphasizing Buddhism in preparation for rebirth in the Pure Land after death. Fo Kuang Shan Buddhists frequently call themselves “humanistic Buddhists” to offer a similar emphasis. And the largest Buddhist groups in America, namely, SGI-USA and the Tzu-chi Compassion Relief Foundation, also give importance to life on earth as the primary locus of practice.

In addition to being committed to improving contemporary society, Buddhist institutions in many Asian countries are now recovering from oppressive government control, and for the first time have an opportunity to meet together to reflect on their institutional procedures and methods of using power. Major new nonmonastic Buddhist movements have emerged in Taiwan (the Tzu-chi Foundation), in Sri Lanka (the Sarvodaya movement), in Japan (Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai), in India (the TBMSG movement), and elsewhere. Based on the Buddhist principle of consensus, it is necessary for representatives of these and similar Buddhist groups to come together for dialogue to reflect on their own social procedures now being practiced and to seek some consensus on the priorities and principles for the future.

A popular starting point is the account in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (*Digha-nikaya* 16.1) where the Buddha used seven criteria to evaluate the social strength of the Vajjian society.<sup>25</sup> Certain of these rules are to be expected—such as, support for the sangha, respect for elders, and respect for women in other families—but there is a remarkable insistence on maintaining traditions, both secular and religious, including non-Buddhist traditions. This principle reinforces the exceptional nonsectarian nature of early Buddhist teaching.<sup>26</sup> In addition, there is the insistence on regular and frequent assemblies conducted in harmony and leading to harmonious settlements. A similar norm was applied to sangha meetings that used the rule of consensus for all decisions, making the sangha the epitome of democracy since everyone had a voice and everyone had to agree on all decisions.

<sup>25</sup> By asking if they:

1. held regular and frequent assemblies;
2. met, dispersed, and conducted their business in harmony;
3. did not authorize what had not been authorized by their ancient tradition;
4. respected, revered, and saluted the elders among them and valued their words;
5. didn't forcibly abduct wives and daughters of others nor take them captive;
6. respected, revered, and saluted the shrines at home and abroad, and didn't withdraw the proper support given before; and
7. gave proper provisions for the safety of Buddhist Arhats so that they could live in comfort, and so that other Arhats might come to live there in the future.

The sutta then reports that the Buddha recommended the first four principles to his monks, but replaced the last three with the following: (5) do not fall prey to desires; (6) be devoted to forest-lodgings; and (7) preserve personal mindfulness so that good companions will be attracted and will remain. This discourse then gives several other lists focused on maintaining positive individual mental habits. Since the oral texts were preserved by monastics, it is natural that they would remember advice on their personal practices, while it is striking to see a list to prevent the decline of the Vajjian state.

<sup>26</sup> See David W. Chappell, “Buddhist Interreligious Dialogue: To Build a Global Community,” in Paul Ingram and Sallie King, *Memorial Volume for Fred Streng* (Curzon, 1999), pp. 3-35, and “Six Buddhist Attitudes Toward Other Religions,” in Sulak Sivaraksa et al, eds., *Radical Conservatism: Buddhism in the Contemporary World* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1990), pp. 443-458.

Compassion is a gift of the human heart, but social processes are necessary for helping people evolve a sense of trust and universal responsibility. The Buddha recommended “regular and frequent meetings” that are convened, conducted, and concluded with consensus. The modern code words for these values are transparency, diversity and dialogue. The requirement of twice-monthly uposatha meetings of the sangha where decisions are to be made by consensus implies transforming dialogue. Only through careful and penetrating discussion, sharing of motivations and mutual adjustment of participants to the values and needs of each other, can consensus arise and harmony result for the benefit of the common good.

To help out social meetings to take time to be inclusive of everyone means that individuals must learn to take time to find balance. Fortunately, the world has a model for building a commitment to mindfulness, inclusion, transparency, and dialogue by following the example of Dr. Puey Ungphakorn.



# Endangered Values and the Global Economy

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Stephanie Kaza

## I

Economic violence, and violence in general, is a difficult topic to consider in depth. One cannot enumerate the horrors perpetuated by greed, fear, hatred, and outright competition to survive without feeling sick at heart and discouraged about the human condition. John Cobb has bravely made such an effort to assist our conversation, noting himself how serious these matters are. Right in the midst of oft-touted economic success—stock market booming, internet exploding, millionaires abounding—lies tremendous economic disparity and injustice. What the press reports is only half the story. Such success rides on the backs of many laborers and ravaged ecosystems. It does not come free of cost.

Buddhist perspectives on violence may be helpful in demonstrating just how serious a matter this is. Buddhist philosophy takes as a given that powerful passions are core to human nature. Spiritual development involves the taming of such distracting passions as lust, fear, sloth, doubt, hatred, and greed through the establishment of equanimity and a stable mind. Rather than ban these human tendencies as “sins”, Buddhist teachers urge intimate examination of such passions to understand completely the nature of their arising. Thus, the study of emotions or passions is central to Buddhist practice.

In many teachings, the passions are framed as the “Three Poisons”: greed, hatred, and delusion (or ignorance). It is thought that all forms of extreme distraction pulling one away from the path to enlightenment can be subsumed under these three. Buddhist psychology describes the emotions as being rooted in attraction, aversion, and neutrality. For example, one responds to another person by either a) wanting to have more (time together, depth of experience, physical contact, etc.) or b) wanting *not* to have more contact, in fact, wanting less, or c) not really caring one way or the other. These choices are repeated with situations, places, plants and animals. A person’s collection of preferences (likes and dislikes) might be described as their personality. From a Buddhist perspective, these preferences represent a person’s self-centered ego, an obstacle to overcome in gaining a true understanding of the interdependent nature of the world. *Greed* represents the desire for “more” of whatever: wealth, possessions, love, knowledge, attention. *Hatred* represents the desire for “less” of whatever: corrupt politics, unwanted immigrants, aggressive police, obnoxious weeds. *Delusion* represents a cloudy view, neither pulled toward

nor away, but with no clear insight into the true nature of what exists.<sup>1</sup>

These passions are sometimes described as the “animal” nature of a person. This is not necessarily meant to be debasing; rather, one could think of these as the hard-wired choices necessary for the survival of an organism. Paramecium and person alike must know when to go toward food and shelter and when to turn away from predators and destructive situations. Adrenaline and the other hormones are finely tuned to respond to the slightest nuance that can signal success or distress. The superb capacity for smell in dogs assists in such discrimination, as do the sharp eyes of hawks. Some Buddhist meditation practices focus on developing awareness of the slightest shifts in attraction and aversion, from even a single thought or sound. One can study moment to moment the micro-releases of adrenaline that destabilize quietly cultivated equanimity.

Violence can certainly be generated out of any of the three passions, but for a moment let us look more closely at hatred. The best translation for hatred is probably “aversion”, given the Buddhist understanding of emotions/passions as push and pull events. Tibetan scholar Robert Thurman makes a distinction between anger and hatred which may shed some light on the nature of violence. He defines anger as “vigorous energy that is determined to right a wrong situation”,<sup>2</sup> i.e., a justice-related response, based on a sense of fierce protection. For example, a mother would be filled with such vigorous energy if she saw someone threatening her child. Hatred, in contrast, is a “mental and spiritual poison”, with great capacity for destruction. Anger combined with compassion can be a powerful force for justice, for such energy is motivated by a response to suffering and a desire to eliminate it. Anger combined with hate, however, can be extremely destructive. Further, he says, forceful actions on behalf of those who are suffering are actually much more effective *without* anger, i.e., force need not be equated with anger, though it most often is shown this way in the media, for example.

Japanese temples are protected by fierce temple guardians, often in the form of massive growling bronze dogs. They are said to protect the Dharma from destructive threats. The wrathful deities of Tibetan iconography serve a similar function, compassionately threatening those who would even hold one thought of harming the teachings. These forms embody the fierce protective energy that is essential for guarding not only the teachings but also one’s awareness and equanimity. They serve as reminders that hate itself is the enemy, finding its fuel in the dissatisfaction and frustration of not getting what “I” want or conversely, getting what “I” *do not* want.

Sixth-century Tibetan teacher Shantideva offers some of his strongest words about anger in the chapter on “Patience”.

Whatever wholesome deeds,  
Such as venerating the Buddhas, and generosity,  
That have been amassed over a thousand aeons  
Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth Buddhist analysis of emotional states, see, for example, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology*, trans. Herbert V. Guenther and Leslie S. Kawamura (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Thurman, *Inner Revolution: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Real Happiness* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor, (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1979), p.56. For extensive commentary on this chapter, see H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Healing Anger: The Power of Patience from a Buddhist Perspective* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).



How can anger be such a powerful force? The explanation lies in the Buddhist understanding of the law of cause and effect as a central organizing principle of the universe. A single moment of passion-driven action, unleashed in a receptive context, can generate countless repercussions causing endless suffering. Since one can never know the full impact of one's actions, Buddhist practice continually emphasizes kindness and compassion to mitigate karmic consequences. Furthermore, Buddhist practice places a strong value on the role of intention, recognizing the power of the mind to influence the course of events. Since Buddhists believe this mind is made of many causes and conditions and is not personally determined, it is seen as infinitely plastic, always capable of learning. Thus, the intention to harm coupled with a mind-state of anger is taken as a very serious misuse of the mind. If harm is committed when none was intended, then amends can be made by stopping the harm-causing action and apologizing for the harm caused. If harm is intentional, the agent of harm is unlikely to admit to such intentions and will engage in cover-up rhetoric or gestures to diffuse the blame. Discerning intent in harm is often a core work for advocates of social and economic justice.

## II

Personal violence can be easily understood and recognized; Cobb has described this well and we all know this from our own experience. Economic violence, however, is less well documented, though it grows out of the same desires for self-protection and self-perpetuation. The self in this case, though, is not an individual organism, but is rather a state, a corporation, a non-profit organization, a law-making body, etc. Structural, systemic, or institutionalized violence generates karmic repercussion just as individual violence does, only usually on a larger scale. Each institution represents the collective weight and force of many individuals acting in concert toward some set of goals or policies. They may be, for example, making a profit, taking new territory, or perpetuating a belief system. Some economic institutions carry a particularly strong weight and thus karmic forces in the world today are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Millions of lives are affected by the choices these institutions make to secure a controlling role in global economic dynamics.

If these institutions have lives and roles in the world that reflect a self-perpetuating instinct, what, in fact, keeps them in check? As with individual organisms, inadequate resources or the threat of others who might destroy them become limiting factors. Such checks and balances have been fairly observable within national economic institutions: within the United States, we have witnessed the rise and decline of the steel industry, of the railroads, of the gold rush. At the turn of the new millennium, state limits have been systematically removed through political negotiation benefiting multinational corporations and international trade regulating bodies. Resources in every reach of the globe are up for grabs; threatening predators of larger scale do not exist. Perhaps only through such events as corporate takeovers are such multinationals engulfed, amoebae-like on the big screen of the macroscopic world.

Cobb sketches some of the economic history that has led to the current situation, outlining the belief system of economism that has supported the self-interest of those with the greatest wealth and most relevant economic theory. We can clearly see how economic power has come to define the relative worth of states and corporations. From a biological survivalist perspective, this turn of events should not be too surprising. However, for those with some empathic concern for others, the increase in global suffering is more than alarming.

Central to the takeover of economism has been, as Cobb says, a systematic eradication of certain values which stand in the way of wealth expansion for the powerful few. I would like to build on Cobb's central thesis, highlighting several characteristics of economic violence and then enumerating some of the values important to Buddhists, which have been eroded in this context. The current situation might be called a "crisis of restraint" or rather a crisis of the *lack* of ethical or common sense restraints in the milieu of global economism. Without adequate checks and balances on the international scale, rampant economic growth will proceed like the cancer it has been compared to. Through analysis of the forces at work, we can find points of application of ethical restraint. There is very important work to be done here, articulating the karmic repercussions of economic violence. Intention to harm can be routed out and named for what it is. Institutional expression of the Three Poisons in the forms of colonialism, domination, slavery, and exploitation can be documented and challenged.

As Cobb demonstrates, this work begins by naming what has been erased and calling it back into existence. This is no small task, but we have several thousand years of wisdom traditions to draw on. I believe this is a particular calling for people of faith, and it is a difficult one. We begin here to educate ourselves and find the inner resources of mind and heart to undertake this tremendously important work.

### III

In this section I will highlight five characteristics that appear frequently in case studies of economic violence. Each of these has clear and observable impacts on social and environmental systems at many organizational scales. For each, I will also look at a specific arena of ongoing economic violence to draw attention to some of the social and ecological suffering that supports economic profit. This approach suggests a model, a way to work with the concrete realities of economic violence. By naming the values that underpin economic violence, one can then identify alternative values that act as restraints on unchecked economic activity and as stabilizers to promote a peaceful and just society. This process parallels the Buddhist practice of identifying the Three Poisons at work in one's consciousness and then cultivating the antidote values in order to establish equanimity and compassion for oneself and others.

*Economies of scale*, as mentioned also by Cobb, are central to economic violence. Consolidation and vertical integration of functions further enhance economies of scale by centralizing the profit-making capacity in the hands of a single controller. Factory farming of chickens, hogs, and cows offers all too graphic examples of this production ethic taken to new heights. Children's story books notwithstanding, the average U.S. farm today is hardly a family operation. During the last fifty years, family-scale agriculture has been more or less replaced by corporate-scale agribusiness. For example, ten large corporations control 92% of all poultry production today, with each producer owning as many as 500,000 layers and some over 10 million.<sup>4</sup> Producers such as Tyson and Purdue own not only the chickens but also the slaughterhouses, the packaging plants, and the transportation and distribution system. The whole operation is under one economic umbrella—"from semen to cellophane".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in a public forum on large farm operations May 2000 in Burlington, Vermont by speaker Ken Midkiff, Sierra Club coordinator for their *Corporate Hogs at the Public Trough* campaign.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

By running such large operations, owners make enormous savings by buying feed in quantity, raising animals in quantity, hiring and training staff in quantity, and processing animals in quantity. They gain further advantages through tax incentives and government subsidies designed to draw operations to low-income areas to provide jobs. Often these incentives include reduced environmental regulation and poor on-the-job standards for workers. Chicken processors, for example, generally women of color, who handle icy chicken parts all day long, often develop arthritis in their hands as early as their late 20s.

Corporate farmers also benefit from economies of scale in transportation, refrigeration, packaging, and reproductive technologies. Factory farm animals are not allowed to reproduce naturally: semen is controlled and injected to guarantee consistency of line and product. High-yielding cows can be made to produce dozens of eggs at a time, and after artificial insemination, the embryos are transplanted into surrogate cows through incisions in their flanks.<sup>6</sup> Biotechnology advances, such as bovine growth hormone for increased milk production, can be implemented on a mass scale easily, through supplements to mass-produced feed. Losses due to large-scale production techniques are insignificant compared to profits. Thus, unhealthy hens are left to die in their tightly packed cages and pulled out later rather than revived. With one or two staff caring for 10,000 chickens in tent-like sheds, it is simply uneconomical to care for specific individuals.

Clearly the bigger operations will crowd out the smaller operations, and this they have done on a massive scale. Because corporate agribusiness companies can reduce costs in so many aspects of their operations, their net gain is substantially higher than smaller operators. This gain allows them to establish more operations, develop consumer desire for their products, promote these products internationally, and lobby for favorable state and federal regulations. Power and profit accumulate rapidly. So does human, animal, and environmental suffering.

Human suffering takes its toll among not only the food-handlers, but also among neighbors of factory farms. Who wants to live near the stench of a major hog operation? Air and water pollution are common due to the massive amounts of waste produced by concentrations of farm animals. When Hurricane Floyd struck North Carolina, an estimated 100-500,000 hogs and over four million turkeys and chickens drowned. The enormous runoff of manure into local estuaries led to massive fish kills and an increase in the deadly *Phytheria* disease. In California's Central Valley, one mega-dairy contains 28,000 cows that produce the equivalent waste of a city of 700,000 people.<sup>7</sup> One milking cow alone produces as much waste as 22 humans. Yet these factory farm waste pits generating methane and hundreds of odiferous compounds are not regulated as closely as human waste.

From the producer's point of view, the value of individual lives is clearly less than the value of the combined profits from many animals raised together. Likewise the value of environmental health and stability is of secondary value. In the case of factory farming, economic violence consists of disregard for the suffering of those who are at the very center of the corporate operation: the animals and the people who handle them. Animal protectionists decry such practices, for example, as chicken debeaking, veal calf confinement, cattle castration, and tail docking for pigs. Where family-scale farming was predicated on a love and care for individual

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Midkiff, *op. cit.*

animals, corporate farming is based on systematic disregard and even deliberate infliction of suffering. One can only wonder at the karmic spinoffs of antibiotic resistance, hormone injections, and opportunistic disease for both animals and humans as these elements circulate through the web of life.

A second trait associated with economic violence is *commodification of bodies*, briefly referred to by Cobb in his mention of sex tourism. Corporate animal agriculture aptly fits this trait, but here I would like to examine the dynamics of the increasing trade in global prostitution. Feminists have been the most recent protestors against the use of women's bodies for profit, but moral commandments against abusive relationship go way back in both the Buddhist and Christian religious traditions. Commodification of the human body for work or sexual slavery reflects a uni-dimensional relationship between the user and the used. The user is always in the dominant position—the one with power, wealth, or ownership, and the ability to determine what happens to the one to be used. This type of relationship necessarily eradicates values of human commonality and a shared concern for the fate of all humanity. Such relationships are clearly degrading to the one who is used, for whom self is identified only through the economic role of slave. In patterns of domination, the user will exaggerate differences to justify the superiority of the user over the used.<sup>8</sup> The health and welfare of the slave or prostitute is then seen as no concern of the owner or renter, except as it may impact his or her own health (as in the case of AIDS).

The trade in prostitutes is not tracked in the *Wall Street Journal*; it is largely an illegal economic activity. Nonetheless, millions of women and billions of dollars are involved. In many places women are handled with varying degrees of brutality and are valued only for their sexual services. This trade is particularly strong where there is already a gaping economic disparity between the wealthy and the poor, engendering a kind of cultural nod of approval for treating women as the poor or lower classes are treated. Prostitution tends to follow military influence as well as colonial patterns of historic settlement. Thailand, for example, was the main center for rest and recreation for American soldiers in the Vietnam War; it is now the center of trafficking in Southeast Asia. According to feminist geographer Joni Seager, in the new global economy, Cuban women are being transported to Spain; Russian women are serving men in Europe, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia; and with modernization, the Vietnamese market is opening up as well.<sup>9</sup>

Christian and Buddhist groups have been working hard to prevent the spread of prostitution and AIDS in Thailand, but it is difficult when the market is so lucrative. A young virgin (assumed to be AIDS-free) of 10-12 years old will bring the highest price for first use. As the disease spreads, younger and younger girls are sold into the market, often serving as slaves in brothels, chained to their beds. The International Coalition against Trafficking in Women is particularly active in the Philippines where it has been opposing the State of Forces Agreement, which permits the U.S. military presence on the islands. This women's group opposes all forms of sexual exploitation—prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, as well as bride trafficking. They are working closely with the United Nations as human rights advocates to provide testimony to state governments and to serve as a clearinghouse for information on the global trade in women.

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<sup>8</sup> Spelled out in some philosophical detail in Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> From a guest lecture by Dr. Seager at University of Vermont, April 2000, Burlington, Vermont.

What values are lost in the commodification of women's bodies? German feminist Maria Mies suggests that male subjugation of women in this context is rooted in a larger social pattern of dominating nature through abstract, technological, mechanized relationships. She posits, "the more modern man interposes machines between himself and nature, ... the greater becomes his hunger for the original whole, wild, free, women and nature: the more he destroys, the greater his hunger."<sup>10</sup> Sexuality then becomes the strongest direct contact with nature, revealing the extent of loss of relationship with the earth itself. This implies that any religious efforts to increase human-earth contact could serve to reduce the pressure on women as sole point of engagement with nature.

A third feature of economic violence is the *concentration of political and economic power* in the hands of fewer and fewer institutions. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the primary political holders of power have been the nation-states. Most recently, however, this power has shifted to transnational or multinational corporations (MNCs). Many of these have incomes and budgets larger than some European nations. Mitsubishi, for example, has 36,000 employees and an income larger than South Africa and Norway. Two-thirds of today's world trade is conducted by MNCs; half of this is between MNCs themselves. With such concentration of economic power, MNCs are in a position to increase the scale and intensity of their use of natural resources, and this they are rapidly doing, to the consternation of many. It would be hard to imagine that religious institutions could make any headway in slowing these behemoths down in their gobbling of the planet.

The rise of MNCs has been well documented by David Korten<sup>11</sup> and others; the social and environmental impacts of their economic activity are now being tracked much more closely than even ten years ago.<sup>12</sup> Here I shall review the mechanisms for protecting and increasing corporate power through three multilateral institutions: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). To the extent that they do work with MNCs as global trade partners, these three institutions may be held accountable for the combined social and environmental violence stemming from MNC activity.

The creation of these three institutions has its roots in the post-World War II desire for economic recovery among the developed nations. While the United Nations was being forged as a mechanism for global conflict resolution, the Bretton Woods, New Hampshire meeting in July 1944 focused on creating an institutional framework that would promote economic prosperity so satisfying that no one would take up arms again. Some have suggested that from the start, the architects of these institutions favored U.S. leadership for this trade-friendly world economy with open access to global markets and raw materials. The World Bank and the IMF were established at the Bretton Woods meeting; the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) was created later as a locus for settling the details of multilateral trade agreements. Though formally designated as "special agencies" of the United Nations, these three institutions carry on much of their work behind closed doors, safe from public scrutiny.

The missions of the IMF and World Bank were to offer loans to developing countries as a way to spur economic production of imports in developed countries. Despite internal

<sup>10</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993), p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press and San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publications, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *Multinational Monitor* published by Essential Information, Washington, D.C.

resistance to transnational economics of this scale, many such loans for major projects have indeed been made, often wreaking ecological havoc on the loaner countries. Big dams and mining development have been particularly devastating; major environmental resistance today is focused on the Three Gorges Dam in China, where predictions of flooding and displacement of local people are dramatic. Though the IMF and World Bank technically make loans to state governments, their projects usually involve MNC construction and procurement firms. The policies of the IMF and World Bank encourage MNCs to expand into developing countries, ostensibly to create jobs and encourage trade, though often the loss of social programs due to structural adjustment agreements is a far more consequential outcome.

Of the three institutions, it is the World Trade Organization, born in the 1995 Uruguay GATT rounds, that holds legislative and judicial powers to reduce global barriers to trade. This means that the WTO can literally block (or fine) nations that resist free trade of specific products. Though supposedly representing the interests of its 135 member nations, the WTO is guided strongly by the Group of 7 (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the U.S.). In practice, rulings of the WTO can supersede national interests, sidestepping the needs and interests of the people to whom the national governments are accountable. This takes place through reviews of trade disputes between member countries, adjudicated by a non-elected board of three corporate trade experts behind closed doors. Often trade challenges are initiated by a multinational that feels its activities are compromised because of a specific national law. For example, tobacco companies have used such trade agreements to fight health reforms that would reduce harm from cigarette smoking. When Taiwan proposed a law to prohibit tobacco advertising and promotion and ban cigarette sales in vending machines, the U.S. responded to complaints from MNCs by threatening trade sanctions against Taiwan.<sup>13</sup>

As the WTO has begun to accumulate trade rulings in its mission to “harmonize” global trade standards, a pattern has emerged that favors MNCs and the economic elite nations to the detriment of social and environmental health. For example, despite Canada’s ban on milk from cows injected with bovine growth hormone, U.S. dairy interests were able to secure a ruling which forced the importation of U.S. rBGH milk. Currently the European Union is resisting the importation of U.S. hormone-treated beef, taking a strong stand against further risk following the terrifying impacts of “mad cow” disease. For this they are being fined by the WTO, because of the loss of profits they are “causing” to the U.S. beef industry. Thus we find national interests and definitions of risk being overruled by transnational interests protected behind closed doors, with little opportunity to engage in ethical debate of any kind. Economism has become a complete ideology, with all the necessary institutional infrastructure in place to reinforce its goals. The challenge to those who perceive injustice and environmental threat is formidable.

A fourth characteristic of economic violence is the affiliated *culture of false promise*, leading to profits for the few and struggle for the many. Again, many authors have discussed the promises of development pointing out the failures of the Green Revolution and other technological offerings of the First World to the Third World.<sup>14</sup> Much like the “trickle-down” theory, the rhetoric of promise always seems to cover up who the true benefactors are in terms of actual wealth. At the turn of the new millenium the gap between rich and poor is the widest it

<sup>13</sup> Korten, p. 175.

<sup>14</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992) and *Global Healing: Structural Violence, Social Development, and Spiritual Transformation* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development, 1999); and Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989), among others.

has ever been, and each technological revolution only seems to widen the gap.

In the 1950s agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto promoted the benefits of the Green Revolution, and certainly increased yields were apparent in the early years. Only later did ecological flaws in the approach show up in the form of insect resistance, soil degradation, and loss of diversity due to monocropping. Economic flaws included dependence on cash crop exports, gender inequities, and decline of health and social programs as result of agricultural development. The early rhetoric of promise was not based on the precautionary principle, now encoded in the proposed Earth Charter. This principle states that preventing harm is the best method of environmental protection and when knowledge is limited, it is best to take a precautionary approach, placing the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm.<sup>15</sup>

The 1960s brought a repeat of the rhetoric of panacea with the promises of the nuclear industry, seeking civilian applications of the new technologies developed during World War II. Anti-nuclear activists compiled thousands of pages of documents demonstrating the dangers of nuclear power and the difficulties of dealing with nuclear waste. This fortunately slowed the building of nuclear power plants, but the promises are still very much alive in different parts of the world, despite evidence of safety hazard to the contrary.

Identifying this rhetoric of false promise is critical, for it is surfacing again at the turn of the millenium in the many fervent arguments being made on behalf of biotechnology.<sup>16</sup> “Genetically engineered food will feed the world”, “genetic screening will prevent disabled children”, etc. The proclamations of biotechnology advocates predict a rosy future based on scientific ingenuity and industrial competence. Meanwhile the genetic engineering firms are making tremendous profits through patenting their “inventions”. The ethical basis for what constitutes a new invention is being worked out at a rapid rate to the advantage of the genetic engineering firms, which are quick to advise the patent lawyers.

This rhetoric of promise is reinforced and delivered through the powerful media, concentrated in nine corporate giant MNCs, including Time-Warner and Disney (1997 sales, \$24 and \$22 billion respectively).<sup>17</sup> With a U.S. government bent on establishing the U.S. as the top economic nation in the world, the corporate media play a critical role in pacifying those who would question the promise of biotechnology. Yet close behind the rhetoric of false promise lies betrayal and despair, the general population’s sense that nothing can be done to counter the actions of the economic giants. It seems that whatever harm is caused by genetic engineering, the profits will be worth it, and any relief from suffering will have to be dealt with in the future.

A fifth characteristic which is well illustrated in the rise of biotechnology, is the *colonizing mind*. This mind views resources as territories to be claimed and protected for profit-making ends. The process of Western European creation of property through the piracy of others’ wealth forms a complex political history, with many ramifications for today’s economy. Indian conservationist Vandana Shiva points out that Europeans justified the original taking of

<sup>15</sup> Principle #6, page 4 of the March 2000 draft, available on <<http://www.earthcharter.org>>.

<sup>16</sup> Exposed in Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: the Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), among others.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea del Moral, Athur Foelsche, and Erin Royster, eds., *The Plunders of Biotechnology* (Plainfield, Vermont: Third Nature Press, 2000), produced for the Biodevastation 2000 conference in Boston, p. 17.

American lands from native peoples by relegating them to inferior status, equivalent to that of nature.<sup>18</sup> Ownership of property was established once lands were “improved” by turning natural ecosystems into labored fields. Physical colonization of territories through conquest goes back as far as recorded history. Economic colonization developed further as trade routes and modes of transportation for goods became more efficient. The last twenty years of trade globalization has fostered another wave of neocolonization from afar, as First World businesses make profits from Third World labor, without the complications of national sovereignty.

Of particular concern today is the application of the colonizing mind to biological life forms, through either bioprospecting or biotechnology patenting. This has been termed “biopiracy”, the privatization of what was originally communal resources for corporate profit. Shiva describes the current trend of colonization as claiming *interior* landscapes — women’s reproductive organs, cell lines of indigenous peoples, the genetic maps of organisms.<sup>19</sup> What was once assumed to be an integral whole is now being colonized by the biotechnology industry as profitable parts. With the same mindset, biocolonialism devalues traditional cultural knowledge and technologies in favor of modern scientific technologies that can be patented and sold.

The patenting process in the United States is based on a philosophy of intellectual property rights, which parallel legal protection of land property. Patents were designed to reward intellectual creativity and stimulate competition for new technologies. With the advance of genetic engineering, patents are being applied to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the fields of agriculture, forestry, and pharmaceuticals. GMO soy and corn varieties are now planted in 30-50% of U.S. acreage, depending on the state. Individual product brands have been designed to be herbicide-resistant or to secrete their own pesticides. Cotton, tomatoes, potatoes, and sunflowers have been similarly manipulated.<sup>20</sup> Monsanto has even developed varieties of seeds that produce sterile flowers, thereby forcing farmers to purchase new seed every season. Anti-biotech activists in Europe and the U.S. have soundly attacked this “terminator technology”, forcing Monsanto to pull back on this development.

Bioprospecting pharmaceutical companies have made claims on cell lines of native peoples, using them to develop medical research products. Other patents have been approved for organ tissue lines and even cloned organisms. The prospect of all life claimed as a colonized resource for corporate profiteers is more than frightening; it signals new heights of dominating relationships invading every aspect of human activity. With vertical integration almost complete in corporate agriculture, the same giants sell all the commercial seeds, produce all the commercial fertilizers and pesticides, and control the processing and distribution of food products. Patenting of biotechnologically-invented food sources guarantees the biocolonizers secure income and almost complete control over tremendous territory.

To their credit, Third World nations have resisted attempts to universalize the U.S. patenting process. They see the process as serving primarily the colonizers and only very tangentially, if at all, the colonized. This is all too familiar. The WTO will soon face pressures to settle trade disputes regarding genetically modified organisms. Just this spring, European farmers discovered, to their outrage, that the rape they had planted was contaminated with GMO

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<sup>18</sup> Shiva, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> For a full list of genetically-engineered crops available today, see Del Moral, Foelsche, and Royster, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.



seeds. Because GMOs have been inadequately tested and may prove dangerous to native plants through genetic drift and bear unknown risks to human health, Europeans have been actively resisting further colonization by the biotech industry.

Economies of scale, commodification of bodies, concentration of political power, the culture of false promise, and the colonizing mind are more than five elements at play in economic violence. Fundamental belief systems associated with each of these are reinforced and validated in the others. Economic structures formally legitimize these belief systems into codified international trade relations. The particular combination of global power in the World Trade Organization, the multinational corporations, and the biotechnology industry has perhaps never been seen before in economic history. New forms and scales of economic violence are possible now on a global scale beyond most human experience. This is certainly a cause for consternation, and strong motivation for taking stock of endangered values, as Cobb has done.

#### IV

Let me now add weight to John Cobb's argument by lifting up several more core values that have been omitted from economic theory and practice. Though I draw from Buddhist philosophy and practice to define these, they could as well be drawn from other religious and ethical traditions, including Christianity. The greater point is that they are *not* present to any degree in the current practices of trade relations or multinational corporation expansion. They will require other leaders to articulate the importance of these values, not only for human development, but also for ecological stability under corporate impact.

The first is *accountability*. The principle behind this value is that one is responsible for the impacts of one's actions on others and thus one can be held accountable for these impacts. Such an ethic is embodied in the U.S. National Environmental Protection Act which mandates environmental impact reports for projects that will disrupt the stability of ecosystems. From a Buddhist perspective, this value is derived directly from an understanding of karma. Traditional definitions of karma referred primarily to actions by individuals; thus, for example, angry actions committed with the intent to harm carried some of the strongest repercussions. The law of karma describes the physics of energy release: when strong negative energy flows towards someone or something, there is bound to be a reaction or consequence. The same is true for strong positive energy. Kenneth Kraft has coined the term *eco-karma* as a way of expressing the long-term impacts of human activities on the environment, many of which we cannot predict.<sup>21</sup>

The current reign of economism tends to be in the direction of *avoiding* accountability, particularly in the multinational corporate realm, where business dealings are spread across many countries and loopholes abound. In fact, many MNCs choose to relocate in countries where legal and environmental accountability is lax, since this means there will be few penalties for using cheaper labor or materials. The use of sweatshop labor provides a good example; corporate clothing producers know consumers would prefer fair treatment of workers, but they plead lack of knowledge where work has been contracted out to sub-factories under foreign management.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Kraft, "Nuclear Ecology and Engaged Buddhism" in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: the Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 269-290.

Though foreign workers make tennis shoes for extremely low wages, the shoes are sold in the United States for significant profit. It is very difficult to trace the path of all the parts of any product before it arrives in a U.S. shopping mall.

One realm of innovation by alternative economists is a different measure of national economic success. The current standard, Gross National Product (GNP), considers anything that generates a profit to be a good thing. Thus, divorce, disasters, air pollution, and prisons are all considered profitable along with the usual increase in material goods and services. Redefining Progress, a nonprofit group based in San Francisco, has proposed instead a measure of combined factors they call the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI).<sup>22</sup> They add in contributions from the volunteer and household economy which are not typically valued economically. They also subtract costs to human health from air and water pollution and costs for crime prevention, aiming to describe more accurately whether people are actually better off now than they were 30 years ago. In fact, according to their calculations, the rate of progress is not only leveling off, it is dropping. GPI offers a structural mechanism for better economic accountability, modeling a new way of choosing indicators that can help people, businesses, and governments monitor the impacts of their actions.

Closely related to accountability is taking *universal responsibility* for the well-being of all others. This value has been extolled many times by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.<sup>23</sup> It is expressed as the core imperative of the draft Earth Charter: "We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world."<sup>24</sup> In the Buddhist tradition, this value is based on an understanding of the law of interdependence, that all actions and beings mutually shape and condition each other. Thus what one person does socially, environmentally, or economically is felt by others to varying extents. When that "person" is a multinational corporation or the World Trade Organization, such actions are felt by many, many beings.

