THAI BUDDHIST SOCIAL THEORY

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BY

TAVIVAT PUNTARIGVIVAT

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The World Buddhist University (WBU) is very pleased to publish *Thai Buddhist Social Theory*, an impressive research work by Dr. Tavivat Puntarigvivat, the Director of the WBU Institute of Research and Development. This is one of many publications initiated and supported by WBU in order to introduce the valuable teachings of the Buddha and the progress of Buddhist communities to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Especially, on the auspicious occasion of the 100th Birthday Anniversary of His Holiness, Somdej Phra Ānāsaṃsvāra, the living Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Thailand, on 3 October 2013, the WBU truly expects that the presentation and distribution of this book may be taken as gift for all readers in the celebration.

*Thai Buddhist Social Theory* attempts to give an academic analysis that Thai Buddhism is a dynamic religion in economic, political, and social environments. The author does not fix his idea with traditional and normative interpretations of the Buddhist teachings in the Buddhist Scriptures but rather considers many factors in human life.
which effect variation of thought and practices in different Buddhist communities.

On behalf of the World Buddhist University, may I express my appreciation to the author and all the WBU staff who work hard together in order to bring this book to a good success.

Professor Noranit Setabutr
Acting Rector
The World Buddhist University
Preface

This book is the result of a research project which studies the social phenomena of Buddhism in Thailand. It is an attempt to present a social theory of Thai Buddhism by critically analyzing the various aspects of Buddhism in Thai society from a socio-political perspective.

*Thai Buddhist Social Theory* covers such topics as the characteristics of Thai religions, reform of Thai Buddhism, and schools of Thai Buddhism. It also includes Buddhist social theories such as Buddhadasa’s Theory of Dhammic Socialism, Buddhist Economic Theory, and Buddhist Social Ethics. Buddhist Liberation Theology is presented as a provocative term to address socio-political problems from a Thai Buddhist perspective. Buddhist Theory of Human Nature is introduced as a focal point to compare and contrast the major schools of Mahayana, Vajrayana, and Theravada Buddhism. Theory of Interfaith Dialogue is also included to analyze Thai social ethical theory as well as to articulate the Theory of “Cause and Effect” in Thai Buddhism.

The life and works of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993), the great Buddhist philosopher and a leading
reformist figure, are introduced to present his reform of Thai Buddhism and his theory of Dhammic Socialism. Another great Thai Buddhist thinker and monk, Prayudh Payutto, whose main contribution is a critique of Western thought, is substantially referred to in Buddhist Economic Theory. In presenting schools of Thai Buddhism, a unique Dynamic Meditation school, as taught by Luangpor Teean (1911-1988), is elucidated as a school of “Sudden Enlightenment” in the Thai Theravada Buddhist context.

It is hoped that *Thai Buddhist Social Theory* contributes to a new social theoretical perspective on the study of Thai Buddhism, and that this book is proved useful for Buddhist scholars as well as those who are interested in understanding Buddhism and Thai society.

**Dr. Tavivat Puntarigvivat**
Director
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Chapter 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIONS IN THAI SOCIETY

The characteristics of religions in Thai society will be explored from two perspectives, syncretism of Thai religions and socio-politics in Thai Buddhism. The syncretism of Thai religions includes the elements from Theravada Buddhism, Brahmanism and Animism. For socio-politics in Thai Buddhism, the relationship between Theravada Buddhism and the Thai state will be presented. Three forms of Thai Buddhism will be analyzed from a socio-political perspective: Establishment Buddhism, Reformist Buddhism, and Thai Supernaturalism. The analysis shows how Buddhism will be shaped by different social classes to the complication of the socio-political situation in contemporary Thailand.

1.1 Syncretism of Thai Religions

Religious tradition in any society can be understood by the distinction between “great tradition” and “little tradition.” Great tradition, according to Robert Redfield, is the culture of the “great community” of priests, theologians, and literary men. Little tradition, on the contrary, is the culture of the “little community” of peasants.
Viewed from this “great tradition” perspective, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia is Theravada. The popular religion, the synthesis between Buddhism and non-Buddhist elements, in these countries is therefore “little tradition” from Redfield’s analysis. Yet, anthropologists have argued that the Buddhism of these countries is distinctively “Sri Lankan,” “Burmese,” “Thai,” “Laotian,” and “Cambodian.” This poses a methodological question to Redfield’s theory.

To solve this problem, Gananath Obeyesekere proposes a new way of analysis from the great tradition and little tradition perspective. Obeyesekere uses the same methodology but with the different levels of application. He argues that the great tradition is the religion of Theravada Buddhism of the greater community of monks, intellectuals, and scholars. The little tradition, on the other hand, is the religion of the masses (or little community) in those Theravada countries.

From Obeyesekere’s analysis, the religion of Myanmar or the religion of Thailand or the religion of Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is the “little tradition” called Burmese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, or Sinhalese Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism as a doctrine embodied in the Pali texts, studied and discussed by monks, scholars, and intellectuals, becomes the “great tradition.” From this new analysis, the “little tradition” in Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka can reconcile with the observation of
anthropologists mentioned above.

Obeyesekere’s methodology and Thomas Kirsch’s analysis of the complexity in Thai religion will be used to discuss the nature of religious syncretism in popular Thai religion and to analyze the reform movements of Buddhism in modern Thai history.

From Obeyesekere’s “great tradition” perspective, Thai Buddhism is Theravada in the sense that there are at least a number of Thai monks, scholars, intellectuals, and students who study the Pali texts from the doctrinal or theoretical point of view. The doctrine or theory based on the Pali canon and texts—including the commentaries studied by those Thai Buddhists—is Theravada Buddhism within the Thai religious context.

From Obeyesekere’s “little tradition” perspective, Thai Buddhism is the religious complexity composed of many elements, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Although to many Western scholars, these components of Thai religion are contradictory, Thai religious believers do not find contradiction in their belief system or practice.

Ames made the distinction between Buddhism and “magical-animism,” whereas Spiro distinguished Buddhism from “supernaturalism” or simply “animism.” Kirsch, however, distinguishes three components in Thai religion: Buddhism, Brahmanistic component, and animistic component.
A. Theravada Buddhism in Thai Religion

In contemporary Thailand, Theravada Buddhism is recognized as the state religion and enjoys special government support. Although the Thai constitutions have guaranteed freedom of religion, the Thai king must be a Buddhist and a defender of religion. Buddhism is so intimate to Thai people that there is a close link between being a Thai and a Buddhist.

In Thai society, Buddhism influences not only the Buddhist elites, but also the mass of Thai people. Buddhist values, conceptions, and attitudes penetrate almost all aspects of Thai life. While intellectuals participate in Buddhism from a doctrinal perspective, the ordinary people contact Buddhism through tradition and rituals of merit-making (tham-bun) such as almsgiving, ordination, “kathin,” and the like.

Even though ordinary people may not know or understand the sophisticated Buddhist doctrines, their participation in merit-making rituals serves as symbolic action for the Buddhist values and ideas. The identification of Thai laymen with Buddhism is very general. In rituals they learn that the path to liberation is to give up attachments and move upward on their way to enlightenment.

In modern Thailand, the sangha organization has been increasingly formalized and centralized, along with the bureaucratic system of the Thai government. The sangha penetrates more deeply into all classes of Thai society than
the government itself. This is why the government has been trying to utilize the sangha in its efforts to create national unity, to seek the sangha support for those programs relating to economic development and political integration.

**B. Brahmanistic Elements in Thai Religion**

There are two main components of Brahmanistic elements, according to Kirsch, in Thai religion: “Court” Brahmanism and “Folk” Brahmanism. Court Brahmanism is closely tied to royal institutions and the capital city. Folk Brahmanism is more widely diffused with people throughout the country.

Court Brahmanism, probably derived from the Khmer kingdom, was used to promote the prestige of the Thai monarchy. The Thai court adopted many Brahmanistic rituals focusing on the kings and other aspects of society such as agriculture. The two main rituals, which have been practiced until the present time, are the “divine kingship ritual” (*Chat Mongkon*) and the “first plowing” (*Phuet Monkon*). Court Brahmans and astrologers still play some role at the royal court.

Folk Brahmanistic elements are pervasive in Thai religion, both urban and rural. Attitudes toward Folk Brahman practices are generally positive. Folk Brahman component of Thai religion serves to articulate individuals and local segments of Thai society with the larger Buddhist value system.
C. Animistic Elements in Thai Religion

The term “animism” in Thai religion refers to the belief and practice relating to “spirits” (*phi*). According to Landon and LeMay, animism in contemporary Thailand appears fragmentary, disorganized, and unsystematic. Animism might be viewed as providing a “symbolic opposition” to Buddhist conceptions of order. The spirits provide an image of chaos and disorder which might exist if a Buddhist order did not prevail.

Among Thai people there is a general belief that monks are immune from spirit attacks, and Buddhist symbols, chants, holy water, and inscriptions may be used to overcome the threats of spirits or to disperse them. There is also a belief that spirits cannot harm any truly devout Buddhist, either lay or monk.

1.2 Socio-Politics in Thai Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism, as a key social institution, has played an implicit, yet important role in the Thai political system. It provides an explanation for the place of human beings in the cosmos and the social world. Since the Sukhothai period in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this social cosmology has been used to provide a theoretical justification for Thai political institutions. Despite significant changes in the structure of the state and its political forms over the past century, Buddhism continues to fulfill its historical legitimating function—giving meaning,
significance, and authority to political institutions in the secular domain—in Thailand today. Each new political regime has attempted to restructure the Thai Buddhist order in its own political image in order to maintain a legitimating parallel between the religious domain and the secular power structure. In this section, I will present Buddhism and the socio-political structure of Thai society. I will first present the relationship between Theravada Buddhism and the Thai state. Then Thai Buddhism will be analyzed from a socio-political perspective with an emphasis on the role of reformist Buddhism.

A. Theravada Buddhism and the Thai State

Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, represents a relatively conservative tradition in Buddhism. It has sought to preserve, in the long history of its own tradition, the Buddha’s teaching and form of monastic life without any significant change. In particular, doctrinally the Theravada tradition has been determined primarily by the formulations of the Third Buddhist Council (viz. the Kathāvatthu) and the commentaries of the fifth century philosopher, Buddhaghosa (viz. Visuddhimāgga).