Taking universal responsibility for the well-being of others directly contradicts the business philosophy underlying economism, as Cobb describes. The most profitable business is the one that can use human and natural resources the most expediently and efficiently, taking the least responsibility for social and environmental consequences—usually seen as costly add-ons. Universal responsibility reflects a relational worldview in which every player is seen as a significant element in the mutually causal web. This is central to Buddhist virtue ethics, as developed in the guiding precepts. In contrast, the objectifying view associated with exploitation and misuse of people and the environment, depends on viewing the parts of the system as independent and unrelated. This view more easily justifies use for profit, as in removing trees from the forest as so much standing timber.

Some companies in Germany are now taking greater responsibility for the waste generated by their products and are designing more parts to be recycled when the product is no longer useful. Animal rights advocates argue for "humane" animal farming, promoting a greater sense of responsibility for reducing animal suffering. Organic farming is increasingly popular,

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<sup>22</sup> Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe, "If the GDP is up, why is American down?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1995, pp. 1-15.

<sup>23</sup> H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millenium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Earth Charter, *ibid.*, p. 1.

not only because of its safer and tastier produce, but because of its commitment to take responsibility for the soil and for the community it feeds. These are encouraging signs, but they are miniscule next to the enormous responsibility a big corporation carries for all the people, plants, and animals it affects.

A third value is *service*, the heart of the Bodhisattva vow. From a Mahayana Buddhist perspective, service represents the highest expression of human development. The third of the Three Pure Precepts is a vow to “save all sentient beings”—an impossible but dedicated task for the Bodhisattva. Service in the Buddhist context includes not only caring for another person’s basic needs, but also serving others on the path to liberation. Since liberation from desire (and the driving afflictions of the Three Poisons) is the central goal, it would definitely *not* be in the best interests of most businesses to practice service in the Buddhist sense. Without desire, who needs to consume products?

If a service ethic were at the basis of our wealth distribution system, it would produce a very different configuration of economic holdings. Land, education, and profits would be distributed to benefit all, rather than just the upper classes. The highest calling would be giving one’s life to help others rather than making profit and gain through economic activity. Those committed to a life of service would be held in high regard and supported in their training and efforts. This is not to say that it is impossible to live a life of service in the business world, but many aspects of global corporate activity indicate it is far from right livelihood.

Service as path raises issue with the practice of usury and credit, or making profit from the loaning of money. In the Islamic tradition, usury is considered illegal and immoral. This has created certain conflicts among the Muslim nations in entering the global trade market, where credit is a given. This concern has not been critical in Buddhist practice, but it is worth examining, considering the rate at which wealth multiplies based on credit and compound interest. The service of money-lending could be seen as similar to other forms of service: a gift of generosity. Making extra money from acts of service puts them in a different, more self-enhancing light, opposite to the goals of enlightenment.

A fourth value is *contentment* or “santutthi”. This can also be translated as ‘satisfaction or the absence of craving. Since craving is what generates attachment and prevents liberation from the ego-self, absence of craving assists one in moving along the path. Over thirty years ago, after the First National Economic Development Plan was drafted, the Thai government prohibited Buddhist monks from teaching this concept; they felt it impeded economic growth and development.<sup>25</sup> If people were content with what they had, how could they be stimulated to buy consumer products? In Thailand, where Buddhism is the state religion and plays a significant role in social as well as economic culture, this proclamation has no doubt had a strong impact. Liberated from the restraints of this value, Thais are now free to join the rest of the modern world in the grip of over-consumption.

Activists committed to reducing consumption such as members of the Voluntary Simplicity movement or the Alternative to Consumerism group of Thailand, see their work as extremely radical and threatening to the current race toward globalization. They act on the

<sup>25</sup> Pipob Udomittipong, “Thailand’s Ecology Monks”, in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000), pp. 191-197.

premise that reduced consumption will decrease the drive for production of consumer goods. As part of their work, they support local community development to increase contentment based on non-consumer values. This approach can be applied in both First and Third World contexts, where strengthening community generates local empowerment. Sometimes, though, the allure of American-style materialism cannot be muted and economic growth remains a primary goal.

A fifth value is *generosity*, one of the six paramitas or perfections. This value is held in the highest regard among Buddhists and is seen as a mark of a spiritually developed person. “No hoarding”, one of the ten prohibitory precepts in the Mahayana tradition, applies to material goods, love, and to the teachings themselves. Generosity is codified in the system of alms-giving from villagers to monks in many Asian countries. In simple karmic terms, being generous is a good way to “make merit” and ensure a more propitious next life. Practicing generosity offers a way to express one’s understanding of the nature of the universe: always ebbing and flowing, never accumulating in one place permanently.

The rhetoric of international development often promotes projects as acts of generosity, reflecting the virtue of those providing the development aid. Critics of development programs point out that this rhetoric may provide a good cover for business deals that serve the donor much more than the receiver. The spirit of this precept would be more fully expressed in philanthropy, the giving away of wealth in the service of others. An economy that favored philanthropy (with higher tax write-offs for charitable giving, for example) would create a base of support for community development, schools and libraries, cultural programs, and environmental monitoring. Accumulating wealth would only be seen as virtuous to the extent that one could share this wealth with others, much as King Asoka did in early India.

These five values reinforce each other in Buddhist virtue ethics. One who reduces desire and lives life without attachment is able to freely practice generosity and enjoy contentment. One who takes universal responsibility for the well-being of others is more likely to assume full accountability for his or her own actions. One who commits to a life of service as the highest expression of the Bodhisattva path will seek ways to liberate others from hoarding, dissatisfaction, and non-relational views of the world. These values have been well-described in the Buddhist literature as guidelines for individual enlightenment. What is difficult is finding ways to apply them to institutions whose actions are equally subject to the laws of karma. Certainly there are roles for enlightened leaders, whose influence can shape organizational behavior. But leaders come and go, particularly in this era of corporate mergers and CEO buyout packages. More hopeful and perhaps ultimately more effective are ethical policies that can define restraints on corporate activities. The Sullivan Principles and Ceres Principles, and now the Natural Step program all move in this direction.

In today’s globalized economic structure, what is needed are codes of ethical restraint at both the individual corporate level and at the level of systemic governance structures such as the World Bank, IMF, GATT, and the World Trade Organization. The World Bank and IMF have shown some responsiveness to environmental and social pressures regarding the ethicality of their projects; this is a good sign. The WTO, however, with its rising political power, bases its adjudications entirely on scientific advice, not ethical guidelines. There is currently no mechanism for ethical input into trade dispute decisions. Creating a forum for such deliberations would be a first step in pressing for restraints on the domination of global culture by economic values.

## V

Why is it important for people of faith to address these issues and concern themselves with economic violence? Already many individuals and organizations are challenging the direction of globalization. Demonstrations in Seattle in November 1999 followed by protests in Washington, D.C., in April 2000 expanded on earlier teach-ins that engaged activists and intellectuals from around the world. Thousands of people are speaking to the impacts of corporate economic and political domination as it displaces community values and respect for individual lives. Is there a particular role in this conversation for people of faith?

First, such involvement offers a path of action. Buddhist leaders such as Sulak Sivaraksa and others in the International Network of Engaged Buddhists take their activism as *engaged practice*. Socially-engaged Buddhism as a field of endeavor now includes hospice work, gay rights activism, environmental work, peace advocacy, prison support, and race relations.<sup>26</sup> Economic justice is only a very small part of this already small movement. Thai monks in the Phra Sekhiyadhamma group have taken on the plight of the poor and the ravaged environment on several Dhammayatra walks.<sup>27</sup> As they walk with villagers, they raise issues generated from *lokanuwat*—“spinning according to the world”—the common Thai word for “globalization.” Much much more could be done by leaders of Buddhist communities in solidarity with each other across the globe. Practicing Buddhists who are in a position to influence the direction of global economism—scholars, environmentalists, lawyers, government employees, NGO staff—may take up this work as a way to serve all sentient beings and fulfill their bodhisattva vows. Carrying out such efforts with compassion and fierce wisdom protection could be encouraged and supported by local Buddhist communities.

Second, people of faith are often more experienced in expressing ethical concerns. Using the language of their faith tradition, they can articulate the particular points of digression away from a relational, life-supporting view and help others find a way to “speak truth to power”, as the Quakers would say. People of faith traditions have not only a wealth of knowledge and literature to draw on, they also have heightened sensitivity to ethical nuance. Through the effort of examining their own thoughts and behavior, they are familiar with the tensions involved in finding a path to clarity and right action. They can offer patience to others as they engage the most difficult and sobering arena of global economics. Solace, courage, and solidarity can be immensely helpful in the shared task of developing better alternatives to economism.

Third, this task can be seen as central to what Catholic geologist Thomas Berry calls “the Great Work”.<sup>28</sup> In his most recent book, Berry outlines the “Great Work” as the transformative generation-wide effort to change human-Earth relationships from disruptive and destructive to mutually enhancing and beneficial. Berry sees this as not merely an idealized goal but a necessity, if the present Cenozoic is not to be a terminal era. This century’s Great Work is equivalent, he says, to earlier socially transformative efforts of the Greeks, medieval Europe, and third century China. Berry expresses foreboding with the “extensive disarray in the biological structure and functioning of the planet” that signals a painful loss of human intimacy with the

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Christopher Queen, ed., *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000) and Sulak Sivaraksa, ed., *Socially-Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Santikaro Bhikkhu, “Dhamma Walk around Songkhla Lake” in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 206-215.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

natural world, overridden by the primacy of the economic order.<sup>29</sup>

Berry argues that economic conflicts in today's world cannot be described by the traditional dualisms of political alignment: conservative/liberal, republican/democrat, First World/Third World. Instead, he says, the primary tensions are between ecologists (or environmentalists) and developers. Developers, in this sense, are those who believe in the tenets of economism as primary. Environmentalists include those who consider life and the Earth community as primary. Reconciliation between these two tensions is not easy but it is especially difficult today when every aspect of life has been absorbed into the commercial context.

To participate in this Great Work is an opportunity for people of faith. It may even be a calling for some. For me personally, as a practicing Zen Buddhist and scholar of Buddhism and ecology, this work is central to my teaching in Environmental Studies. My commitment to the Bodhisattva way casts this teaching and scholarship in the context of service, taking universal responsibility for the liberation of my students and all suffering beings. The comments in this paper are informed by my understanding of the Buddhist laws of karma and interdependence. I have explored these concepts in the context of economic violence, looking for vehicles of analysis and ethical reflection. Like Cobb, I would hope that these explorations are accessible to people of diverse faiths. Clearly the scope of this work is too vast and multidimensional to be taken up in isolation.

Thus this paper, as one of two paired essays, is an invitation to consider the implications of economic violence for the state of our world and to consider ways in which people of faith can participate in this Great Work. Buddhists must examine the tendency to passivism for which they have been criticized and find ways to actively engage the principles of their practice. Learning to accept the shortcomings of others (including corporations) can be taken too far, justifying a relative view of all behaviors. Though Buddhists have a weak history of international political involvement, perhaps the dark cloud of economic globalization, which threatens so many human values, will be compelling enough to arouse the fierce protective energy of the wrathful deities. Certainly the economic order of the 21<sup>st</sup> century offers ample ground for practice in the study of institutionalized greed, hatred, and delusion.

Like others, Buddhists have the choice to help turn the direction of the global economy. What will be their offering?



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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

# Economic Aspects of Social & Environmental Violence from a Buddhist Perspective

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Sulak Sivaraksa

Dr. Puey was keen on trying to improve some economic aspects of social and environmental violence, approaching the subject from Humanistic and Buddhist perspectives. But I shall try to write on such a subject although my knowledge is much limited in the matter. The present economic reality, widely known as neoliberal capitalism, prizes the accumulation of profits over human wellbeing and environmental sustainability. As such, it is criminal and hence definitely not the way to regulate or organize the global society. The present trend however is of increasingly giving the agents and institutions of capital a free hand to do so.

The main beneficiaries of this violent and highly unjust system are invariably transnational corporations (though some critics prefer to call them transnational tyrannies), big financial investors, and their supporters. Roughly two-thirds of what is known today as world trade is simply intra-firm or inter-firm trade. Small wonder that they are virtually the present-day “masters of the universe,” increasingly accumulating special rights, influence, and power vis-à-vis the mass of humanity. An open secret is that the wealthiest 20 per cent of the world’s population receive 83 per cent of the world’s total income—a fact that no longer creates consternation or moral outrage in the mainstream; rather it is taken as a healthy phenomenon that will contribute to human progress. Moreover, the environment is being plundered to quench the greed—which happens to be a bottomless pit—of the few. Inevitably, this creates a two-tiered system both within and between countries; a small opulent minority builds their castles on the suffering and impoverishment of the absolute majority of humanity. A large segment of humanity enjoys freedom with no opportunities and has the freedom to starve but not freedom from poverty. Everyday thousands of children are dying from easily preventable disease. Millions more are malnourished or starving. It is against this backdrop that we need to discuss some of the economic aspects of social and environmental violence from a Buddhist perspective.

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Let us first deal with the production side of the capitalist equation. What is its main driving force and value system? How do they impact social organization and the environment? Undeniably, the fuel that keeps the capitalist engine running is profit: the more of it, the better, the argument goes. Hence, corporations must be free to pursue it—at all costs. The ends justify the means. It is also argued that the profit generated by the system will eventually trickle down to

benefit the mass of humanity. The available evidence points otherwise. To be fair, capitalism does generate some benefits to humanity, *but they are largely unintended by-products of the system.*

In the mainstream discourse, profit is said to derive solely from entrepreneurship—a concept that acts as a soda-bicarbonate for intellectual and moral indigestion. In reality, the easiest and cheapest way to reap massive profit is exploitation or ostracism: one is keeping rich by making others poor, directly or otherwise. The masters then seek solace in the tenuous assumption that the global economy utilizes the best and disposes the rest. Furthermore, the environment is seen as a sub-system of international capitalism, not vice versa. Hence it is to be raped in order to lubricate the wheels of the capitalist machine. Put differently, the insatiable quest for profit upheld by capitalism really reflects greed, hatred, moral callousness, and wanton criminal negligence towards the wellbeing of the people and environment. The name of the game is getting ahead even at one another's expense, to rise to the top of the pecking order. If one frequents any bookstore one is likely to find business books with interesting titles such as *Divide and Rule* and *Colonizing the Market*. This nefarious aggressiveness is benignly known as “free competition” in mainstream parlance. Those that succeeded to the top are lauded as “efficient.” If allowed to have a firm grip on the people, these values will necessarily generate a grotesque society of violent, selfish, anti-social environmental-plunderers. A founding father of the free market system, Adam Smith, himself, derided acquisitiveness, selfishness, and greed as “the vile maxims of the masters of mankind”; of course, this is expected out of a child of the Enlightenment.

However, let us now turn to Buddhism and profit. Capitalism may be an efficient and rational socioeconomic system, but its morality is highly dubious. To put it less charitably, the morality of capitalism is conspicuous by its absence. *The so-called triumph of capitalism in the late twentieth century in fact exploded the moral world, removing all moral (and increasingly legal) restraints to the accumulation of profits.*

Unlike (neo-liberal) capitalism, Buddhism respects and upholds the primacy of all sentient beings—not of non-corporeal corporations. Also, Buddhism critically differs from capitalism in that it does not make a virtue out of self-interest, greed, and self-aggrandisement—out of the masters' vile maxims. Unfortunately, the masters' vile maxims are gaining ascendancy in, for example, educational institutions and the mass media. The logic is simple: the more the guardians of the brutal system control, the more stable it will be.

Buddhism denounces and renounces greed, because it is seen as leading one down the perfidious road of aggression and hatred—in a word, of suffering. Greed can never lead to satisfaction, individually or collectively. Thus Buddhism seeks to show how to be content with changing oneself—that is, self-cultivation—and emphasizes the importance of caring about, promoting, and benefiting from one another's wellbeing. Whereas capitalism treats a person as only half-human—the economic dimension e.g., greed, hatred, and selfishness is cultivated to the exclusion of other considerations—Buddhism approaches a human person holistically. The mind and heart must be cultivated, and diversity must be nourished in social relations and in human relations with nature. A human person is an “interbeing.”

At the individual level, this means the practicing of, *inter alia*, the Four Sublime Abodes (*Brahma Vihara*). They are as follows:

A) *Metta* or loving-kindness towards oneself and others. Yes we all desire to be happy



and have every right to do so. Nevertheless, through practicing the precepts and meditation, a different state of happiness can be achieved. It is a state of happiness where the mind is harmonious with oneself as well as with others. It renders assistance and benefits without ill will and without the malice of anger and competition. Once one is tranquil and happy, these qualities will be spread to others as well.

- B) *Karuna* or compassion can only be cultivated when one recognises the suffering of others and, consequently, is driven to bring that suffering to an end. Undoubtedly a rich person who does not care about the miserable conditions of the poor lacks this quality. It is terribly difficult for him or her to develop into a better person. All those who lock themselves up in ivory towers in the midst of a shockingly unjust world cannot be called compassionate. In Mahayana Buddhism, one vows to become a Bodhisattva and forgoes one's own nirvana until all sentient beings are free from suffering. In other words, one cannot remain indifferent. Rather one must endeavor to help others and alleviate or mitigate their suffering as much as one can. The essential characteristic of any healthy community/society is its principle of inclusion. As we become more attuned to compassion as the instrumentality of social organization, we can embrace the community.
- C) *Mudita* or sympathetic joy is a mental condition whereby one genuinely rejoices when others are happy or successful in a number of ways. One feels this without the flame of envy even when a competitor gets ahead.
- D) *Upekkha* or equanimity refers to the state in which the mind is cultivated until it becomes evenly balanced and neutral. Whether one faces success or failure, whether one is confronted with prosperity or adversity, one is not "moved" by it.

The Four Sublime Abodes are to be developed step by step from the first to the last. Even when one is not perfect, one must set one's mind toward this goal. Otherwise, in one way or another, one's dealing with the self or with others will tend to be harmful. Moving towards happiness and tranquility rather than towards worldly success and material progress, a Buddhist is then in a position to develop his or her community—the family, neighborhood, village, etc. An individual who is awakened by these realities is called *Purisodya*. Once this awakening is gradually shared with others ultimately the whole nation may be awakened to the threats posed by capitalism, including its ethos.

Moreover, in a time of *moral emergency* like now, the Buddhist teaching of the Four Wheels may serve as useful antidotes to the detrimental values of capitalism. As a cart moves steadily on four wheels, likewise human development should rest—and this point cannot be overemphasized—on the four dhammas, namely, Sharing, Pleasant Speech, Constructive Action, and Equality.

- A) One must share (*dana*) what one has with others—be it goods, wealth, knowledge, time, labor, etc. Capitalism on the other hand upholds the dictum "all for myself and nothing for other People," in Adam Smith's telling phrase. Powerful transnational corporations control the access to essential commodities such as food, drugs, and technology. Yes they are all made available to us—for a high sum of course. To a large extent, *dana* is still practiced in most village cultures. We should strengthen the concept of *dana* and spread it to counteract the invasion of materialism and the ethos of competition by sharing, by leading less commercialised lifestyles.

- B) Pleasant Speech (*piyavaca*) not only refers to polite talk but also to speaking truthfully and sincerely. Its basic assumption is that everyone is equal. On the contrary, consumerism or the culture of capitalism, which will be dealt in greater detail below, posits that less commercialised lifestyles are inferior. People must be *deceived* to consume goods and services that they do not really need in the name of a “high standard of living.”
- C) Constructive Action (*atthacariya*) means working for one another’s benefit. Here again it is antithetical to the dynamics of the corporation. A corporation does not work to benefit its employees or the town or city it is situated in. Rather, it is only geared towards enriching the large shareholders. For instance, it seems that every time a corporation “downsizes,” the price of its shares would skyrocket. Thereby new rules must be promulgated whereby investors that have high stakes in the wellbeing of their localities are rewarded.
- D) And finally Equality (*samanattata*) means that Buddhism does not recognize classes or castes, does not encourage one group to dominate or exploit the other. The global economy however creates a small caste of “winners” and mass hordes of “losers.” The winners take all, and their action is deemed perfectly legitimate under the banner of “free trade” and “free competition.” Hence, we urgently require “fair trade” not free trade.

In Buddhism, one is taught to be aware of the three root causes of suffering: greed, hatred, and delusion—the very things that capitalism promotes. They are great barriers to openness, compassion, and responsibility—in short, to the Buddhist conception of freedom, which is threefold. First, all people should be free from insecurities and dangers that threaten their existence such as poverty, disease, famine, etc. Second is social freedom. All people should be free from human oppression and exploitation; such a state presupposes tolerance, solidarity, and benevolence. And lastly is the freedom of the inner life. This means the freedom from mental suffering, from impurities of the mind that propel people to commit all kinds of evils.

To achieve such states, the practicing of *dana* (sharing or generosity), *sila* (moral precepts) and *bhavana* (mindfulness) is essential.

Examining the practice of *dana*, one can clearly see that giving is more important than receiving or taking. Giving enables us to restructure our consciousness; that is, away from selfishness towards selflessness. Additionally, we should be content with a simple lifestyle, a lifestyle that is not obsessed with the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others. *As Mahatma Gandhi pointed out, we should all live simply so that others can simply live. We must also be willing to share our wealth, knowledge, talents, time, etc. to benefit those that are less fortunate. Once we have restructured our minds to be more humble and less selfish, we will then be able to start transforming society to be more just, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable. Needless to say, dana is a radical departure from capitalism and consumerism.*

The practice of *sila* is still useful in transforming the self and society. The Five Precepts entail the following: a commitment to abstain from taking life and from taking what has not been given; and refraining from sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants that cloud the mind. It can be argued that the global economy at least violates the first two precepts.

If we understand liberation as an impulse that seeks to enhance life in all forms, then the

Buddhist *ahimsa* (non-killing) concept becomes a precondition for societal liberation and world peace. To generate peace and bring about liberation requires eliminating, or at least reducing, violence. The first precept deals with direct violence, but may also encompass structural violence. Structural violence may be defined as “institutionalised forms of violence involving, for example, women, children, minority groups, low income countries, or the rest of nature.” *It is the culmination of greed, hatred, and delusion.* Though less visible and hence less accountable, structural violence sets the ground for direct violence: Violence does not require direct confrontation. The structures of the global economy make *possible* exploitation and oppression on a scale that defies comment—actions that necessarily involve the loss of lives. These structures *inclined* the masters to violate the poor and the environment. Partly because of vested interests, the rich and powerful do not see these structures and their actions as violent. Besides they have a number of ideas that help legitimise and redeem these structures such as progress and development. Increasingly, trade laws are legalising the exploitation and plunder of transnational corporations.

Furthermore, the global economic structures facilitate the concentration of wealth, capital, and especially resources in the hands of the masters, denying them to the masses. Certainly, the masses’ permission of such conduct is found wanting—hence the violation of the second precept.

And if one perceives consumerism as deliberately deceptive, then one can also accuse the global economy of promoting false speech. Modern education deals almost exclusively with the minds, not the hearts, of students. The most able (e.g., aggressive, competitive, etc.) are recognised and rewarded, although they need not be “good” in the moral sense or aware of societal ills. Indeed many of the rich and powerful are unhappy. Directly or otherwise, their exalted positions are built on mass poverty and ecological devastation. This is in part a result of ignorance (*avijjā*) or delusion (*moha*). Realizing the threat of ignorance or delusion, Buddhism encourages the cultivation of right mindfulness, which directly leads to inner peace and heightened awareness of social realities.

In order to build inner peace along with an understanding of social reality, one uses *bhavana*, the third Buddhist component to realize freedom. Often described as meditation, *bhavana* is better understood as ‘cultivation’ or ‘self-training.’ Contrary to popular belief, it does not merely mean sitting in solitude and engaging in some special form of internal contemplation. *Bhavana* really entails investigating, reflecting, learning—nourishing the mind in order to develop oneself towards enlightenment. In short, it is the practice of living daily as mindfully as possible. Thus one can engage in it even while performing daily routines.

Traditionally the first part of *bhavana* aims at achieving tranquility (*samatha*), at planting seeds of peace within. The second is comprised of the technique for understanding the true situation of one’s psychophysical constitution and of the world. This is known as *vipassana* or insight meditation, that can be further developed into a tool for analytical thinking by way of causal relations or problem solving. With the ego detached, it becomes an internal factor of wisdom. Critical self-awareness leads to selflessness.

The Buddha said that tranquility is the most important prerequisite for self-cultivation and self-criticism, for the true understanding (*prajna*) of the self. It should be pointed out that understanding is different from intellectual knowledge, since it is filtered through both the heart

and the mind. Understanding helps the individual to recognise his or her limits and to be more humble. At the same time, it promotes loving kindness and compassion: the individual will be in a better position to witness the suffering of others and to help eliminate the cause of suffering. Of course, when one tackles the cause of suffering, particularly in an oppressive social system, one usually gets hurt. Here *bhavana* facilitates the understanding of such danger as well as the forgiving of the oppressor. The oppressive system is hated and will be destroyed, but the oppressor will neither be despised nor executed. If one is aware of one's anger, then one can envelop it with mindfulness, thereby transforming it into compassion. Thich Nhat Hanh says that anger is like a closed flower; the flower will only bloom when deeply penetrated by the sunlight of *bhavana*. The constant radiation of compassion and understanding will eventually crack anger, enabling one to perceive its depth and roots. Likewise, *bhavana* will fully open the flower buds of greed, hatred, and delusion.

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So far, I have only offered a Buddhist glimpse at the production side of the capitalist system. I have tried to answer (cursorily of course) the question 'What makes the masters tick?' by examining their vested interest, mentality, and value system, and have analysed some of their negative impacts on the society and environment. And contrasting Buddhism with capitalism, I have offered some suggestions on how to make Dhamma matter in everyday life; that is, how to correct the ills of capitalism and achieve liberation, individually and collectively.

Let us now turn to the second half of the equation: consumption. The masters' vile maxims still dictate the nature of consumption in capitalism. (Therefore the Buddhist critique presented above is also relevant here.) After all, production and consumption form a vicious circle. Mincing no words, consumption is likewise driven by greed, acquisitiveness, and selfishness—albeit in a slightly different context. Here consumerism or insatiable consumption is equated with ultimate happiness and freedom, with self-realisation. As David Arnott, an English Buddhist, explains

By participating in the sacrament of purchase, sacrificing money, we can buy an object that is not so much an object as a focus of images which grants us a place in the system of images we hold sacred. For a while when we buy a car we also buy the power, prestige, sexuality, success, which the advertisements have succeeded in identifying with the car, or whatever the commodity is. Consumerism works by identifying the sense of unsatisfactoriness or lack (*dukkha*) we all hold at a deep level of mind and then producing an object guaranteed to satisfy that "need."

If transnational corporations are able to appease their greed for profits then consumers will be able to consume "happiness and satisfaction" with greed, the argument goes. Both sides will benefit. Wonderful! In reality, greed, in whatever context, can only breed suffering. Furthermore, the enormous pressure that this vicious circle puts on the environment is all too apparent.

As the culture of economic globalisation, consumerism directly nourishes the unlimited greed of soulless transnational corporations. It will take quite a talent to miss this observation: markets dependent on consumption and controlled by powerful corporations cannot do otherwise. The consumers cannot be expected to know what they want; the demand must be

manipulated or generated. The Unconscious of the consumer must be “told” what to purchase. Therefore, whereas the political and economic dimensions of globalization are marginalizing many people worldwide particularly the poor, consumerism seeks the active participation of all classes. As a form of greed, consumerism obscures the path to personal liberation.

In many respects, consumerism is able to dominate much of contemporary society because individuals have become alienated from their culture and from each other. The sense of community that led people to share scarce resources and work cooperatively has been supplanted by the vile maxims of the masters of mankind, by an anger or competitiveness that causes people to seek acquisitions at the expense of their neighbors. In sum, consumerism is a consequence of using greed and violence to regulate socioeconomic relations.

At the most profound level, consumerism owes its vitality to the delusion of the autonomous individualised self; a self that exists independently of social relations and of human relations with nature: a human person is thrown into the world. For the Buddha, it was clear that the “self” constituted only a pattern of persistently changing experiences that had no more substance or permanence than those experiences.

We are deluded into seeking some transcendental subject, something that defines experience yet lies beyond the experience. We are exhorted to know ourselves and yet the “self” in this dualistic system remains unknowable. For the Buddhists, this delusion is the fundamental cause of suffering. Ontologically, we become estranged aspects of our experiences of others and ourselves. Hence we are precluded from any meaningful conception of identity.

Consumerism provides an artificial means of defining our existence by suggesting that identity is realized through the process of acquisition. Put differently, consumerism is a perverse corollary of the Cartesian proof of personal existence: “I shop therefore I am.”

I have often referred to consumerism as a demonic religion because of the manner in which individuals become mired in a cycle of behavior that is fundamentally self-defeating: the insatiable desire for goods ultimately leads to despair or boredom.

However the Buddhist practice of mindfulness may help the individual to realise gradually that “I breath therefore I am.” Put another way, *bhavana* will help us synchronise our heads with our hearts. The primary result will not be greater intellectual power, which is amoral and compartmentalised. Rather, we will achieve real understanding or *prajna*. The less selfish we are, the more our *prajna* will merge with *karuna* or compassion. *Prajna* and *karuna* are important for leading an alternative lifestyle, for overcoming consumerism. The two foster spirituality, which goes hand in hand with the engendering of harmony within ourselves, our society, and our natural habitat. In turn, this would help bring about social justice, fraternity, and ecological balance.

The deterioration of the community as a significant social, economic, and political system is both a cause and a consequence of consumerism in the contemporary world. Traditional communities in both the North and the South were predicated upon recognition of the interrelationship of all beings and the responsibilities that arise from that kind of relationship. Industrialisation tended to undermine the conditions upon which traditional communities were constituted—no doubt a process that is still happening in the industrialising parts of the world. The exaltation of

wealth and possessions (i.e., the legitimisation of greed, hatred, and delusion) often led to the disintegration of these communities. Therefore the individual, isolated within the society, anchors to the new sense of purpose configured by the corporate culture.

Under market capitalism, individuals and communities are required to be completely dependent on the market for goods and services, which in turn must be consumed in ever-increasing quantities: the more the better. A new television set for everyone, a new car for everyone, and so on. Prosperity is defined as “more having.” Again, the adverse environmental implications are clear. In large part, economic growth is predicated on this dependent lifestyle: the greater the degree of market dependency, the greater the chance of having a high growth rate.

The control over one’s own sustenance must be surrendered to the market and the technocrats. No, you must not grow your own food. Rather you must shop in supermarkets (i.e., feed the multinationals). The availability of food is not a problem as long as one can afford to buy it: every person on his or her own. The only freedom is the freedom of consumption—or conversely, the freedom to starve. Along with this new pattern of behavior comes a new set of attitudes, which has already been discussed above. They are necessary and complementary to each other. Social organisation or relation is necessarily fragmented, atomistic, and violent. The more people are concerned with amassing personal possessions at all costs, the less they would care about “the losers” of the unjust system and about the state of the natural environment, the less they will be able to embark on concerted efforts to challenge the transnational tyrannies. Thus contrary to popular belief, economic globalisation thrives on fragmentation —on indifference or lack of compassion. Fragmentation offers the best environment for the flourishing of monoculturism, including that of the mind and heart. From a Buddhist perspective, this is not propitious at all for individual and collective liberation.

In Buddhism, prosperity is defined as “more being.” As such, it cannot be realised atomistically, only collectively and with an emphasis on spirituality. The Buddhist spiritual community is known as *sangha*. A *sangha* should be small, autonomous, and decentralised. The objective of the *sangha* is to live together in harmony with oneself, with the community, and with one’s natural surroundings; that is, not to exploit oneself and other sentient beings. In other words, members of the *sangha* would have the time to cultivate seeds of peace within and to develop critical self-awareness. The realisation of one’s optimal potentiality would, in turn, help enhance the understanding of the self and the world. The lifestyle pursued should be simple, content, self-reliant, compassionate, generous, and mindful. Such qualities are necessary in order to restructure one’s consciousness and overcome greed, hatred and delusion. What can be a greater threat to consumerism than a voluntary simple lifestyle and self-reliance?

The basic philosophy of the *sangha* can be applied to the contemporary world. For instance, Gandhi’s vision of the village republic is quite similar to the Buddha’s *sangha*. More recently, the promising Sustainable and Self-Reliant Communities Movement worldwide, which serves as a potent symbol of a fundamental critique of the violent international economic order and hence a rotten apple in the barrel in the eyes of the members of the rich men’s club, also shares a similar view.

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Let us turn to a concrete example and see an approximation of Dhamma and Buddhist

freedom and happiness in action.

In Siam (Thailand), there are several movements, secular or otherwise, in the direction of developing self-reliant and sustainable communities. The most notable one is probably that of the Assembly of the Poor.

Mind-deadened and long subdued, that is how the Thai ruling elites generally perceive the country's poor, an attitude that is similarly shared by their counterparts elsewhere. The emergence of the Assembly of the Poor proved wrong their assumption, and the ruling class feels irritated and frustrated, if not threatened. The rabble are no longer in line. As the Assembly put it, we are not satisfied with "being nothing more than cheap cheering crowds in electoral games..." The Assembly of the Poor has a history of protests against injustices and externalities resulting from the government's developmental policy and economic globalisation; for example, forced relocation without adequate compensation due to the constructions of dams, industrial pollution, and increased indebtedness of small farmers who are being uprooted by giant agribusiness.

The Assembly is perhaps an unprecedented movement in Siam and is one of the bright signs of the emergence of non-violent grassroots democracy in Southeast Asia. It is a sustained grassroots movement that first became visible in the mid-1990s, but its origins are probably rooted in the early 1980s. The Assembly is an amalgamation of seven distinct networks, representing almost every region in Siam and comprising more than half a million members. At the heart of the Assembly are urban and rural small-scale agriculturists and manual laborers. They form the absolute majority in the movement. Non-governmental organisations, environmentalists, responsible intellectuals, students, and some individuals from the business community strengthen the sinews of the Assembly. Simply put, the movement is able to transcend class and regional divisions; a significant portion of the middle-class, which has traditionally tended to serve as buffers between the rich and the poor and hence perpetuating the elitist and unjust system, now supports the cause of the poor. Together they help voice the grievances and advance the interests of the poor in mainstream politics.

Things did not have to turn out this way. To a certain extent, the poor could have mitigated their material and psychological plight by becoming oppressors themselves, by exploiting each other. After all there is always someone weaker to take advantage of. Instead, they chose to fight for justice peacefully and collectively. They chose to survive and fulfill themselves by caring about, promoting, and benefiting from one another's wellbeing. Perhaps, they realised that when the oppressed become oppressors, the system of exploitation hideously ramifies. And this cruel system must be put to its deathbed.

What binds these groups together is the sincere concern about socioeconomic changes and environmental degradation, about 'fast-track capitalism' and the pervasive negative impacts of globalisation. For instance, at the end of the UNCTAD X meeting, the Assembly of the Poor along with other people's organisations issued the People's Declaration, which reads: "Our aim was to make it known that the poor have been severely affected by the implementation of governmental policies, which are emphasising trade profits rather than the preservation of our natural resource base or to address our problems. We expect that our voices would be heard during the sessions so that the delegates of all governments would become aware of our problems, and would unite to tackle them..."—a plea that went unheeded.

True, the core members have long been hardly hit by the pressure to modernise and globalisation. For example, thousands of families have been forcefully re-located due to the construction of ecologically destructive dams. Local resources are being plundered for exports, an act that is justified in the name of increasing economic growth. Of course, these victims demand for, and they have every right to do so, compensation and the right to use local resources for local wellbeing and development. But no, they are not primarily driven by self-interest, a crucial point that is often missed in the mainstream. Rather, they are propelled by a vision of a more democratic and sustainable society; that is, one that is more just, participatory, transparent, compassionate, cooperative, respectful to the natural environment, etc.

What measures have the Assembly taken? Collaborating with non-governmental organisations and social activists, they are trying to establish/network communities that are by and large self-reliant, self-sufficient, and participatory; that live in harmony with the natural environment; that engage in voluntary simple life-styles; that are contented with their cultures, identities, and (as it turned out, more appropriate) lifestyles; and that are concerned about broad issues of justice, locally, nationally, and internationally. All these suggest that the Assembly's conception of happiness stresses "more being" not "more having": to them prosperity is seen as "well being" not "well having."

The relationship between non-governmental organizations and activists, on the one side, and the core members of the Assembly, on the other side, is symbiotic. The leaders and advisors of the Assembly work closely together to identify activities that would strengthen the people's movement and build sustainable and self-reliant communities. The former help to introduce the latter to knowledge on, for example, launching sustainable alternative agriculture, community businesses and organizations; on managing community resources; and on improving teamwork, cooperation, financial management and accountant skills, conflict resolution skills, and social and political analysis skills. The latter enrich the former group's experience and knowledge with their indigenous wisdom, traditional values, and simple lifestyles.

In rural Southeast Asia, poverty can be vastly alleviated and exploitation reduced if local communities are empowered and move towards greater self-reliance and self-sufficiency; *that is, if the poor could provide collectively for their own needs through their own resourcefulness and skills, employing a modest share of the earth's resources.* Mahatma Gandhi envisioned this when he stated "Not mass production, but production by the masses." As Satish Kumar explains, "Mass production is only concerned with the product, whereas production by the masses is concerned with the product, the producers, and the process."

In fact, self-reliance was one of the hallmarks of Southeast Asian—and Buddhist—communities. Finding alternatives to market dependency and consumerism does not mean living in holes and digging roots to eat! For example, the sustainable community economic model emphasises local production for local consumption (e.g., via the establishment of credit unions, cooperative shops, and appropriately scaled income-generating businesses). Money must circulate locally as much as possible: local currencies must be launched. Since priority is given to meeting local needs rather than to exporting or fulfilling the needs of the rich in urban areas, this means that industries or businesses are small-scale, taking from the environment no more than is locally needed—hence, for example, the emphasis on natural farming. Most important, the model cannot be realised without participatory management approaches, without fostering solidarity, cooperation, and teamwork within the community. *It must be noted that there is no specific*



*blueprint for setting up sustainable communities: a lot depends on the local culture and the diversity and availability of local resources.*

Power asymmetry must be reduced before the poor and marginalised can achieve self-determination. The development/networking of strong, participatory, self-reliant, and self-sustaining communities will serve as the necessary bulwark against economic exploitation and cultural domination, and therefore will provide the necessary launching pad for the poor to prosper socially, economically, culturally, and spiritually *in harmony with nature*. As a direct by-product, the civil society will be strengthened for the poor would be able to participate more meaningfully in the state's decision-making process; they would have more power to influence decisions democratically.

Last year, the small-scale farmers created their own University of the Poor, a forum to freely exchange current environmental, socioeconomic and political concerns and to learn from one another's experience. The University of the Poor is linked with the Midnight University, which was pioneered by a number of progressive professors at Chiang Mai University, as well as with the Spirit in Education Movement, a non-governmental organisation that I am involved with.

Near Pak Moon Dam, thousands of Assembly members from all over the country have long been gathering on a rotational basis and have, consequently, established a protest settlement. The Assembly has protested here for many years, previously in an unsuccessful attempt to stop the construction of the dam and later to gain fair compensation for the loss of their livelihood. The government has reneged on the compensation for many relocated families.

This settlement has been gradually experimenting with aspects of self-reliance and sustainable community, thereby making a huge improvement in the quality of life there. For example, the following initiatives have been implemented at the protest settlement:

- 1) A group was formed to operate a traditional healthcare center that offers herbal sauna, traditional massage, and medicinal herbs to the members of the settlement;
- 2) Several community businesses emerged. Producing for their own consumption, only the surplus is sold, thus meeting the needs of the members and reducing the amount of money flowing out from the community. Income generation enterprises there include the production of natural shampoos and dish-washing liquids, herbal teas and medicines, natural vegetables, microbe fertilizers, soya milk, and vegetarian food;
- 3) A youth environmental group was established; and
- 4) A pre-school center that is run by volunteer teachers was built.

To sum up, in the Buddhist context, liberating and sustainable lifestyles are possible if people live in small communities, surrounded by natural habitats; the achievement of human freedom in community is possible when the individual's interests are in harmony with those of the whole. Buddhadasa Bhikku put it well:

“The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and soil. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent,

cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering, and death, then we can build a noble, even heavenly environment. If our lives are not based in this truth, then we shall all perish.”

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An unintended benefit of globalisation is that it enables the oppressed and marginalized peoples worldwide to support each other's struggle, to create transnational alliances that will help check the growing power and influence of the transnational tyrannies. Ironically, while economic neo-liberalism is creating massive socioeconomic inequalities, formal political democracy is spreading worldwide. Without mindfulness and compassion this combination is a recipe for social and political mayhem or instability. With Dhammic sensibility far-reaching socioeconomic and political changes are possible—a globalisation based on cooperation, as opposed to competition, can be unleashed.

There are opportunities for great and constructive changes. But we, as concerned global citizens, must first reclaim our respective civil society and minds as well as the international society, all of which have long been colonized by **greed** (e.g. consumerism, profits, and capital), **hatred** (e.g. violence, distrust of mass participation, centralisation, secrecy, militarism, etc.) and **delusion** (e.g. expertism, scientism, individualism and competition).

No single action is sufficient to meet this challenge. Rather there must be concerted efforts to turn back the tide. Opposition to the global economy must be waged, but alternatives to it must also be laid out or experimented with. Reforms or changes need to be simultaneously made at the individual, local, national, and international levels.

For example, the activities of transnational corporations must be vigilantly inspected and made accountable to the public. The hidden agendas of the transnational capitalist class in the forms of free trade or investors' rights agreements must be constantly exposed and subverted. Governments must increase their roles in regulating the market for the sake of public wellbeing and environmental conservation; the public and the environment must not be left to the mercy of the transnational oligopolies. Democratic participation by the public must be encouraged, not restricted to only casting ballots in elections. Alternative media must be set up to voice the concerns of the subaltern groups. Experiments with economic localisation must be supported; this means independence from the global economy. Alternative lifestyles (e.g. voluntary simple lifestyles) must be sought and promoted to combat consumerism, lest cultural diversity and the environment are destroyed. Through time unregulated capital will homogenise all cultures like it had successfully broken down political, social, economic, and geographical barriers since its emergence 500 years ago. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the clash between cultures and capital is more likely than the so-called clash of civilisations. Values such as compassion, mindfulness, self-contentment, selflessness, and cooperation must replace selfishness, delusion, acquisitiveness, competitiveness, and hatred. And so on.

With patience, diligence, compassion, as well as solidarity we will be able to stymie, if not completely overcome, the exploitation of the mighty transnational corporations, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Funds, etc. Undoubtedly, this is no small feat. The best and brightest work for them, and they are equipped with the latest technologies. Furthermore, their mass media lure and tempt us daily into the demonic religion of

consumerism, indoctrinating us with the “I-shop-therefore-I-am” equation. But, however powerful they are, with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, we will be able to experience the false as the false, to see the truth in the falseness of capitalism.

To summarize what I have said, the basic philosophy of economic liberalism intrinsically contradicts the basic Buddhist principles in at least three aspects; the basic assumptions about happiness, the codes of conduct in terms of human relationship and the attitude toward nature. All these three aspects are closely interrelated to one another.

In Buddhism it is believed that to be happy one should be moderate in terms of material well being. Either wealth, power, recognition, or sensual pleasure can be harmful if we have too much or too little of each. We don’t believe that the more the better either for an individual or for a collective. However our ignorance always tells us to accumulate more and more of these four worldly things. Modern economics endorses this ignorance to the extreme.

To be happy, we need to reduce our unwholesome desires either in term of greed, hatred, competition, selfish individualism, and selfish collectivism and cultivate our wholesome quality of life—generosity, compassion, calmness and wisdom. Modern economics does the opposite. The unwholesome desires are the root cause of unhappiness. To endorse it is to exploit and oppress first oneself and then unavoidably others. Hence both the poor and the rich are unhappy.

From this basic assumption, we can see that a good society is a society with a social environment that encourages the cultivation of the wholesome quality of life. This mean people are encouraged to live a moderately simple lifestyle and share wealth, power, respect with one another in a spirit of cooperation instead of competition, oppression and exploitation promoted by the present economic system. We should also make it clear that there is no space for production and trade of arms and chemical insecticide and fertilizer in the principles of Buddhist economics.

From a Buddhist point of view, there is no contradiction between wholesome self-interest and the interest of the community when we talk about human relationship.

In terms of our relationship with nature, the Buddhist teachings of generosity and compassion extend beyond fellow human beings to all sentient being. The precept not to kill extends to cover even insects that may bite us. We look at the universe as a living being. When we share our merit, we also share it with the moon and the sun, the visible and the invisible.

As a good lifestyle is one of moderate simplicity, this also means that we take from nature as little as possible so that we can live harmoniously with our natural surroundings. Like many other Asian and indigenous civilisations, the forest is vital to Buddhist civilisation. An ideal life is a life considering the absolute basic needs and living in the forest close to nature. The Buddha’s enlightenment happened in the forest and he spent the rest of his life wandering from forest to forest spreading his message of what a good life is.

We can see that all these three aspects are closely inter-related. However to create a good society accordingly means a need for critical selection and rejection of many of the basic assumptions and principles of the Enlightenment that modern economics is based upon. Then we have to radically change the present structure of our society accordingly side by side with changing the structure of our consciousness.

# Buddhist Economics

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Gabriel Lafitte

Usually Buddhists disapprove of the greed and excess of capitalism, but have little more to say. That does not lead to alternatives, just to ineffective, peripheral muttering.

If Buddhists are to address the centrality of economics in contemporary life and its privileged role as the discourse setting the terms for all other languages and discourses, we need to do better than to say that, like sin, we are against it.

We might start, not with moralizing, but by saluting the creative energies that constantly pour into renewing the engine of growth. Our contemporary capitalist economy is a collective work of genius, a product of the best minds concentrating their creative energies. The engine of modernity requires ever increasing consumption. That is possible only if new human needs are invented and come to be believed. This is a highly creative process, and it works with exactly the same human energies that meditation practice works with. The brand builders are the drivers of corporations. They determine from the outset what a corporation's products are to be, how they are to be positioned. Buddhist meditators and brand strategists alike watch the minutiae of desire as it erupts and dissipates in human minds. So why moralize as the first and only move?

Capitalism is a global system dominated by large corporations, often transnational in their scope, plus a host of smaller businesses that the finance pages call the minnows. Transnational corporations have come to dominate international trade and commerce and the minnows are just bit players. Even though these days a minnow can be anything from the mum and dad milk bar on the corner through to a specialised manufacturer employing a hundred workers and turning over \$30 million a year.

## **Capital Triumphant**

Throughout the English speaking world, governments have quietly surrendered any will to resist, regulate or even moderate the corporate concentration of wealth and power. No longer are there major political parties willing to oppose this global concentration. They know from experience that opposition to corporate power condemns them to the opposition benches, denying them their taste of power. In theory governments can still regulate, legislate and curb corporate

excess, and they still speak as if they exercise real authority, but in practice they have abdicated. European governments are starting to do the same. Outside of Europe and the English speaking rich countries, governments seldom had much control over corporations in the first place, and are commonly subservient to the big corporate interests, and to their cronies.

Capitalism is always restless, dynamic, in flux, forever re-inventing itself in the endless pursuit of advantage, growth, competitiveness, the edge. This is highly seductive, because it forever holds out the promise of satisfaction, not just of our basic needs such as food or clothing, but with every hamburger or pair of jeans comes the invitation to make a lifestyle statement, a fashion statement, to be with the in-crowd. In the hierarchy of human needs, almost every ordinary sales transaction is a step towards self-actualisation. The promise of capitalism is that it is actually the force of nature, the outcome of our genetic programming. It's only natural to believe I deserve better than this, better than what you have.

Yet, paradoxically, the message of the brand builders is that by consuming this product, you become more you, more individual, special, unique. You become fun to be with, free to think your special, unique thoughts. By consuming what everyone else consumes you assert your liberation, your spontaneity, your lovability.

### **A First Buddhist Response**

This is an awesome energy to work with. Yet Buddhists usually shudder at it, turn away from it, try to renounce it or suppress it, and live conspicuously simple lives uncluttered by a surfeit of stuff. That is a *hinayana* response, a response that is premised on a fear that the brand builders have real power, not only over our purses but also over our minds. It is a response enmeshed in the problem/solution mentality, the very mentality on which capitalism and modern rationality thrive.

As meditators, we do indeed find when we sit that we do expect much, as if it was our due. For starters, we treat meditation as a commodity, to be purchased by our investment of time on the cushion. This is spiritual materialism. We feel frustrated when peace of mind eludes us: isn't that what meditation is all about? We might blame the dharma centre, or ourselves, and pledge to persist in the quest, to try harder. We tend, as modern Buddhists in a consumer society, to say advertising, marketing, brand building are merely the workings of greed, hatred and ignorance, the energies which bog us down in samsara. Rather like Christ's answer to Satan, we say get thee behind me. We repudiate and deny the extent to which our habits are influenced by the powerful passions capitalism conjures with.

### **A Playful Response**

A less fearful, more confident and playful response might be to plunge into the stream of advertisements, images, metaphors, fantasies, and desires capitalism evokes. It's a bit humbling to acknowledge how many brand names I know, and how far I have absorbed their message as to what emotions the brand conjures up. If I sit in meditation and let all this trash flood the mind, I cease wrestling with my protestant super ego, that duty-bound part of me that likes to think I am too intelligent to be swayed by advertising. If I sit here, and acknowledge those guys know how

to press my buttons, because I do have the buttons to press. I do want to be liked, loved, respected, be the life of the party, be up to date, rather than a fat, balding red-faced old man.

The mythicisation of routine consumer goods demands more of us than thin lipped condemnation and sanctimonious declarations of renunciation such as forsaking the Porsche. If the finest minds, of our generation are hard at it in the ad agencies and marketing departments building brands on the heroic stories distilled from the entire narrative heritage of humanity, we need a more potent and playful response than wowsersism. Condemnation we can leave to the apollonian retentives in the churches, and on the reactive left, the public moralists who know only what they are against.

A playful response is responsive, labile, fluid, energetic, funny. It is always a middle way, balanced between extremes. In this situation we might call the extremes triumphalism and victimism.

The triumphal version is, in the words of a recent marketing text, that there is a clearly structured system that all business and marketing professionals can follow, to understand and replicate the deep archetypal meaning of their product category, and claim it for their brand.

The victim mentality is simply the obverse: taking us all to be the exploited victims of this all-powerful marketing psychology, passively helpless to resist this ultimate level of manipulation of our deepest dreams and desires. Naomi Klein in her book, *No Logo*, is just one of the outraged authors articulating this latest version of victimhood.

What the triumphalists and the victims share is unquestioning belief in archetypes, in their potency, universality as keys to fundamental human urges and drives. They accept uncritically the itemisations, lists and schema of Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, and of Frazer's Golden Bough before them, not to mention Jung's essentialist grandiosity.

This is clearly nonsense. Empirically, it is manifest nonsense, as Hollywood has for at least a decade used Campbell formulaically to churn out sure-fire hits that more often than not flop because they are so creakily obvious in their hero-recipe. More basically, all efforts at cataloguing human nature invariably fail, because the cataloguers are but magnifying their own historically-bound, class-bound and gender-bound fantasies and projections, and claiming them as universals.

More basic yet is the assumption of all these famous cataloguers, collectors and arrangers of myth and symbol that human nature is the measure of all things, the self-evident benchmark of what is noble and worth striving for. This is a complacent, comforting mythos that ignores greed, aversion and denial as basic drivers of our being. Greed, ignorance and hatred are explained away as arising from self-existing evil, or genetics, or sociological outcomes of childhood deprivation. Whichever popular explanation you opt for, our innate propensity to behave badly is explained away. If it does exist, it is due to external factors, or is hard wired, programmed into us and therefore necessary and inescapable. The result is collective denial of responsibility, and as whole cultures and civilisations, a collective disbelief in transcendence.

More basically yet, the empowerment of a pantheon of fixed archetypes—the hero, the outlaw, etc.—as keys to human souls, actually disempowers us. It makes us creatures rather than

creators. It denies the source of symbols in the mind. It denies the fertility and infinite variety of what we create and uncreate. It forgets that we live in a world of images, which includes not only the visible, sensual imagery we surround ourselves with, but also our words. A brand is at its root a word, a word we learn to associate with what we desire. It is just a single word implanted firmly in mind, a word we know consciously, and ask for by name.

## **Idolatry of the Brand**

The process of branding a product is the process of linking a set of symbols, such as images, habitual emotions etc, with other images such as brand names. We have little trouble recognizing the advertisement's seductive imagery of freedom, rebellion, cool, or sexiness as symbols, but we tend to forget that the punchline: the brand name, is just another symbol, just another sign made by human minds.

Signs point, but they lack inherent existence, the Buddhists tell us. They are artifacts of the mind's extraordinary expressive, communicative, creative capacity; but once they are out there we assume they self-exist, we reify, deify, and worship them. They can then enslave us. It is no accident that the word 'brand' means a mark seared by fire into flesh, and the quintessence of consumer desire.

To protest at our enslavement by brands is to make a moralistic objection that conceals the origin of brands, their fictive ontology as creations of human minds. Brands are not buttons connected to deep, immutable, hardwired human archetypes.

The classic Buddhist response goes deeper, to the source of all our imagery, in the nature of the mind. The Buddhists say if we relax enough, are open enough, and at the same time concentrated and on the ball, we experience not only the onrushing stuff/content of the mind but beyond it, the basic nature of mind, which we discover to be profoundly empty, yet luminously radiant and creative, even blissful.

This is a powerful, empowering discovery. It is the discovery that the fount of all imagery, all symbols, archetypes, brand associations, desires, hopes and fears is the sky-like expanse of the nature of mind, within which images boil up like clouds, and dissipate like clouds. We rediscover that we are creators, not creatures.

We then have the option of living, moment by moment, in the unadorned reality of the nature of the mind, of experiencing everything precisely, with utter clarity and, to quote Herbert Guenther, consummate perspicacity. We see the arisings, abdings and dissolutions of all our imagery happen, as a conjuror sees his own trickery. We have restored agency to ourselves. We see the essential emptiness of the archetypes. Jung may have embraced Buddhism; we need not return the embrace.

If Buddhists held only that all phenomena, all ideas, all images and symbols are empty, we might perhaps have to say the goal of practice is to live without illusions, amid the torrent of mental arisings, or better yet, in a calm tranquility in which mental arisings have been snuffed out like an extinguished candle.

But the Buddhists, especially the Tibetans, go further. Far from making the contents of mind problematic, to be wrestled into perspective, the mind's ability to create images is celebrated as the innate capacity of the empty nature of mind to communicate, to connect with other minds and with the phenomenal world, rather than exist in isolation. The capacity to communicate is one of the fundamental aspects of Buddhahood, *samboghakaya*.

So the Buddhist approach is not to climb out of the onrushing river of imagery, but to be both in it and beyond it. Buddhists gradually familiarise themselves with the nature of mind, getting occasional glimpses that gradually grow in confidence and clarity. Meditators are reminded not to privilege emptiness, or make luminous communicativeness subordinate. There is no sense of original sin, of having made a mistake or having fallen into error. The confusion and din of neurosis are celebrated as being just as original as is the empty nature of mind. We didn't after all make a wrong turn at the start, from which we forever struggle to retrace our steps. Life is not a quest for etiology. Time is but an image, a concept, a fiction made for its usefulness, but apt to become a prison. There is no ur-moment, no instantiation of origin, to be recaptured by diligent detective work.

Buddhism offers us a more basic response, in fact a gamut of responses, including the moral, and also a range of reflective tools to help us connect better with our basic being, and proceed from there to bigger questions of how shall we live. Morality and ethics arise naturally out of meditative experience, integral to the shift of perspective meditation generates, away from self-centredness towards inclusiveness.

Buddhism teaches us that the most basic process of a mind in the seductive grip of imagery is to either exaggerate or minimise. Whatever we encounter, internally or externally, is coloured to become even more attractive, or edited out and denied. Whatever we have conditioned ourselves to find attractive we add to and enhance; whatever we have programmed ourselves to feel aversion for, we minimise. Mostly, we have focussed on fetishised desire and seduction; without looking much at the flip side of denial. What we deny, individually and collectively, are the costs of our expanding universe of neurotic desire to have it all. The United States denies the reality that the global climate is heating, the ice is melting, and the seas are rising. It has simply been edited out of national consciousness. It's not just the president, in cahoots with the oil companies, that finds such reality inconvenient. It is the entire country that fails to take seriously what everyone, at a certain level, accepts as scientifically valid. There's a disconnect, a cognitive dissonance. Global climate change is seen as a fascinating scientific detective story; but people fail to connect it with the daily decision about how much heating oil their basement furnace consumes.

When we contemplate, sit on a meditation cushion, we discover experientially these disconnects and denials, and the dramatisations and seductions we set ourselves up for. We discover that our habitual strategising of life to leverage maximum advantage for numero uno has in fact consistently led me to disappointment and grief, isolation, confusion, anxiety and self-defeat. We discover our buttons, how easily we fall for the promise that the next time, the next buy, the next relationship, it's going to be better, this time it's going to come good.

More profoundly, we discover the gap between me and you, self and other, subject and object, is not all that great. We discover that life is not a zero/sum game of winners and losers, and I have to win or all is lost. We discover that compassion is not a cost but starts at home with being



more relaxed and accepting of myself, allowing me to be more generous and accommodating of others. We discover that we can let go, give away what we hold most precious, and far from being bereft are set free.

### **Is a Buddhist Economy Imaginable?**

Does such an understanding of human nature, freshly experienced in ourselves and our encounter with others, lead us to the possibility of a different sort of economy? Is there really any alternative to the onrush of contemporary mass capitalism? Are we collectively doomed to go faster and faster, until we reach exhaustion, both of resources and sanity, and then collapse?

Clearly, the individualistic Buddhist option, of opting out into conspicuous non-consumption, is not much of an alternative. It changes little and does not challenge the dominant paradigm. It is at this point that Buddhists tend to falter. Alternatives are hard to imagine.

If we turn to history, there is little to encourage us. Seven decades of Soviet-bloc socialism proclaimed the creation of Soviet man, who turned out to be as selfish and corrupt as anything to be found in capitalism. One could argue that from the outset this was not socialism but state capitalism, and China today persists in the state capitalist model.

Revolutions and renaissances notoriously denounce and repudiate the immediate past, seeking salvation in either a distant golden age or a distant utopian future, and fail. History offers us no successful utopias, and from a Buddhist point of view one might say the hope for a utopia is magical thinking, the wish for a total solution to all problems. All historical attempts at distributive justice, at redistribution of wealth, of ensuring everyone has equal access to education and wealth creation, have largely failed. One could shrug the shoulders and say it's only human nature that we tend to be selfish and exclusive.

It is at this point that many fall silent, because it is part of scientific modernity to accept that human nature is anti-social, that selfishness and even aggressiveness are hard wired genetically, and altruism is not natural. It is precisely at this point that Buddhism comes into its own, with its observation that we do naturally wake up to how self-defeating our selfishness is. We do have a natural capacity for love, altruism and standing in the shoes of others, capacities that can be trained and fostered by meditation practice. Such awakening is not only a subjective transformation; it also shifts the direction of economic behaviour.

### **Buddhist Economies in History**

It ought to be possible to approach the search for a Buddhist economics historically, as there have been so many societies, over thousands of years, deeply influenced by Buddhism. Throughout Asia there have been economies influenced in various ways by Buddhism. Seldom do historians of Asia manage to depict the dynamics of those economies, and even less often have they asked whether Buddhism influenced the way the economy worked. Nonetheless the question can be asked, and some answers may be possible.

But first, we must be clear as to what might constitute a Buddhist influence on an actual,

historical economy. We cannot look for utopias. Nor is it relevant to look for purely materialist outcomes, such as equality of wealth distribution, as if such a statist intervention from above were the yardstick of Buddhism in action. To look for equality, in large and complex societies, presupposes a powerful central state with the capability and the will to intervene for egalitarian purposes, and such states are a modern invention.

## **Steady-State Economies in Equilibrium**

If history might yield useful examples, we must think with care about what we are looking for. Rather than seeking imperial edicts commanding a redistribution of wealth, we should look for consensually shared values, community-mindedness, a celebration of civic virtues, of generosity and altruism, inclusiveness arising from the common experience of the human condition.

Such a search would be a vast undertaking, and perhaps end inconclusively. We could instead propose a more basic yardstick. Put simply, the fundamental stance of a Buddhist economy is equilibrium, which might also be called balance, or stasis, or a steady-state. Where a Buddhist society exists, in circumstances conducive to exponential growth and the concentrations of wealth and power that go with exponential growth, yet such growth does not occur, that is a Buddhist economy.

There are plenty of historical examples of what modern historians call stagnation, a puzzling failure to grow which requires explanation. Modern economics assigns a huge role to technology in enabling growth, and a major role to ecological constraints that, in the absence of modern technology, limit growth. In this view, ecology determines the limits to growth, and technology releases societies from those limits, liberating their inherent potential for growth.

From a Buddhist point of view it is not equilibrium that is problematic, and in need of explanation, it is the addiction to exponential growth as the solution to all human problems. History tells us that accumulation, of crop surpluses, then monetary wealth, enabling kings to recruit standing armies and centralise power, goes back at least 5000 years. Urbanisation, hierarchy, the hedonic treadmill, the endless quest for more, all go back almost as far as the invention of agriculture. Yet some societies resisted these worldwide trends. Maybe they had no choice. Their subsistence lifestyle was ecologically determined. That explanation is popular in this material age. Until the introduction of modern technologies, they were limited in what was possible. This presupposes that the urge for wealth, for me to have more than you, is innate, genetically preprogrammed.

Ecological determinism is reductionist and wrong headed. It rests on the modern assumption that humanity and nature are mutually exclusive categories of existence, and primitive people are slaves of nature, while modern people are masters of nature. Ecological determinists have looked at many areas, such as the inland of Australia, the tropical forests, and the open rangelands of the nomads, and quickly reached the conclusion that such environments are inherently low in productivity, suited only to low concentrations of human use unless modern technologies are brought in. Only very recently has careful fieldwork made it apparent that such areas, far from being marginal, are in fact highly productive and have been used both sustainably and productively by their inhabitants over long periods.

## Buddhist Tibet

So we might consider a specific historical example: Tibet. Seldom in history have Buddhist values been so directly adopted by state power as in Tibet. Was the Tibetan economy a Buddhist economy? Was it an economy in equilibrium, and if so, was this because ecological constraints made equilibrium necessary, or was it a human choice?

The evidence is hardly conclusive, as this is a research question seldom asked or answered. We immediately enter contested territory. China says life in Tibet was poor, nasty, brutish and short for all but a privileged class of nobles and clerics. China says Buddhist Mongolia and Tibet were not only stagnant but also declining, and may well have died out altogether, crushed under the weight of feudal theocracy, had modernity, in the form of the Chinese Communist Party, not arrived.

The romantic obverse of this is that Tibet was a saintly land that cared not for things of this world, dedicating its entire energies to inner exploration rather than outer conquest of nature and material wealth. In the Hollywood version, Tibetans seem to spend their days carefully protecting worms from the spade.

If we are to find our way through such extreme projections, we need to remind ourselves of what we are (and are not) looking for. We are not looking for an earthly paradise, or egalitarian wealth distribution, or explicit policy statements couched in our modern language of steady-state economics, welfare economics, natural capitalism, ecological economics or distributive justice. We are looking for implicit assumptions, tacit meanings, basic world-views that defined the uses of wealth and more basically, how life's ups and downs are to be accepted, or overcome by human will and effort.

## Tibetan Neediness

If modern society is one in which new human needs are invented to keep pace with new technologies, we might ask how needy were Tibetans in Buddhist Tibet? Conversely, to what extent were they not merely passively resigned but actively embracing of their material standard of living?

This is not a defence of old Tibet. Few Tibetans today defend it. It is a question of seeking, despite the intense politicisation of the whole issue, some way of gauging the practical effect in economic life of the widespread and heartfelt belief in Buddhism.

When Tibetans look back, comparing Buddhist and Communist Tibet, one of the first things they say is that in old Tibet, despite great inequality there were no famines. Many Tibetans remember the terrible revolutionary years of desperate hunger, from 1959 to 1962, when Tibetans ate grass, roots, bark, boiled leather, and starved *en masse*. The absence of famine is no small matter, especially if we accept Tibetan estimates that the human population of the entire plateau was around six million people, a very full human usage of a high, cold and mostly arid plateau. The work of Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen reminds us that famines are seldom unmitigated natural disasters, and that in the midst of famine there is usually plenty of food about, hoarded by the rich and powerful, while the poor have neither the income nor the political strength to access

it. Sen strongly correlates democracy with an absence of famine, and conversely, correlates dictatorships with famine.

Tibetans say that in old Tibet there were many poor people, and beggars, but poverty and even beggary were not stigmatised as moral failings of individuals. Everyone knew that life is unpredictable, that the inexorable workings of karma may mean that today I am rich, but maybe tomorrow I will be poor. Everything rises and falls. Without much need of government intervention, still less of dedicated official institutions, people accepted a social responsibility to be generous to the poor and the beggars.

The big differences between rich and poor did not have strong connotations that the rich were inherently superior and the poor inherently inferior human beings. Farmers bonded to landlords maintained considerable dignity and freedom.

### **Tibet's Place in Globalization**

Tibet notably did not urbanise. This is remarkable, as there are ecological limits on what can be grown in Tibet, necessitating trade as essential to basic subsistence, and trade usually means market towns as the hub of urban growth. In Buddhist Tibet much trade was fairly local, self-contained, and enabled a high level of local self-sufficiency. Nomads each summer have surpluses of dairy products and wool to sell, and each autumn, surpluses of animal skins and meat. The farmers in nearby sheltered, watered valleys each summer have surpluses of grain. The trade in these commodities, at rates fixed by proverbial custom, was sufficient to supply most of the necessities of life. However, long distance trade was also integral to the Tibetan economy, with caravans of pack animals taking salt, wool, yak tails, horses, skins and other products to distant markets in India and China. They would come back laden with cotton, silk, tea and other goods in demand among Tibetans. Tibet rapidly became part of the global economy and thousands of tons of wool went annually, via Kalimpong and Calcutta, to Britain's woolen mills. Communism put a stop to that.

This long haul trading required much organising. It required a banking system enabling merchants access to capital to accumulate goods to sell, and to meet the many expenses of the enterprise, paying workers and feeding animals, for many months, before a profit was made. It required economic intelligence to know the arbitrage opportunities, the margins to be had by buying at point A and selling at point B. There was also a need for grain silos and storehouses to hold surpluses until such time that they might be profitably sold.

These are all classic factors for the growth of market towns, as Skinner demonstrated for China. These hubs have opportunity to grow exponentially, and have often been driven to do so by the cost of money, by the merchants' need to service loans by maximising profits, hoarding commodities and guarding their secret commercial knowledge of comparative advantage. The entire modern world of infinitely expanding human needs can be traced back to such market towns.

Yet Tibet did not urbanise. Even the holy city of Lhasa, at the time of China's conquest in 1950, had a population of only 20,000, plus a constant flow of pilgrims in and out. What is most striking about the Tibetan economy is that all the functions of a market town were filled by the

monasteries. They were the granaries, warehouses, banks, financiers, entrepreneurs and profit takers of Tibetan trade.

Throughout the twentieth century this was seen, both by European and Chinese observers, as proof of monastic venality, corruption, unhealthy worldliness, a dangerous mix of sacred and secular power. Undoubtedly, there is truth in these accusations. But if we look at the scope of wealth creation, and the uses of the wealth accumulated, a different picture emerges.

### **Wealth Creation in Old Tibet**

If the lamas at the head of these monastic enterprises had opted for our familiar modern, competition-driven exponential growth, the option was there. All that would be needed in order to generate bigger surpluses and thus greater accumulation and concentration of wealth, would be to persuade nomads to slaughter animals in a modern way, namely to slaughter almost all male animals while very young in order to maximise the number of breeding females in a herd. Recent Chinese statistics show that to this day Tibetans sell or slaughter around 11% of their yaks each year, compared with a Chinese average (for cattle) of over 20%; while 22% of Tibetan sheep are sold or killed each year, compared with 55% for China. Despite a half-century of Chinese efforts at intensifying Tibetan meat production, Tibetans still resist, and prefer to keep their animals with them, on the hoof, to live out their days, as the best insurance a nomad can have against unpredictable blizzards. The modern world regards such practices as irrational, uncompetitive, unproductive and backward.