The high degree of centralized control by the Thai state over the teaching and administration of Buddhism in the past century-and-a-half has succeeded in conferring on Buddhism the status of being the national ideology. As
Peter Jackson points out, all of the competing political groups in Thailand today, except the Christian and Muslim minorities, claim allegiance to Buddhism. Debates about capitalism versus socialism, authoritarianism versus democracy, and the form of political and economic development are often couched in Buddhist terms. Thai Buddhism’s historical legitimating function, together with the increasing control of the Sangha (order of monks) by the Thai state and the systematic suppression of subversive expressions of the religion in the past century, has contributed to the unique institutional status of Buddhism in modern Thai society.

The recent history of Thai Buddhism is a history of attempts by competing factions of the elite to gain control over the interpretation and administration of Buddhism, the key religious symbol of political legitimacy. This struggle within Buddhism has been waged on two fronts. The first front in this conflict has been at the level of formal state control over the administration and functioning of the sangha. The history of official Thai Buddhism concerns the long conflict between the Thammayut and Mahanikai Orders of monks. In contrast, the second front of this conflict has occurred at the level of debates on doctrinal interpretation and religious practice between competing sects and movements within the religion. It involves some of the most prominent Buddhist movements sponsored by the various factions of the Thai elite.
The history of Thai Buddhism, argues Krajang Nanthapho, reflects the history of social conflict in Thailand. He explains the recent history of Thai Buddhism in terms of a conflict between what he calls the feudal and dictatorial forces—that is, the political and economic establishment—and the supporters of democracy—that is, the professionals and middle classes. He maintains that this political conflict is mirrored in the conflict between the establishment-aligned Thammayut Order of monks and the popular Mahanikai Order, now broadly aligned with the middle class.

The Thai people in general believe that the welfare of the country is intimately related to the welfare of the Dhamma, the teaching and practice of the Buddha’s message of salvation. According to this belief, the Dhamma prospers when the Sangha (order of monks) maintains a strict ascetic practice (patipatti) guided in the vinaya (discipline) and accurately upholds and interprets the teachings of the Buddha (pariyatti) recorded in the Tipitaka (Pali Canon). This belief in the interrelationship between the welfare of Buddhism and of the country is linked with the belief that the monarch derives his right to rule from his possession of great religious merit.

The king’s merit and accordingly the right to rule were demonstrated both by the well-being of the state and by the well-being of the Sangha as measured by such criteria as the number of well-maintained and functioning
monasteries, the strictness of the monk’s ascetic practices, and the monk’s scholarship in the scriptures. Thai monarchs consequently intervened in Sangha affairs to ensure that the religious symbol of their right to rule was maintained: enforcing proper practice among monks, promoting the scholarly study and teaching of the scriptures, and building or renovating monasteries, religious sanctuaries, and images of the Buddha.

The history of Theravada Buddhism during the Bangkok period (1782 to the present) is dominated by an ever increasing control over the order of monks and the teaching and practice of the Dhamma by the state. The state imposed organizational structure on the Sangha, its legal guidelines and administrative procedures in the three Sangha Acts of 1902, 1941, and 1962; a fourth was presented to the Thai House of Representatives in 1975 but was not acted upon after the coup of October 1976.

The domain of the Buddhist Sangha (sasanacakka) is regarded as a separate and distinct “world” from that of political and mundane affairs (anacakka). Politically the Thai state utilizes Buddhism to draw its legitimacy from the spiritual purity or worldly detachment of the Sangha. At the same time the state enforces the separation of the Sangha from political affairs to ensure that the Sangha does not become an alternative, competing power base. For example, monks are not allowed to vote or to stand as candidates at elections. The risk of the politicization of the
Sangha is witnessed at times of political crisis in Thai history, such as the military campaigns of the monk Phra Fang after the Burmese destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767 and the rise of political monks in the 1973-76 period.

Because of the intensive and extensive state control over the Sangha, historically Thai Buddhism has not had an independent existence apart from the state and has responded to, rather than initiated, social and political change. The independent exercise of authority or initiative by monks in the social or political domains has generally been regarded as subversive and has usually been forcefully suppressed as in the case of Khruba Sriwichai and the more recent case of Phothirak (Bodhiraksa), the founder of the Santi Asok movement. Furthermore, monks not sympathetic to state policies are structurally excluded from senior administrative positions within the Sangha, just as monks supportive of the regime in power receive material and career advancement in the Sangha hierarchy.

B. Thai Buddhism: A Socio-Political Perspective

From a socio-political perspective, three different forms of Thai Buddhism can be distinguished. These are, according to Peter Jackson, the metaphysical form of Buddhism emphasized by the establishment, the rationalist form of Buddhism espoused by the middle class, and the magical and supernatural form of the religion adhered to by many peasants and urban workers. Because there tends to be a relationship between the form of the religion adhered
to and the socio-economic position of the adherent, religious and doctrinal debates also tend to reflect the political conflicts and competition for power between antagonistic sections of Thai society. I will use Peter Jackson’s categories to characterize and schematize Thai Buddhism and its role and relationship to the various social classes in the Thai political economy.

1. Establishment Buddhism

The interpretation of Buddhism supported by the Thai establishment is the traditional royal form historically used to legitimize the institution of the absolute monarchy. This royal form of Buddhism places particular emphasis on the notion of kāmma (action). Ethically and ontologically the Theory of Kamma related a person’s present states of well-being or suffering to the moral or immoral quality of his or her past actions. This theory, moreover, was subsequently developed into a sociological theory so that upper class status, wealth and power was equated to past morality, and lower social class status with its accompanying poverty and powerlessness to immorality in previous lives. Those who occupy the most advantageous positions in the social hierarchy were regarded as having been the most moral in previous lives and so the most deserving to rule in this life. The king was traditionally regarded as the most meritorious person in the kingdom and so was placed at the apex of the social and political order.
This traditional explanation of Thai social order was also supported by a metaphysical cosmology. This cosmology was systematized in the Traiphum Phra Ruang (Traibhumikatha), a religious text attributed to the Thai King Lithai of the late Sukhothai period. The Traiphum taught that just as the gods Brahma, Ishvara, and their divine attendants (devatā) occupied the higher heavens because of their great merit, so the king and the aristocracy occupied the higher ranks of the social order because of their greater merit. With the later influence of Khmer Brahmanism upon the Ayutthaya court, the Thai king also came to be endowed with a semi-divine status. Brahmanical rituals symbolically linking the monarchy with the gods were integrated into the royal religious cults.

After the 1932 democratic Revolution, which radically transformed Thai politics from an absolute monarchy to a more democratic form of government, the royal form of Buddhism was temporarily out of official favor. In the late 1950s, however, royal Buddhism was rehabilitated under Sarit Thanarat as a convenient legitimating symbol of his political authoritarianism. Royal Buddhism, which provides an interpretation of the cosmic and social orders justifying a hierarchical and pyramidal structure of political authority, has continued to be supported by the Thai establishment. Peter Jackson has rightly commented that establishment support for the monarchy and the relationship between establishment forms
of Buddhism and the monarchy should not be interpreted as monarchist in the traditional sense but as the manipulation of a historical symbol for political purpose. Donald K. Swearer has observed that the ritual functions of the monastic order also serve to legitimate political, social and economic hierarchies. As Swearer comments:

On the one hand, the ritualistic orientation of the function of the monk tends to characterize the role of the Sangha as largely ceremonial. Monks spend a great deal of time chanting at auspicious occasions such as the opening of a department store or at the dedication of a new industrial site. On the other hand, the ritual function of the monk tends, in many situations, to make him little more than a magician with the power and ritual knowledge which can promote worldly success and good luck.¹

The most notorious example of an “establishment” monk is Bhikkhu Kittiwuttho. While Kittiwuttho is not a member of any establishment group by birth, he has managed to attract a significant and influential following among members of the establishment by espousing conservative Buddhist interpretations and by cultivating the friendship and support of influential patrons. Kittiwuttho has obtained a clerical title and financial support to fund

his various projects based at the Chittaphawan College for monks which he founded in Chonburi province in the late 1960s when Thailand was under direct military dictatorship. In the 1970s Kittiwuttho became a highly visible pro-military and anti-democratic figure who interpreted Buddhist doctrine to justify the military suppression of pro-democratic Thais. In the 1980s and 1990s, popular antipathy towards military authoritarianism and the acceptance of democracy as the only acceptable political ideology for Thailand together preclude explicit reference to the virtues of dictatorship or oligarchical rule expounded by Establishment Buddhism.

2. Reformist Buddhism

A first encounter between the traditional Thai Buddhist and Western worldviews occurred in the nineteenth century. Feeling pressure to counter Christianity’s increasing influence, Prince Mongkut (reign, 1851-1868) introduced Western rationalism into Buddhism to make it more logical and secure. With a certain amount of demythification, he believed the Buddhist texts could stand up to Christianity and Western science and form the basis for a modern religion. The rationalist and anti-metaphysical aspects of Mongkut’s religious reforms in the 1830s and 1840s, however, introduced a contradiction into Buddhist hierarchical metaphysics. While he strictly used Western rationalism to criticize the indigenous Thai Supernaturalism, Mongkut did not fully utilize it in his treatment of the
ontological kammic explanation of social hierarchy. Furthermore, when he became king he continued to support Establishment Buddhism, with its metaphysical beliefs, to legitimate his throne and political power. Thus he left his religious rationalism incomplete. Mongkut’s religious reforms and his establishment of the Thammayut movement within the Thai Sangha occurred at the same time as economic, political, and cultural reforms in Thailand.

Mongkut’s criticisms of local and regional religious beliefs were taken up by the royal-sponsored Thammayut Order during the reign of his son and successor, King Chulalongkorn, as part of the process of centralizing political power and undermining the religious and cultural bases of the traditional regional elites. Peter Jackson has observed that the partial rationalism of Mongkut’s interpretations of Buddhism sits uneasily with the rehabilitated metaphysical beliefs supported by the Thai establishment. This is because Mongkut’s incomplete rationalism retains the potential of becoming a complete rationalism that could threaten the hierarchical metaphysics of royal Buddhism. Mongkut’s incomplete rationalism, which repudiated traditional Thai Supernaturalism but left the metaphysical royal form of Buddhism used to legitimate the monarchy largely intact, has been criticized by middle-class professionals and intellectuals. The acceptance of scientific empiricism has led new reformers to reject both supernatural and metaphysical interpretations of Buddhist
doctrines involving belief in spirits and deities. Donald K. Swearer defines reformism in the following way:

Reformism takes modernity seriously but not at the expense of the rejection of the religious tradition. It is basically a reinterpretation of the religious system in the light of a variety of changes on both the social and personal levels. Looked at from the perspective of the concept of rationalization, reformism might be said to be the attempt to transform the particular cultural and institutional moorings which had characterized the tradition in order for its essential (and, hence, universal) truth to be reinterpreted in the light of a new existential situation.²

Reformist Buddhism is based on a thorough demythologization of the religion’s doctrines and a reduction of metaphysical realities to psychological states of mind or to mere metaphors of states of wisdom (paññā) or salvific states (nibbāna). For example, the prominent reformist monk Buddhadasa maintains that the terms “heaven” (sugati, svārga) and “hell” (dugati, naraka) in the Buddhist scriptures are merely metaphores for mental states of pleasure and of suffering. Similarly, Buddhadasa argues that references to heavenly realms such as the heavens of “sensuality,” of “form,” and of “no-form,” and the woeful states of “hell,” “hungry ghosts,” and “cowardly demons”

² Swearer, “Dhammic Socialism,” p. 79.
do not denote actual supernatural realms but rather refer to human beings who experience either “heavenly” states of pleasure or “hellish” states of suffering. This antimeta-physical interpretation of Buddhist doctrine is associated with an emphasis on human spiritual life in this world here and now. While Nibbana has traditionally been regarded as a spiritual goal appropriate for only a few ascetic monks, Buddhadasa and other reformists maintain that Nibbana should be a universally accessible goal for all, both monks and laity.

The religious reformists justify their empirical view of Buddhism by rejecting metaphysical interpretations of the post-canonical commentaries as non-Buddhist or as Brahmanical accretions which obscure the true teachings of the Buddha. Instead, they turn to the Buddhist scriptures in the Sutta-Pitaka and Vinaya-Pitaka and claim that only the words of the Buddha recorded there provide an accurate picture of the true original teachings. While the reformists do not reject the Sangha as such or the tradition of renunciate ordination, they are critical of the state-imposed Sangha administrative system and of the links between senior administrative monks and the establishment. Furthermore, reformists demand that social and political structures be founded on Buddhist ethics based on notions of equity and justice.

Peter Jackson argues that Buddhist reformists emphasize ethical practices which can be regarded as
promoting the personal qualities valued by the middle class as requisites for commercial success in the market-place. Jackson claims that many Buddhist reformists emphasize a this-worldly asceticism and contentment with a frugal life-style. However, this asceticism and frugality is not associated with inactivity but is linked with calls to productive and fruitful activity in the world. Such emphases on work and frugality can be regarded as providing a justification for the accumulation of wealth that is required for capitalist investment by middle-class entrepreneurs. That is, the doctrine of this-worldly asceticism and religiously inspired work adhered to by the Thai Buddhist reformist middle class provides a religious justification for the commercial activities of the new business groups who must forgo immediate consumption in order to accumulate the capital required for investment in their enterprises. The reformist religion of the Thai middle class can thus be interpreted as representing the development of a Buddhist legitimatory system for Thai capitalism.

If capitalism in Thailand is, as claimed by Jackson, based on the principle of this-worldly asceticism in Thai Buddhism, capitalism should be developed and has been prosperous in Thai society since Sukhothai period because Buddhism has flourished throughout Thai history. But, in fact, Thai capitalism has developed just recently within recent decades. And, if capitalism in Thailand is based on the Buddhist this-worldly asceticism and frugality, then
Thai people under modern capitalism would not have spent for enjoyment and luxuries so carelessly that Thailand faced the financial crisis of 1997. So there are differences between the reformist Buddhism of the nascent Thai middle class and the Protestantism during the Industrial Revolution in Europe.

This relationship between religion and the economic and social life in modern culture was first studied by the well-known German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). In his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber studies the psychological conditions which made possible the development of Western capitalism. He analyzes the connection between the spread of Calvinism and a new attitude toward the pursuit of wealth in post-Reformation Europe and England. In 17th-century Calvinism, the resulting profits and wealth proved that one was blessed by God and included in those whom God has chosen to be saved. Proof of being included among the “elect” required a life of “good works”–now seen as works in the “worldly sphere.” The dramatic increase in profits and prosperity was spent not for enjoyment and luxuries, but was mainly reinvested in one’s work and business leading to still greater profits and prosperity; thus, the rise of capitalism. This was an attitude in Protestantism which permitted, encouraged–even sanctified–the human quest for prosperity.
Peter Jackson observes that middle-class reformists criticize as corrupt the continuation of traditional patronage systems in Thai society and the interference by the political and bureaucratic authorities in the modern Thai economy. Such criticisms represent an ethical evaluation of the attempts of the middle class to free the Thai economy from political intervention and the rigidities imposed by the patronage system, and so also represent an attempt to establish the economy as an independent field of activity operating according to its own internal laws of exchange.

In the past decades, the reformist rejection of metaphysical Establishment Buddhism, which is often disparagingly called Brahmanism, has also been developed into a political critique of centralized, authoritarian forms of government symbolized by the notion of the absolute monarch. The reformists attempt to undermine the legitimacy and validity of Establishment Buddhism by maintaining that it is tainted with Brahmanism and other non-Buddhist elements. It is claimed that the introduction of these non-Buddhist elements was related to the efforts of the monarchy to incorporate the medieval Khmer tradition of the god-king into the legitimatory ideology of the Thai monarchy.

The reformist interpretations of Buddhism emphasizes the direct access of the individual to the ultimate reality of Nibbāna. This view of the universal relevance of Nibbāna parallels the desire for a democratic political
system in which individuals, particularly the middle class, have more direct access to political power. Those who emphasize the traditional supernatural and cosmological aspects of Buddhism also tend to emphasize the centralization of power under either the monarch or the military. On the contrary, those who criticize the traditional Buddhist cosmology and Supernaturalism in favor of a psychological interpretation of Buddhism, also tend to criticize the centralization of political power in favor of democracy.

Buddhism is the only indigenous Thai theoretical system capable of being formed into the ideological basis of an alternative socio-political structure. Consequently, Buddhist justifications for democracy, economic development, human rights and women’s rights represent attempts to use an acceptable indigenous expression of the middle class’ political, social, and economic interests. As Jackson points out, religious rationalism and political democracy then are the basic elements of the alternative ideology which the Thai middle class uses to criticize the establishment and to promote its position in Thai society and political life.

3. Thai Supernaturalism

Reformist monks criticize Supernaturalism (saiyasat) as being irrational and superstitious. Thai Supernaturalism’s emphasis on supernatural powers and influences is totally at
odds with the rationalist and empirical interpretation of reformist Buddhism. Reformist monks reject all magic and supernaturalism outright. However, monks aligned with the establishment are often prepared to concede a minor place to Supernaturalism within Thai Buddhism.

Because of its individualistic emphasis on personal protective power, Thai Supernaturalism is seen as undermining the collective or national identity nurtured by the Buddhist Sangha. Supernaturalism is also regarded as weakening the authority of Buddhism and as threatening its legitimatory function in Thai society. Furthermore, the local spirits of Thai Supernaturalism are regarded as free agents independent of human control whose actions and involvement with human beings are often unpredictable. As Peter Jackson has observed, on the one hand, Establishment Buddhists reject Supernaturalism because its local and unpredictable character, often tied to specific geographical locations or natural phenomena, lacks the unifying quality required of a national ideological system capable of focusing the sentiments and loyalties of diverse communities upon the political center of the Thai monarchy. On the other hand, reformist middle-class Buddhists reject Supernaturalism because the unpredictability of its source of power makes it unsuitable as a legitimating ideology for a highly structured modern Thai society.

Although I share the common view of many Thai and some Western scholars on Thai Buddhism that Peter
Jackson’s analyses of the relationship between Buddhism and Thai politics are oversimplified, overgeneralized, and at some points inaccurate, his social class analysis is useful for the socio-political study of Thai Buddhism. Jackson’s analysis reveals a clear picture of how the Thai state, for its political purposes, manipulates Buddhism and how different Buddhist interpretations reflect class struggle—particularly the struggle for democracy in the interest of the growing middle class—in Thai society.

C. Socio-Politics in Contemporary Thailand

Absolute monarchy ended in Thailand in 1932. A revolution led by a small group of civilians, bureaucrats, and military elites brought about a radical change in the power structure by placing the monarchy under a constitution. Influenced by the Western idea of democracy, they introduced a new political system in Thailand. Since then the country has experimented with democracy for eighty years, during which time the arena of politics has been overwhelmingly dominated by the military, with eighteen coups d’etats or attempted coups, and eighteen revisions of the constitution.

During this time, influenced by the global market economy, Thailand has also experimented with capitalism. From 1932 to the fall of the Phibun’s regime in 1957, it was ruled primarily by the military under democratic constitutions; the monarchy was suppressed, and the
economy was dominated by state-owned enterprises. From the 1957 coup by Sarit Thanarat to the fall of the Thanom-Praphat’s regime in 1973, Thailand was under a military dictatorship without a constitution, and there was an increase of private enterprise and capitalism. During the same period, the Thai monarchy gained widespread respect both among the people and the military.

1. Democratic Movements

The 1973 student-led revolution and the middle-class revolution of 1992 were the first uprisings by the people in the modern history of Thailand. Although neither revolution changed the fundamental social and political structures of the country, they demonstrated that ordinary people, especially the middle-class, have increasing power in Thai politics. From the mid-70s to the mid-90s, there was an economic boom in Thailand within the global market economy dominated by the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, but this was accompanied by a widening income gap between urban elites and the rural poor, the destruction of the rain forests, and deterioration of the natural environment. This economic expansion, which saw the rise of an affluent upper middle class, was interrupted by the economic crisis of late 1997 which caused Thailand to go more deeply under the influence of transnational capitalism.