### **Wealth up in Smoke**

The Tibetan economy does seem to have been in equilibrium, and Buddhism did moderate needs. The poor led simple lives materially, but the rich were not noted for routine conspicuous consumption such as is common among the cadre class today. Popular Buddhism reminded people to think not just of this life, or just of one's own needs, but of future lives, and of the needs of all living beings. The bigger picture was always presented, as a reminder to consume in moderation. Nature was not external. The commonalities of the human and animal condition were emphasised. Herds of wildlife grazed with domestic yaks and sheep, unafraid of people. Fish were not caught. These are all, by today's standards, primitive failures to maximise economic gain.

Tibetans could have opted for greater wealth creation had they chosen to. The material poverty of the Tibetans was not ecologically determined. The monasteries attracted wealth, and actively financed the wealth creation of the traders, yet the capital accumulated seldom became an end in itself, with a life of its own and an endless need to pursue higher returns, as is the norm in any modern economy. Much of the wealth accumulated by monasteries financed the daily expenses of running the monastery as an enterprise existing consensually for the welfare of the entire community and for the welfare of sentient beings generally. Much of the wealth went up in smoke in devotional butter lamps, or in goldplating of statues, in conspicuous spectacles of piety.

To Chinese and Europeans alike this was deeply offensive, a squandering of capital which could have been made the engine of exponential growth. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, visitors

to Tibet almost uniformly expressed disgust at the parasitical monastic class, who seemed to produce nothing for the community in return for the donations, taxes and profits they received.

In any modern economy, capital assumes a life of its own, and becomes so important in its own right that everything is judged by it, or becomes a form of capital. Thus we talk of education these days as human capital formation, of the skies and rivers as natural capital, of our human heritage of custom and social bonds as social capital, in order to not be swept aside by the insistence that capital must always flow to where it generates maximum profit, and everything irrelevant to that may be swept aside.

In development economics, the hardest stage is the first, in which poor communities lack monetary capital to invest in infrastructure and intensification of production. Once capital begins to accumulate, as taxes in government hands or profits in enterprise hands, the dynamic of growth has begun, and it is easier to turn modest capital into major capital. Tibet clearly rejected this reification of capital. Capital accumulation was episodic. Once it accumulated it was spent rather than being held aside to fulfil the law of the market that capital must generate maximal return.

In this sense, for all its inequalities, we can say Tibet was a Buddhist economy. It might seem that our definition of what constitutes a Buddhist economy is rather basic, and easily met. But in today's world, a return to modest human neediness would subvert the entire dynamic of endless growth. If we all learned to moderate our needs, and take personal responsibility for acknowledging our desires but not solidifying them into needs or rights, the accelerating inflation of contemporary capitalism would implode.

Once more, this is not a moral injunction. Buddhism begins with the assumption that no matter how much leather we cover this prickly world with; there will still be thorns, so the best protection is the more modest alternative, to put leather on our feet. Attend first to the mind, for it is the mind that can instantly be anywhere, imagine anything, deliver us into heaven or hell in a flash. If we are to be happy, productive and of genuine help to others, we need to clean up our act, take responsibility not as a moral duty but as a way of discovering what really matters, and what clutters us up.

As we practice, we experience ourselves unvarnished, prior to the colourisation and editing. We experience ourselves as we are, without it feeding into the never-ending soap opera storyline. We experience rawness, soft spots, unedited. We discover our ordinariness and foolishness. We soften and discover more space for others, we become more receptive, better able to stand in their shoes, sense where they are at, and respond appropriately.

We see the obsessive repetitiveness of our fantasies, our willingness to be seduced by the promises of brands. We experience our self-pity, our desire to be treated as someone special, given preferential treatment by corporations whose promise is to treat everyone as special, which is a logical nonsense. Our fantasies lose their urgency, their neon-lit colours fade, we discover that having ditched our boring old partner, we have chosen another in the image of the last one. We awaken.

For Buddhists the capacity, indeed the inevitability, of awakening is a given. This is where Buddhism is actually different. Awakening is not a distant unattainable goal achieved only

by cultural heroes, by unattainable archetypes. Awakening from our self-enclosing reverie is never more than a breath away. Momentary glimpses of awakening are not at all uncommon. In such moments we know our striving, strategising, yearning are all irrelevant, because things are as they are, and that's it.

## **Deflating the Modern Economy**

As the fantasies become less lurid, and the editing and denial less automatic, we return to unadorned reality, experienced moment by moment, and get on with whatever comes next. We cease being drama queens and do the dishes; we stop worrying about the meaning of life and feed the dog. We take responsibility for our needs, wants, desires and fantasies. We cease to be available to the brand builders. Our hot buttons are unplugged. Our footprint on the earth is less heavy, more mindful, we consume less, not because it is a moral imperative but because we have tired of the endless promise and unfulfilment of capitalism. We get on with life, softening further, opening up.

This is powerfully subversive stuff. We seldom transpose such micro transformations to the macro scale to see how subversive it is. Usually, we just say social change begins with changing ourselves, because it is only when we can take care of ourselves that we can live up to our ideals of caring for others. That in itself is a big enough agenda, so we don't go beyond, and scale it up to a scenario of how it would be if a lot of people forsook consumption and took up reflection.

What makes this so subversive is that capitalism requires constant growth. Equilibrium, a steady state, in which we make and consume as much this year as last year, is death. This is why capitalism is so restless, revolutionary, so intent on creative destruction, so unable to sit still. We mistakenly call capitalists conservatives, whereas they are in fact the most revolutionary of systems, forever craving the new, needing excitement, whipping up adrenalin, seeking out the next big thing, the category-killer.

Buddhist economics is part of our general recovery from addiction, from assuming the answers to our problems are out there. One of the outcomes of meditation is equanimity, in which the restless energy of the mind averting itself from the unpleasant, and craving the pleasant, has subsided. With equanimity, they say, whether we are praised or blamed, we can react the same. Our sense of confidence, responsiveness and openness no longer require that we be surrounded by nice people, and shielded from nasty folk. We have discovered an inner strength and flexibility that are no longer dependent on getting our external causes and conditions just so.

Equanimity and equilibrium both suggest balance, steadiness, and a clarity that is not clouded by addictions and neurotic neediness for more stuff. Now we have the supposedly weightless new economy of the cyber age. It weighs heavily on us by seductively persuading us to invent needs we never even imagined only a few years ago. There is little new about the new economy, except its addictive speediness and literalist insistence that answers to our needs are out there, not within.

When we discover our yearnings for magical shortcuts and the seductions of modernity, we need not recoil in moralistic horror. We need not zealously reprogram ourselves to need less.

If we get on with discovering our basic nature, our addictions give us up. A Buddhist economy comes into being as we learn to live economically, simply because life is short, and there is so much that is worthwhile in life that the life of the mall rat, the e-commerce deal maker, the day trader or data dandy fades.

Is there a way I can let the brand builders tell me something about myself? They seek out my response. In turn I discover my responsiveness. I discover how I fill in the dots, complete the picture, put myself in their picture, win the girl and ride off into the sunset. Discovering my responsiveness is the discovery of my creativity, the power of my imagination, my ability to colourise my world. The discovery of responsiveness is the beginning of greater confidence and responsibility, in my ability to make it up as I go along, or alternatively remain a prisoner of predictable habit.

Responsiveness is a fundamental discovery for Buddhists, a joyful discovery that the script of my life, and of the next moment, far from being written for me, is in my hands. I can choose how to respond, and the range of possible responses is infinitely varied. This is a somewhat tantric approach to capitalism, which acknowledges the richness of the imagery constantly being presented to me, the endless parade of brand names and their associations.

The tantric approach admits these energies into our lives, and by fully experiencing the responses they invoke, we discover their nature, which is dreamlike, empty of substance. We discover that it is a fantasy world we inhabit, and only a small part of the fantasy is given to us, most is our own work. We discover our ability to create, to visualise, to become, in the mind's eye, the warrior, the great lover, the cool dude, the great nurturer, the sublime meditator, whatever turns you on.

In tantra, these creative abilities are harnessed in a programmatic way, in the visualisation of deities, often in an obsessively detailed way that matched the obsessive force of our habitual fantasies. We dissolve the deity and all divine qualities into ourselves, and discover what had seemed stuck, stale and unworkable in our lives is actually labile, responsive and workable.

Passions driving us to self-destructive behaviours turn out to be profound wisdoms, which can accomplish anything. It is no longer a question of ridding ourselves of our embedded niche in the capitalist system, but of moving fluidly, gracefully, spontaneously, even effortlessly with those energies, seeing them as both powerful and phantom-like, insubstantial.

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# The Pgakenyaw's Bioregional Mapping and the Struggle for Land Rights in Northern Siam

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Nuttarote Wangwinyoo

## Introduction

After finishing coursework at the Environmental Studies Department at Naropa University at the end of October 1998, I decided to go back to Siam and join the Interfaith Solidarity Forest Walk in Northern Siam led by my teachers Elizabeth Roberts, Elias Amidon, and Pracha Hutunuwatr. I found myself on a plane flying back home across the familiar Pacific Ocean with mixed feelings of excitement and peace, knowing that the journey in the sacred land and forests of the Pgakenyaw people was about to start.

Since 1995 the Interfaith Solidarity Forest Walk, first called the Deep Ecology Walk, has been organized annually to provide an opportunity for social workers and environmental activists to retreat into a natural landscape, share experiences, and learn from each other so as to deepen their understanding of the complexity of the world's problems. The Walk was organized mainly by two organizations. One is the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), a Thai-based NGO whose main goal is to provide a holistic approach for education in Siam, encouraging the integration of the intellectual and spiritual search for knowledge. Also, it promotes traditional wisdom that coexists with an ecological worldview.

The other co-organizer is The Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit, based in Boulder, Colorado. Its programs "promote just and sacred relationships between people and the land and sponsor a variety of educational events, leadership and professional training, spiritual retreats, and wilderness journeys. It seeks to create modes of activism in which a spiritual, moral witness can be brought to bear upon the political, social and environmental problems of our time."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of November 1998, a small group of staff from the Walk went to Soblan village, a small Pgakenyaw community, for a meeting regarding routes and the organization of the Walk before it set off on its journey. This community is located in the northwestern part of Chiangmai, about 60 kilometers from the city. With its forested and hilly terrain, it took about

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<sup>1</sup> From *Spirit in Action* report, by Elias Amidon and Elizabeth Roberts, eds., The Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit, Boulder, Colorado, 2000.

two and one-half hours to get there, even by a four-wheel-drive truck.

The trip was the first time I experienced the beauty of the Pgakenyaw forest. Compared to most of the open land area in Chiangrai where I grew up and where there are many groups of forest-based communities, I was so impressed and sure that the forest in which this Pgakenyaw community lived would be much healthier and ecologically richer. The forest looked more mature, especially as we climbed up to higher elevation by a narrow, bumpy dirt road. I could feel more moisture and cooler temperatures. Such an impression brought me great joy. I was so glad that there were still some communities of human beings that chose to live their life in such an ecologically healthy environment. This headwater forest is both their back and front yards.

When the truck reached the wooden bridge made of big logs, we realized that it was time to get down on our feet, since the village could not be reached by any four-wheel-drive vehicle, but only by foot or motorcycle. We met some people at the bridge waiting for our arrival, and among them was the headman of Soblan village. His face looked so kind and filled with compassion, with wrinkles and graying long hair and beard.

It did not take us too long, about 30 minutes, to walk to the village. By the time we got there it was so dark that we could not see clearly what the whole village looked like. Only some light from fires set inside of each bamboo house and the humming of Pgakenyaw residents were gently creeping through the small cracks of those bamboo walls.

When we arrived at the house of the shaman of the village, I overheard the radio broadcasting in Pgakenyaw language mixed with the Thai word, 'Dharmayatra' (which means the dharmic walk). I was surprised and asked our translator from Pgakenyaw to Thai, and he told me that it was all about the Interfaith Solidarity Forest Walk that was about to set off its journey. Then I turned and translated this for the rest of the crew who could not understand Thai. The news about the broadcast brought all of us a warm welcoming message. It showed their recognition of our work with them. We felt as if we were arriving home. We could not wait to meet with them during the next 2-3 days, discussing their current political, environmental and cultural situation, and how we could be of service to them in the following years of our work together.

The sounds of the evening in the village—people talking, children playing, pigs, cows, and chickens looking for a safe spot to sleep—and the smell of burning wood accompanied our arrival. After taking our backpacks to where we would sleep that night, we were invited to have dinner that was already prepared by the shaman's wife. People there were very attentive and tried to listen to what we said. Since it was my first encounter with the Pgakenyaw, I did not know which language was more appropriate to use, Thai or the northern dialect. After many attempts to communicate in Thai, I realized that they could understand the northern dialect or the local tongue better. Since the Pgakenyaw did not live too high up in the mountains and have been making close connection with lowlanders for various reasons, they were able to understand and speak in the northern dialect but not in the central Thai language. But for other tribes such as the Akha, the Lisu, or the Hmong, their exposure to Thai culture and language, before paved roads reached their communities, was mainly through the governmental outreach schooling program, the main educational agency for social assimilation which taught them central Thai.

When the community had guests visiting overnight, traditionally, the Pgakenyaw would

eagerly help each other out with hosting and cooking. As we were having dinner at our hosts' houses, with the hosts giving with appreciation, we were being invited by someone from another house to come over and have dinner there too. Then we realized that it is the Pgakenyaw tradition to invite visiting guests to each house for a meal. They believe that it will bring great merit to their life. Despite the fact that I did not know and did not leave some space available for more food in my stomach, I was very impressed and followed each invitation with respect. I thought that was such a great idea to host guests by the whole village; the opportunity to practice generosity is shared. Four or five of us walked from house to house, eating food little by little, and at the same time getting to know our new friends, whose faces were reflected by glowing candle lights. Most households did not use candles but instead used pinewood collected from the community forest and cut into small pieces.

After breakfast in five or six houses, we walked to the place where the meeting among the villagers and all of us was about to be held. We were struck to see from afar about 50 Pgakenyaws of all ages, dressed in their traditional outfits, were already there in an old all-purpose school building, having their own casual conversation, and most men smoking their local tobacco. As we did not expect the full participation of everyone in the community, we felt that the meeting, which was about to start, was overwhelmingly honored by the people.

The village looked very different from how it looked at night. Now we could see the hilly terrain on which the small bamboo houses were built. After introducing ourselves to unfamiliar but welcoming faces, we could not wait to ask questions and pay respect by deeply listening to stories they were about to tell us. One of the purposes of this journey, as Elias pointed out, was to bear witness to reality that would arise, with an open heart and non-judgmental mind, in order to learn both implicit and explicit lessons. It was our intention to step into the classroom as friends of the Pgakenyaw and learn what they had to teach us.

We learned that the term 'Pgakenyaw', as they chose to call themselves, literally means human beings, though they are internationally recognized by the term "Karen." According to stories told by the elders, the Pgakenyaw migrated originally from Tibet, southern China, and Burma, and eventually to Thailand due to the ongoing wars between and within those countries. They made their first arrival in the Northern Kingdom of Siam about 700 years ago, and became unrecognized members of the Siamese society.

As in other parts of the world, indigenous peoples of Siam have been living on the edge of Thai society in which stereotypes and prejudices against them have been formed at all levels and to all degrees. They were also pressured to change their way of life by modern Thai culture. Since the idea of nation-state and nationalism were practiced, the indigenous peoples have been struggling with racism both on a personal and policy level over the past 60 years.

At present, one of the most threatening issues facing these natural communities is land rights. As the natural resources, particularly timber, have become scarce (and therefore fetch high market prices), the Pgakenyaw realized that it is more difficult to protect their natural resource from being extracted by outsiders, many of whom worked closely with corrupt local government officials.

Besides their ecological conservation practices as guardians of their sacred land and forests, the Pgakenyaw are well known for their humility and non-violence. It was evident that

past wars in China and Burma were the main factor that led to the migration of the Pgakenyaw across the border of Thailand. Their many years of isolation from the main Thai society, however, contributed to a distorted perception of who they are. Even though Pgakenyaw communities live nearby the Thai lowlander communities and engage in some business practices such as raising water-buffalo or cattle, very little of Pgakenyaw culture and political situation has been studied or understood by the mainstream society.

In Thai society, a common stereotype of the Pgakenyaw, like those of other indigenous forest-based communities, is that they are primitive, uneducated, dirty, underdeveloped, and inferior. Thus they need education and they need to be developed. More often than not, the words or stories from the Pgakenyaw are not truly listened to or heard. Many development programs concerning conservation, protection, rehabilitation, and restorations of headwater natural resources, especially those pioneered and implemented by the government were initiated from what the government perceived to be the needs of the nation, disregarding the inhabitants' needs. The Thai Government has been projecting such misguided policy onto its indigenous members. This has led to unbearable and, many times, irresolvable, environmental constraints and social tension.

The history of development by government agencies has proven to the Pgakenyaw that as long as there is constant lack of their participation in decision-making processes, they cannot promise their future generations that their natural heritage as well as wisdom can be maintained and passed along down the road.

With regard to the issues mentioned above, the outcome of the meeting was a plan for the following year of working together. This included collaboration on the Forest-Based Community Mapping Project, the formation of the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities, both of which would accompany the Interfaith Solidarity Forest Walk and the Festival of Forest Communities at the end of the year 1999.

## **Political Context**

Since my childhood, growing up in a middle class family in the City of Chiangrai, I had very little awareness of the threatening reality, prejudices and discriminatory political policies the rest of the people in my country had to face. Admittedly, with biased information provided throughout my formal public education, I became one of the biased and prejudiced people, making judgements and justifications for my own middle class interest and sense of security. In the back of my mind, those hilltribes people who lived in small bamboo huts with no electricity or running water and who spoke with broken Thai accents appeared to be uncivilized, poorly educated, and dirty. Had I not been involved in social movements after my engineering education and had I not been a Buddhist forest monk, my set of reality and assumptions probably would have remained unchanged.

Working for the Alliance for Sustainable Forests and Communities provided me with a great chance to explore what had become simply a lie about the indigenous communities in Thailand. By working closely with the Pgakenyaw, living under the same roof, eating from the same plates, and walking the forest and mountain with them, I was assured that my misunderstanding of who they are was shaped by a powerful indoctrination and effective propaganda

system ingrained in the very fabric of Thai society.

Moreover, such a fresh mindset on reality motivated me to dig into researching the literature regarding the indigenous rights and the community forest issues, which are becoming more controversial lately.

In June 1998 *The Bangkok Post*, Siam's most popular English-language newspaper, reported about the increasingly heated demonstrations regarding the top-down forestry policy:

*Hilltribe people in rally threaten: They fear govt will revoke resolutions.* More than 10 million tribespeople in Thailand will be asked to join rallies if the cabinet revokes three government resolutions which allow them to live in forests. The National Forestry Policy Committee wants the resolutions revoked and for it to have the power to evict tribespeople. Representatives of Northern hilltribes people made the protest threat at a press conference held at Chiang Mai University yesterday.

As in other parts of the world, unofficial wars declared against the politically-deprived native people by the powerful state over natural resources are common, despite the emergence of global consciousness toward maintaining cultural and racial diversity. Indigenous people in Siam, most of whom still live in the forested areas in higher elevations, are included in this attack as they have been denied the rights to live on their ancestral lands.

In order to understand the complex causality of the contemporary conflicts, it is important to step back to take a look at the whole context, in which wars over scarce natural resources have been impinging on the sovereignty of forest communities in Siam.

Over the last few decades, Siam had been one of the world's fastest growing economies, driven by exports and linked with the push for direct foreign investment. Its population has rapidly increased and the whole nation seems to move in one common direction; that is, expanding its various economies to meet the demands of the world's trading markets. It achieved an average GDP growth rate of 11.5% from 1986-1990.<sup>2</sup> This attempt to be integrated into the world's free trade economy impacted the agricultural practices of Thai farmers as well as the land and forest. Thai farmers were encouraged to grow and increase the productivity of commercial crops for exports, such as cabbages, tomatoes, tobacco, and tapioca, resulting in the expansion of agricultural territory into the forested area, as well as the intensive use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides.

Modernization and its twin, consumerism, played a crucial role in leading Thai society to a crisis of natural resources and an unprecedented amount of pollution. As it is well concluded:

There have been clear benefits from this economic growth. For example, standards of health and education in all countries have improved markedly. However, there have also been negative effects of this growth. In some countries the number of poor people has actually increased over the period of the high growth rates. In all [South-East Asian] countries this rapid growth has put pressure on lands and resources and introduced

<sup>2</sup> Catherine J. Iorns Magallanes and Malcolm Hollick, *Land Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Indigenous Peoples, Environment and International Law*, (Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press, 1998), p. 2.

competition for control and ownership over lands and resources not preciously contested. In many cases of conflict over land and resources, development has prevailed over previous uses and there have been some severe and adverse consequences resulting from that development. The most visible and hotly debated of the adverse effects of development in Southeast Asia has been those affecting the natural environment.<sup>3</sup>

Among the few economists who have long been concerned with Siam's direction of development is Walden Bello. Through exhaustive research in order to comprehend the economic breakdown Siam has been facing, Bello and his colleagues made some close observations and found out that

Ecological degradation has been one of the hallmarks of Thailand's high-speed economic development. The crisis of the environment has many dimensions—deforestation, climate change, air and industrial wastewater pollution, depletion of marine life in coastal waters caused by overfishing.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main goals the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) has been trying to achieve is to increase the amount of forest from 25% to 40% of the nation's total land. This in effect gave rise to many reforestation projects around the country. However, its effectiveness in implementing reforestation is still in doubt as its emphasis on solving this problem at the root is inadequate. While in many cases, the influential and the wealthy few can get away with the national regulation by the Royal Forestry Department, the majority of the victims are poor peasants.

Over more than half a century, the forest administration has tried many strategies to curb forest loss. Forestry laws were passed; protected areas were established; forests were patrolled; flows of forest products were regulated and checkpoints manned; trees were planted; many poor farmers who ventured into the forests were prosecuted; and many forest occupants were resettled. Deforestation proceeded at an average rate of almost 3 million rai per year in the last 30 years, but the actual [tree] plantations established covered less than 100,000 rai [2.5 rai = 1 acre] per year as an average.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary deforestation as commonly understood by the Thai public is directly and overwhelmingly caused by the forest communities that live on the margins of Thai society. This oversimplified explanation, embedded both in political discourse and educational curriculum, has great impact on the public perception of hilltribes people. Many critical factors involved in deforestation by forest communities, such as economic motivations and cultural background, are not taken into consideration. In fact, the government itself has a high tendency not to look at its own contributions to the nation's vast loss. Since Siam adopted the idea of 'development,' deforestation is not seen as illegal or ecologically immoral, but as 'natural extraction for the benefit of the whole country.' These days, such justification is still widely used by those who do not have to pay the price wherever there are conflicts over natural resources between the state and the local communities. As Bello writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham, Li Kheng Poh, *A Siamese Tragedy: Development & Disintegration in Modern Thailand*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1998), p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Royal Forestry Department, *Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan: Discussion Draft* (Bangkok; Thailand, 1993), p. 15.

Traditionally, the official explanation has been that poor peasants migrating from the low lands and tribal people practicing swidden agriculture in the highlands have been principally responsible for deforestation. However, a more honest attempt to understand the situation would come to the conclusion that while poor people and tribal people are involved in the dynamics of deforestation, they are both victims and agents, often unwilling and unwitting, of the process. The role of government bureaucracies in creating the situation they are now decrying must be taken into account.<sup>6</sup>

Stories told by the Pgakenyaw elders about the time when the massive forest exploitation started were far different from stories told in the social studies classes in high schools. One elder, Pati Tazwae, recalled more than 30 years ago when his father, a good elephant rider, was hired to work for an English logging company and had to travel far to wherever there were concessioned teakwood forests. The Pgakenyaw, through at least three generations, have witnessed different eras of logging concessions since Siam was pressured to open the country and give way to Western colonialism. However, such stories have not been commonly heard among Thai lay people. Evidently, the Pgakenyaw's version of Northern Siam's history finds an ally in Bello's findings as well:

The process of deforestation might, in fact, be said to have begun with the exploitation of the rich teak forests of the North by western firms operating under license from the Royal Forestry Department (RFD). Indeed, central to the early forest management philosophy of the RFD was the cutting and processing of wood for export to Europe. So central were foreign markets that the administrative head of the agency was always an Englishman from its founding in 1896 until 1932. Most of the logging concessions distributed during this period went to foreigners as well. In 1927, for instance, out of 32 forests under concession, 17 were operated by British citizens, six by French, and one by Danes.

In those concessioned areas, which contained a total of 1,313,396 teak trees, the British have 819,682, the French 216,614, and the Danes 110,312, while the Siamese managed to keep only 94,788 teak trees under their concessioned forests. Even though the Siamese were given concession of eight out of 32 forests, the total number of trees was much less than in the one forest that had been given to the Danes. In short, it would not be wrong to say that deforestation in Thailand has its origin in the long history of colonial expansion in the region.<sup>7</sup>

The foreign concessions were phased out following the 1932 revolution; deforestation was continued by Thai citizens as teakwood was constantly demanded in the export market.<sup>8</sup> Such a big portion of valuable forest in Thailand has been extracted for the commercial benefit of those outside the forest communities. The rapid reduction of the forest over the past 50 years led the Thai Government to engender forestry policies for conservation programs, which in effect victimize the poor far more than the rich.

Since the 1960s, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) has pursued an active program

<sup>6</sup> Bello *et al.*, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

of preservation despite the rapid pace of deforestation. In 1985, the area of forest reserves extended to 42% of all Siam, despite the reduction of actual natural forest cover to between 22% and 29%. It is estimated that 1.2 million families, approximately 20% of Thai farmers, are illegally occupying land in forest reserves. Attempts by RFD to reclaim the land compulsorily have led to outbreaks of violence in affected communities because many farmers simply have nowhere else to go.<sup>9</sup>

Obvious to the forest peasants was the conflicting government property systems, such as “decreeing protected areas from above that clashed with the sense of property of the people who established communities in the forest.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, with the development policy to increase industrialization, land entitlements or tenure are given to the wealthy business sector to develop the land for commercial purposes such as eucalyptus plantations for feeding the paper industry, or golf courses and resorts. Over the past three decades, such increasing land conflicts have given rise to a diverse network of Community Forest Movements around the country whose common goal was to prove and revive traditional systems of sustainable land management and to give the community legal rights over their land and natural resources, particularly community forest.

Attempts to pressure the state to recognize forest community rights met with slow success as the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) plays a politically centralized role in defining the term ‘community forest.’ On the basis of this definition, they impose regulations that conflict with traditional practices of local communities. Discourses over such definition have led the grassroots movements to see the crucial role of developing effective tools, such as mapping and exhaustive research, to reinforce and strengthen their work.

### Community Forest Mapping Project

After the meeting with the Pgakenyaw leaders from Mae Khan, Mae Wang, and Mae Lan Watersheds in December 1998, the Alliance for Sustainable Forests and Communities was determined to conduct a map training for five Pgakenyaw communities. The goal of this process was a complete set of maps, a tool for displaying the interdependent relationship between the indigenous communities and the native forests and land. I served as the main coordinator and a facilitator for a one-year-long project, which took place along with the creation of the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of Pgakenyaw Forest Communities.

The objectives were:

1. To display traditional wisdom regarding sustainable land management of Pgakenyaw forest communities.
2. To provide opportunities for increasing awareness and identification with the land.
3. To create maps as a tool for communication and negotiation with governmental officials when dealing with land conflicts.
4. To assess and display the conditions of the forest, types of forests, and threats to the

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Hirsch, *Seeing Forests for Trees, Environment and Environmentalism in Thailand* (Chiangmai, Thailand: Silkworm Book, 1996), p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Walden Bello *et al.*, p. 191.



natural resources.

5. By the end of the project, Pgakenyaw mapmakers should be able to develop a set of maps that can help reinforce their struggle for community rights in an on-going politics regarding natural resources.

During 1998, the 3-4 mapping sessions were conducted in the five Pgakenyaw villages once to twice a month. Each time the session took place in one village and then moved to the other rotationally so that mapmakers had a chance to help each other in the mapping process and at the same time to exchange information about their knowledge of the land. A team of mapmakers from each village was comprised of both young and old generation. Youth leaders who became our mapmakers were generally more capable of writing and drawing whereas the older ones could contribute their greater knowledge of the land as well as of the traditional value system and historical events to the rest. The process involved

- 1) Developing a base map of each community forest on which different kinds of information would be shown. Identify the boundaries of each community forest in the topographical maps and then expand from 1:50,000 to 1:10,000-1:5,000 depending on how large the base map is.
- 2) Selecting the kinds of information relevant to the current political and ecological purpose that would be displayed in each map. This information includes, for example, names of the creeks, locations of rice fields of each family, ecological threats, history of settlement and archeological remains, locations and the size of different kinds of forests, tourist attractions, areas where chemical fertilizer or pesticides were intensively used, crops grown in the rotational rice field, rare wildlife, etc.
- 3) Gathering information from members in their own communities.
- 4) Placing the acquired information on the maps. The benefit of moving our mapping session to each village was beyond my expectation. Occasionally, some curious members of the community where the session was taking place—young, old, male, female, children—would stop by and participate either by just listening to the discussion, or watching their peers artistically filling in different kinds of information by drawing and painting, or sharing what they knew about the place. Some people contributed their help by preparing food for the mapmakers or rolling tobacco in dry banana leaves for those mapmakers who smoked. Some sang traditional songs when we were mapping, which sometimes made me feel like their ancient wisdom and memory was invoked so as to be pictorially displayed in the maps.
- 5) Refining and correcting. For the purpose of accuracy, we encouraged mapmakers to present the draft version of maps to their members of the community and asked for feedback or correction. Furthermore, it was a chance for mapmakers to practice the presentation in front of the public before they would actually do it in front of government officials.
- 6) Training of trainers. Besides mapping, the mapmakers were encouraged to train other community members to be able to read, create, and present the maps.

### **Map 1: Location Key of Mae Lan Kham Community Forests**

The location key is a very important element of the maps used to orient map users to

understand where the target area is in relation to its larger context. In this case, Mae Lan Kham Community forest is located in the southern part of District of Sameong in northwestern Chiangmai. Once a capital city of the Northern Kingdom and currently a tourist attraction due to its cultural richness and diversity, Chiangmai is the biggest and the most well known city in northern Siam. Besides being a home to the northern Thai people, this province is also the habitat for many major ethnic minorities known as indigenous or hill-tribe people—such as Pgakenyaw, Hmong, Lisu, Akkha, Lahu, Mian, Yao, Daraan, etc. Moreover, Chiangmai is also well known for having a moderate climate preferable to Western travelers and for its warm hospitality, delicate handicrafts, and marvelous historical sites including beautiful ancient temples. The Northern ecosystem is vital to the ecological health of the nation:

The north of Thailand is an especially critical ecological zone, being the site of seven river basins that drain principally into the country's breadbasket, the central plain. While the most important and largest river basin is the Chao Phraya basin in the middle of the country, the headwaters of this basin are largely the Ping, Wang, Yom, and Nan rivers in the north. Many of the raining standing forests in the north thus constitute head watersheds, and, with their destabilization by rapid deforestation, the flow of water from these watersheds has become quite irregular: in the dry season, drought has become more severe; in the rainy season, flooding has become more devastating in its impact on lives, soil, and property.<sup>11</sup>

When we started mapping, the first thing to do was to identify the boundaries of the area, the Mae Lan Kham Community Forests, from which base maps of each sub villages could be developed. Topographical maps published and distributed only with the official permission of the Thai Military were the only resource we had access to. This however was the best map we could get since, in Thai culture, maps were not used as extensively as in Western countries: we were thereby limited to a small collection of maps. Maps showing areas along the border of Siam are considered as strategic military points, thus the authorities would only allow a purchase of such maps with special permission.

In the process of identifying the boundaries of Mae Lan Kham Community Forest, we took more time than I expected. The Pgakenyaw knew their land very well, but when working with a two-dimensional map, it was quite challenging. Even though some of them had had prior experiences working with maps with other NGOs, the two-dimensional features carved by elevation lines and dots on a piece of paper were quite a tough nut to crack. It was quite intimidating, even for myself. Moreover, many creeks are missing in the government maps, and for most creeks, their names are designated not by the local people but by those who did not live there. With inspiration, this small discovery of missing ecological features had determined us to develop our own set of local maps showing all existing creeks with their native names and history. Unexpectedly, we now realized that merely the renaming of many local creeks not shown on the government maps could be such a political step toward the reclamation of self-determination of indigenous communities over their endangered natural resources.

Eventually, with great effort and discussions, some helpful landmarks such as creeks, rivers, mountains, and roads were identified. "We have found our home in this paper, finally," said a surprised young Pgakenyaw from Soblan village.

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<sup>11</sup> Walden Bello, *et al.*, p. 176.

Mae Lan Kham Forest Community is comprised of 5 villages:

1. Soblan
2. Ban Mai
3. Huai Hia
4. Mae Lan Kham
5. Huai Ya Sai

The next challenging step was to identify the boundaries of each village due to the fact that these lines were drawn quite arbitrarily. However, what determined these lines were not political but ecological factors. The boundaries define the community forest for which each village is held responsible regarding ecological sustainability. These boundaries were agreed upon by members from each village and by using geological landmarks such as main creeks, rivers and mountain ridges. And since most members of the villages were related as kinship, they shared the utilization of land and natural resources. For example, a member of Soblan may have a piece of land, given by his parents, for annual wet rice cultivation in different community land belonging to Ban Mai boundary.

In contemporary discourse, the possibility of a community forest bill to define political boundaries for natural resource management has become controversial. This is particularly true as conflicts over natural resources between the local and the government have increasingly emerged over the past two decades. Whereas boundaries defined by the government were based on its administrative purpose, those of local communities were based on ecological characteristics of the areas mainly relating to the capacity of the community to take care of their land. Such a capacity is therefore related to the size of the population and their management structure in relation to the ecological and physiological features of the land.