During the successive regimes from 1973 to 1992, the military continued to exercise control, staging a number
of coups and dominating parliamentary government. The monarchy continued to win wide support from the Thai people, gaining the power to negotiate with the military, as seen by the King’s intervention in the resignation of Thanom Kittikhachorn in 1973 and of Suchinda Kraprayun in 1992, as well as in the appointment of Sanya Thammasak as Prime Minister in 1973 and Anand Panyarachun in 1992. Pro-democracy movements among the Thai people, especially the middle-class revolution of 1992, gained international support in the post cold-war era. Business elites became more influential in Thai politics, with a more democratic parliament and a civilian government gradually taking shape.

2. Transnational Capitalist Influences

The 1997 economic crisis which started in Thailand and spread throughout Asia and the world has added economic hardship to Thai people, especially the urban middle class. In the 1990s under the ideology of “globalization” and pressure from the U.S. government, Thailand was the first ASEAN country to free its financial market. Then transnational financial corporations, or the Hedge Fund—particularly the Tiger Fund of Julian

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3 The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original Member Countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on January 8, 1984, Vietnam on July 28, 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on July 23, 1997, and Cambodia on April 30, 1999.
Robertson–attacked the value of Thai currency, the Baht. With its sophisticated strategy, the Tiger Fund took most of the foreign reserves from the Bank of Thailand, leaving the country in a financial crisis. Many financial institutes as well as individual businesses went bankrupt. The government of Chuan Leekpai changed 11 Thai laws to meet the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to borrow its money to fill the lack of foreign reserves. The changing of 11 Thai laws then opened up Thailand to transnational capital for conveniently buying any economic sector at an extremely low price in an economic crisis situation. Banks, financial institutes, state-enterprises, businesses, real estate and land in Thailand were subjected to being sold to foreign investors. Although the Thai government returned the loan to the IMF in 2003 before the due date, most of the essential economic sectors of the country were owned by foreign investors, making the Thai economy deeply dependent on transnational capital.

3. Capitalist Democratic Movements

The sixty-fifth anniversary of Thai democracy in 1997 marked a turning point when a reformed constitution, to which most sectors of the Thai people contributed, was finally promulgated. After the promulgation of the 1997 reformed constitution, it was the hope of Thai people that

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4 The reformed constitution was approved by the parliament on September 27, 1997 and promulgated by the King on October 11, 1997.
when the constitution was fully applied in every aspect, people would experience a more genuine democracy and Thai politics would turn a new page in history. In 2001, Thaksin Shinnawatra, one of the richest businessmen in Thailand, rose to power under the reformed constitution. Thaksin spent the government’s budget to appease the poor in rural areas by a popular policy, for example, the “village fund” (one million Baht\(^5\) per one village) from which a villager could borrow money for local investment, and “a massive social health care system” (30 Baht per each illness). These policies have significantly improved the well-being of poor people in the Northeast, the North and the Upper Central parts of Thailand. The elites and the middle class in Bangkok and other major cities in Thailand, however, have not really received any benefit from these popular policies.

All the while, Thaksin’s Government staged a big campaign to reform Thai bureaucratic system by using business management. For example, the new policy of “one stop service” has been applied at the district offices in the Ministry of Interior, the passport offices in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Land Department offices in the Ministry of Agriculture. A number of Provincial Governors have been assigned as CEO Governors in an attempt to reform their roles and responsibilities. These reforms have

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\(^5\) Baht is the Thai currency, US $1 is approximately equal to 30 Baht in June 2013.
affected the interests of those powerful authorities who were unhappy with this new reformed system. Furthermore, Thaksin’s Government made “underground gambling” legal under state control and suppressed the “underground drug trade,” both of which affected powerful mafia gangs who were also unhappy with Thaksin’s policies.

4. Bureaucratic Aristocracy v. Capitalist Democracy

Thaksin’s political legitimacy was in question when he over-exercised his political power for the profits of businesses in his own circles—especially when he made a profit (60 billion Baht) by selling the THAICOM Satellite and his licensed nation-wide mobile phone business to a state-owned fund, TEMASEK, from Singapore. This selling was made legal without paying any tax under the 11 Thai laws by the former government of Chuan Leekpai. In the atmosphere of anti-government demonstrations (during 2005-2006), the “yellow shirt”—the elites and the middle class in Bangkok and other urban areas—demanded the resignation of the capitalist leader Thaksin. At the same time, the “red shirt”—poor people from the Northeast and the North as well as the urban poor were organized to counter the demonstrations. The country was in confusion and split into two socio-economic groups. In 2006, the Thai military staged a bloodless coup d’état to oust Thaksin and his government. A new government, led by Surayud Chulanont—a retired military general, was appointed by the
coup leaders and approved by the King.\textsuperscript{6}

In short, since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, Thai politics has gone through six stages. First, from the 1932 Revolution to the 1957 Phibun Songkhram’s regime, Thailand was basically dominated by the military under a constitution. Second, from the 1957 coup d’état by Sarit Thanarat to the 1973 Student-led Revolution, it was under a military dictatorship without a constitution. Third, from the 1973 Revolution to the 1976 bloodshed coup d’état, Thai politics went through democratic experiments in which the vast majority of people participated, and was followed by contemporary ideological conflicts between the left and the right. Fourth, from the 1976 coup to the 1992 middle-class Revolution, Thailand experienced half-democratic politics as the country had general elections with a Prime Minister from the Army. Fifth, from the 1992 Revolution to the 1997 economic crisis, Thai politics was dominated by bureaucratic elites with the impact of foreign economic domination. Sixth, from the promulgation of the 1997 Reformed Constitution to the 2006 coup d’état, Thai politics was under capitalist leadership.

The rise to power of the rivalry governments of Abhisit Vejjajiva’s (2010-2011) and Yingluck Shinnawatra’s

\textsuperscript{6} On 19 September, 2006, General Sonthi Bunyaratkalin, the Army Chief, staged the coup. The next day the coup was approved by the King. On 1 October, 2006, Surayud Chulanont was appointed as Prime Minister and the new constitution was promulgated in 2007.
(2011-present) represent the power struggle between Bureaucratic Aristocracy, supported by the “yellow shirt” bureaucratic elites and middle class, and Capitalist Democracy, supported ironically by the “red shirt” rural poor and urban workers. Thailand has been in the transition from Aristocracy to Democracy in which capitalists and workers share the same interests against aristocratic bureaucracy.

Charles F. Keyes\(^7\) provided insights on how the changing economic and social development, particular in the Northeast of Thailand, influenced the rural population’s preferences for a change of national politics. He argue that Northeastern families have become increasingly ‘cosmopolitan’ because they are linked to a global labor force, have sophisticated understandings of Bangkok society, and yet still retain long-standing resentment for being looked down on as country bumpkins. Therefore the deep division of Thai society that cannot be overcome by the prosecution of the Red Shirt leaders or government ‘development’ programs that perpetuate the traditional hierarchical relationship between officials and subjects. Keyes was optimistic about the future on how Thailand can reach reconciliation and move forward from its current crises, but stressed the importance of reconciliation in Thailand.

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\(^7\) Professor Keyes shared his experience and knowledge on “the Color of Politics,” in regards to the current Thai political situation at the University of Washington on June 7, 2010.
coming from grassroots levels and includes all levels of society and regions of the country in order to overcome the deep division in society.

Once again Buddhism will be shaped by different social classes to the complication of socio-political situation in contemporary Thailand.
Chapter 2

REFORM OF THAI BUDDHISM

The reform of Buddhism in modern Thai history will be explored from King Mongkut’s era up to the present. Doctrinal reform as well as institutional reform of Thai Buddhism will be analyzed. Reformist Buddhist movements will be presented with a focus on Bhikkhu Buddhadasa as a leading reformist figure in modern Thai society.

2.1 Reform of Thai Buddhism

The reform of Thai Buddhism, initiated by King Mongkut in the 19th century, was done in two directions: doctrinal reform and institutional reform. For doctrinal reform, the western methodology of “rationalism,” together with “demythification,” was introduced. Thai Buddhism has been doctrinally reformed for over a century and became completed in the works of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. For institutional reform, the Thai sangha has been structured according to the institutional forms of contemporary Thai politics.

A. Reform Movements in Thai Buddhism

The era of King Mongkut (1804-1868) is regarded as
an important transitional period for Siam. Since Europe passed through the Renaissance Period and the first Industrial Revolution, the West was empowered and went out to colonize the rest of the world, including Asia, with unsurpassed military technology. King Mongkut—also known as Rama IV of Bangkok (Ratanakosin Period)—thus faced at least three Western threats: Colonialism, Christianity, and Western Science. Together with Colonialism, the West sent Christian missionaries and brought science to Siam.

Facing these threats, King Mongkut investigated Siamese society to find some basis of strength and wisdom in order to cope with these threats. He eventually could find nothing except Buddhism. But Buddhism at that time was full of legends, miracles, supernatural beliefs, and superstitions. These had weakened Buddhism. Buddhism at the time could not offer a basis of wisdom for coping with Western threats. Thus, King Mongkut initiated a reform of Thai Buddhism for the first time in modern Thai history. His reformation of Buddhism went in two directions: doctrinal reform and institutional reform, which were implemented simultaneously.

**B. Doctrinal Reform of Thai Buddhism**

To reform Buddhism doctrinally, King Mongkut adopted a Western methodology, namely “Rationalism,” to reinterpret Thai Buddhism so that the religion became more
logical. He reduced the miraculous, supernatural, superstitious and fortune telling elements—especially in remote and rural areas.

Prince Vajirayana-varorasa, who was ordained as a *bhikkhu* (monk) and later became a Supreme Patriarch of Siam, played an important role in helping King Mongkut’s religious reformation. Besides writing the book *Navakovada*—a handbook for newly ordained monks, Prince Vajirayana also wrote a biography of the Buddha. This was the first biography of the Buddha in Siamese society. It described the Buddha as an ordinary human being who sought truth and eventually found the Dhamma—the law of Nature—without any miracles.

The doctrinal reform of Thai Buddhism was initially carried on by monks of the newly established *Dhammayutika Nikāya*. After founding this order (*nikāya*), King Mongkut persuaded sons of the noble class to ordain as bhikkhus in order to carry on the religious reforms that he started. Dhammayut monks during the initial stage were highly educated and able to help the King with his reform programs.

In the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1853-1910), a modern educational system was first introduced in Siamese society. In order to educate people throughout the country, King Chulalongkorn announced that all Buddhist monasteries were to become schools and all monks were to become teachers for children. At first monks taught children
the language–basically Thai and in some cases Pali–as well as Buddhist morality. The education combined language, local knowledge and Buddhist ethics, and it spread widely among common people throughout the country.

When the educational system developed further, there arose more specialized subjects, such as Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, History, and Foreign Languages, which required professional teachers. This led to a gradual separation between schools and monasteries, and between worldly knowledge and Buddhist ethics. This modern educational system, however, empowered common people with higher knowledge. Consequently, monks of the Mahanikāya order–the vast majority of whom came from a common background–received a better education and were prepared to continue the responsibility of religious reform initiated by King Mongkut.

When Siamese society became more modernized, sons of the noble class were rarely willing to ordain as monks for life. It seems that the last well-known monk who came from a noble background was Phraya Norarat Rajamanitaya (Chaokhun Nor). Thus, the shortage of noble-class monks prompted the Dhammayutika Nikaya to ordain common men into their order of privilege. As the Dhammayut monks were close to the power centers, their ideas were more conservative. Thus, the reform of Buddhism in the later period continued for the most part because of the Mahanikāya monks who had received a
higher education. These monks from a common background were far away from the authority of the central power structures, so their ideas were more liberal.

The doctrinal reform of Buddhism initiated by King Mongkut was carried on by monks of both orders and was notably accomplished through the work of the reformist monk Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993).

C. Institutional Reform of Thai Buddhism

Hearing of the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and Christianity in the Vatican in Rome, King Mongkut thought of the Sangha’s structure in Siamese society. He therefore initiated a second program of reform, namely, the institutional reform of Thai Buddhism, within a Thai socio-cultural context. King Mongkut used his own political structure as a model.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Religious Realm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. King</td>
<td>1. Supreme Patriarch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nobility</td>
<td>2. Dhammayutika Nikāya Monks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. People</td>
<td>3. Mahanikāya Monks</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The head of the Kingdom was the king. Correspondingly the head of the Religious Realm was the Supreme Patriarch. The king had the nobility to help govern people all over the country. However, the Supreme Patriarch lacked noble-class monks to help with his governance. For this very reason, King Mongkut established the Dhammayutika Nikāya by persuading sons of nobility to be ord
ained as monks in this new order, so that they were a noble-class of monks who would help the Supreme Patriarch to govern the common monks in Siamese society. This Sangha hierarchical structure followed the political structure of the Monarchy in Siam and was promulgated by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) as the First Sangha Act in 1902.

Then the 1932 Revolution brought a radical change to Siamese politics by replacing the Absolute Monarchy with a so-called Democracy. In 1941 the Piboon Songkhram government thus promulgated the Second Sangha Act according to a political structure of Democracy:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Religious Realm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Prime Minister &amp; Cabinet</td>
<td>2. Sangha Prime Minister &amp; Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Court</td>
<td>3. Sangha Court</td>
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</table>

The Kingdom had a Parliament to create laws, and the Religious Realm had a Sangha Parliament (*Sangha-sabhā*) to establish Sangha laws. The Kingdom had a Prime Minister and a Cabinet for governing the country, while the Religious Realm had a Sangha Prime Minister (*Sangha-nāyaka*) and a Sangha Cabinet (*Sangha-montri*) to administer over the Sangha. There were four Sangha Ministries (*Ongkān*): Governance, Education, Dissemination, and Public Welfare. While the Kingdom had a Court to ensure justice for people, the Religious Realm had a Sangha Court (*Khana Vināya-dhara* or *Vinaithorn*) to end disputes in
the Sangha.

In 1958, Sarit Thanarat’s Coup d’État brought Thailand into the Dark Ages of a Military Dictatorship. After setting up the country to his dictatorial rule, Sarit turned to the Sangha and abolished the Democratic Sangha Act. In 1962, Sarit promulgated the Third Sangha Act by following the political structure of his Military Dictatorship as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Religious Realm</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Military Leader</td>
<td>1. Supreme Patriarch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cabinet</td>
<td>2. Maha-thera-samakhama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. People</td>
<td>3. Monks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The kingdom had a military dictator as the leader, while the Religious Realm had the Supreme Patriarch as the leader. The military dictator appointed his own Cabinet to control people all over the country, whereas members of the Maha-thera-samakhama (which literally means “Society of Great Senior Monk”) were appointed to help the Supreme Patriarch to control monks in the Thai Sangha.

In 1992, Thailand was in a brief period of military dictatorship under Suchinda Khraprayoon. This short-lived military government amended the Third Sangha Act. It tried to settle the power struggle amongst members within the Maha-thera-samakhama for deciding who would be the next Supreme Patriarch. Thus, in 1992 the Sangha Act was amended to rule that the next Supreme Patriarch would be the high ranking (Somdej) monk of longest standing rather
than the most “senior” monk of that rank. Thus, the Third Sangha Act of 1962 amended in 1992 became dictatorial in-nature. It did not encourage change or respect seniority through meritorious accomplishments. Thus, the Sangha Act as an institutional structure could not solve problems in the Sangha as it was not open, only emphasizing longevity of position. Unfortunately, this dictatorial Sangha Act has been in effect until today.

The Ministry of Education has drafted a new Sangha Act by basically using the Third Sangha Act of 1962 amended in 1992 as the model. In the draft, the Maha-thera-samakhama becomes an advisory committee and a new group of younger monks called Maha-khanitsorn (which literally means “Great Independent Group”) would be promoted as a new administrative body. It is claimed that because the Maha-khanitsorn is comprised of younger monks, it would be more active and efficient, and more responsive to current monastic realities.

Religious Realm

1. Supreme Patriarch  
   Head of Thai Sangha
2. Maha-thera-samakhama  
   Advisory Committee
3. Maha-khanitsorn  
   Administrative Body
4. Monks

Thai people, however, question the structure itself which is dictatorial. What is the difference between dictatorship by the younger generation or dictatorship by
the older generation? Now, the draft is under review and revision by the government’s Judicial Council.

King Mongkut’s doctrinal reform of Buddhism was and has been successful. Thai Buddhist teachings are profound, modern, and have widely captured the interest of well-educated people in Thai society. However, the institutional reform has seen less success. The Sangha Act entered the Dark Ages through the influence of a Military Dictatorship. Thus, it became a retrogressive structure for half a century now. Likewise, it has kept the Thai Sangha in the Dark Ages of a Military Dictatorship, despite Thai society’s populace-based revolutions of 14 October 1973, 6 October 1976, 17 May 1992 and the recent political events of 10 April and 19 May 2010.

Thailand has one of the best democratic constitutions in the world. Why don’t we write a new Sangha Act by following the structure of checks and balances of power as in our national Constitution? Or why don’t we return the power to monastics and laity and abolish the present dictatorial Sangha Act? Then monastics and laity would be able to reach their full potential, and isn’t that what Buddhism is all about? We would then simply live under our Thai Constitution, without any hierarchical obstacles. Then and only then do I believe that we will see Thai Buddhism sprout a fresh shoot. And, a shoot may grow into a great tree.
D. Reformist Buddhist Movements

Buddhism in Thailand is not only structured by the official state-imposed system of the Sangha administration, but also by a complex and fluid system of unofficial relations between the Buddhist laity and individual monks and monasteries. Actually, the most important developments in Thai Buddhism are taking place outside of the convention-bound hierarchy of the Sangha administration. Occasionally, some monks with distinctive interpretations of doctrine or systems of religious practice or charisma develop a large following of faithful lay supporters. The monk and his lay audience can be regarded as a distinct movement or sect within Thai Buddhism.

Over the last several decades a number of these movements—many of them reformist—centered on the teachings of a particular monk have grown rapidly in size and influence. The Buddhist interpretation and practice of those movements tend to reflect the political aspirations and economic interests of a certain section of Thai society, and consequently attract significant numbers of followers from that social stratum. For the average urban dweller, individual monks and religious movements reported in the printed and electronic media have far greater importance than the remote and increasingly irrelevant activities of the members of the central Sangha administration (Maha-thera-samakhom) and provincial Sangha councils. One such monk who has exerted great influence on the Thai people through
In his reform effort, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993) uses, among other things, the notion of “benefit” (*prayot*) to justify his reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrine. Buddhadasa maintains that Buddhism must be interpreted so that it is “beneficial” for modern people—it should be appropriate and relevant to contemporary concerns. For example, when explaining his demythologized interpretation of Nibbāna (liberation) as being a spiritual condition attainable in and relevant to this life here and now, Buddhadasa says, “What benefit is there in the teaching that we will attain Nibbāna after we have died? It is as a result of such teachings that modern people are not interested in Nibbāna. Moreover, Buddhism is made barren by such teachings.”

This rationalist approach to the teaching and the practice of Buddhism leads the reformists to reject both the supernatural forms of Buddhism and the metaphysical form of the religion. This rejection of all forms of supernaturalism, both traditional animism and the metaphysics of civil religion, places the reformists in opposition to both the lower class of rural peasants and urban laborers and the upper class of the establishment. Reformist Buddhism is thus categorized as a middle-class phenomenon linked to modern education and economic development in Thai society.
From the perspective of this class analysis, there is a strong association between the philosophical rationalism of the reformist Buddhists and their socio-political stance as advocates of democracy, liberty and equality in the Thai political and social structures. While Buddhist doctrine does not have a clear position on modern political concepts such as democracy, the Buddhist texts are nevertheless being interpreted in a democratic way by reformists. Buddhist doctrine is also being used by reformist monks and their lay supporters to promote liberal social values and the social and political rights of individuals.