The central principle of community forest is not about planting trees or simply reforestation, but healthy relationship between human community and natural forest on which their lives depend.<sup>12</sup>

### **Government political boundary**

Each village has its own headman. However, according to the political system, only one of them is chosen to be the official headman representing his community, comprised of five small villages, in dealing with government affairs. Napaw Chokesongserm, the headman of Huai Hia, was chosen to serve this role because of his moderate fluency in Thai language and literacy. Drafted to serve in the military for at least two years, he gained experience in working with the Thai bureaucratic system. When important decisions were to be made, especially those that would determine the future of his 455 fellow villagers however his traditional role was to listen to suggestions and advice from the council of elders of the five villages. It shows how the Pgakenyaw tradition still put wisdom on a higher priority as compared to officially learned knowledge or literacy.

It is also important to note here that the government has a tendency to welcome

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<sup>12</sup> Saneh Chamarick, *Community Forests in Thailand: the Direction of Development*, Volume 1(Bangkok: Rural Development Institute for Local Communities, 1993), p.142.

community leaders whose characteristic are conformity and submissiveness to their authority in conducting their policies made from the top of the hierarchy. Although, the nature of the Pgakenyaw is friendly, flexible and compromising, when dealing with the decisions that could shape their destiny, they prefer their leaders to be strong enough to take a solid stance. This requirement from both sides made it hard for the Mae Lan Kam leaders to fulfill their expectations.

### **Map 2: Physiography (overview)**

This map displays the physical information of the land, such as elevation, creeks, and the location of the five communities. From this map, mapmakers identified the boundaries of their own community forests. It was challenging to define these boundaries and to trace solid lines over them since they were not definite. They were culturally defined by how much land and which piece of land a village need for agriculture, which depended on physical factors—soil quality, water, and also on the distance from the residence. For the purpose of making a base map of each village, these boundaries are required.

### **Map 3: Cultural Map (overview)**

The map displays physical features formed by humans after the settlement, such as roads, schools, temple, villages, and governmental offices. The map also contains information that tell stories of the place such as the size of population, the number of households, history of settlement and important events that took place in the area.

### **Map 4: General Information (Soblan Village Community Forest)**

The map displays basic information of the village such as important landmarks, roads, bike or walking paths, a waterfall, main creeks, the size of population, number of households, cemetery forest, and the history of settlement of Soblan village. The Pgakenyaw mapmakers also located the honey trees as one of the important sources of income of their community.

### **Map 5: Elevation**

This map is a simplified version of the topographical map of the area. At a glance, a map user can get a sense of the landscape's elevation and the ways in which creeks from the headwater area flow.

### **Map 5: Creeks**

Whenever I look at this map, I always feel amazed with all the details drawn from the local knowledge of the land. As mentioned before, in Thai official maps made by the Thai military, creeks and rivers are named in Thai, a non-native language, and many are missing. Some names use racist terms such as the word “yang”—how the Pgakenyaw were called by the

northern Thai. Many creeks are named after particular events or stories that took place there. For example, “Dead Elephant creek” is the name of a creek where a dead elephant was found.

### **Map 6: Area for Agriculture**

Strategically speaking, this map, displaying the location of cyclical agricultural plots, is the most crucially important because the Pgakenyaw mapmakers hoped to use this map to help the government officials to gain a better understanding of their agricultural system. The Pgakenyaw’s rotational agriculture had been commonly misunderstood as ‘shifting’ agriculture. In the former system, the Pgakenyaw use a piece of land for six-month rice plantation. After the harvest is done, the land would be left untouched for another seven to ten years so as to restore the forest and vegetation as well as to nourish the topsoil quality. This rotational system has been proven to support the preservation of soil, water and forest resources. On the other hand, in the latter system, shifting agriculture, lands are not being rotated. Each piece of land will be reused again and again as long as it entails adequate yield. After a number of years of cultivation on the same piece of land, the decrease in yield indicates that the nutrition in the soil has naturally been depleted and then new lands for agriculture need to be found. The map contains a list of names of farmers with numbers referring to pieces of land on which they plant crops.

### **Map 7: Community Forest Management**

The map displays different kinds of forests designated for different functional or cultural purposes.

- 1) The Sacred forest is where rituals and ceremonies are conducted so as to pay respect to the Great Spirit who, as the Pgakenyaw believe, exists in this forest. Except for the shaman or spiritual leaders, lay Pgakenyaw fear to enter this forest.
- 2) Cemetery forest
- 3) Dae Paw forest (umbilical cord)
- 4) Conserved forest, mainly headwater forest area, is the largest area which the Pgakenyaw recognized as an indispensable area for ecological health.
- 5) Multi-purpose forest

### **Map 8: Threats to the Forest and Rivers**

The map displays threats to the ecosystem, all caused by humans mainly those from outside the village. These threats are human-caused forest fire, illegal logging, poaching, over fishing with the use of electric shocks or poisoning in the creeks, eucalyptus plantation (by the government), littering by tourists, etc.

### **Maps 9-20 are maps of the four villages only with different details.**

Map 21: Sacred land offered to the King Rama IX of Thailand in the auspicious occasion of his birthday. With the consensus of the five villages around this 4,000-acre headwater forest,

this piece of land will be strictly preserved and used for ecological restoration.

### **The Declaration of the Rights and Responsibilities of Pgakenyaw Forest Communities**

Declared by the Pgakenyaw on December 16, 1999, at the Headwater Forest ordination ceremony, the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of the Pgakenyaw Forest Communities became one of the important landmarks of environmental and social movement in Siam.

#### **Background**

At the beginning of February 1999, Elias and I went to Soblan village, one of the Pgakenyaw communities we have been working with over the last year to have a meeting with Pgakenyaw leaders about our work with them in the following year. About 10-15 Pgakenyaw leaders came to the meeting from all directions, some walked through the forest and some came in a pickup truck with members from the same village. Most Pgakenyaw villages are located in the forested mountains with the elevation ranging from 500-1400 meters above sea level. This is a crucial time in the Pgakenyaw's history, as it would determine their livelihood and the community sense of security. Enough unarmed Pgakenyaw farmers had been arrested, threatened, abused, and jailed under the law regarding natural resources regulation. Despite the rough terrains that physiologically separate their communities, whenever there was a meeting, the Pgakenyaw leaders were almost always willing to attend.

Encountering discriminatory land use policies by the Thai Government, the Royal Forestry Department in particular, the Pgakenyaw leaders started to realize that their rights earned through their hard work to preserve the forest need to be claimed and politically recognized. They realized that they could no longer be quiet or politically passive, but need to speak up for themselves and have their rights to live in the forest and on their traditional land acknowledged by the state. This led them to join the Forum of the Poor, a national grassroots assembly comprised of oppressed communities around the country.

Two years ago, the declaration of indigenous rights was written by the indigenous communities of Thailand and in alliance with the indigenous communities from around the world. However, the process did not include as many Pgakenyaw members as it was supposed to, due to time constraints and the number of representatives. Many of Pgakenyaws were not even aware of the existence of that declaration.

The idea of the creation of this declaration, as suggested by Elias Amidon, is for the Pgakenyaw community to explore their value systems that need to be maintained and to be acknowledged by the mainstream society in this modern era. Urbanization with its structural and institutional assimilation is the main pressure the Pgakenyaw communities are facing. The new values the young Pgakenyaws adopt from governmental formal education and from simply being exposed to the outer world worry the older generations. They are concerned that the transmission of traditional values, especially in regards to spiritual and ecological ethics will not survive in the face of the culture of consumerism.

This experimental process in itself is, therefore, valuable—and so is its goal. It provides an opportunity in which self-reflections can be done on a community level. The intention of the declaration was to be inclusive as much as possible so that other forest communities and tribes can participate. Besides, it was to accompany the Community Forest Maps, which were to be displayed on the Festival day at the end of the year.

During our discussions with the Pgakenyaw leaders, Paw Luang Joni, Patee Moosaw, Patee Thazae and Mr. Prasert decided who would be in our target group since we would not be able to include all Pgakenyaw members in Thailand in our dialogue. However, we wanted to get as many leaders from different parts of Thailand as we could within our budgetary and labor constraints.

### **Action Plan**

The meeting had discussed about who would be invited to be included in the council. I suggested that we form a group that is as diverse as possible. It should include the young, the old, males, females, poets, story tellers, officially-designated leaders, shamans, midwives, etc. The following were the steps of actions that were taken after the group decided to begin to form the declaration council.

1. Form a set of survey questions and consult with Pgakenyaw elders (February-April).
2. Form a council to create the Declaration to which contributions in forms of verses, poems, songs, or stories can be made from any Pgakenyaws (April-September).
3. Hold the meetings of the council once every month to gather the contributions and put together the first draft.

### **Follow-up action**

1. Translate the first version of the Declaration into three languages—Pgakenyaw, Thai, and English—and four written versions—Liwa, Pgakenyaw, Romanized Pgakenyaw (invented by the missionaries), Thai, and English. Create a brief version of the Declaration for press release and as optional for other publications.
2. Broadcast on the Pgakenyaw radio station, and get feedback.
3. Send the full version of the Declaration and the bioregional atlas of Mae Lan Kham (Pgakenyaw) community to the King of Siam, the Prime Minister, the Head of Royal Forestry Department, the Governor of Chiangmai Province, and the media.

### **Facing Obstacles / Challenges**

It was hard to explain the term “rights” or “sitti” in Thai to the Pgakenyaw. It is a new term for them, if not a new aspect in their community life. We spent many hours discussing this concept in the Pgakenyaw language with the help of elders and educated participants. However, they know that they shall have the right to live on the land that they have been living for generations long before the land title was introduced to a legal system, and the right to live in the forest they have been conserving. In other words, it is sensible for them and rights and

responsibilities justify one another.

The original idea was to mail the questions regarding their traditional land ethics in relation to the idea of sustainability to Pgakenyaw villages. However, we started to realize that most older Pgakenyaws could not read, as traditionally most information was transmitted via oral tradition. Therefore, the declaration council called for selected leaders, both men and women, including some youth leaders.

Since Pgakenyaw communities are spread all over the northern part and along the western border of Thailand, it was occasionally difficult to organize the monthly meeting. This was further complicated by the fact that their agricultural work in the rice fields is labor intensive. Additionally, the rainy or monsoon season made it more difficult for the Pgakenyaw to travel up and down the slippery dirt roads in the mountains. The most effective way to spread the news was to broadcast it through one of the national AM radio stations in the Pgakenyaw language. All of the staff working for this native radio program were Pgakenyaw, one of whom had always been very supportive in spreading the news.

There was lack of support from some NGOs that are more politically and strategically oriented. It has been an invaluable learning experience for a young activist like me to try to get closer into the inner circle of the environmental NGOs in Chiangmai. I found out that working with indigenous NGOs was much easier. I did not have to push too much to get work that had already been agreed upon done. There are NGOs working on different objectives and varying foci and their values regarding strategic actions could be conflicting. Due to pre-conceptions holding them back from full participation in forming the declaration, some NGO workers considered our work as *Farang* (White Westerner) value-imposing action. Ironically, the main focus of our work was a community-oriented declaration. The set of questions that we used in each meeting was meant to help explore the Pgakenyaw traditional values—even the way in which the declaration was expressed was supervised and edited by educated Pgakenyaw poets and writers themselves. Some NGOs said that since it was written by Farangs, it could not be effective. Others asked how it could be taken seriously, having been written by politically powerless Thai activists. In addition, I also found out later that there had already been a split within the NGOs themselves. This shows the polarization between those whose work is based on cultural and community empowerment, and those whose work is based on political lobbying on the policy level and on the use of collective forces of organized protest.

Each month, we decided to hold meetings in different places within the Pgakenyaw communities so that this process could be more inclusive and gain more feedback from the Pgakenyaws themselves. Each meeting was also intended as a moving campaign for the revival of their traditional land conservation practices. Pgakenyaw communities who lived closer to the lowland or to the city, exposing themselves to urban culture, had become less aware of what they had been losing, regarding natural resources use and pride of being Pgakenyaw. In other words, among Pgakenyaws themselves, there were those who were more progressive than others, and also those who were more conservative, but mostly confused about their place in the society.

The good things about holding our meetings in the villages were many. The cost of food and lodging was lower. People got a chance to visit members of families, or friends who they had not met for a long time. It also made more sense to talk about the meaning of being Pgakenyaw within Pgakenyaw villages and architecture instead of enduring the smoke and noises from cars in



the city, etc.

The form of meeting used throughout this process was consistent; sitting in a circle and letting each person speak one by one. Speaking one by one in the public is not the form of expression most Pgakenyaw were used to, and particularly women tended to speak less in this form of meeting. It seemed most productive to conduct a meeting in a village setting as the atmosphere is more familiar and friendly to the participants. When people feel relaxed, they tend to think more clearly and therefore will speak up more naturally. This is why we tried to have our meetings in the village as often as we could.

It is also important for participants to be reminded of the purposes of the declaration every time we got together. Since this was the first time that the people came together to create a statement of their collective wisdom, it was vital to hold a big picture for the desired outcome.

In the spirit of bearing witness, the whole process of declaration creation since its beginning gradually revealed its own beautiful unfolding story. As I learned from my time in Naropa, I realized that what I needed to do was just to show up to be with all the details of this evolutionary process until it found its own ending. Asking questions and listening deeply to whatever was offered to be heard was one of the great practices I reminded myself to take on over the whole year of this work.

When people feel that they are being listened to and their values and beliefs are being heard, they feel respected and honored. Then trust and friendship start to grow. I told them they were my teachers and wanted to learn from them everything they knew. Since their way of life, agricultural practices and sacred rituals were closely related to different seasons throughout the year, I tried to spend most of my time in the village, visiting their rice fields and their surrounding sacred forests. Occasionally, I participated in their sacred rituals such as weddings and forest ordinations so that I could more fully understand their way of life in all aspects, so that I could become familiar and recognizable as their friend.

I still remember when I was sitting in the council of about 15 Pgakenyaw elders and leaders witnessing their last meeting, I felt honored and realized that I was the only non-Pgakenyaw in the room. They did not seem to mind my presence at all. In fact, over the past year, true friendship was cultivated between me and the Pgakenyaw leaders. I consider them as my teachers for their fearlessness and strong leadership.

Despite being a marginalized community, the Pgakenyaw are not yet dispossessed of their land. Though now is a very crucial time in the history of Siam, we will see how conflicts between legal and centralized government versus indigenous communities will unfold. The Declaration hopes to contribute some positive changes in the perception of indigenous peoples in the Thai public mind.

After many meetings spanning over many months, it was time to decide in what form, and how many languages the first draft of declaration should be written. Since the beginning, I had no idea of what the outcome of our ongoing dialogue would be.

At the Festival of Forest-Based Communities, songs were sung, poems were recited, and the declaration of the Pgakenyaw rights and responsibilities was first declared on top of their

home mountain, which they considered sacred. I cannot think of enough words to explain how powerful 16 December 1999 was. About 600-800 Pgakenyawes came from all directions. They were very happy to see their relatives, friends and elders again. At night, there were small groups formed around the camp fires that kept their catching-up colorful dialogue until late. Despite all of the translation and management work I had done all day since dawn, I could not suppress my excitement and go to sleep, deciding instead to visit some of those circles of elders, smoking tobacco and listening to their dialogues.

Many Pgakenyaw elders told me after they reviewed the Declaration that this documentation is very important not only for its political statement, but also for preservation of the old verses and poems, which are prone to be lost in the modern time. In other words, it is valuable for its cultural preservation function. Many of the elders hoped to get copies of the Declaration to read in their communities.

Moreover, the Declaration contains many old sayings from the ancestors, and therefore is filled with heartfelt feelings, reminding the Pgakenyawes themselves of their obligation to the great spirit and to the earth, as well as their dignity as human beings. Many Pgakenyaw elders when listening to this would feel at peace and nostalgic. The beauty of their language and tune is as if that of spiritual chanting, simple and powerfully penetrating.

I still remember hearing many Pgakenyawes a year earlier expressing their exhaustion after all of those years of demonstrations and struggles against institutional racism. They had become tired, and many were hopeless—women feared to go to work in the rice field after many cases of arrests by the Forestry officials.

The whole process of writing this Declaration was involved and witnessed not only by the Pgakenyawes themselves, but also by outsiders like myself. It brought with it messages that were very important for the Pgakenyaw to hear; they are beautiful at heart, and they were doing what was ecologically needed to make the world a better place. This year, the expressions in their faces, eyes and voices, signaled that they have become more empowered, have gained more confidence and have become hopeful for environmental justice yet to come.

## **Conundrum**

While I was doing the maps and facilitating the Declaration, I kept in mind the large picture of the work I have been doing with the Pgakenyaw. Our work was not just to produce a set of bioregional maps or a well-edited Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities. It was not just for a grand event where 1,000 people would come to celebrate at the Forest Festival, or for 1,000 trees to be ordained.

The vision, which we were trying to achieve as a whole movement, was to maintain the beautiful relationship between human communities and nature. While I strongly believe that the Pgakenyaw, with their traditional ecological wisdom, are highly capable of living in a sustainable way, I do not have adequate evidence to suggest that such indigenous wisdom and technology can resist the negative impacts of modernity.

Apparently the Pgakenyaw's exposure to the modern society through both personal

contacts and the mainstream mass media bring with it many challenges to their traditional value system. Similarly, Buddhism is facing the same cultural threats and therefore critical questions addressing values and disciplines need to be asked. As soon as the Pgakenyaw forest communities gain a clearer awareness of the finite natural resources, they realize that, in order to survive, skillful means in natural resource management as well as the spiritual empowerment of their people are needed in order to deal with outside power, namely the state and multinational corporations. It is time to come up with a collective fight against different forms of oppression and racial prejudice. The bioregional Mapping project, the Declaration, the Interfaith Solidarity Forest Walk, and the Forest Festival are intended to serve as a tool to strategically reinforce and to spiritually empower the Pgakenyaw in their struggle against such powerful forces. However, it is essential to keep in mind the long-term vision of our work, which requires the honest process of asking the question 'What further improvements are needed?'

There is an urgent need for the Pgakenyaw to revive their traditional wisdom that can guide their way of life in the face of rapid global changes. It was evident that as we moved our meeting to a new village in the same watershed region, we had expanded the frontier of ecological awareness and practices to include more communities to embrace the principles of community forest.

Huai Yuak Village is a good example of the new member of the Pgakenyaw's ecological conservationist movement. It is a relatively big Pgakenyaw community with about 200 people and is located in the southern part of Wat Luang Monastery. We held a meeting there as we intended to invite them to participate in and help organize the Forest Festival and the Tree Ordination Ceremony. The leaders of this community had been working closely with and for the local unit of the Forestry Department. Many villagers were quite skeptical about our work and about what they saw as 'NGOs' in general. In addition, the idea of 'community forest' seemed rather unfamiliar and questionable for them. It took Paw Luang Joni a whole night to give a three-hour-long lecture and to answer questions regarding the relevance of community forest and the continuation of the Pgakenyaw as a whole community. However, this village played a very important role in the Forest Ordination and the Festival of Forest Communities.

Without disregarding their spirituality, which unreasonably modern Thai culture disapproves as superficial, the Pgakenyaw can integrate a new set of knowledge into their way of life. An example is the clear distinction between plastic and banana leaves. The former becomes more commonly used when goods are purchased from the market in the city and cannot disintegrate in the forest as fast as banana leaves do. I believe that everybody, including the Pgakenyaw, has a choice to enjoy the convenience and commodities made available in our modern time. However, without the awareness of the impacts that these items can bring to their environment, both physically and spiritually, they can easily destroy the common wealth that the younger generations might enjoy.

Can the Pgakenyaw resist the modern pressure and changes? How many of them really want to pursue their traditional way of life anyway? Many people in Ban Mai village have become addicted to Thai soap operas on TV, since electricity was brought to the village. People from other villages nearby, such as Huai Hia and Mae Lan Kham, sometimes walk back and forth for one-half hour on dark evenings to be entertained by the visual images that are caught for free with the antenna from the air. They hope that some day the government will have enough money to pave the road to their village and then the electricity poles can be planted, cables suspended, and

light will arrive.

Biological and social adaptation to the local environment is related, but is not quite the same thing. I believe the land rights issue is the most crucial one that can determine the life and death of the Pgakenyaw culture. I once asked Pre, a courageous youth leader, that if the Government gave what the Pgakenyaw asked for, that is legal rights to live on the native land, would every problem facing the Pgakenyaw be solved? In other words, once their native land becomes legitimate, and once the Pgakenyaw can continue their rotational agriculture practice as the main production of rice, what they regard as their most basic need, will be taken care of, would the culture remain unchanged in the midst of global consumerism encroaching on the boundaries of their native minds? The answer was 'yes.'

My observation is that the people enjoy modern items such as electricity, television, motorcycles, trucks, etc. I once felt discouraged about the future of the Pgakenyaw. However, I regained hope after working with a small group of Pgakenyaw leaders and elders. They helped the members of their community to question the modern way of life and not to unequivocally adopt it.

Ken Wilber made an argument regarding 'pre-rational' mindset, particularly of tribal culture, and its relationship with nature as compared to the rational mindset of modern society. As Wilber argued, the pre-rational would potentially have destroyed as much as the modern rational has done, if there had only been the same 'ability' or 'technology' to do so. This implies there is no such thing as 'tribal wisdom,' since all of them just naturally adapted to the current local environment. When there was national registration for Thai households, rural peasants first received their official address from the Interior Administration of Thailand. However, one of the government criteria was that the house had to be built with a permanent infrastructure. The Pgakenyaw, in order to fulfill such standard, had to build another house made with hard wood, such as teakwood, instead of bamboos. The government failed to acknowledge the local wisdom that houses built with bamboos are more ecologically friendly than houses built with teakwood.

What about the Pgakenyaw's wisdom on rotational agriculture, their heroic tool, as believed by many Thai anthropologists to be an ecologically friendly form of cultural adaptation to the physiological limitation? It was a way to work with nature, to live with the land, in a way that allows the continuation of both the ecosystem and human culture.

But can rotational agriculture with limited land feed the increasing population in the next 20-50 years? It is still questionable how the two systems can coexist and survive without causing one another to disappear. As Paw Luang Joni Odochao observed, the Pgakenyaw population growth rate is very small compared to the rest of the world. For example, the size of a remote Pgakenyaw village can grow from 30 people to only 75 people in 20 years, and there is no need to expand the agricultural territory since seven to ten plots per family, although only one plot per year is used, are enough to feed the whole family.

To break the myth of sustainability, he also said that there should be a scientific research to study the dynamic relationship between the Pgakenyaw community and its surrounding environment. The study might gain some insights on the factors that sustain the two systems. But, there is no doubt that the Pgakenyaw ecological footprint per capita is far lower than a Thai lowlander, or a Bangkokian, or a New Yorker. Perhaps, the Pgakenyaw should be one of the last

communities to change their way of life at their own will, since their ecological footprint is far lesser than most city and urban members.

## Conclusion

The survival of the Pgakenyaw community and their natural environment lies not only on the legal rights to live on their native land and the achievement of self-determination regarding natural resource management, but also on the renewal of their traditional wisdom that embraces ecological wisdom. Although I am afraid that no one or no community can resist change, I believe that there is a healthy pace in which changes can be made. If it is unrealistic to have none at all, maybe five television sets in a village of 120 people is 'more sustainable' than five sets in one household of two persons.

Furthermore, the most challenging task is to eliminate all prejudices and racism against the indigenous communities that are ingrained in Thai society—as reflected in the RFD's policies. We are determined to speak the truth fearlessly but with respect. It is also our primary goal to educate the Thai public mind to recognize their responsibility for their greater ecological footprints, and not to blame degradation on the forest communities. The urban communities need to learn to work with the forest communities as their guardians of the forest.

Pawluang Joni, a well known Pgakenyaw philosopher and political leader, has made an undeniable suggestion:

“We cannot only industrialize our nation and ignore agricultural sector. People who build and create the airplane or factories still need to breathe fresh air and eat healthy food. They cannot eat the airplane or machine as their food. We have to be careful not to rely on or have too much faith in technology as it cannot guarantee to solve problems such as severely contaminated water. At some point when nature lost its self-recovery capacity, there will be no turning point for us as humans. Progress will no longer help, nor will we able to reverse our destructive course. Science cannot create life, birds nor fish, so don't leave behind or ignore our creeks and rivers.”<sup>13</sup>

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# A Voice from the Wilderness

John Seed and Samantha Trenoweth

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You are walking through the forest a moment before sunrise one morning in summer. To the west, the sky is still indigo. A handful of dim stars dip towards the horizon. To the east, mountains and sky glow pink. Twigs crack underfoot. The earth feels cool. The first birds call across the great gash of a valley into which the path you're travelling winds. Otherwise, there is only silence. You reach the valley floor and, looking around, notice a rustling form emerge from a mound of leaves, just the way street people do from newspapers about this time every morning. It stands for a moment, facing west, losing itself in the infinity of blue. As it turns to the east, the sun crests the valley wall, flooding everything in watercolour light. The form begins its climb out of the valley, towards the sun. This is your first encounter with John Seed. Mine, however is less picturesque. It's about five on a fiercely hot afternoon. A man in the carport points his spanner up the stairs to a darkened room in which bodies are strewn on couches, on cushions, on the floor. One of these belongs to John. The others belong to his son, his son's friends, his friend's sons. They've all been surfing since dawn. They collapsed about twelve. They stumble blearily to their feet before piling back out the door beachwards. Only John remains. Slowly, he rises to his feet, smooths the creases from a magenta sarong, ruffles his short cropped grey hair and offers tea. This is the first time he has spoken. His voice is soft, barely more audible than a whisper. He boils water and, while he's there, begins to make dinner for the boys.

Flitting from stove to fridge to chopping board, he chats animatedly about Ecuador, where the Rainforest Information Centre funds a project which has saved a quarter of a million of hectares of rainforest. John founded the centre in '79, shortly after his first involvement in a direct action. It was a demonstration to save a small patch of Australian coastal forest at Terrania Creek. The protests went on for months, stirring the environmental conscience of a nation and changing the lives of those involved—none more than John's.

"I went in there thinking that I was going to save the forest," he has often said, "and walked out knowing that the forest had saved me."

John Seed has been described by his peers as "one of the genuine heroes of the international environment movement" and "someone who has been personally responsible for saving more rainforest than anyone else we know." His Rainforest Roadshows (in which he travelled the globe, singing, speaking, showing slides and videos about the state of the

environment) inspired the formation of the Rainforest Action Network, which organised the groundbreaking Burger King boycotts in the USA.

Today, he lobbies governments and corporations around the world, implements sustainable forestry practices in Pacific island nations, raises funds to support campaigns from Siberia to Ecuador and is among the most influential and creative thinkers in the new environmental religious philosophy called Deep Ecology.

The term Deep Ecology was first used by Arne Naess, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Oslo University, to describe a cosmology which draws on influences as diverse as Eastern and indigenous religions, Spinoza, Thoreau, the Neo-Platonic mystics and recent developments in physics and the biological sciences. Deep Ecology sees the root of the current environmental crisis in the anthropocentrism of much Western philosophical and spiritual thought and sees the world, not as pyramid with humans teetering on top, but as a web of which homo sapiens is a single strand.

“It went IBM, LSD, meditation and community,” John smiles, explaining the evolution of his own thought towards Deep Ecology. In the Sixties, he ‘turned on, tuned in, dropped out’, leaving a lucrative position as a systems engineer with the international computing giant to take drugs, explore Eastern mysticism and get back to nature on the Australian east coast.

“I grew vegetables for a few seasons—the experience of placing a seed in the ground and growing a tomato and taking a seed from the tomato and putting it in the ground and growing another tomato,” he recalls. “Then, I helped to conceive a child and birthed that child with my partner. Finally, ecology swept me away. I had a very powerful spiritual experience of the environment through Terrania Creek, the Franklin River, the Daintree and all those direct actions.

“Each of those things gradually transformed my life, until I finally surrendered to the earth. Now, I find myself asking for guidance and direction and energy and wisdom from the earth, knowing that I am part of the earth, knowing that I’m a cell in the body of the earth. I just go back to the forest, lie down on the forest floor, cover myself in leaves, imagine an umbilical chord going from my belly deep down into the earth and pray for nourishment, wisdom and guidance. There I find energy and an ability to act, to inspire other people, to think, write, dream, make films and do all of these things.”

John compares the notion of a God with a human image to the once firm conviction that the earth was the centre of the universe and all else revolved around it. It comes, he says, from the same mindset but neither belief is logical nor particularly productive in the world in which we live today. We let go of the idea that we were the centre of the solar system and discovered a vastly more complex and interesting universe to explore. In much the same way, John postulates, we can discard this notion that we are the crown of creation (evidenced by a God who is much like us) and find ourselves part of an intricate web sustained by a force whose wealth, diversity and generosity are unlike anything we have imagined.

“When I think of divinity, I think of four thousand million years of evolution,” he says. “I think of the Milky Way. Virtually all the stars we see are the Milky Way. We can barely see anything else with the naked eye. What we call the Milky Way is just the centre of the Milky



Way. It's all Milky Way. We are Milky Way and that's one of hundreds of billions of galaxies.

“So, when I think of sacredness, I think of the expanding universe and the propensity - you might even say desire—of that universe to articulate itself, to become more conscious, to become more complex.” He speaks of this vast web as though it was alive and intelligent. Each of its threads is unique but none is indispensable. Humanity is magnificent but no more or less important than anything else.

“It's so huge,” he insists, “and the human circuitry is such a tiny fragment of it. It's like a hologram. One human being, in a sense, contains it all, though with less clarity. One human being is an attempt to articulate and to give expression to that force which you might call the universe or God or nature.”

He can see no end to the web of creation but individual strands must come and go. He perceives no menace in the violence of nature and is comfortable with the notion that he, and all humanity, will one day return to the earth, leaving no trace but fertile soil. He claims he's not afraid of death.

“I don't see what difference it makes,” he grins impishly, “whether all my constituent molecules go back into the great cycle, out of which they emerged, with or without some trace of my soul.

“I understand reincarnation, I understand genetics, I understand near death experiences. I know that people come back from them and people remember past lives in rebirthing or under drugs. I've had intimations of this, that and the other myself but I don't understand what the fuss is about. It's all miraculous and 'I' am miraculous but 'not-I' is just as miraculous as 'I,' so who cares?”

All this, John relates matter of factly, as he busies himself about the kitchen. By far the most important thing on his mind at the moment is that the vegetables begin steaming. Musing about cosmology is a pleasant distraction but a distraction nonetheless. It is only when he begins to speak about a particular campaign that his passion informs his every word. In the Solomon Islands and Papua Niugini, he has been instrumental in the introduction of a whole new approach to forestry.

As multinational lumber companies swept in, striking deals with indigenous people to deforest their neighbourhoods, John Seed heard of a product called the Walkabout Sawmill. These tiny mills are just the right size for island villagers to operate their own sustainable forestry industries. In conjunction with ecological forest management, they can bring economic development to villages without destroying the integrity of the forest. Teaming up with a local non-government organisation, the Rainforest Information Centre convinced the Australian Government to fund the introduction of well-managed Walkabout Sawmills, protecting hundreds of thousands of hectares of rainforest which had been slated for industrial logging.

Even other activists are in awe of his boundless energy. He is, they say, possessed. The burnout rate amongst those who try to keep pace with him is enormous. Over twenty years, his passion for the environment has not abated. The reason, he says, is that he has never been fighting for anything but himself. As an activist, he says, he represents the earth.

“This is difficult to discuss,” he admits, “because, ‘I represent the earth,’ can sound terribly arrogant. When I tell you I represent the earth, I mean that, when you don’t represent your ego and when you don’t represent Australia and when you don’t represent Christianity and when you don’t represent humanism and when you don’t represent anything else, then that’s automatically what you represent. I don’t think of it as something I’ve constructed so much as, when you pull all the other things away, that’s what’s left because that’s what’s always been underneath it all.

“The sense of separation from nature, which everybody in this society suffers, is an illusion. I’m not talking, here, about anything more mysterious than trying to hold your breath for three minutes. “The fact that we can’t hold our breath for three minutes totally demonstrates our interconnectedness, our interdependence, the lack of an independent, isolated self. That’s our relationship with the air. Then there’s the water and the soil and all the other earth cycles which move through us and which define us. The psyche grows out of this soil and out of this water and out of this air.

“It’s not any big deal to represent those things because that’s who we are. As soon as you know that, what else can you do? What else can you represent?”

It’s not like, ‘I’m a very noble person because I represent the earth.’ No, I’m totally self-centred and self-absorbed like everybody else. It’s just that most people don’t know what their selves actually consist of.”

It’s a family thing. Recent cultural influences have led us to see ourselves as separate from and superior to the rest of nature. Common sense and even elementary high-school science, however, tell a different story. We all started out as stardust. Every single thing around us is a relative. “We’ve been evolving here on earth for thousands of millions of years,” Paul explains. “I’ve been evolving here for thousands of millions of years. Every cell in my body has been evolving here for thousands of millions of years. To represent the thrust of that today seems to be my task. In order to do that, I need to be able to recognise the conditioning that makes me identify with something smaller than that, whether it’s a country or a religion or an ideology or my ego. Rather than representing those tiny things, I aim to represent the big picture, in the same way that every ant and every mosquito and every little microbe does. There’s nothing particularly grandiose about it. It’s just that humans, it seems to me, are the only ones who have some choice in the matter. We can choose not to represent that life force.

“Ever since we grew this big bulge above our nose and developed self-reflective thought, it’s been possible for us to see ourselves as separate from the rest of it. Along with that possibility, comes the freedom to represent anything we can imagine. So people imagine that they are fundamentalist Christians or Fascists or Socialists or Buddhists and they live certain kinds of lives. Humans are very fragmented. Millions of different human cultures have developed.

“Indigenous cultures, through regular rituals which lie at the very root of their social organisation, are able to maintain a spiritual connection with the matrix out of which humanity and everything else has evolved. However, modern human beings, having dispensed with all that in their arrogance, no longer have any way in which to articulate and experience the connections between themselves and the rest of the earth or between themselves and their evolutionary journey. Our evolutionary journey becomes like a story in a book or one branch of science rather

than being the root of our existence.

“I remember, there was this thing when I was at university. It was a black box with a switch on it. You turned the switch and there was a creaking of gears, a door opened, a hand came out and it switched itself off. Today, we’re in a position to represent that. We can switch ourselves off if we want to.”