2.2 Buddhadasa and the Reform of Thai Buddhism

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa was born on May 27, 1906 at Phumriang in Suratthani, a southern province in Thailand. His original name was Nguam Phanit. He was ordained a monk (bhikkhu) in the Mahanikai Order at the age of 20. Concerning his name, Buddhadasa says:

I devote my body and life to the Buddha. I am the dāsa (servant, slave) of the Buddha, the Buddha is my boss. Hence my name Buddhadasa.\(^8\)

After he had studied several years in the Thai Buddhist monasteries both in Chaiya and Bangkok, he retreated into a forest in southern Thailand and devoted himself to studying

and practicing dhamma—the teachings of the Buddha—for six years. In 1932, just one month before the 1932 Revolution in Thailand, he founded a forest monastery called “Suan Mokkhabhalaram” (garden of liberation) at Phumriang. Later he moved “Suan Mokkhabhalaram” to its present site at Chaiya in the same province.\(^9\) At Suan Mok, Buddhadasa had been teaching dhamma and working on his reform of Buddhism for more than half a century.\(^10\)

**A. Buddhadasa and the Reform Movements**

Buddhadasa was influenced by the reformist, rationalist approach of Prince Mongkut and Prince Vajirayana.\(^11\) He had close relationships with monks of the Thammayut Order during his early years as a monk and was popular among some Thammayut monks. In 1937 his translation of the history of the Buddha’s life was accepted as a textbook by the Thammayut-run Mahamakut Buddhist

\(^9\) For details on the interpretative biography and teachings of Buddhadasa, see Swearer, “Introduction,” pp. 2-5.

\(^{10}\) For details on Buddhadasa and modern Thai Buddhism, see Swearer, “Buddha, Buddhism and Bhikkhu Buddhadasa.”

\(^{11}\) As the head of the Thai sangha in the early twentieth century, Vajirayana essentially shaped the form and content of monastic education. He established a standard curriculum in Buddhist history, doctrine and practice, nine levels of Pali studies, and a graded sequence of examinations. He also founded the first monastic university, Mahamakuta, at the royal monastery, Wat Bovornives, and was instrumental in organizing a nationwide public educational system using the network of Buddhist monasteries throughout the country. As a scholar, Vajirayana was a brilliant student of Pali language and literature, producing dictionaries and numerous doctrinal treatises like the *Navakovada*, still the standard text for newly ordained novices. See Swearer, “Introduction,” pp. 2-3.
University. Buddhadasa received personal encouragement for his rationalistic analyses of Buddhist doctrine from several senior Thammayut monks throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The Thammayut Sangharaja (Patriarch), Wachirayanawong, of Wat Bowornniwet and Phra Sasanasophana (Plort Atthakari) of Wat Rachathiwat were among his strongest supporters in this period. When the conservative Phra Thipprinya made representations to Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram and Sangharaja Wachirayanawong in 1948 accusing Buddhadasa of being a communist, the Sangharaja took no action against Buddhadasa other than to direct him to study the scriptural commentary of the Visuddhimāgga.\footnote{For details on the socio-political perspective on Buddhadasa’s biography, see Jackson, \textit{Buddhism, Legitimation and Conflict}, pp. 126-135.}

It seems that Buddhadasa received support from some senior Thammayut monks because his reformist ideas were recognized as continuing the rationalist intellectual tradition begun by Mongkut and continued by Vajirayana. Buddhadasa was very critical of traditional Thai supernaturalism and he supported such innovations as the teaching of Buddhism to lay people in the indigenous language rather than in Pali and advocated the translation of the Tipitaka into Thai. Buddhadasa’s criticism of the beliefs and practices of his fellow Mahanikai monks and his adoption of some Thammayut teachings and ascetic practices was undoubtedly regarded as supporting the
interests of the Thammayut Order. Furthermore, Buddhadasa’s retreat from sangha politics in Bangkok to the monastic isolation of southern Thailand meant that he posed no threat to the sangha administration. Buddhadasa did not join any of the protest movements to reform the sangha in the 1930s or later decades but rather worked out his own intellectual reform of Buddhism at Suan Mok by simply lecturing, writing and publishing.

Peter Jackson observes that Buddhadasa did not re-ordain into the Thammayut Order because he supported the democratic principles espoused by the revolutionaries in 1932 and because his social background in the middle class put him in a social and political position of conflict with the aristocratically dominated Thammayut. Buddhadasa’s continuing formal association with the Mahanikai Order is also important for his middle-class supporters who regard the Mahanikai as progressive and aligned with the interests of the common people.

The intellectual history of Thai Buddhism in the past two centuries has represented a triumph of rationality or a linear progression from superstition to reason. Rationalist Buddhism became a legitimatory basis for the exercise of political power by the Thai government from King Mongkut to the mid-1950s. However, after the 1957 coup d’etat led by Sarit Thanarat, which brought Thailand under direct military dictatorship for the next one and a half decades, the Thai establishment by and large abandoned rationalist
Buddhism and returned to the earlier metaphysical Buddhism to provide legitimatory support to military rule. This decline in the political fortunes of reformist Buddhism under Sarit’s and Thanom’s regimes explains the corresponding decline in the fortunes of reformist monks such as Phimontham and Buddhadasa. During this period, progressive monks of both Orders, particularly Phimontham, were harassed and persecuted.\textsuperscript{13} Buddhadasa came under suspicion of being a communist during Sarit’s regime in the 1960s.

Sarit’s political oppression and religious atavism in fact reinforced the association between reformist Buddhism and progressive political movements. While Buddhadasa’s early supporters in the 1930s and 1940s were Thammapayut monks who saw him as continuing the intellectual traditions of their Order, he developed a wholly new following among students and the middle class from the 1970s to the 1990s. Rather than destroying the religious reformists, Sarit and Thanom instead unintentionally transformed Buddhadasa and other Buddhist rationalists into the politico-religious symbols of an alternative, non-authoritarian social order. From 1957 to 1992, religious rationalism was placed on the

\textsuperscript{13} Phra Phimontham was at the center of efforts to democratically reform the administration of the Thai sangha in the twentieth century. Because of his unconventional and progressive views, Phimontham became the victim of a concerted campaign against dissent in the sangha during the regime of Sarit Thanarat. The movement to obtain legal justice for Phimontham has been an important focus of agitation for change within the sangha. See Jackson, \textit{Buddhism, Legitimation and Conflict}, p. 94.
defensive after earlier successes over traditional beliefs under Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn and during the governments of Pridi Banomyong and Phibun Songkhram. The 1992 middle-class Revolution brought back a democratic government which would, in turn, promote reformist Buddhism. The intellectual history of Thai Buddhism is thus intimately related to the political and economic history of modern Thailand.

B. Buddhadasa as a Leading Reformist Figure

The historical significance of Buddhadasa lies in the fact that he introduced the intellectual rationalism and practical strictness of the Thammayut Order to Mahanikai monks. He also further developed Mongkut’s and Vajirayana’s original incomplete religious rationalism bringing it to its completion by criticizing both Thai supernaturalism and royal-promoted metaphysical Buddhism. As Peter Jackson has observed, the Thammayut Order has not been able to continue the intellectual momentum of Mongkut’s initial attempts to develop a rationalist interpretation of Buddhism because of the historical legacy of its conservative political associations. Because of the royal associations, senior Thammayut monks were prevented from openly endorsing rationalist Buddhism. The intellectual orientation toward Buddhism represented by Buddhadasa has been picked up by other contemporary interpreters, both monks and laity. Buddhadasa has thus permitted a new generation of
educated, professional, and middle-class Thai Buddhists to see the Mahanikai Order as both the most intellectually progressive and the most politically progressive religious Order. Louis Gabaude compares Buddhadasa’s reformist work with the Christian Reformation in the sixteenth century in Europe:

It may be interesting to compare here the reformist movement of Buddhadasa and the Christian Reformation in the 16th century Europe. The Protestants, and to a certain extent the Catholics, thought that Europe had not ever been really Christianized, that the Church had integrated too many pre-Christian rites, festivals, practices and that time had come to wipe out all these “superstitions.”

Buddhadasa is one of the most important intellectual and political influences on contemporary Thai Buddhism. While he has eschewed personal political involvement, Buddhadasa has nevertheless maintained contacts with pro-democratic politicians and he has lectured and written extensively on politics. In the 1940s Buddhadasa maintained contacts with the progressive politician Pridi Banomyong (later a Prime Minister) and the pro-democratic lawyer Sanya Thammasak (later a Prime Minister), and in the 1950s with the progressive author and journalist Kulap Saipradit (Sri Burapha).

Buddhadasa’s political writings, however, are less progressive than his doctrinal reinterpretations. He emphasizes the importance of moral leadership based on the ten royal virtues (*dasarāja-dhamma*). To him, the system of government, whether decentralized and democratic or centralized and authoritarian, is not as important as the moral qualities of the leaders. As a utopian thinker, Buddhadasa has a definite model of what the world should be like. When he discusses an ideal Buddhist society, he has a picture in mind of an ancient Buddhist state whose king, the nobility and the rich strictly practiced the Buddhist ethical principles of self-restraint (*sīla* and *vinaya*) and giving (*dāna*) and shared their wealth with the poor by establishing alms-giving houses (*rong-than*). This individualistic approach might very well serve as a moral guideline for the personal conduct of political leaders and other individuals, but it could not solve the structural problems that face Thailand today under the influence of the global market economy.

While Buddhadasa’s rationalist interpretations provide a strong criticism of supernatural and metaphysical Buddhism, his political views lean more towards authoritarianism than democracy. Buddhadasa in fact oscillates between the two options in his political work. In his early writings, he supports more explicitly democratic systems, but in his more recent work, he supports centralized political systems. Contradictory to his rationalist
religious reforms, Buddhadasa’s recent political writings go along with establishment Thai Buddhism which legitimizes centralized authoritarian rule by emphasizing the notion of a strong leader taking responsibility for the welfare of the country. Consequently, as Peter Jackson has observed, younger pro-democratic members of the middle class have found it necessary to accept Buddhadasa’s interpretations of spiritual doctrine but to criticize and further develop his political theory.
Chapter 3

SCHOOLS OF THAI BUDDHISM

The schools of Thai Buddhism will be explored from a socio-cultural perspective: Buddhism identified with the Thai political and economic order, Buddhism above Thai society, Buddhism against Thai culture and society, Buddhism as transformer of Thai society, Buddhism and Thai culture in paradox. A unique school of Thai Buddhist meditation—the dynamic meditation of Luangpor Teean—will be presented and analyzed as a school of “Sudden Enlightenment” in Thai Theravada Buddhist context.

3.1 Thai Buddhism: A Socio-Cultural Perspective

Richard Niebuhr presents his methodology to explain the relationship between Christian tradition and Western culture. There are five ways to characterize the trend of the interaction between religion and society: (1) religion identified with culture and society, (2) religion above culture and society, (3) religion against culture and society, (4) religion as the transformer of culture and society, and (5) religion and culture in paradox.
I will use Niebuhr’s methodology to identify and characterize the major trends in Thai Buddhism within the context of dramatic political, social, economic, and cultural changes since the end of the nineteenth century. In an attempt to do so, schools of Thai Buddhism will be classified and presented.

A. Buddhism Identified with the Thai Political and Economic Order

Since the Sukhothai kingdom in the thirteenth century, Buddhism has been used to, cosmologically and institutionally, legitimize the Thai monarchs and the state. In the more modern period of time, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) of Bangkok set an ideological slogan, “Nation, Religion, King” (chat, sasana, phra-mahakasat). This slogan has become a simplified political ideology for the masses of Thai people.

During the 1960s when Thailand accelerated the Western way of “development,” the government sponsored the Thai sangha (monastic institution) to establish two programs for the purpose of national unity and development. In the first program, “Dhammadhuta,” monks from central cities were sent to rural areas to help people develop their communities as well as propagate the Dhamma (Buddhist teaching). The second program, “Dhammacarika,” was directed at converting northern hill tribe peoples to Buddhism for the reason of national unity. The more recent similar program is “Land of Dhamma,
Land of Gold” (*Phandintham-phandinthong*). The government has tried to control under one policy all the social projects initiated by monks throughout the country. These projects include rice and buffalo banks, drug detoxication program, trade skills, diversified agricultural production, and environment protection.

The more recent trend of Thai Buddhism identified with political and economic establishment is the movement of “Dhammakaya.” Dhammakaya movement may represent the emergence of the new middle-class in modern Thai society.\(^{15}\) It uses sophisticated mass-marketing, media skills and techniques to propagate its movement. Its activities and interpretation of Buddhism legitimize the monarchy, military, and capitalist establishment, which in turn support Dhammakaya’s movement. Doctrinally, Dhammakaya reduces the traditional Buddhist cosmology, with its goal of *nibbāna*, to a location within the body. Its technique of meditation is to visualize and concentrate on a crystal ball two inches above the naval, which is regarded as the “center” of the body. Their meditation is accompanied by the silent recitation of the phrase *sammā-araham̄̄* (one who is free from defilements). Later on, a practitioner may attempt to visualize a crystal Buddha image. In the final stages, the practitioner is told that he or she may literally see the Buddha and *nibbāna* at the “center” of his or her own body.

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\(^{15}\) Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict*, pp. 32-36, 205-206.
B. Buddhism above Thai Society

In Thai Theravada Buddhist tradition, there are two kinds of monastery: town monastery (gāmadhisā) and forest monastery (araṇṇavāsi). Town monastery has more to do with study (ganthadhura) whereas monks in the forest monastery devote themselves more to the practice of meditation (vipassanādhura).

Achan Man and his lineage have been regarded as one of the strongest meditation traditions among the forest monasteries (araṇṇavāsi) in northeastern Thailand.16 The lineages of Acharn Man tradition include Acharn Cha, Luangta Mahabua, and Luangpu Sim. These monks are regarded by most Thai people as ariya (Buddhist holy man), one being at least a stream-winner, who is “above” the mundane world of ordinary life. They observe, with the exception of Achan Cha, a very strict traditional Dhammayutika discipline.17 Their form of meditation is to concentrate on the breathing and to silently recite the word buddho (Buddha) each time they inhale or exhale. In deep

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16 In the Thai Theravada tradition, there are two kinds of monasteries: town monasteries (gāmadhisā) and forest monasteries (araṇṇavāsi). Town monasteries are more concerned with study (ganthadhura) whereas forest monasteries emphasize more the practice of meditation (vipassanādhura).

17 There are two main sects or orders (nikāya), based on disciplinary interpretation, within the Thai Sangha: Mahanikaya and Dhammayutika. Mahanikaya is the original form rooted in the long history of Thai Buddhism. The majority of monks in Thailand belong to this sect. Dhammayutika is the reformed sect, with its strict discipline, initiated by King Mongkut (Rama IV). It represents royal interests within the Thai Sangha.
concentration, on the path to nibbāna, it is believed that a practitioner may encounter gods (deva) and other forms of supernatural beings. Achan Man’s forest tradition represents “traditional orthodoxy” within the Thai Theravada Buddhism, and is fit into the category of religion above society in the Thai context.

The Yup-no Phong-no (falling-rising) tradition originally derived from a Burmese form of meditation. It has some traditional links with the contemporary Srisayadaw movement in Myanmar. This Burmese form of meditation emphasizes concentration on the falling and rising of the abdomen, while breathing out and breathing in, with the silent recitation of the words yup-no (falling) and phong-no (rising) respectively. A practitioner may use this well-trained concentration to contemplate a corpse or to “see through” a beautiful body as a composite of skin, flesh, blood vessels, organs, and skeleton to realize the impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature of a human being. In this tradition, Luangpor Charan at Wat Ambhawan in Singhburi, is regarded as an ariya who is above society in Thai society.

C. Buddhism against Thai Culture and Society

In the poor region of the northeast of Thailand at the turn of the century, there arose a short-lived millenarian movement (or “phi-bun” rebellion) against the central power of Bangkok. As Ishii analyzes it, the “phi-bun”
rebellion represented the religious expression of the northeastern poor people to protest against the economic injustice from the central government.

According to northern Thai Buddhist tradition, a respected senior monk could become a preceptor and ordain a new monk. Under the centralization of Thai sangha in Bangkok, only appointed monk can become preceptor. In the 1920s, Kruba Sivichai, a highly respected northern monk, protested against this centralization of the Thai sangha. He was arrested, but with the support of the masses of northern people, he was released later on. These two examples are the historical cases that Buddhism protests against the mainstream of Thai culture and society.

A more recent case is Samana Bodhiraksa and his Santi Asoka movement. Bodhiraksa’s emphasis on the strict Buddhist disciplines and ethical purity is the application of rationalism common to other reformist monks. He and his followers observe a very strict vinaya (discipline) by being vegetarian, having only one meal a day, wearing no shoes, living a very simple life, and building self-sufficient communities. Judging from his standards, most monks within the Thai Sangha are far below the level of purity of the sīla set by the Buddha. Bodhiraksa and his followers criticize the lax behaviour, superstitions, and consumerism.

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18 The word “samana” is called for ascetics of any religion. Because Bodhiraksa and his followers “resigned” from the Thai Sangha, they are not allowed to call themselves “bhikkhu.”
of most monks; and the self-indulgence, corruption, violence, and capitalism in Thai society.

He puts the reformist rationality into practice on the institutional and organizational level by announcing independence from the Thai clerical hierarchy, which makes his movement radical within the Thai Sangha. In other word, Bodhiraksa has acted out the theoretical rejection of establishment Buddhism, a position held by most reformists, at the practical and organizational level by rejecting the authority of the Thai Sangha Council (*Maha-thera-samakom*). Because Bodhiraksa was against the mainstream of Thai society and culture, the Thai sangha and the establishment have persecuted him and his movement for violating the Sangha law of 1962. Bodhiraksa and Santi Asoka are a contemporary movement of Buddhism against Thai society and culture.

**D. Buddhism as Transformer of Thai Society**

The most prominent reformist and interpretator of Thai Buddhism is Bhikkhu Buddhadasa.19 Buddhadasa has established “Suan Mokkhabalaram” (*Garden of Liberation*) in his attempt to return to the original form of sangha of the

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19 To maximize understanding among Buddhists and scholars from diverse linguistic backgrounds, I have chosen Pali transliterations of Thai names into English. Thus, the Pali transliterations yield such names as Buddhadasa, Bodhiraksa, Santi Asoka, Dhammakaya, Mahanikaya, and Dhammayutika, whereas the Thai transliterations would give us Phutthathat, Phothirak, Santi Asok, Thammakai, Mahanikai, and Thammayut.
Buddha’s time. The reform of Thai Buddhism which King Mongkut began in the nineteenth century has been completed in the works of Buddhadasa in the twentieth century.

Buddhadasa, a great reformist monk in contemporary Thai Buddhism, has rationalized and psychologized the teachings of the Buddha from the Tipitaka and Thai Theravada culture as a whole. In elevating oneself towards nibbāna (cessation of suffering), a practitioner acquires paññā through studying the scriptures, reading and listening to the Dhamma teachings, observing nature (for him, “Dhamma is nature, nature is Dhamma”), living a properly conducted life, as well as practicing ānāpānasati (awareness of breathing). Ānāpānasati is a meditation technique referred to in the Pali Canon; it concentrates on the various ways of breathing (samatha) and, in later stages, uses concentration to contemplate the nature of things (vipassanā).

Another important figure of Thai Buddhist reformist is Phra Prayut Prayutto (P. A. Prayutto). Phra Prayut has written extensively on Thai Buddhism and Western thoughts, a dialogue between Buddhism and Western way of thinking, such as science, medical ethics, psychology, social ethics, political science, economics, education and ecology. Besides Buddhadasa and Phra Prayut, there are a number of Buddhist activists who are regarded as influential in the Buddhist reformist movement of Thailand. Activist monks
include Phra Phayorm, and monks of younger generation such as Phra Dusadi, Phra Phisan and Phra Vajiramedhi. Buddhist activists also include Bhikkhuni Dhammananda and lay people like Sulak Sivaraksa and Prawes Wasi. These reformists represent Buddhism as the transformer of Thai society.

E. Buddhism and Thai Culture in Paradox

Within the Thai Theravada tradition, there arose a Thai meditation teacher whose teachings and practice are hardly fit into the Thai culture. He was more like a Dhyāna teacher (Ch’an in Chinese or Zen in Japanese) rather than a Theravada teacher. He was Luangpor Teean (or in his Pali name, “Cittasubho”), the founder of Dynamic Meditation in Thailand.

The story of Luangpor Teean is hardly accepted in the Thai Theravada context. Luangpor Teean was raised in the Buddhist tradition in the northeast of Thailand. He penetrated the Dhamma when he was a lay person at the age of 46. His way of knowing the Dhamma was a “sudden” way, familiar in the Ch’an or Zen tradition. In the traditional Thai Theravada context, a person needs to pass endless cycles of rebirth and the accumulation of good kārma (action) before he can attain nirvāna (cessation of suffering), the ultimate goal in Buddhism. In the last life, he needs to be a monk practicing meditation vigorously in the forest for many years before he attains enlightenment.
In this sense the life of Luangpor Teean is in paradox with the Thai traditional culture.