By now, steam is rising from a bevy of pots in the kitchen and John is sitting on the couch, cradling his tea. He seems envious of ants and microbes, envious of the ease with which they play their integral roles in the scheme of things. Surely, I suggest, there must be some reason for the evolutionary path we’ve trodden. There must be some advantage to this perilous facility for choice.

“The place we’ve come to has certain characteristics,” he says, then pauses. “Which of those are advantageous, I guess, depends on your point of view. I see some advantage to the experience of love, to the experience of spiritual upliftment and consciousness. Our human circuitry is capable of experiencing and expressing certain states which, as far as I can tell, are unique. To me, they have value but so do the characteristics of decomposing bacteria.

“A species is defined by the fact that it has certain characteristics which other species don’t. I would expect that every species, if it were capable of reflecting on such things, would find its own characteristics particularly delightful. So, as a human being, I can’t help but feel that the highest qualities of my species are particularly marvellous but, objectively, the qualities of decomposing bacteria must be more marvellous because, without them, organic life would cease.

“It’s easy to see the beauty of the earth going on without any mind capable of reflecting on it. Without the decomposing bacteria, however, you can forget it, it’s just a lump of rock.”

The disadvantages of this condition we’ve evolved to are, for John, far simpler to identify.

“The disadvantages are our anthropocentrism and our arrogance in thinking that we are the measure of all being and that we alone were created in the image of God. I like James Lovelock’s way of putting it. He says it’s as if the brain thought it was the most important organ in the body and started mining the liver. It’s not to say that the brain isn’t as miraculous as the liver or anything else. It’s just that it’s part of a body and it has no existence outside that body. To start mining the liver doesn’t show what a powerful brain it is, it shows what a stupid brain it is.

“It’s like a tree with a billion leaves and one leaf thinks that the sole purpose of the tree is to be a place for that one leaf to grow. It’s ugly and embarrassing and the consequence, if this attitude is lived out with our current technology, is that we start to destroy the tree on which we’re growing. We believe in our own independence, even when ecology clearly shows us our extraordinary interdependence. We behave as though we could profit by chopping down this tree, even though we’re actually a leaf on one of its branches.”

“Is it stretching it too far,” I ask, “to say that, for you, the whole tree is made in the image of God?”

“The whole tree is God,” he insists. “I have no experience or evidence or reason to postulate God is outside it. That’s just unnecessarily cumbersome. The tree is God-like, in the sense that it’s mysterious and powerful and creative and fertile. I’m in awe of the numinous possibilities of the universe. It stretches out to infinity in all directions. I can’t sense any limit to it. That’s the web.”

I never cease to be struck by the power nature holds over the psyche. A very urban, very cerebral child, it was not until my early twenties that I first stepped into a forest and felt it was alive.

It was not until I met John Seed that I realised most of my epiphanies have hit while I’ve walked along beaches. John has spent more time than most of us in nature. His office, his church, his family is the forest. Yet it still fills him with wonder. Have people always been awe struck by nature or is it because we’ve distanced ourselves from it that we’re so often overwhelmed in its presence?

“I think,” John suggests, “that our ability to experience may have evolved. I’m not sure how much other life forms can experience. It seems to me that it might be a human phenomenon which has developed as our leisure and our time to philosophise and think and experience things has increased.

“Then again, perhaps trees are in a constant state of awe. How would one know? That sense that everything is singing God’s praises all the time and that we’ve just forgotten, grown too busy to remember.

“Modern humans have an incredible distrust of feeling. There’s this idea that all our intelligence is in our thinking and that this is betrayed by feelings, that we need to be objective about things and not get emotional. We’re unconscious of the fact that we survived for thousands of millions of years before thinking came along, which must have taken extraordinary intelligence. I came from my mother’s womb and she came from her mother’s womb and it goes back through womb after womb until wombs were invented.

Before that, reptilian eggs and before that, spores. At every step of the way, each ancestor of mine and yours had to somehow survive long enough to reproduce before being consumed. At every step along the way, millions died without being able to do that. How many eggs does a fish have? Well, we had a zillion fish ancestors, one after the other, and every one of those had millions of eggs, of which two or three survived. At each generation, our ancestor was one of those. There’s incredible intelligence in that, yet it had no thinking associated with it at all. It was feeling, intuition, instinct.”

John has co-authored a book on Deep Ecology called *Thinking Like A Mountain* and that is, to some degree, his aim.

“Has intuition been totally replaced by our linear thinking,” he asks, “or is it possible for us to surrender to it once again? I believe we can. In order to do that, we have to see through humanism and the idea that human beings are more special than anything else. We must drop that and recognise the tiny part we play and deliberately surrender the idea that we’re so smart and we know what’s going on. Then we can start to hear the music that everything else is dancing to and

that offers the possibility of living harmoniously with it all.

“At the moment, we can’t smell anything except our own stench. We can’t hear anything except our own thoughts and our own voices. We’ve forgotten that anything else speaks. The world is reduced to human beings and resources. It’s a horrible idea but, when we let go of that, we can once again harmonise with the incredible choir of the myriad beings of nature and that is what has the longevity, that is the thing that potentially lives forever. By cleaving to that, we’ve thrown heads every single toss of the coin, every generation, for four thousand million years. We haven’t thrown tails once. We think we can replicate that exquisite intelligence with our thinking but there’s no evidence of it. Can we create a system where the very thing that the leaves exhale is what we inhale and make that an enduring system? Can we create the tide?”

“We’ve evolved in the middle of this exquisitely complex, beautiful thing and, if we destroy it, I have no confidence whatsoever that we can replace it with machines. So, I think, the first step is to experience the awe and also to experience the embarrassment at having been so childishly arrogant.”

Which is not to say we should throw the baby out with the bath water. Interestingly, for someone who communes with his God by burying himself in leaves, John is not an extremist. Asked once by the American psychologist and mystic, Ram Das, to justify his travel by jet, John told a story which illuminates his stance on compromise.

“The only thing that helps me in this,” he began, “is a metaphor from an archetypal cowboy movie that I saw in my childhood. All the cowboys are asleep and the fire’s gone out and the clouds come over. Then there’s a bolt of lightning and all the cattle start stampeding towards the cliff. The cowboys jump on their horses and they don’t ride in the opposite direction, they ride straight towards the cliff, and they ride even faster than the cattle. Now, their aim is not to go over the cliff but they realise that it’s only by keeping pace with the whole thing that they’re going to be in a position to lean on that herd and turn them around before they reach the edge. So I use a computer and I know the chips were cleaned using CFCs. I’m prepared to get my hands dirty with sawmills and aeroplanes and anything at all but I’m also prepared to let go of them.”

Likewise, John will cheerfully use linear thinking to serve his ends. Indeed, he believes it has a role to play in serving all our ends. “The role of our intelligence,” he says, “is that—at incredible cost to the species we’ve killed and things we’ve dismembered and destroyed and the landscape that’s been trashed—we’ve built up a certain set of skills and attributes and knowledge about ourselves. With that, I hope, we can now construct a place for ourselves on the earth that will allow the earth to continue.

“I think rational, linear thought is a good servant. If it’s accompanied by good will, if it’s accompanied by love and a concern for the big picture, then it’s incredibly clever. I’m full of admiration for it and I believe it’s even clever enough to dig us out of this hole into which we’ve dug ourselves.

“I believe that we either already have the technology or have proved our ability to create the technology to enable us to live extraordinarily well within the limits of the biological systems in which we find ourselves. “The trouble is that, by seeing only our own cleverness, we’ve tricked ourselves. We can’t succeed while we refuse to see the intelligence and generosity of

nature. I used to break my teeth on those hard roots and then I delved into the nature of things and found a way to turn them into the fat, soft orange carrots that I now eat.

“I can either see that as a sign of how clever I am or I can see how incredibly generous nature is. Whatever question we put to her, this mother, this thing that nourished us through all the ages, she’ll say yes to it. We want to dig up a bit of dirt and turn it into a wire to carry our messages all the way around the world. She says yes. There’s this incredible generosity, this incredible intelligence. Our intelligence is the tiniest fragment of all of that. All we need is the humility and the willingness to cooperate with it.

“I believe that our arrogance is actually a reaction. Deep down, we feel miserable and useless and we have no self-esteem whatsoever. So we react to that by crowing, ‘I’m so fantastic, I’m so great,’ without really believing it. We need to let go of that, to experience the pain of being very little and ignorant.

“Really, we don’t know anything. If I cut my skin, it heals by itself. It has nothing to do with me. We’re helpless. It supports us, it keeps us alive and has always done so. When we see how miraculous that is, then we know that there’s no way out of it, we’re part of that. We evolved here. The composition of our blood is akin to the composition of sea water 400 million years ago, when our ancestors crawled from the ocean. All the evidence suggests that we evolved here.

“Therefore, if that is miraculous and awe inspiring and beautiful and intelligent, then so are we. Once that’s understood, there emerges the possibility of conscious cooperation between the tiny fragment and the whole. Then we can hear the music of the earth and can find a way to bring our own human sound into harmony with it again.”

When next I see John Seed it is on the eighth storey of an apartment block in central Sydney. Outside the window, the harbour is a highway for ferries, submarines, pleasure craft, containers of goods from around the world.

The foreshores are packed, shoulder to shoulder, with highrise structures like this one. Asphalt butts up against the water. Witnessing John Seed in my apartment makes me suddenly aware that I am one hundred feet above the ground. If I’m ever likely to be susceptible to vertigo, it will be today.

His precious earth is barely visible. John looks like an elf who’s been plucked from the forest and abandoned in the CBD.

He arrives mid-morning, leaving me ample time to scan the headlines, read of tragedy in Bosnia and Rwanda and a bomb in an Israeli embassy. So we begin by discussing humanity.

“When you see a school of fish or a flock of birds moving as one,” he explains, “they’re not all thinking about what they’re going to do. They just do what they feel like and, in doing that, they’re harmonious with their fellows. There’s a feeling I’ve had from the environment movement— and I think it’s true for almost everything—that, when numbers of human beings align themselves with one spiritual direction or one philosophy, a certain harmony is possible between them.

“However, that harmonious group then becomes disharmonious with another group that has aligned itself with something different. Then you get the Christians fighting the Muslims and you get the Christian Catholics fighting the Christian Protestants and you find one kind of Catholic fighting another kind of Catholic and the whole world is in flames.

“There’s only one thing that human beings could identify with that would really unite everybody and that is that we are Earthlings. All of us are standing with our feet on the earth. We all have a navel and two nipples in common, not just with other humans, but with all other placental mammals as well. We have our toenails. If they became the badges of what we believed in, we wouldn’t have to work so hard to build community. Then, if we had community and love, we wouldn’t need all these objects, these displacement phenomena.

“We feel there’s something missing and we feel this horrible, anxious hole inside ourselves and society teaches us that you deal with that by filling it full of stuff. We dig up the earth to make microwave ovens and electric tooth brushes that we sacrifice to this bottomless pit inside us but, no matter how much we throw in there, we are still empty and incomplete. If we could be natural - in the sense of natural relationships, natural food, natural sex, natural everything - that would be totally satisfying and enduring. That would have a future.”

“The craving only disappears,” he continues, “when we find that place of humility, that place of love for the earth, that place where I am the earth. Then we know that whatever beauty we can see out there has to be in us because, if it wasn’t, we couldn’t see it. I can’t get out of the fact that I’m part of all this and, if it’s magnificent, so am I. The earth is alive and generous and wants to nourish us and that’s why we’re alive, because she’s nourished us all the way along, without a moment’s pause. We only have to stop breathing for three minutes and we’re dead.

“I don’t even have to remember to breathe. I can breathe when I’m asleep. So she’s pushing that air in, she’s breathing me all the time and I’m too arrogant to notice it. All I can think of is, ‘Aren’t I fantastic.’” This morning, as I look out the window and realise that the earth is still alive under the weight of this city, John strikes me, not as a prophet of doom, but as an emissary from some Tolkien Ent with a message of hope. The fact that we come from generations and generations of successful adaptors speaks to me of a resilience in our species and a resilience in the planet.

“Exactly,” John concurs cheerfully. “I’ve steeped myself in the prophecies of doom from the scientists—the number of species becoming extinct every day, what’s happening to the atmosphere, the intractability of nuclear waste. I’ve soaked up all this stuff. On the one hand, I realise, there is no way that the environment movement is going to get us out of that. If all of the efforts of all the well meaning people were multiplied a thousandfold, it wouldn’t get us out of that. It’s so huge and the momentum is so fast. On the other hand, my ancestors survived ice ages, my ancestors learned how to walk the land after being fish, my ancestors went from being inorganic to being organic.

“When you identify with all that, there’s this fantastic pedigree, this unbroken record of survival and success and it becomes difficult to completely lose hope, even in the face of what seems like a hopeless situation. We’ve demonstrated our ability to face the odd crisis in the last four hundred million years and the fact that we’re here talking about it is, to me, irrefutable proof of that. So, I think there must be a resilience there—in humanity and certainly in the biosphere.”

The difference, however, between myself and this self in my lounge room is that, while I'm cheering for humanity, he's cheering for the biosphere and if that must survive at the expense of his species, so be it.

"When the early plants in the water began producing oxygen and gradually pushed methane out of the atmosphere, 90 percent of all species died," he relates dispassionately. "Our ancestors didn't die. It's another example of how incredibly clever we've been. At the same time, 90 percent of everything died and that was fine. It might have seemed a tragedy if you'd been up close to it but, looking back now, everything went on fine. "So, I could let go of humanity and even complex life on earth without feeling it was an utter tragedy. I could let go of organic life too because all those molecules and atoms existed before there was any life on earth. It was just hot gas once but it had the propensity—and we must say the desire—to evolve. There's nothing we can do that's going to touch that. That's who we are.

"We're the whole thing. We're the clouds of hydrogen gas, we're the big bang, we're all of that. It has recently articulated itself into this form and I like this soft stuff. I like flesh, I like organic life, I like humans, I like consciousness, I like love. I like all those things so, if I get to vote on it, I will vote for it to keep evolving on from here but I don't know whether I get to vote on it or not. If I do, I'll vote for this because I like it but not because of some terrible abyss that will be left if it all disappears.

"Nothing goes on forever, except possibly the matrix out of which things are born and die. So, I don't feel particularly hopeful but I certainly don't feel desperate. I just feel that, any time someone gives me a chance to choose between vibrant life and microwave ovens, I'll vote for life."

It is the night before demonstrators will confront loggers in a pristine patch of forest in south-eastern Australia. Just outside the township of Eden, they have pitched tents and gathered in a field under a starry sky. They have come together, in preparation for the morning's demonstration, to honour the earth and reaffirm their connection to nature in a ritual known as the Council Of All Beings.

John developed the Council Of All Beings, with anti-nuclear campaigner Joanna Macy, as an experiential extension of Deep Ecology which, up until then, had been an exciting but nonetheless mostly cerebral affair. Through guided visualisation, movement, drama and dance, they aimed to create a very personal sense of connection with all of nature.

"I had been steeped in the philosophy of Deep Ecology," John recalls, "but I felt that it wasn't enough just to think these things. I felt that, unless we could move from having ecological ideas to having an ecological identity, it wouldn't change our behaviour. So, through meeting Joanna Macy, doing one of her Despair and Empowerment workshops, combining some of those philosophies and techniques with Deep Ecology, came the Council of All Beings. It's a series of processes that dispel the illusion of separation between human beings and nature. It's ritual and ritual touches us at a deeper place than our intellect. We resonate with it."

"The Council Of All Beings is a spontaneous expression of something that is very deeply human," John explains. "I haven't been able to find any indigenous culture that doesn't, at its very core, have a Council Of All Beings or some such ritual. These have been practiced since time



immemorial and are held to be what defines and creates the society.

“That suggests that the propensity to lose the connection must go very deep, that it’s not a modern phenomenon. Otherwise, why would people whose lives are embedded in nature need to remind themselves, through these rituals, that human beings aren’t fundamentally different from anything else? Why would we need to put on the mask of bear and wolf and speak for bear and wolf if there wasn’t some doubt, some danger there?”

“For a long while, I thought of the Council Of All Beings as a therapy. Arne Naess spoke about the need to move from ecological ideas to ecological self to ecological identity. To accomplish this, he suggested the creation of community therapies. To begin with, I thought, ‘Hey, that’s the Council Of All Beings.’ It’s performed in community. It’s a therapy that moves us from this skin encapsulated ego to an expansive, ecological self.

“Then, I visited a Hopi village, which was the longest continuously inhabited village in the Western Hemisphere. They had their masks and drumming. It was much more splendid but they’d been doing the Council Of All Beings for thousands of years, and still their ‘therapy’ wasn’t complete. That’s when I decided that the Council Of All Beings isn’t a therapy. A therapy is like, ‘I’m sick now but I’m going to be well and the therapy’s just a temporary thing.’ Ritual, on the other hand, is something that we need to keep reaffirming and renurturing every season, every moon, every generation, all the time. It’s like eating food. You don’t say, ‘Well, now I’ve eaten, I never need to eat again.’

“The Council Of All Beings is a modern interpretation of this ancient phenomenon. It comes very naturally to people because it’s archetypal, it’s universal and it’s only quite recently that we’ve forgotten it.”

Scores of facilitators on three continents now offer these workshops and many more take place spontaneously, like the one at Eden, in times of celebration or confrontation. Like everything John’s involved with, Councils Of All Beings are fundamentally democratic. He refuses all credit for their inception and is happy to take a back seat if he happens to be around as one unfolds.

“Anyone can perform Councils Of All Beings,” he says. “No qualifications or particular training are required. It’s a really useful adjunct to direct action. It grounds direct action. If I know for sure, because I’ve just had that experience, that I’m speaking for the trees and that I’m speaking for all the animals and so on, then there’s a different quality to my voice. I can stand up to the police. I can stand up to the Prime Minister.

“My constituency is vaster and more powerful than anything they can throw at me. It changes the confidence with which I present myself. If I just think, ‘I’ve got my opinion—I’m an environmentalist—and you’ve got your opinion—you’re a developer’ then it’s my opinion against yours and there’s no real power there. If, however, I know I’m speaking for the earth, that’s a very strong place to be coming from.”

Deep Ecology is a philosophy, an ideology, a gateway to the transpersonal and an impetus to action. There is, however, some dispute amongst its adherents about whether Deep Ecology is a religion. “It depends who you ask,” John laughs mischievously, “but you’re asking

me, so, sure. I would say that those people who don't experience Deep Ecology as a religion haven't experienced the best of it."

For John, Deep Ecology is not so much a way of thinking about the world as a way of being in the world. He might be sitting in my lounge room, sorting through my discs to find his favourite one by Leonard Cohen, or chained to a bulldozer on a muddy logging track a day's drive from anywhere. He might be walking defiantly into a boardroom at Mitsubishi or catching a wave off the point at Byron Bay. In every instance, he is a Deep Ecologist. Every cell of his being grew up from stardust. Every moment of the day, he aims to act and think and feel from a core that's conscious of that.

"I'm talking about living it," he smiles, "and I'm also talking about being awe struck. You don't have to do a hell of a lot of reading or take too many drugs to know that there are heights of ecstasy of which human beings are capable that hardly anyone these days can experience through their political life or their work or their sexuality or anything.

"Some people think this is the experience of Jesus and other people think that the Buddha showed us the way to enlightenment but I think that these things come from the earth, just the same way that Jesus and the Buddha did. If Jesus and his followers and the Buddha and the Sufis have been capable of this extraordinary, elevated, high, high experience, that's because one of the qualities of the earth is the ability to create that.

"If there's any reason whatsoever why I'd be sorry to see human beings go, it's because I think that experience has more value than anything else I know. That's the religion of Deep Ecology. Deep Ecology says that experience comes from the earth. The earth offers many gifts, like food and water and air. The most important of all is enlightenment."

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# Why a Tree is More than a Tree: Reflections on the Spiritual Ecology of Sacred Trees in Thailand

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Les Sponsel  
Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel

## Introduction

Throughout Thailand from Bangkok to the remotest rural villages, one effortlessly sees colorful cloth wrapped around the lower trunk of a tree. A small spirit house with offerings such as candles, incense, and fruit may be located at the base of the tree. Local people believe that the tree is the residence of a spirit, usually from a deceased person. Generally such sacred trees are respected to the extent that they are protected. Anyone who harms such a tree might experience misfortune, sickness, or even death as the spirit takes revenge.

Sacred trees are characterized by Altman (1994:9) in his world survey as follows:

A tree becomes sacred through recognition of the *power* that it expresses. This power may be manifested as the food, shelter, fuel, materials used to build boats, or medicine that the tree provides. How a tree is used will vary according to geography, species of tree, and the particular needs (and ingenuity) of the human culture involved. Sacred trees have also provided beauty, hope, comfort, and inspiration, nurturing and healing the mental, emotional, and spiritual levels of our being. They are symbols of life, abundance, creativity, generosity, permanence, energy, and strength [emphasis added].

This characterization coincides with our observations in southern Thailand where we collaborated in field research with ecologist Nukul Ruttanadakul and botanist Somporn Juntadach from Prince of Songkla University in Pattani.<sup>1</sup> However, before citing some observations from our fieldwork it is necessary to first provide some background on religion.

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<sup>1</sup> The field research, which this chapter draws on, was conducted within a 100 km radius of the city of Pattani in southern Thailand during the summers of 1994-95. Sponsel gratefully acknowledges the research support of a Fulbright grant from the Thailand - U.S. Educational Foundation and John F. Kennedy Foundation of Thailand. The host institution was the Biology Section of Prince of Songkla University in Pattani. Sponsel is indebted to anthropologist Chai Podhisita of Mahidol University for providing estimates of the total number of temples and villages in Thailand. However, only Sponsel assumes responsibility for any deficiencies in this chapter.

## Religion

Religion in Thailand as elsewhere continues to be important in the daily lives of many individuals.<sup>2</sup> About 95% of Thais identify themselves as Buddhists. However, while this religion predominates, individual religious beliefs and practices are more complex and situational. They include elements of previous animistic and Hindu beliefs in the realm of spirits (*phi*) and deities (*thaen*) as well as vital essences (*khwan*). The latter render humans, rice, and some animals much more than mere organisms (Formoso 1996:76, 80; Keyes 1987:416-417). Animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism each independently allow for sacred places in nature. Thus, in the popular religion of most Thai people these three sources of a belief in sacred places may reinforce one another (e.g., Holm and Bowker 1994).

In the four southernmost provinces of the peninsula of Thailand about 70% of the population are Muslim. Yet, there are also elements of animism and Hinduism in the popular religion of many Muslims, although many would not openly admit this. Often both Muslims and Buddhists believe in the sanctity of the same specific trees and other sacred places in their local environment.

## Sacred Trees

In Thailand, there are a multitude of sacred places in nature of different types and sizes, ranging from a single tree to a forest grove to the forest on a mountain, to cite a few examples (e.g., Munier 1998). Local people regard these places as sacred because they believe that one or more spirits reside in them. People may believe in a hierarchy of guardian spirits at various levels: the family (*phi na*), village (*phi ban*), and municipality (*phi muang*) (Formoso 1996:63). These spirits often reside in a single tree or a grove of trees, usually on the margin of the community. These spirits are thought to promote harmony among humans and between humans and their natural environment. Accordingly, locals show respect through specific salutations, offerings, and ceremonies for the tree spirit. Also they avoid any actions that might desecrate the tree and its surroundings. Individuals and their relatives may appeal to the spirit(s) during their rites of passage and life crises (Formoso 1996:77-78).

Sacred trees are usually extraordinary in age, size, shape, or other attributes. For example, in one village we visited a giant ironwood or Malacca teak tree (*Azelia bakeri*) is considered sacred. Its secretions resemble blood. Also residents in the area told us that twice lightning struck and burned other trees nearby, but did not touch this tree because of its extraordinary power. In addition, some residents have seen an unusual light near the tree in the early evening.

Near another village there are two parasitic banyan trees that have grown around a previously existing tree to form a "single" sacred tree. Other vegetation in the vicinity of this sacred tree is protected as part of its environment, including about a dozen species of other trees. This sacred grove is surrounded by a coconut plantation and in turn by wet rice paddies.

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<sup>2</sup> For background on Thai religion, see Formoso (1996), Keyes (1987), and Stanlaw and Yoddumnern (1985). On the ecological relevance of Buddhism, see Kaza and Kraft (2000), Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel (1988, 1993, 1995, 1997), and Tucker and Williams (1997); and for Hinduism, see Chapple and Tucker (2000), Nelson (1998), and Prime (1992).

Some trees are also sacred because of their association with Buddhism or another religion. Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) and bodhi (*F. religiosa*) trees have been associated with Buddhism since its inception, and in Thailand both are introduced species (Graham and Round 1994:31). The Buddha is believed to have been previously incarnated as a tree spirit (Mansberger 1988:404) and later during his reincarnation in human form he reached enlightenment under a bodhi tree (Fields 1992). Also in Hinduism the bodhi tree is supposed to be the home of the gods Krishna, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Thus the bodhi is the most sacred of trees for both Hindus and Buddhists, and this is reflected in its species name *religiosa*.<sup>3</sup>

These and other species of trees may also be sacred when associated with Buddhist temples or monuments (e.g., Pei 1993). For example, in southern Thailand Khao Chedi Luang Pho Non is a mountain that has a stupa on its top containing the cremation ashes of a revered monk who died about one hundred years ago. The surrounding forest is considered sacred by Muslims as well as Buddhists in the area. The size of this forest is estimated at about 160 km<sup>2</sup>.

The recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. Monks practice compassion for nature as well as for humans because they understand the connection between environmental degradation and human suffering. Accordingly, many monks have become environmental activists.

A number of monks have symbolically ordained trees by ceremonially wrapping the saffron robes around giants in the forest to protect them from loggers. By mere association the surrounding trees may also be protected, but during the ritual strings may be attached from the sacred tree to others, which makes them sacred as well. This ordination of trees in effect renders them surrogate monks. The worst crime in Buddhism is to kill a monk. Tree ordination as a conservation technique has usually proven successful (e.g., Darlington 1998). It is also noteworthy that this involves the creation of a new sacred place. Such actions by environmentalist monks in Thailand have led some naturalists to recognize them as “custodians of nature” (Graham and Round 1994:71).<sup>4</sup>

Sacred places in nature function to simultaneously humanize nature and naturalize humans, since they are often the residence for the spirit of a deceased person. That is, the tree as part of nature is humanized by being the residence of the spirit of a deceased human, and humans are naturalized by recognizing that after death their spirits may reside in nature. The unity of humanity, nature, and the supernatural is a basic philosophical tenet shared by animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The sacred tree is surely one reflection of this unity.

## Ecology

At first glance a single sacred tree may not appear to have much, if any, significance for environmental and biodiversity conservation. However, actually a single tree is *part of a*

<sup>3</sup> So far our field research has revealed eleven species of individual trees that are considered sacred by local communities: *Azelia bakeri* (Malacca teak or ironwood), *Bauhinia chrysophylla*, *Carallia lucida*, *Dipterocarpus pilosus*, *Ficus benjamina* (weeping fig), *F. lacon* (fig species), *F. religiosa* (bodhi or sacred fig), *Heterophragma adenophyllum*, *Hopea odorata* (Malabar ironwood or candle tree), *Mangifera faoetida* (Bachang mango), and *Saraca indica* (Asok).

<sup>4</sup> See Darlington (1998), Grady (1995), and Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel (1997) for further discussion of monks as environmental activists.

*hierarchy of progressively larger ecological systems.* Furthermore, if a single tree can have some importance, then perhaps the importance of a community of trees such as a grove or forest can be appreciated even more. These are significant realizations for ecology as well as for environmental and biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity includes not only the number of species in an area, but also the diversity of their interactions or symbioses. A large tree can host dozens or more of other species such as lianas, epiphytes, mosses, and fungi. In turn, there may be dozens to hundreds of species of resident and transient animals, such as squirrels, monkeys, civits, birds, bats, frogs, lizards, snakes and insects. Millions of microorganisms may also inhabit a single tree (e.g., Marchand 2000). Interacting with these species are others such as predators, parasites, competitors, mutualists, and so on. For instance, each species may host a distinctive combination of other species of ecto- and endo-parasites. In addition, birds, bats, monkeys, and insects pollinate flowers of the tree and those of other members of its species in the surrounding environment. Also such animals may eat fruit from the tree and disperse the seeds elsewhere, thereby stimulating the growth of other individuals of that tree species. In fact, some seeds are dependent for germination on the chemicals in the digestive tract of certain animal species. In such ways, diverse animals link individual trees of the same species into wider networks of reproduction and production.

A giant tree also creates microclimates and microenvironments for plants, mosses, fungi, and other organisms that grow on its leaves, branches, trunk, and roots as well as on the adjacent ground. Fallen leaves and other litter from the tree yield nutrients for plants and animals below on the ground through decomposition and the aid of decomposer species. A giant tree may also act like a water pump; its deeper taproots pull water toward the surface, a phenomenon called hydraulic lift (Dawson 1993). Some of this water may become available for surrounding plants. The roots of a giant tree may also pump nutrients to the surface. In addition, acting something like a sponge, the tree captures and slowly releases some rainwater, which might otherwise contribute to more soil erosion.

Trees are a very important component of the composition, structure, and function of many ecosystems. The economic value of the environmental services provided by a living tree has been estimated. According to T.M. Das of the University of Calcutta, a tree living for 50 years will generate \$31,250 worth of oxygen, \$62,000 of air pollution control, \$31,250 of soil erosion control and soil fertilizer, \$37,500 of water, and \$31,250 of shelter for animals (quoted in Bennett 1996:468). From these figures we may conclude that the total services provided by this single 50-year old tree amount to some \$193,250. In contrast, the value of such a tree for lumber is a mere fraction of this. Furthermore, a tree cut for timber is only used once, unlike its continuing services if conserved as a living resource.<sup>5</sup>

In these and many other ways, a tree is an integral part of its ecosystem and wider ecological contexts. From this systems perspective, a single tree can contribute to environmental and biodiversity conservation. When a large tree is considered sacred, and thus afforded special protection from harm, it may help conserve a multitude of other species and their symbiotic relationships as well as specific microclimates, microenvironments, soil, and water resources.

These manifold ecological functions of a single tree are, of course, multiplied many

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<sup>5</sup> Also see Bennett (1996) and Shiva 1993:34-39 on various values of trees.

times over in a grove or forest, which are even more important for conservation. Thus, appreciating a single tree, whether it is sacred or not, may lead to a much greater appreciation of groves and forests as communities of trees.

Collectively through space and cumulatively over time the conservation effect of sacred places, including individual trees, must be substantial. There are some 63,358 villages and 37,000 temples throughout Thailand, and many are associated with single trees, groves, or whole forests that are considered sacred. Temple groves and forests may range up to one hectare or more in size (Weir 1991). Furthermore, the cumulative impact of sacred trees and other sacred places over time must also be substantial, because a belief in them may extend back centuries. In Thailand, Buddhism has existed for about 700 years, Hinduism for 800 years, and animism for many thousands of years (Sponsel, *et al.*, 1998). Given such considerations, it can be hypothesized that sacred trees and other sacred places in Thailand probably serve in effect as a widespread, varied, and ancient “system” of protected areas that are community-based and sanctioned by religion.<sup>6</sup>

## Biodiversity

Thailand is rich in biodiversity at the genetic, species, ecosystem, and bioregional levels (Graham and Round 1994:222, McNeely and Somchevita 1996). Even what might at first glance appear to be a poor environment, a swamp forest, can contain more than 470 plant species (Phengkklai and Niyomdham 1991:4). However, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially in recent decades, in many respects Thailand has increasingly become an environmental disaster (Sponsel 1998). Many people are involved in depleting natural resources and degrading or even destroying the environment out of ignorance, greed, or just plain need. This is even happening in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Yet there are also numerous individuals who and communities that try to use and manage natural resources sustainably (Ekachai 1994, Sponsel 1994), and many adhere to the sanctity of sacred places in nature. Thus, *on the ground each case must be examined on its own terms, it is not all one way or the other, but very complex and situational*. Nevertheless, the net trend in Thailand is toward unsustainable use of natural resources to the point of the irreversible depletion and the degradation of natural ecosystems beyond their capacity for regeneration within a time period meaningful to humans (Arbhabhironan, *et al.*, 1988, Hirsch 1993, 1997, Phantumvanit and Sathirathai 1988). Although nearly 75% of Thailand were forested prior to World War II, now at best some 15% are forested (Leungaramsri and Rajesh 1992, Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel 1988). This deforestation must have resulted in the enormous loss of biodiversity.

The problem of deforestation with the concomitant erosion of biodiversity in effect renders sacred trees and other sacred places in Thailand all the more important for conservation, even though there are also government-protected areas. The latter include 77 national parks and 35 wildlife sanctuaries, covering an impressive 13% of the country (Graham and Round 1994: 236-237). However, it is important to note that these protected areas are mainly mountain and hill forests, and nearly exclude lowland forest, wetlands, and mangroves (Graham and Round 1994:224). For this and other reasons, it is doubtful whether the full range of biodiversity in Thailand could be conserved by the government, even if the parks and sanctuaries were

<sup>6</sup> See Chandrakanth, *et al.* (1990, 1991), Laurance and Bierregaard (1997), Ramakrishnan, *et al.*, (1996), and Schelhas and Greenberg (1995).

adequately protected.<sup>7</sup>

In principle, the more numerous and varied the protected areas the better for, among other reasons, a larger range of genetic variation within a species can be conserved by a wider distribution and variety of protected areas. Sacred places in nature vary tremendously in their causes, age, size, shape, species diversity, species composition, and dynamics. Although sacred places are usually relatively small in area, the bulk of species that compose biodiversity are small in body size, and most are invertebrates (Wilson 1992:133-140). So even small areas protected as sacred places can be significant for biodiversity conservation.

At the same time individual sacred places are much smaller than parks and sanctuaries. Consequently, their conservation value is very limited by their individual size, relatively low level of species diversity, limited taxonomic range of species, and low population size within a species, compared to national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. However, that does not mean that sacred places are insignificant for conservation, if they are considered collectively and cumulatively and as parts of wider systems as previously argued (Sponsel, *et al.*, 1998).

In short, government protected areas and sacred places each have their own advantages and disadvantages for conservation, therefore they may be best considered as complementary systems (Sponsel, *et al.*, 1998). As ecologist Aldo Leopold (1966:262) stated in his land ethic: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." In Thailand sacred places, individually and collectively, may reflect Leopold's land ethic.

Religious beliefs can be a powerful influence on the behavior of many adherents. The belief that a place is sacred may deter or limit exploitation of the natural resources or environment in and even around it. In contrast to government designated protected areas, sacred places are usually more powerful because they are sanctioned by religion, rather than only by civil laws or regulations. For instance, ritual ordination of trees by monks usually inhibits loggers who otherwise would cut the trees, even though illegally at the risk of being fined or jailed. As Anderson (1996) has convincingly argued, natural resource management and environmental conservation involve emotional as well as rational components, and the emotional cannot be ignored even by scientists.

The significance of sacred trees and other sacred places for environmental and biodiversity conservation needs to be recognized and appreciated more widely through further research, education programs, protective measures, and even restoration where they have been degraded. Individual sacred trees and sacred groves may be remnants of previous forests, and they may provide seed stock for new trees and for reforestation, either through natural processes or by human design (see Laurance and Bierregaard 1997, Schelhas and Greenberg 1995).

Furthermore, while the present conservation functions of sacred places may be more limited than in the past, they have considerable *potential* to play a more significant role in the future. This is especially so if they can be revived, maintained, and in some instances even enlarged, and if the awareness of the public can be increased regarding their environmental and

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<sup>7</sup> Also see Brockelman (1988), Graham and Round 1994:221-237, Gray, Piprell, and Graham (1994), and Leungaramsri and Rajesh (1992).



conservation significance. Indeed, their potential conservation role is probably more important than ever, given the increasingly degraded condition of so much of the environment in Thailand. In turn, an increased recognition of sacred trees may contribute to the appreciation and perpetuation of some cultural traditions of Thailand. Possibly a synergy may develop between environmental conservation and cultural identity.

## Conclusion

Given the above considerations, systematic research and action are needed regarding the possible relevance of sacred trees, other types of sacred places, and other aspects of religion for environmental and biodiversity conservation.<sup>8</sup> As Hamilton (1993:13) notes, there is a need to reinforce, reinvent, or reinterpret some of the conservation functions of traditional culture and religion. However, this is not to suggest that there could be any return to some golden age, something that may never have existed anyway (Sponsel 1998). Yet it is increasingly clear that Thai society and economy can only be as healthy as the environment. From this perspective, sacred trees and other sacred places as conservation phenomena merit much more attention in the future as integral components of the nation's life support system and quality of life. A tree is more than merely a tree!

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<sup>8</sup> For research on biodiversity see Heywood 1995, Levin 2000, McNeely and Somchevita 1996, Pei and Sajise 1995, and Ramakrishnan, et al., 1996.

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V  
Miscellany



# Kwik Kian Gie: Indonesia's Romantic Nationalist

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Jeffery Sng

There is more to Kwik Kian Gie, Indonesia's Senior Economic Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economy, Finance and Industry, than meets the eye. In a country where recent anti-Chinese riots evoke disturbing memories of anti-Semitism in Europe, Kwik stands out as the single Chinese-Buddhist minister in Indonesia's predominantly Moslem cabinet.

In a political system traditionally dominated by corruption, cronyism and patronage Kwik managed to get where he is by doing what he believes is right without fear or favour. Gus Dur, Indonesia's mercurial democratic President, told the BBC that he put Kwik in the cabinet because the latter demonstrated integrity and was "up to the job."

Where did Indonesia's most unlikely Cabinet Minister come from and what drove him to aspire to the highest political office ever attained by an Indonesian of ethnic Chinese descent?

Kwik was born in Juwana, a small town in Central Java, on January 11<sup>th</sup> 1935. He was only seven years old when Indonesia was swept in the throes of the Second World War. Kwik reminisced that his family fled Juwana for the open country to escape the threat of Japanese air strikes, only to run into marauding bands of pemudas armed with bamboo spears. The family feared for their lives but for one member of the band, who happened to recognize Kwik's father as his former employer and vouched for his decency.

After that close shave the family decided to return to Juwana and brave the air strikes. However, shortly after luck ran out on the Kwik family. Kwik's father was arrested in 1942, by the invading Japanese army, for his role in a Chinese organization supporting China's struggle against Japan following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Kwik's father was imprisoned until 1945 and young Kwik and his mother had to fend for themselves and endure the privations of the war years.

Kwik was 14 years old when the Indonesian Revolution broke. Life was hard but he had no traumatic memories. Java was divided into the Republican zone and the Dutch zone around the coastal city of Semarang where the Kwik family lived. No heavy fighting took place in the Dutch zone, which was spared the worst ravages of the revolution. Still the Kwik family's physical movements were restricted and he remembered being largely confined to the house.

Kwik admired his father, who exercised a deep influence upon his adolescence. The Bandung Conference in 1954 settled the thorny issue between China and Indonesia over the status of Overseas Chinese. Henceforth, Indonesian Chinese had to choose whether to be Indonesians or remain as Chinese nationals.

Kwik's father chose to be Indonesian. For the Kwik family it was a grave decision. Kwik senior summoned his family together to declare the momentous decision he had taken, which would change their lives forever.

Till today Kwik remembers vividly the words uttered by his father on that fateful day. Kwik senior declared, "You are now Indonesians from today. You must be loyal to Indonesia. It means if war ever breaks out between China and Indonesia you may have to shoot Chinese soldiers. And you must do it." Kwik had received his first nationalist education.

The budding nationalist became a student activist in first grade of SMR (Middle School). In 1955 he attended an Indonesian high school. It was formerly a Chinese high school, which now teaches in the Indonesian national language. "My primary schooling was all in Chinese," recounted Kwik.

Kwik joined the Indonesian Students' High School Organization and rose to become Chairman of its Semarang branch. "Later when I moved to Jakarta I became Chairman for all of Indonesia, which at that time meant all the branches throughout Java," said Kwik. After high school he was admitted into the University of Indonesia (UI) for one year before leaving for further studies in the Netherlands at the end of 1956.

Kwik became more politicized in the Netherlands. He became Chairman of the Indonesian Students' Association of the Netherlands. There were parallel Indonesian students' organizations in Moscow, Beijing, Prague and other capital cities. Together they form the Persatuan Pelajaran Indonesia (PPI) or the World Indonesian Students' Federation. Once a year the PPI chapters would meet together. "The discussions at these meetings were very political," said Kwik.

When war broke out between Indonesia and the Netherlands over the issue of West Irian most of the Indonesian students were sent home to Indonesia and formal communications between Amsterdam and Jakarta were cut off. However, non-scholarship students who paid their own way to study in the Netherlands were not required to return. Kwik was among the group of Indonesian students who stayed back in Amsterdam.

In this little known chapter of his life Kwik became involved in setting up a spy-ring in Europe to support Sukarno's war effort in West Irian. "Sukarno was a humanist. Although he wanted West Irian back he was loath to waste Indonesian lives in a direct military confrontation with superior Dutch forces," reminisced Kwik.

Sukarno's strategy was to engage the Dutch in a psychological warfare rather than throw Indonesian troops against the better armed Dutch forces. Therefore, the object of Indonesian intelligence operations was to gather information on Dutch troop movements, naval deployments and military plans to enable the poorly armed Indonesian army to negotiate around the Dutch positions and avoid direct military confrontation. This was where the Kwik spy-ring

came in.

Kwik had to change his normal student lifestyle to accommodate his espionage activities. He attended classes less and less. He bought armfuls of Dutch newspapers every morning. His ears became glued to the radio and his nocturnal activities increased to the point where he hardly slept at home.

Through the Dutch newspapers and radio broadcasts Kwik was able to plot Dutch troop and naval movements around West Irian. Dutch radio unwittingly, provided Kwik with invaluable information.

“The Dutch radio had created a special program to service Dutch military forces stationed out in the colonies. Through this program lonely Dutch soldiers stationed in colonial outposts and aircraft carriers could send affectionate messages to their sweethearts and families. Often lovesick soldiers would tell their sweethearts where they were stationed,” said Kwik.

By piecing disparate reports together Kwik could plot out most of the Dutch military positions in and around West Irian and relay the information back to Jakarta. The intelligence from the Kwik spy-ring made Sukarno’s strategy of avoidance more effective and helped to save lives on both sides.

However, the Kwik spy-ring still had no access to Dutch military intentions. Indonesians were not allowed to join the Dutch military. But Eurasians (of mixed Dutch and Indonesian parentage) were not similarly blocked from joining. The Kwik spy-ring had spotted a Eurasian sympathizer named Kessel, who was doing his compulsory military service.

With the help of Indonesian agents Kwik managed to “turn” Kessel to work for the Indonesians. Through Kessel the Kwik spy-ring was able to obtain copies of classified military documents, maps and plans reflecting Dutch military intentions in West Irian. But Dutch counter espionage smelled out Kessel and he was arrested.

Kwik’s spy-ring was now in grave danger because Dutch Intelligence tried to use Kessel to lead the police to members of the Indonesian spy-ring. The Indonesians decided to undertake a bold but risky operation to pre-empt the Dutch move by rescuing Kessel.

In a carefully planned operation the Kwik spy-ring, with the help of Indonesian agents, managed to successfully abduct Kessel under the noses of the Dutch police. With the cooperation of Soviet intelligence Kessel was swiftly smuggled out of Amsterdam to Prague and then moved to Moscow, where he was immediately conferred Indonesian citizenship. Kessel was sent to Indonesia where he received a hero’s welcome. Today Kessel lives in Bogor, in West Java.

However, Dutch intelligence began to watch the small community of Indonesian students living in Amsterdam. Kwik noticed that he was being followed. His wife began to receive telephone calls in the middle of the night, from the Dutch police, asking where her husband was. Often she had to answer “he is not here!”

The Dutch police opened his mail, secretly. “I knew that the Dutch police must be reading my mail when my wife received an anonymous phone call inquiring whether she



possessed a Triumph typewriter. She innocently replied that her husband had a Triumph typewriter. Why? 'Oh I was just thinking of buying one,' came the offhanded reply," explained Kwik. "After that I stopped using the Dutch Post Office for sending letters. I would drive across the Dutch border to Belgium and post my letters to Jakarta from Antwerp," he added. But Dutch counter intelligence was closing the circle dangerously.

Fortunately, the West Irian war ended and diplomatic relations were restored between Indonesia and the Netherlands before the Dutch counter intelligence service could muster enough evidence to completely close the circle. Kwik moved fast. On the first day that the Indonesian Embassy re-opened at The Hague Kwik was accredited as a local staff. Unwilling to sour the newly established diplomatic relations, between Indonesia and the Netherlands by declaring Kwik as *persona-non-grata*, the Dutch authorities decided not to pursue the Kwik dossier any further.

After letting things cool down by lying low in the Indonesian Embassy for one year the closet Sukarnoist turned a new leaf and went into business, with a close associate of President Sukarno named Tabunan, as the Managing Director of a trading company based in Amsterdam. Kwik spent seven more years in the Netherlands operating the trading company on behalf of Tabunan. The fateful Untung coup, which triggered off a bloody nationwide anti-Communist witch-hunt that ultimately claimed over a million lives, caught Kwik abroad.

The fall of Sukarno was a terrible blow to Kwik, the passionate Sukarnoist, who had repeatedly put himself at risk to further the vision of Indonesia's great populist leader. Even after the military, then already under the control of Colonel Suharto, had closed down P.T. Telekomunikasi (PTT) to black out the international media's spotlight on Indonesia's ideological cleansing under the military's umbrella, Kwik managed to maintain communications with Jakarta through a private satellite channel which Sukarno had secured for Tabunan. "The news of so many people being killed who were not even Communists made me immensely sad," said Kwik.

In 1970 Kwik decided to return to Indonesia. He continued to do business. The trading company with Tabunan had ultimately closed down. Kwik set up several successful companies including Indonesia's first finance company named Indonesian Financing and Investment, an agribusiness company specializing in managing plantations, a management consultancy, and an electronics company—ITT & Graetz. Some of these companies still exist in Indonesia today.

But politics was calling again. When General Suharto tried to force Megawati—daughter of the late President Sukarno—out of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Kwik went to her aid. Kwik joined Megawati's party, PDI, in 1987 and was elected to the MPR. It was during his term in the MPR from 1987 to 1992 that Kwik met Gus Dur and forged a lasting friendship with the charismatic Moslem cleric who was destined to be Indonesia's future leader.

Nineteen eighty-seven was a significant milestone in Kwik's life. In 1987 he decided to make politics his true calling. Looking back, Kwik's life had always been intensely political. But he had engaged in politics in the shadows. Now he would come out from the cold; he would practice his calling in broad daylight. Between 1987 and 1989 Kwik sold off all his companies. Henceforth, he would be involved only in politics and education.

On the education front Kwik got the government to establish a foundation and used the

proceeds to set up Indonesia's first business school, IMPM, which still exists today. "When I was managing IMPM I saw how the Indonesian conglomerates committed fraud, exploited loopholes in the law and used unconscionable tactics to make money. I exposed them in the press and they in turn used their influence to kick me out of IMPM. It was then that I started my own business school IBI," said Kwik. "Since then the Chinese Indonesian conglomerates hated me," he added.

When President Suharto fell from power in 1999, in the wake of protracted looting, burning and raping, instigated by desperate military elements and a coalition of Moslem parties and PDI formed a government with Gus Dur as President, the conglomerate lobby led by Sofian Wanandi pressured Gus Dur not to appoint Kwik to the new Cabinet on the basis of allegations that "Kwik is anti-business." Gus Dur stood his ground and appointed Kwik as Coordinating Minister for Economy, Finance and Industry.

## **Kwik Kian Gie In His Own Words**

### *On The IMF*

Indonesia still needs the IMF. We want to be under the IMF programme. But since Indonesia's economy is already out of the woods we have less need to take the IMF disbursements. If possible we don't want to take any more disbursements from the IMF at this point. We really don't need it now because, under the governing regulations, IMF disbursements may not be used unless Indonesia's reserves are first depleted. Right now Indonesia still has US\$80 billion in reserves. So what is the point of taking the IMF disbursements? We are not permitted to use it anyway! Moreover, we have to pay 4% interest on money that we can't use. So we want to continue to be under the IMF programme and fulfil all the conditions agreed upon in the IMF Letter of Intent without taking any more disbursements.

### *On Foreign Investors*

There are 2 types of foreign investors. The first category are those who only come to invest in Indonesia when times are good. These investors tend to shy away from Indonesia now because of the prevailing political instability and labour unrest. There is no point in trying to persuade this group to come to Indonesia now. They will come back to Indonesia after the Indonesian economy has improved - in other words when we have less need of them. Most of the foreign investors belong in this category. But even without these sunshine investors Indonesia's economy is recovering. We are currently growing at 3.6%. Indonesia's economy does not critically depend on these investors. But there are also committed investors. These are the investors who continue to invest in Indonesia despite the prevailing political instability and labour unrest. Most of the investors in small and medium sized enterprises are committed investors.

### *On Strategy for Economic Recovery*

Indonesia's strategy for economic recovery has already been outlined by Gus Dur. Business should be left to the private sector as much as possible. The government should provide only infrastructure support and help to level the playing field by legislating in favour of weak and disadvantaged companies as in the case of the Small Business Act in the US. Another point is that Indonesia cannot depend on the conglomerates like before. Most of Indonesia's conglomerates are already in deep financial trouble after the Asian economic crisis. They are in no position to lead the country's economic recovery. We must revive the domestic sector and focus on SMEs rather

than large enterprises except in the natural resource sector. In fact Indonesia's medium sized enterprises have performed very well and are leading the country's economic recovery.

*On Liberalization and Globalization*

Today the Indonesian economy is much more open than during Suharto's time. We have almost no currency controls or restrictions on capital inflows and outflows. Although, I have recommended introducing some currency restrictions the IMF has strongly opposed it.

In Indonesia the pressures of economic liberalization and globalization are compounded by political and labour unrest. It is difficult enough to manage the problems arising from liberalization and globalization without political and labour unrest. But we are managing. Many Indonesian companies have proved that they can compete in the global marketplace. Some international companies found competition from Indonesian food companies so tough that they have decided to leave the local market to the Indonesians.

*On his critics*

The conglomerates oppose me by saying that I am anti-business, I am too academic or I have a bad influence on Indonesia's economic policy. The conglomerates don't like me because they know that I know all their tricks and I could expose them when they act against the public interest. Academics associated with the former "Berkeley Mafia" which provided theoretical legitimization and directed Indonesia's economy during the Suharto era used to regard economic policy planning as their turf and resent losing their former influence. Some of them try to discredit me to my colleagues in the government, the multilateral financial institutions and foreign advisors.

*On His Relationship with Gus Dur*

I am 100% loyal to Gus Dur. But he is under pressure from the conglomerate lobby and its international allies. I have told him, "Please do not hesitate to remove me if it will serve the national interest."

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# The Taechews of the Chaophraya

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Pimpapai Pisalyabutra

Through the legacy of Confucius, the Chinese people have great respect for their history and for the institution of the family. The Chinese respect for history is underscored by the custom of ancestor worship, which emphasizes the importance of the people's venerated forefathers, and the custom of spirit worship, which confers recognition by raising those outstanding characters in history to the status of divinities. The historical and cultural records accumulated by the Chinese since ancient times are devoted to preserving and reinforcing the sense of honor and pride of all the Chinese people in their common heritage. And thus, in villages throughout the Chinese countryside it is a common practice for each clan to maintain a record of its family tree.

The description of each family's fortune can never be complete, of course, as the branches and roots of each clan's family tree spread far and wide over the generations. The maintenance of those records also depends on the generations' changing fortunes. But every so often over the generations, a scholar has appeared with the personal commitment to review the records and update the history of the clan. To her amazement Khunying Chamnongsri Ratanin managed to trace the history of the Tan family, her mother's ancestral line, back 22 generations within a few days when she visited the Tan's home village near Swatow.

In Siam, with the influence of Hinayana Buddhism, the customs are quite the reverse. The common belief is that all is change, all is impermanent. Therefore, there is no tradition among most people to record their family histories over the generations, the exception being the royal family, whose history is formally recorded in the dynastic chronicles, and some nobles and ministers, whose lives were clearly linked with the royalties. Most people know something about the history of their grandparents and great grandparents, but their recollections fade away beyond the third generation, especially as no records were kept.

In Siam, records concerning common people, and the Chinese in particular, during the early Ratanakosin era, were seldom written or kept. The question arises as to why the Chinese in China conscientiously maintained family historical records but the Chinese in Siam did not?

One reason is that the Confucian social class structure comprising of scholars, warriors, peasants and merchants were replicated right down to the village level in China. But in Siam the

Chinese failed to bring the social system with them. In the early Ratanakosin era and before, the Chinese who came to Siam were mostly merchants and men rather than members of the scholar gentry class. This accounts for the lack of records, making it difficult to reconstruct a picture of the Chinese community and its evolution. The above historical poverty may also be attributable to the influence of Thai culture and the fact that the early Chinese immigrants were focused on building new livelihoods and fortunes with little inclination to transcribe family records. Thus, the Chinese in Siam did not leave many manuscripts to posterity and only very few clan lineage records survived.

With the move of the capital of the Siamese kingdom to Thonburi in 1767, the area developed rapidly. When the locus of economic activity gravitated to Thonburi from the city of Ayutthaya, many of the merchants who formerly lived in the old capital moved down to Thonburi, including the Portuguese at Santa Cruz, the Muslims at Klong Bang Luang, etc. Others joined them opening a new era of commerce, such as Francis Light, who was called Kapitan Lek.

However the main force behind putting the capital of Siam back on the trading map were the Chinese. The Chinese traders who had traded with Ayutthaya before the city was sacked played a prominent role in setting up the new trading networks. For example, Ong Mua Seng, a Chinese merchant from Ayutthaya, was authorized by King Taksin of Thonburi to outfit at least 10 to 15 ships a year to trade with Canton, as well as, to build two new ships annually at Chantaburi.<sup>1</sup> Yang Chin Chong or Phya Phichai-aisawan, a Cantonese junk owner and a key player in the Sino-Siamese trade was appointed as the King's Merchant or Phra Khlang<sup>2</sup> later on during the reign.

The first Phra Khlang of the Thonburi era was Phya Pipit or Tan Lien, King Taksin's general of Taechew descent and the leader of the Taechew community from the eastern seaboard who had supported Taksin in his quest for power. Tan Lien and the Taechew families built their community inside the city moat, on prime waterfront property, along the east bank of the Chaophraya River. Today, the Grand Palace occupies this area. Opposite, along the west bank of the river, was Thonburi's city proper, densely populated by senior government officials, their entourages and an older Hokkien community.

After serving the King for five years Tan Lien, who initially served as Phra Khlang and later as Phya Raja-sethi ruler of Phuthai-mas, went into retirement in 1773 when King Taksin decided to return Phuthai-mas to its Cantonese ex-ruler Mac Thien Tu<sup>3</sup>. This turnabout by King Taksin reflected his effort to contain this group of Taechews as well as to distance himself from them despite the fact that he was half Taechew.

Surviving records of the Taechew junk merchants during the Thonburi era were scarce. However, the Sombat-siri, one of Bangkok's most prominent families, can trace their roots back to the Thonburi junk trade. Their forefather Tan Tek-Hah was born in Koa Toeng, Swatow, in 1733. He was one year older than King Taksin was. After marrying a Thai Chinese, Tan became so

<sup>1</sup> Adisorn Muakpimai, *Chantaburi: A Gateway for the Coastal Trade of Ayudhya in the Eighteenth Century* (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1995), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> Yumio Sakurai and Takako Kitagawa, "Ha Tien or Banteay Meas in the Time of the Fall of Ayutthaya" in Kennon Breazeale, ed., *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia* (Bangkok: the Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1999).

successful in the trade between Siam and Canton that both he and his son, Tan Ngiap-Sun, became Mandarins in China. The Tans were awarded the titles of Phya Sri-raj-arkorn and Phya Sombat-wanit in Siam. The Sombat-siri family produced several men of distinction. During the reign of Rama VI, the clan was awarded the royal surname Sombat-siri. Phya Mahaisawan the famous Mayor of Thonburi was also from this family.

Another prominent Taechew of the Thonburi era was Lin Ngo (Wu), a fabulously wealthy merchant from Chonburi. Chesua Lin was allowed to outfit the Royal Junks similar to Ong Mua Seng who belonged to an old Chinese clan from Ayutthaya. As the cost of shipbuilding in Chantaburi was about five to ten times cheaper than in China<sup>4</sup>, due to abundance of high quality wood, the merchants from Siam made a hefty profit as they sold both the cargo and the ships.

Chesua Lin had two sons, Chesua Boonkoet and Chesua Boonchu. Boonkoet was the father of Prang, a consort of Rama II and mother of Prince Wongsa-thiraj-sanit, the 49<sup>th</sup> child of Rama II.<sup>5</sup> During the reign of Rama V, one of Boonkoet's descendents was responsible for a mega irrigation project namely, the Rangsit Canal system, north of Bangkok.

With the overthrow of King Taksin and the change of dynasty in 1782, the capital was moved to the east bank of the Chaophraya River. Returning after ten years of retirement, Tan Lian, the leader of the Taechew community, was put in charge of moving the Taechew village, his home included, downstream, beyond the new city moat, to Sampeng, in order to make way for the buildings of the Grand Palace. Soon after his accession to the throne, King Rama I reinstated Tan Lian as Phya Raja Sethi, ruler of Phuthai-Mas. Rama I reinstatement of Tan Lian was typical of the many successful reconciliatory moves the King made during his reign to unite the fractured society at that time.

From analyzing the location of the Taechew shrines built before Rama V, such as Sanchao Ban-mo, Sanchao Pohsoea and Sanchao Kao, we can draw a clear distinction between the Taechew villages mostly situated on the eastern bank of Chaophraya River and the Hokkien villages primarily on the west bank.

At the dawn of the Chakri Dynasty, Bangkok was bustling with people seeking new alliances, not only political alliances among the Siamese nobility but also economic alliances among the Chinese trading community. With goodwill on both sides, the newfound pacts were resoundingly successful. Nearly all of the heads of important Chinese fleet owners presented their daughters as consorts to King Rama I's son, Prince Isara-Sunthorn who later succeeded his father as King Rama II in 1809. The Chinese consorts of Rama II included Chao-Chom Yisun of the Lim (Krairoek) lineage,<sup>6</sup> Chao-Chom Phlap of the Tan (Sombat-siri) lineage,<sup>7</sup> Chao-Chom Manda Prang of the Ngo/Wu lineage<sup>8</sup> and Chao-Chom Manda Ampha of the Lim (Niyawanon) lineage.<sup>9</sup> A love poem written by King Rama II for one of his Chinese consorts is still celebrated

<sup>4</sup> Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit Sino Siamese Trade, 1652-1853* (Harvard University Press, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> K.S.R. Kularb, *Ton Head Sang Wat Bot Nai Klong Samsen. The Siam Prabtheth Book 2* (Bangkok, 1898), pp. 1134-1135.

<sup>6</sup> Luang Chak Pani Sri Silp Visut, *Rueng Kong Chao Phraya Mahithorn* (Bangkok, 1956), Appendix 5: The Kraireok Family Tree.

<sup>7</sup> Phya Sri Sena, Ton Trakun Sombatsiri. *Memorial Book for the Royal Sponsored Cremation of Nai Srisana Sombatsiri*, 14 August 1982.

<sup>8</sup> K.S.R. Kularb, op. cit., pp. 1134-1135.

<sup>9</sup> Luang Chak Pani Sri Silp Visut, op. cit., Appendix 5.

by Bangkokians.

Lovely, fragrant Chinese flower,  
 You have wealth as I have power.  
 Though my courtiers all may glower,  
 Tis my heart that ye devour.  
 (Translated by Edward Van Roy)

In his autobiography, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj wrote that the poem was written for his forbear, Chao-Chom Marda Ampha, who had six children with the King.

After the change of dynasty and the accession of Rama I to the throne, the Chinese went about their business as usual, Hokkien and Taechew alike. Junks were outfitted in the name of the King and other royalties to allow smooth trade with Canton, Amoy and Tiensin. Apart from the King, other members of the royal family were encouraged to engage in, or render their names to, trade with China in order to earn extra revenue to support the huge entourage expenses. Chao Phya Phra Khlang was responsible for the management of the royal junks whilst Phya Krai Kosa, senior minister for the Front Palace and a Hokkien Chinese by birth, was in charge of the junks of the Second King. Chesua Boonchu, son of Lin Ngo (Wu), the prominent Taechew trader of the Thonburi Period, was outfitting junks for Krom Phra Raja Wang Bavorn Satan Pimuk<sup>10</sup>, a nephew of Rama I.

In the Second Reign, Prince Chesada-Bodin, the King's eldest son, was very keen on commerce and was trusted with overseeing foreign trade together with the Phra Khlang. Several Chinese merchants who outfitted junks for him during this time were to become prominent officials later on during his reign as Rama III, such as Chesua Ong Tao Toa, Chesua Boonma and others.

A careful study of Sino-Siamese nobles who served in Krom Ta Sai or the Department of Eastern Trade showed that the five lineages of Chinese traders during the Thonburi period were still very influential during the reign of Rama III. Thong-di, of the Lim lineage, son of Phya Krai-kosa (Roek), the official interpreter of the Siamese Envoy to China, was promoted to Phya Chodoek-rachasethi, Minister for the Eastern Trade. Chim, of the Ngo (Wu) lineage, grandson of Lin Ngo (Wu), was Phya Sawadi-wari, Deputy for the same department. It seemed that the unspoken custom since Rama I, who put Hokkiens as senior officials and Taechews as the latter's assistants, did not end with his reign. Chesua Tao Katha, of the Lim lineage and Chesua Ngiap-Sun, of the Tan lineage, both operated as independent merchants and revenue farmers. Both also attained the rank of Phya, namely Phya Inthara-arkorn and Phya Sombat-wanit. But by far the most influential Sino-Siamese noble of this reign was Chesua Ong Tao Toa, Chao Phya Kalayanamit, who was the son of a Thonburi merchant named Luang Pichai-wari (Ong Mang).

Fifty-seven years after the fall of Ayutthaya, as wars with Siam's neighbors were subsiding and internal political rivalries faded away the Chakri dynasty became stable and powerful. The Reign of Rama III (1824-1851) was an era of rapid economic development in Siam. Looking at the tax revenue figures, as cited in the thesis of Phuang-roi Klom-iang, the Second Reign only collected 2,260,000 baht in taxes whereas the Third Reign collected 25,000,000

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 5

baht, a more than six-fold increase.<sup>11</sup>

Commercial mining and production of agricultural based products were booming such as ironworks, sugar, rice, alcohol, etc. The Chinese were dominant in supplying both technology and labor. It was around this time that the Chinese brought in the technology for producing granulated sugar, which was also introduced to Hawaii in 1820. The economic growth in Siam during this period was due to the government's active efforts in subcontracting to private concessionaires monopolistic rights to engage in trades in different districts of the country.

In fact, the Siamese economic and organizational concepts were similar to the Chinese. The Siamese adopted the ancient Chinese model of trade as a state monopoly whenever its nature made this system easy to enforce. For example, in China iron working was a state monopoly during Han times and salt remained so throughout history down to the modern period.<sup>12</sup> The relegation of trade to an exclusively official realm was in striking contrast to the European model of trade as private enterprise. So the Sino-Siamese merchants were in familiar turf.

Rama III was skilled in economic matters because he had had prior experience in the Phra Klang. He had a good grasp of trade and the economics of demand and supply in domestic and foreign markets. During his reign Siam placed many trade monopolies under auction, normally for a period of three years. Bids were solicited for a list of 38 merchandise including coconut oil, palm sugar, ironwork and tobacco.<sup>13</sup> Windows of opportunity opened up for those Chinese who immigrated to Siam during the reign of Rama III because they were allowed to bid for these new revenue farms. Merchants who put in the highest bid for a particular government revenue source in a particular area were appointed revenue farmers, and subsequently awarded noble titles. The revenue farmers who received noble titles included Chinese merchants such as Lao Sae, who was awarded the title of Khun Wiset-phakdi and Chin Bi, who was awarded the title of Moen Mathurot-wanit. The former won a concession for fish and the latter for cane sugar.<sup>14</sup>

Bishop Pallegoix, who lived during that time, wrote, "Since then [the start of the Third Reign] the monopolies have grown every year. The Siamese and the Chinese have vied for some time for the possession of these when they were put for auction, but the Chinese have ended up getting them and have remained masters of them."

It was the good fortune of Siam that King Rama III did not squander the financial reserves accumulated by trade and government concessions on non-productive luxuries. He used these revenues to rebuild temples, which were the center of community life and learning, as well as to build forts and other infrastructure to defend the country, all of which supported the livelihood of the people, and opened opportunities for the advancement of the arts and skilled crafts. Those who worked well succeeded and became part of the fast rising elite.

In total, 38 temples were built or renovated and renamed by King Rama III. Nai Mi, the King's gentleman in waiting, described the King's obsession with temple building as the hallmark

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<sup>11</sup> Puangroi Klom-iang, *Royal Policy Concerning the Problems of the Chinese People in the Kingdom During the Sixth Reign*. (Bangkok, 19??).

<sup>12</sup> C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1972), p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> Thongto Kluaymai na Ayuthaya, "The Change to the Tax Farming System During the Reign of Rama III", in *In Commemoration of Maha-chesada-bodin*. (In Thai).

<sup>14</sup> Puangroi Klom-iang, *op.cit.* .



of the Third Reign. Temple building was also encouraged amongst the royals and nobles, resulting in 40 additional temples.

Chinese residents in Bangkok were also fond of building or restoring temples as a way of offering respect to the King. One was Phya Chodoek (Thong-chin), who built Wat Thong Nophakhun. A second was Phya Sawadi-wari (Chim), who built Wat Sawadi-wari in Samsen. A third was Phya Chodoek (Boonma), who built Wat Chotinaram by the waterfront in Yannawa. And a fourth was Phya Chodoek (Chong), the re-builder of Wat Nang-chi.

As the Chinese population in Bangkok was very substantial, almost half of the town's residents were Chinese.<sup>15</sup> Apart from trading and revenue farming the Chinese were also prominent in other fields such as cannon foundry, blacksmithing, brickmaking, carpentry, and masonry. The participation of Taechew artisans from Sampeng in the adornment of temples, built during this time, was celebrated in a poem written in honor of Rama III by Phya Chai-wichit (Phoeak).

A famous artist of Chinese descent in this reign was a mural painter named Khong Pae. His works can be viewed at Wat Suwanaram, Wat Bang-yikhan and Wat Dawadoeng. Khong Pae was quite a notorious character with a fiery temper. Once during a street fight he killed a man. Despite the fact that Rama III was a firm administrator of capital punishment, on this rare occasion he pardoned the crime, decreeing that Khong Pae's skill was irreplaceable. Kong Pae was freed from incarceration to continue his wonderful painting of temple walls.

The Reign of Rama III (1824-1852) was relatively long and there were periods of good and bad times. The Chronicles identified one of the bad years as the ninth year of the Reign (1833)<sup>16</sup>:

There was so little rain and the price of rice was so high that it was necessary to import rice from overseas to distribute to the people. The people did not have money to buy rice. It was necessary for them to work for payment in rice. Those revenue farmers who did not have money had to pay the government in merchandise. Most of the Chinese who owed poll tax didn't have the money to pay. They had to move to Bangkok in search of work. The great amount of money minted by the crown earlier, including the lotus-, garuda-, and prasat-stamped coins disappeared from circulation. Phra Sri-Chaiban, suggested to the King that the saving may be buried for save keeping instead of being spent. In similar circumstances in China, the state would issue lottery to lure money back into circulation.

Hence, Che sua Hong was awarded the lottery concession for Bangkok, which made him fabulously rich.

But the fortunes of revenue farmers were not always rosy. Many of the large revenue farmers encountered losses on their investments due to over expansions, inadequate control and cutthroat competition among themselves. Competitive bidding raised the price of revenue farms ever higher, until in 1905, in the Fifth Reign, the price of opium and spirits had risen so high that

<sup>15</sup> Monsignor Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix, *Description du Royaume Thai ou Siam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000), translated by Walter E.J. Tips, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Prince Damrong-rachanuphap, *The Collected Royal Chronicles*, Chap.17.

these products were being smuggled in to undercut prices set by the legitimate revenue farmers. And when the government could not suppress the smuggling, many revenue farmers ended up suffering serious losses and even bankruptcy. For instance, Phya Phakdi-phatharakon (Chesua Keng Sua), the opium tax farmer, owed back taxes totaling 564,320 Baht<sup>17</sup> in the 1880s due to over expansion and loss of control. As collateral against his tax debts, the government confiscated his large property with three buildings, which are located near the mouth of Klong San. It was converted in to a lunatic asylum. His final demise came in 1905 when he was declared bankrupt after owing a total of 2,000,000 Baht in back taxes.

Besides storms at sea, the junk owners faced the danger of pirates who lay in wait to rob ships' cargoes along the maritime routes. Sometimes pirates would raid ships as close to Bangkok as the Chaophraya River estuary. For instance, in the seventh year of the Fourth Reign, Phya Phisan-suphaphon (Choen) hired a Chinese named Chin Sua to load 52 cartloads of rice onto a ship anchored outside the bar at the mouth of the Chaophraya. A short time after the ship had left Samut-prakan a junk with Vietnamese markings drew alongside. Some 26 pirates carrying firearms, knives and swords boarded the ship from the adjacent junk and captured the ships and its sailors. When the ships had passed Chumphon, the pirates transferred Chin Sua and his 10 sailors on to the pirate junk and set them adrift with some rice and a pair of oars. The Chinese bandits escaped with the rice ship. Rama IV ordered a naval force to sail to Chumphon on the vessel Sri-ratanakosin to capture the pirate ship. But the Chinese bandits were by that time long gone so the 54 cartloads of rice were lost.

Surviving houses of great merchants are few. One of them belonged to Chesua Kim Lo chae, the founding member of the Posayananda family. His biography states that he immigrated from the Kim village in Yiao Pheng around 1817-18 and married a lady named Im from Ang-thong. Initially, he lived in a raft house that also served as his shop, along the river north of Wat Thong-thammachat. When his business prospered he built a Chinese mansion, which remains to the present day.

Chesua Lo Chae had three daughters and two sons. For the love of his children he decided to settle permanently in Siam, even though in those days it was a general practice for the wealthy to retire in China in their old age or to have their bodies returned to China for burial. When he decided to plan for his own grave site in Siam he hired a Feng Shui master from China to survey and select a burial site that would ensure the prosperity of future generations. The Feng Shui master traveled in search for an appropriate burial site at Chantabun and Rayong but was not satisfied with what was available. On the way back he stopped to stay for a few days with the Singkawanit clan, the family friends of Chesua Lo Chae. During his stay in Bang Pla Soi, he discovered a great site in the forest a short distance from the town.

But the plot of land was already farmed by another Chinese named Keng, who was also well aware that it was an excellent burial location. When Lo Chae sought to purchase the site, Keng refused to sell it. He explained that he had farmed this piece of the hilly forest and laid claim to the area to make this plot his own burial site. Lo Chae insisted and asked an elder, whom Keng respected, to ask on his behalf one more time. This time Keng decided to sell, with the proviso that when he died, the family of Lo Chae would bury him in this plot at the spot that he would

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<sup>17</sup> Rachadaporn Sri-phiban, "Kong Ian Koh Ngam: A Birds' Nests Monopoly Held by the Chinese", (In Thai), *Moeang Boran*, Vol. 26, no.2, April-June 2000, pp. 63

designate. Lo Chae agreed to that condition. Later, the Feng Shui master asked Keng where exactly he wanted to be buried, and Keng pointed out the spot. The master was dumbfounded, because it was the very spot that he had had in mind for Lo Chae. Not to lose face, the master selected for Lo Chae another spot close by on the plot with the excuse that it was better than Keng's. The cremation volume of Phya Phipatanakorn (Chim Posayanond) stated that the repositioning of the burial site led to uneven prosperity among the descendants of Chesua Lo Chae.<sup>18</sup>

Another custom concerning the construction of a Chinese grave is that during the construction process no one should call the name of the Feng Shui master in charge of the project, otherwise ill omen would befall the master. One worker who either did not believe or did not like his master shouted the master's name three times whilst standing atop the dirt mound of the freshly dug grave. The master who learned of it was so disturbed by the blasphemy that he fell ill, and died less than a month thereafter. Before he died he asked to be buried in the same plot.

The families of Chinese merchant who want to send their bodies back to China for burial, must visit a small shrine, located in the heart of Sampeng, along a narrow lane that winds its way behind Sanchao Kao. It is the shrine of Siang Oeng Kong, a guardian spirit of the town. It is an ancient Chinese belief that every place in the world has its own guardian spirit. In order to travel, the bodies and souls of the dead require appropriate calligraphic certificates (Hu) from the town's spirit to permit passage of the soul to its destination without being waylaid by other spirits en route. For that reason the descendants of the deceased must come and request the necessary Hu from the spirit of this shrine before the departure of the deceased on the sea journey back to China.

The study of clan or lineage of Chinese families in Thailand back beyond five generations is difficult to achieve. The edict proclaiming the mandatory use of surnames was only issued in 1913. Consequently, a clan may split up into different lineages. For example, the sons and grandsons of Tae Tien Bi, who had immigrated during the Third Reign, created four new lineage names dividing themselves among the Sethaputra, Phirom-phakdi, Posaya-chinda and Pranit families. The study of Sino-Siamese families should attempt to trace the origin of various clans deeper than one generation in order to gain a better understanding of Siamese cultural history.

**The article comprises an English translation of a chapter from a Thai language book titled สำเนาสยาม : ตำนานเจ๊กบางกอก published by Nan Mee Books in July 2001**

**The paper was translated from the original Thai text with the great help and advice of Dr. Edward Van Roy. Any mistakes, controversial claims and shortcomings in the translation is solely the responsibility of the author.**




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<sup>18</sup> Cremation volume for Phya Phipatanakorn (Chim Posayanond), 17 October 1954.

## Contributors

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**Martine Batchelor** lives in France. She teaches regularly at the Sharpham College in England. Her book *Walking on Lotus Flowers* has just appeared in Thai.

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**Nicholas Bennett:** Before joining the World Bank, he was a UNESCO expert at the Thai Ministry of Education and later in Nepal. A collection of his articles, *Barriers and Bridges for Rural Development* (1978 BE) was published by the Text Book Project on Social Sciences and Humanities (founded by Dr. Puey Ungphakorn).

**Judith Simmer-Brown** is chair of religious studies at the Naropa University, Boulder, Colorado. She designed and founded the engaged Buddhism track of the Buddhist Studies M.A. program at the university.

**Chaiwat Satha-anand** teaches "Violence and Nonviolence in Politics" at the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok.

**David W. Chappell** was professor of Religion at the University of Toronto and taught at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. He has just moved to teach at the new Soka University near Los Angeles. He is a founding member of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue and until recently the editor of the *Journal of Buddhist-Christian Studies*. He also helped to start the Alternatives to Consumerism project.

**John B. Cobb, Jr.** is Professor Emeritus at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California. He is the-founder of the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue. His most famous book is *For the Common Good* co-authored with Herman Daly.

**Pracha Hutanuwatr** and **Jane Rasbash** supervise Wongsanit Ashram, an alternative community for activists in search of balance of activism and contemplation. They run grassroots leadership training for peoples-from Burma and are coordinating a research project called Alternative Politics for Asia. Both also run courses for Spirit in Education Movement, especially those related to deep ecology, community building, interfaith forest walks, and engaged Buddhism.

**Carol Johnston** is an ordained minister and member of the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in USA. She is the author of *The Wealth or Health of Nations*.

**Stephanie Kaza** is associate professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Vermont where she teaches religion and ecology, nature philosophy, environmentalism, and ecofeminism. Before coming to Vermont, she taught natural history, ethics, and conservation at U.C. Santa Cruz, Union Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Stephanie is a long-time student of Zen Buddhism, practicing at Green Gulch Zen Center, California; she has also studied with Thich Nhat Hanh and Joanna Macy. Stephanie is the author of *The Attentive Heart: Conversations with Trees* and co-editor (with Kenneth Kraft) of *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*.

**Gabriel Lafitte** has been a Buddhist since 1978. He works with dispossessed peoples seeking to regain their rights. He is struck by the convergence between China's state capitalism and contemporary global consumer-driven capitalism.

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**Nuttarote Wangwinyoo** is a graduate from the Naropa University. He is now active with the Spirit in Education Movement at Chiangrai, northern Siam.

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**Vijay Pratap** is a founding member of an activist-intellectual dialogue forum "Lokayan" (Dialogue of People) in India. He also edits a journal *Lokayan* published by the same forum.

**Bhikkhu Santikaro** was born in Chicago halfway through this Buddha Era. After getting an unmarketable degree in Creative Writing, he joined the U.S. Peace Corps and landed in Siam. Here, he discovered the Buddha-Dhamma. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's life and teaching give him guidance, while engaged Buddhist friends keep life interesting and Dawn Kiam, a small forest community, provides a home. He is now based in the US embarking on a new project to build up a Buddhist community there.

**John Seed** is director of the Rainforest Information Centre. He is the co-author of *Thinking Like a Mountain*.

**Sulak Sivaraksa's** was arrested in Kanjanaburi on 6 March 1999 for obstructing the gas pipeline from Burma (his third arrest—the earlier two were for defaming the king). He has challenged the court that the law used to prosecute him is against the current constitution which gives rights to citizens to obstruct development projects which are harmful to human rights and ecological balance. His case has been returned to the Constitutional Court. He is now on bail and awaits the decision of the Constitutional Court. On 2 October 2001 he received the Millennium Gandhi Award for upholding the tradition of truth and nonviolence in science and ecology in New Delhi, India.

**Jeffrey Sng** is a graduate from the University of Singapore and Cornell University. He is now executive secretary of the Bandung II project under the guidance of A.K. Abdulrahman Wahid, former President of Indonesia.

**S. Jayanama** teaches at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok). He is co-editor of *Seeds of Peace* magazine and has translated two books on Pridi Banomyong as *The Powers That Be: Pridi Banomyong through the Rise and Fall of Thai Democracy*, and *The 1932 Revolutionist*.

**Les Sponsel** and **Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel** teach university courses at Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, and usually contribute articles jointly, especially on Buddhism and the environment.

**David Streckfuss** graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He is the author of *Modern Thai Monarchy and Cultural Politics*. He is now director of the Council Study Centre at Khonkaen University, Northeastern Siam.

**Donald Swearer** is Charles and Harriet Cox McDowell Professor of Religion, Swarthmore College, PA, USA. His recent publications include *The Legend of Queen Cama* with Sommai Premchit (1998), *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (1995), *Me-and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa* (1989), and *For the Sake of the World: The Spirit of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism* with Patrick Henry (1989).

**Ubonrat Siriyuksak** graduated from the University of Hawaii at Honolulu and teaches at the Faculty of Mass Communication, Chulalongkorn University, Siam.

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**Bhikkhu Visalo**, born Paisan Wongvaravisith, graduated from Assumption College and Thammasat University (Bangkok). He has joined the monkhood for approximately 20 rain retreats. At present, he is abbot of Wat Pa Sugato, a forest monastery, in Jayabumi province, northeast Siam.

**Chris Walker** and **Eric Zsebenyi** have both worked as volunteers at the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute and Spirit in Education Movement in Bangkok. Chris is a former editor of *Seeds of Peace*.

**Jonathan Watts** is coordinator of the INEB Think Sangha, a Buddhist style 'think tank' which seeks to develop 'Buddhist' perspectives on contemporary social issues while rooting itself in Buddhist practice. He worked with the INEB Secretariat in Siam from 1990-1993. During this time he came in contact with Ven. Payutto and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's teachings which have remained at the core of his dhamma practice. He now lives in the Tokyo area with his wife, Naomi.

# VI

## Appendices



This 1000 baht bank note was ready to be issued at the time when Dr Puey resigned his governorship of the Central Bank. Hence, his signature does not appear on it.

## Appendix I

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In preparation for the Puey Inter-cultural Forum, we organized an event on his birthday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2001 at the Art and Culture Auditorium, Thammasat University. All messages were delivered in Thai. Unofficial translations are published in the following pages.





# A Note from the Governor of the Bank of Thailand

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M.R. Catumongkol Sonakul

The Minister of Finance, the Chairperson of the Puey Intercultural Forum, and respected guests...It is a great honor for me to be invited here today to deliver a eulogy on an individual who is often heralded as 'the great commoner.'

At present we are facing an economic crisis. The Bank of Thailand must work extra hard to solve or mitigate the economic problems that are attacking the country on every front. This must be done alongside organizational restructuring so that the Bank could operate with optimal efficiency and capacity and take on any economic problems that may emerge in the future.

The problems that we are facing today must be successfully overcome for the sake of the country's continued economic growth. In our quest to find the best solutions to these economic problems and to benefit the country we must always keep in mind the legacy of one individual. That individual is ex-governor Puey. Were he confronting these problems today, what kinds of policy, thinking, and strategy would he come up with to solve them?

Therefore the Bank of Thailand looks up to him as a role model and has used his philosophy and vision as a basis for solving the country's economic problems. We are fully aware that he was a visionary person. He had never wavered in his commitment to realize his vision despite the obstacles. Since he was honest and sincere to his official responsibility, and more importantly to himself, he is worthy of our respect and admiration. It will be difficult to find another individual with comparable qualities.

I will end this eulogy with a poem that ex-governor Puey had written. It best captures his personality.

*The way of a virtuous pandit can neither be bent, nor altered, nor veered.  
He cannot be shifted, or fall backward.  
His mind, body and spirit are thoroughly permeated with the truth.*



# In the Memory of Acharn Puey

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Somkid Jatusipitak, Minister of Finance

Acharn Sulak, Minister Supatra, the Dean, and respected guests... I did not come here to give a talk. Rather I am here to reveal my true feelings. My initial position is that of a Thammasat University alumnus, an alumnus of the university's faculty of economics. Acharn Puey had laid a solid foundation for the faculty of economics, contributing to its success today. And I come here as the minister of finance. Acharn Puey had set an excellent precedent for subsequent finance ministers.

During his lifetime, Acharn Puey pursued many occupations. He was a professor who provided knowledge to his students like a caring father; the director of the budget bureau; the governor of the Bank of Thailand; the minister of finance who helped stabilize and strengthen the country's monetary and financial system; and the dean of Thammasat University who was dedicated to fostering the development of knowledge and human potentials as opposed to materialism.

When I enrolled in Thammasat University during the 14 October 1973 era Acharn Puey was the dean of the university. From that day on, I gradually realized that the successes of Acharn Puey are rooted in five principles.

One, a person must be principled when making any decisions or when working. Reason and principles must be applied when explaining any situation. In particular, the wellbeing of the nation must serve as the underlying principle and reason. Since he was highly concerned about the wellbeing of the nation, a certain kind of policies emerged and Acharn Puey was able to pursue them courageously.

Two, is thinking, reading, or acting on the basis of knowledge, on the basis of information, on the basis of self-reliance prior to relying on others.

The third principle is based on intellectual courage, decisiveness, and selflessness.

Four, one must be honest and sincere. I have never heard any rumors of Acharn Puey doing something unjust.

Lastly, Acharn Puey relied on santi pracha dhamma in order to realize any policy or program. He relied on the power of dhamma and encouraged the nonviolent participation of the people in the policy making process.

Although Acharn is no longer with us, these five principles will remain with us forever. These five principles are especially pertinent today when our country is facing numerous economic, political and social problems. To overcome these problems successfully, state authorities should uphold these five principles.

As minister of finance, I realized the magnitude of responsibilities that I must perform in the present and the future. But I am not overwhelmed by them because Acharn Puey serves as my source of inspiration and confidence. He was full sacrifice and courage, especially his decisiveness in pursuing various policies that were truly beneficial to the nation. I hereby pledge to convince other authority figures to uphold Acharn Puey's principles. I can only hope that the ceremony today will help successfully promote the philosophy of Acharn Puey. Thank you.



# Reminiscences of Acaraya Puey Ungphakorn

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Professor Apichai Pantasen  
Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University

Acharn Sulak, the minister, the dean, and respected guests... We gather here today to pay homage to the late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, a venerable individual and a source of inspiration for us to travel down the path of goodness. He was one of the persons who had trail-blazed this path in a time when doing good deeds faced immense obstacles because the authority was corrupted by moha (ignorance) and kilesa (defilements). Nowadays we have fewer excuses not to travel down this path than Acharn Puey did. He had prepared this path for us. Today we are in the era of the new constitution, which gives priority to people's participation in the policy making process. We are in an unprecedented era that may open the way to the establishment of a democracy based on diversity and santi pracha dhamma as defined by Acharn Puey-who did not live to see the fruits of his labor.

If we merely try to maintain our moral standards so that they are as high as Acharn Puey's, even without struggling against the corrupting forces of power, which are rooted in moha and kilesa, we will be able to reach the state of santi pracha dhamma without much difficulty. We will not attain santi pracha dhamma if we are unable to maintain our moral standards at the level of Acharn Puey's.

Back in the days when I was an assistant professor I received a scholarship to further my education abroad. Before I departed from the country I went to bid farewell to Dr. Puey, who was the dean. I told him that intellectually I would never be able to match him but I could and would compete with him to do good deeds. Doing good deeds requires determination more than intelligence, I reasoned. Anyone can do good deeds. For long what I told Acharn Puey has served as my mission statement. I am aware that so far I have not done as many good deeds as Acharn Puey had done. But as long as I am still alive I will keep on trying. In my view, only if we always keep this mission in our hearts could we be seen as the true admirers of Acharn Puey. We must do more than simply make donations to sustain the special Puey fund, which no doubt is a good thing. In other words, santi pracha dhamma will be meaningful only if we begin to compete with Acharn Puey to perform good deeds.

Why do so many people honor Acharn Puey as a good person and how should we define goodness? Since I am one of the persons who knew Acharn Puey and whom Acharn Puey had related with metta karuna, I will discuss this matter based on first-hand experience. In his opinion,

every human being must be endowed with goodness, truthfulness, and beauty. And he had cultivated or firmly upheld these three elements.

In terms of goodness, anyone who knew Acharn Puey could sense it in him without needing further explanation. His goodness derived from his knowledge and capability. He had served in many important official positions. He was and still is well respected domestically and internationally. At the same time, he was very simple, friendly, sincere, and full of *metta karuna* towards individuals who were more unfortunate than he was. As Snoh Tanbunyin, one of Acharn Puey's close friends and later on his colleague at Thammasat University, said after Acharn Puey was forced into exile: "Acharn Puey has only one fault; that is, he is a commoner." In other words, had Acharn Puey positioned himself as one of the ruling elites at that time—or the "aristocrats and warriors" as Acharn Rangsan put it—he would have been spared from the mishaps in the latter part of his life.

Acharn Puey's colleagues at the faculty of economics, Thammasat University, will be able to recall that Acharn Puey would leave the Dome building—where the dean's office was situated—at around 6 PM. Then he would knock on the office doors of professors who were still working, calling them out to enjoy Happy Hours. We would then gather at his room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the riverside economics building. He would open the cupboard above his bookshelves and proceed to bring out the brandy, whisky, and all kinds of nuts. Then we would start talking about almost everything under the sun, ranging from our daily lives to politics. But there was no overriding theme or topic. After all, the idea of Happy Hours was well to relax and be happy. At about 7 PM we would disperse to finish off our works. At 9 PM if we were still around and had no other preoccupations, Acharn Puey would invite us to have a late supper with him at the nighttime food market near Bussayapan Theater in the Banglampoo area. His favorite dish was fried mussels accompanied by a bottle of beer. We would go home at around 10 PM. Acharn Puey would habitually drop home those of us who lived far from the campus—like myself. As he liked to joke, "Got to send Apichai home so he can brag that the dean is his driver."

Acharn Puey was friendly to everyone he knew. He even knew all the janitors by name. He could easily separate personal relationship from work. In other words, he never resorted to favoritism and his colleagues must never expect it from him. The only things they could expect from him were challenging tasks. He was full of challenging tasks for us to do or think about. These are just some of the goodness of Acharn that I'd like to share with you.

In terms of truthfulness, I'd like to describe Acharn Puey as 'a pure hearted individual.' He never cared about the backgrounds of individuals who tried to befriend him or who worked with him. According to him, a person misbehaves or does something improper because s/he did not know. In other words, everyone is prone to ignorance. Only if s/he knows the truth about everything s/he will not perform improper conducts. Thus the truth must not be denied from the people. They should have the opportunity to appreciate or see the truth. Whether or not that individual would alter his or her improper conduct after knowing the truth and whether or not that individual would turn the knowledge of the truth against him were not matters of concern for Acharn Puey. I have known many leading figures in society. None of them have a heart as pure as Acharn Puey's—if one uses the criterion mentioned above. Perhaps only a few Buddhist monks who lead celibate lives do. Acharn Puey was an embodiment of sincerity and transparency. He not only preached the truth he also lived according to this principle.

On beauty, anyone who knew him can attest to the fact that he loved artistic and cultural productions. He advocated the construction of the Silpa Birasi Art Hall, which has held numerous cultural and artistic exhibitions. To my knowledge, he remains to date the only dean of Thammasat University who encouraged the decoration of the common rooms in the faculty of economics with oil on canvas paintings. Once, I stayed over at Acharn Puey's lodge in University College, Cambridge University. At around 5 PM he would start replying letters written by friends, colleagues, and students while sipping brandy, whisky, beer, or whatever that was available. In the background, he would turn on Thai music to lull him. His favorite musical instrument was the Thai flute. He could play it very well too. His preference for the Thai flute should not be interpreted as his penchant for nationalism. Rather it should be seen as a reflection of his gentleness and appreciation for art and beauty.

In sum, Acharn Puey was endowed with all of the elements which he believed every human being should have: goodness, truthfulness, and beauty. Here I am not even talking about his moral courage and his sacrifices (to the extent of the willingness to risk his life) for the cause of goodness and justice. These are all evident and I need not elaborate on them. Today, the very day we open the Puey Intercultural Forum, we need to talk about a dimension of Acharn Puey that is not that well known—the fact that he was a practicing and socially engaged Buddhist. He saw Buddhism as the tool for national development. This is in fact the reason why we are here today, why we have established the Puey Intercultural Forum.

Evidence for this assertion may be drawn from his 1971 speech entitled “Buddhism and National Development.” It was delivered to monks and lay people at the Mahachulalongkorn University. The essence of that speech is still relevant today and will be even more important for the future, especially in the borderless world of consumerism where money is god and where shopping malls serve as the new temples. Therefore, I would like to summarize some of the important points Acharn Puey made in that speech. Acharn Puey defined national development as follows:

1. A ‘developed’ society must have the capability to benefit its inhabitants in terms of materials, wisdom, and dhamma. He gave primacy to the development of wisdom and dhamma because they contribute to the cultivation of knowledge and beauty in every soul.
2. Individuals in that society must have freedom and independence. The most important freedom is the freedom to pursue good deeds, a freedom that promotes wisdom.
3. Social justice is a prerequisite for solidarity.
4. That society must be built on *metta karuna* because social peace requires the reduction or elimination of social disparities. Acharn Puey often cited the words of Filipino president Ramon Magsaysay: “Those who are born with little should be given a lot by the law.” He saw this as similar to the Buddhist concept of *metta*. But he further elaborated that *metta* is not about sympathy but about the respect for the human dignity of every person. The weak must have the right to demand for special privileges. The *sangha* must participate in national development. His view on this issue is the primary reason why we have established the Puey Intercultural Forum. It may serve as the starting point for a broader and better cooperation between the state and the *sangha* to develop the nation along the lines of wisdom and dhamma—a kind of development where the inclination to perform good deeds is nurtured thus contributing to social solidarity, which is rooted in *metta karuna*. From a western

perspective, this is a competent society with liberty, justice, and equality. Friends, colleagues, and students of Acharn Puey must help foster this relationship.

In conclusion, I'd like to invite you all to do what I believe Acharn Puey would be happy to see; that is, to compete with one another to be good individuals who uphold truthfulness, in particular sincerity and beauty, and gentleness, facilitating the fathoming of the Buddhadhamma. In addition, we need to collaborate with the sangha to develop the country along the lines of *santi pracha dhamma* as Acharn Puey attempted to do.



## Appendix II

# Puey Inter-Cultural Forum

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When Dr Puey Ungphakorn passed away two years ago, among the first few ideas to honour the late statesman was to build him a lifelike statue. But can a statue capture the essence of the great man's deeds and vision—to see his motherland as a land governed by dhamma and peace? Today, the second anniversary of Dr Puey's departure, a different sort of "monument" will be officially launched. Called Puey Sevanakarn (Puey Inter-Cultural Forum), it's a small seminar hall located in a temple, a venue of alternative education in all disciplines, and open to everyone regardless of their social status.

Sulak Sivaraksa, who initiated the project, said the choice of location (Wat Pathum-kongka) was deliberate. As a child, Puey was ordained as a novice there. His ashes were likewise buried underneath a Buddha statue at the same temple. "Moreover, I cherish a dream to see a temple become a community's centre once again. Besides the Puey Inter-Cultural Forum, we will also open the Buddhadasa Library, since Buddhadasa Bhikkhu studied Buddhist scriptures here before he returned to launch the Garden of Liberation (Suan Mokkh) in his hometown in 1932. Both Acharn Buddhadasa and Acharn Puey served as guiding stars, facilitating our navigation through the dhammic and secular worlds respectively." Since June this year, the Puey Forum has played host to several non-mainstream events, ranging from a talk on alternative media to an experimental play on infanticide. Next month's topics include a workshop on cultural management.

As Bangkok becomes increasingly cluttered with mega-shopping centres and nightly entertainment spots, a humble platform for those dissatisfied with a reckless lifestyle, to aid in the search for an alternative, is thus refreshing.

Historically, the Puey Forum is a successor to a pioneering venue called Paritat Sevana, meaning the group on reviewing society, also launched by Sulak in the late '60s. Back then, progressive-minded students and intellectuals suffered political suppression under the dictatorial regimes of Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn. They resorted to exchanging their ideas—from arts to politics to international relations—at a mobile forum which move around to various locations.

Dr Puey was one of the guest speakers. Other prominent names include Sanya



Dhammasakdi, Direk Jayanama, Chetana Nagavajara and Angkarn Kalayanapongse.

A number of Thai intellectuals attributed the subsequent activism among university students that led to the fall of Thanom's military government to this small, but not inconsequential, effort.

Dr Wichai Chokewiwat, among the first generations of Paritat Sevana "graduates", said the Paritat Sevana forum did not only cultivate a critical mind among its participants, but also set a model of an all-embracing education that stresses action and moral courage.

"The number of participants might have been small, but that was exactly what helped us to learn from each other in a more profound way. The (mainstream) university, then and now, only teaches students to accumulate and process data, but not how to achieve genuine knowledge, and in a spiritual sense, wisdom in life," said the doctor, currently heading the Food and Drug Administration. Dr Uthai Dulyakasem, his contemporary and a well-respected scholar in education reform, shared a similar view. The liberal approach of the Paritat Sevana forum—everyone was treated equally as an independent intellectual—reflects a genuine "child-centred" learning philosophy, now fashionable jargon among educators.

But are the young nowadays still brimming with curiosity to question the status quo? Can the Puey Forum become a new think tank to rekindle the sparks of decades ago? Perhaps one has to search for inspiration from Dr Puey himself. After fleeing into exile following the October 6, 1976 massacre of university students, he continued to express his confidence in his compatriots' ability to realise peace—"I do not know whether we can achieve it. But whether we can or we cannot achieve it, we must achieve it."

From "In Concrete Memory of Dr Puey" by Vasana Chinvarakorn, *Bangkok Post*, 28 July 2001

For further information on the schedule of activities, please contact Puey Inter-Cultural Forum, 666 Charoen Nakhon Rd., Klongsan, Bangkok 10600 Tel. +662-4389331-2, Fax +662-8601277, [www.sulak-sivaraksa.org](http://www.sulak-sivaraksa.org)



bust by Prawat Raksayam at the Puey Inter-Cultural Forum



## Appendix IV

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### List of our publications

1. ***Angkarn Kalyanapong: A Contemporary Siamese Poet.*** (US\$ 5)  
By Angkarn Kalyanapong (Editor: Michael Wright), 82 Pages
2. ***Dhammic Socialism.*** (US\$ 6)  
By Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Chief translator and editor Donald K. Swearer, Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, Bangkok 1986, 142 Pages
3. ***Radical Conservatism.*** paperback (US\$ 40)  
A volume in celebration of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's 84<sup>th</sup> year written by: Thich Nhat Hanh, Gabriel Lafitte, Phra Debvedhi, Bhikkhu Sumedho, Lewis R. Lancaster, Sulak Sivaraksa, John A. McConnell, G. Lubsantseren and David W. Chappell etc, 576 Pages
4. ***Modern Thai Monarchy and Cultural Politics.*** (US\$ 15)  
Edited by David Streckfuss, Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, 180 Pages
5. ***The Dissolution of the Sparkling Bridge.*** (US\$ 10)  
Poems by Frank Finney
6. ***Mindful Mediation.*** (US\$ 20)  
A handbook for Buddhist peace makers, by John A. McConnell, 385 Pages Paperback
7. ***Entering the Realm of Reality.*** (US\$ 15)  
Towards Dhammic Societies. Edited by Jonathan Watts, Alan Senauke, Santikaro Bhikkhu. INEB, 291 Pages
8. ***Life Without a Choice.*** (US\$ 15)  
By Karuna Kusalasaya; Published by Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation & Thai Inter- Religious Commission for Development Bangkok 1991, 303 Pages
9. ***Essays on Thai Folklore.*** (US\$ 15)  
By Phya Anuman Rajadhon (new edition), 422 Pages
10. ***Popular Buddhism in Siam and Other Essays on Thai Studies.*** paperback (US\$ 15)  
By Phya Anuman Rajadhon, Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development/ Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation Bangkok 1986, 216 Pages
11. ***Some Traditions of the Thai.*** (US\$ 10)  
By Phya Anuman Rajadhon, 196 Pages
12. ***Wishes and Lies.*** (US\$ 15)  
Feature Stories from Thailand by Pravit Rojanaphruk, Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute/ Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 168 Pages

13. ***Real Life at Moo Baan Dek.*** paperback (US\$ 10)  
By Rajani & Pibhop Dhongchai, Edited by Ellen Coahey and Piphop Udommittipong,  
FFC Publishing House, 157 Pages
14. ***Seeds of Hope.*** (US\$ 20)  
By Sanitsuda Ekafchi, Published by Thai Development Support Committee, 230 Pages
15. ***Buddhist Perception for Desirable Societies in the Future.*** (US\$ 15)  
Papers prepared for the United Nations University, edited by Sulak Sivaraksa et al.  
Thai Inter- Religious Commission for Development, Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation,  
1993, 288 Pages
16. ***A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society.*** (US\$ 15)  
Collected articles by a concerned Thai intellectual, Sulak Sivaraksa. Thai Inter-Religious  
Commission for Development, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing 1994, 380 Pages
17. ***Five Cycles of Friendship.*** (US\$ 5)  
By Friends of Sulak Sivaraksa to honor his 60th birthday anniversary, Suksit Siam, Bangkok  
1993, 132 Pages
18. ***Looking to America to Solve Thailand's Problems.*** (US\$ 5)  
By Phra Rajavaramuni, Translation by Grant A. Olson
19. ***Loyalty Demands Dissent.*** paperback (US\$ 15)  
Autobiography of a Socially Engaged Buddhist, by S. Sivaraksa, Parallax Press
20. ***The Quest for a Just Society.*** (US\$ 6)  
The Legacy and Challenge of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu edited by Sulak Sivaraksa, Thai  
Inter-Religious Commission for Development & Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, Bangkok 1994
21. ***Religion and Development.*** (US\$ 10)  
By Sulak Sivaraksa, Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1987,  
84 Pages
22. ***Searching for Asian Cultural Integrity.*** (US\$ 10)  
Papers from Inter-Cultural Seminar in Bangkok 1990, edited by Sulak Sivaraksa et al,  
222 Pages
23. ***Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society.*** (US\$ 10)  
Sulak Sivaraksa. Foreword by H.H.The Dalai Lama. Parallax Press/International Network  
of Engaged Buddhist/ Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation 1992, 186 Pages
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Institute & Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, Bangkok 2533/1990,  
371 Pages
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By Sulak Sivaraksa: A Controversial Siamese, Thai Inter-Religious Commission for  
Development, Bangkok 1998, 206 Pages
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mation;  
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28. ***Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium.*** paperback (US\$ 38)  
Sulak Sivaraksa Hon. Editor Sathirakoses - Nagapradipa Foundation, May 2542, 536 Pages  
Hard cover (US\$ 60)

**The following titles are published in honor of  
Mr.Pridi Banomyong's Centenary on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2000-2001.**

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by Luang Pradist Manudharm (Pridi Banomyong) US\$ 12
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by Pridi Banomyong US\$ 12
5. ***Retracing the Path of an Idealistic Individual: From the Heart of Grandfather to All Idealistic Persons Working for the Common People*** (Komol Keemthong Publishing House, 2001) US\$ 4
6. ***A Siamese for All Seasons: Collected Articles by and about Puey Ungphakorn***  
Fifth Edition, November 2000  
Komol Keemthong Foundation  
This collection of essays represents both the writings of Dr Puey Ungphakorn and tributes to his life and work. Dr Puey writes on his vision for democracy, development, peace and human rights in Siam. He also writes of his experiences during the Second World War and the bloody events of 6 October 1976. Those who remember him write of a man who was truly humble and devoted his life to benefiting others.
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taken at the Bank of Thailand in 1972  
by Lance Woodruff

Dr. Puey's life-long integrity and dedication saved Siam from being declared loser of World War II and from further economic demise accelerated under the grip of successive dictatorial regimes in 1950's and 1960's. Despite his enormous contributions he was forced to live abroad in exile until his death. His legacies remain following the three-pronged principle, *santi* (peace), *pracha* (public participation), *dhamma* (righteousness) and inspire many of the present avant-garde academics and activists working in various fields including political science, economics, democratisation, rural development and environmentalism. Hopefully, articles by learned scholars in this volume shall help readers to have a deeper understanding of *Santi Pracha Dhamma*.





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