Luangpor Teean taught meditation as a lay teacher for more than two years without much success. In the monastically-centered world of Thai Buddhism, it is hard to be accepted as a lay meditation teacher. His method of meditation allows lay followers to use the practice traditionally attributed to the forest monks. So the lack of success of Luangpor Teean as a lay teacher was not a surprise. But when he was ordained as a monk and taught meditation as a monk teacher, he widely earned his audience and followers. So Luangpor Teean’s attempt to teach meditation as a lay teacher was another paradox with the Thai culture.

Luangpor Teean’s teachings were “outside of tradition and scripture.” He emphasized awareness and the seeing of the world as it is outside of thought. Since scripture and tradition are one form or another of thought, his teachings and meditation practice, which directly point to the awareness outside of thought, have very little to do with scripture and tradition. From this perspective, Luangpor Teean’s teachings are in paradox with the traditional Thai Buddhism, which strongly emphasizes the Pali scriptures and the tradition.

F. Schools of Thai Buddhism

Buddhism in Thailand is a tradition of Theravada Buddhism. All schools of Thai Buddhism base their
teachings on the Tipitaka—the Pali Canon. Since King Mongkut of the Bangkok period, Thai Buddhism has been split into two main sects: Thammayutika Nikāya and Maha Nikāya. Although Thammayut is regarded as more strict in vinaya (discipline) than Maha Nikaya, the two sects base their teachings on the same texts.

Richard Niebuhr’s theory of the interaction between religion and society as analyzed above can be regarded as one way to look at schools of Thai Buddhism. Another way to look at it is by the approach of tri-sikkhā (Three Characteristics of Buddhist Training): paññā (wisdom), sīla (“precepts”) and samādhi (“meditation.”) All schools of Thai Buddhism, belonging to either Maha Nikaya or Thammayut, embrace tri-sikkhā with different degrees of emphasis on paññā, sīla, and samādhi, the three basic components of Theravada Buddhism’s teachings.20

In contemporary Thai Buddhism, there are a number of traditions and teachers who have taught various methods of Buddhist practice. They can be regarded as various schools of Thai Buddhism.

1. Suan-Mok School of Buddhadasa, with Ānāpānasati Meditation, emphasizes the acquiring of paññā (wisdom) and the study of the Pali Canon, the Tipitaka. This school provides a ten-day training course at the beginning of each month.

20 Olson, A Person-Centered Ethnography of Thai Buddhism, pp. 353-377.
2. *Santi-Asoka* School of Bodhiraksa emphasizes the observing of *sīla* (“precepts”) and ethical purity. This school includes Santi Asoka self-sufficient economic communities throughout the country.

3. There are at least three Schools of Thai Buddhism that emphasizes the practice of *samādhi* (“meditation”). The schools which represent the *samādhi* aspect of contemporary Thai Theravada Buddhism include:

   3.1 *Buddho* Meditation School of Achan Man’s tradition,
   3.2 *Yup-no Phong-no* Meditation School of Luangpor Charan’s tradition, and
   3.3 *Sammā-Araham* Meditation School of Dhammakaya movement.

4. *Dynamic Meditation* School of Luangpor Teean has nothing directly to do with the scriptures. It has nothing to do with contemplation on the nature of things, on a composite of repulsive elements. It does not emphasize the observing of precepts, although the observing of precepts is good—it is regarded as socially good. It has nothing to do with concentration, silent recitation, or visualization. Dynamic meditation is a method of bodily movement involving the raising of arms or walking, one movement at a time, to stimulate and develop awareness, and to let awareness “see” thought—the root cause of human defilements—and break the chain of thought. From these basic differences, Luangpor Teean’s teachings are quite
distinct from the teachings of other traditions and teachers in Thai society. Dynamic Meditation has become a unique School of Buddhism in contemporary Thailand.

3.2 “Sudden Enlightenment” in Thai Buddhist Context

Luangpor Teean (1911-1988) was an important teacher within the world of Thai Buddhism who introduced a new technique of meditation that can be characterized as “dynamic” in contrast to the more conventional techniques of “static” meditation. He elucidated the goal of Buddhist practice with an unsurpassed vividness and authenticity. His dynamic meditation is also unique among the various schools of the contemporary Buddhist world.

Luangpor Teean’s dynamic meditation is practiced by using rhythmic bodily movement to develop awareness (sati), an awareness that can encounter thoughts or mental images—the root causes of human suffering. The teachings of Luangpor Teean indicate the way of developing awareness, which breaks through the chain of thoughts. Once awareness has become the dominating power over thoughts and mental images, it simultaneously overcomes attraction, resistance, and delusion, and hence suffering.

The story of Luangpor Teean’s life is of some interest in itself. He attained the Dhamma while he was a layman, which is very unusual (and for some hard to credit) in the monastically centered world of Thai Buddhism. His
experience of Dhamma involved a sudden way of knowing, which is more common in the history of Ch’an Buddhism in China and Zen Buddhism in Japan.\textsuperscript{21} In contemporary terms, Luangpor Teean can be seen as a teacher of “sudden enlightenment” in a Theravada context; from a historical perspective, his story is similar to that of Hui-neng (638-713), the sixth patriarch of Ch’an Buddhism in China, who also attained sudden enlightenment while a lay person.

\section*{A. The Life of Luangpor Teean}

The fifth child of Chin and Som Inthaphiu, Luangpor Teean was born on September 5, 1911, at Buhom, a small village in the remote province of Loei in the north eastern region of Thailand.\textsuperscript{22} His given name was Phan. He had four brothers and one sister. Since his father died when he was still very young, the boy had to spend much of his time helping his mother with the hard work of running their farm.

There were no schools in the area, and Phan received

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\textsuperscript{21} The Chinese word \textit{ch’an} is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word \textit{dhyāna} “meditation,” which is the etymological source for the Pali word for meditation, \textit{jhāna}. The Japanese word \textit{zen} is the Sino-Japanese reading for \textit{ch’an}. I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to Louis Mangione who helped clarify the sources and the meanings of these technical terms as well as working with me on improving my English.

\textsuperscript{22} For certain proper names, the author is following his own conventions that have appeared in previous publications. For other terms, the Library of Congress system of Romanization has been followed. While the LC system has not been used for proper names, according to it “Por Teean” would be rendered Pho Thian.
\end{flushright}
no formal education. However, at the age of 10, he was ordained as a novice at the local monastery, where his uncle, Yakhuphong Chansuk, was a resident monk. Diligent, obedient, and devout, Phan spent eighteen months there studying ancient Buddhist scripts, meditation, and magic before he disrobed to return to his home. Later, following tradition, he was ordained as a monk at the age of 20, again studying and meditating with his uncle, this time for six months. His interest in meditation, fuelled by a deep faith in the Buddha’s teachings, continued to grow, and he practiced regularly.

About two years after returning to lay life Phan Inthaphiu married. He and his wife, Hom, had three sons: Niam, Teean, and Triam. After the eldest died at the age of 5, Phan became known as “Por Teean” (father of Teean) in accordance with the local tradition of calling a parent by the name of the eldest living child. To support his family, Por Teean worked hard on his farm and fruit plantation, as well as at a small trade in the village. In his community, Por Teean was a leader in Buddhist activities, providing food, robes, and medicine for the monks, as well as organizing construction projects at local monasteries. Scrupulously honest, he was very highly respected and was persuaded on three different occasions to become the head of his village.

Later he moved to Chiangkhan, a larger community in the same province, where he became a successful trader, sailing in his own boat along the Mekhong River between
Thailand and Laos. During these years he met various meditation teachers and practiced the methods they taught him, and his enthusiasm for pursuing Dhamma continued to strengthen. By the time he had reached his mid-40s, however, he came to the realization that his many years of making merit, avoiding “sin,” and practicing meditation had not liberated him from anger, and so he decided that it was time for him to commit himself fully to seeking the Dhamma. And so, at the age of 46, after arranging for his wife’s well being and economic security and settling his business affairs, Por Teean left his home, firmly determined not to return unless he found the true Dhamma.

Embarking on his search, Por Teean travelled to Wat Rangsimmukdaram, in Nongkhai province, where he decided to spend the rapidly approaching three-month monastic retreat (phansa). There he met Achan²³ Pan, a Laotian meditation teacher who taught him a form of body-moving meditation, where each movement and the pause at the end of that movement was accompanied by the silent recitation of the words “moving-stopping.” Achan Pan had decided to spend that retreat in Laos; therefore, he left another monk, Luangpho Wanthon, in charge of the monastery.

On the 8th day of the waxing moon of the eighth month of the Thai lunar calendar, in the year 2500 of the Buddhist Era, Luangpho Wanthon directed all the

²³ The Thai word achan means “teacher.” It is a title for a dhamma teacher as well as an academic teacher.
meditators staying for that retreat (which would begin on the first day of the waning moon of that month) to practice awareness of death by concentrating on their breathing and inwardly repeating the word “death” each time they inhaled or exhaled. In trying to do this, Por Teean found himself at first diligent but then unmotivated. After having practiced many forms of meditation over the preceding thirty-five years—all involving concentration on breathing and also in most cases an inner recitation—he had only obtained transitory calmness. He, therefore, decided to abandon such techniques and instead to only practice the recently acquired body-moving meditation, but without the inner recitations. This he did throughout the whole of the following day, practicing in accord with nature, remaining energetic and at ease.

On the third day of his practice at Wat Rangsimukdaram at around 5 a.m., while he was sitting and moving his arms in meditation, a scorpion and its young fell onto Por Teean’s thigh and then scurried all over his lap and finally onto the floor. To his surprise he felt neither startled nor fearful.24 At that moment a sudden knowledge occurred in his mind: instead of experiencing himself as he always had, he now saw rūpa-nāma (body-mind); he saw it acting, and he saw its disease. Furthermore, at that point he knew

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24 Por Teean’s development of awareness had reached the point where his body (rūpa) and his awareness of the body (nāma) were harmonized. At this point, the rūpa-nāma (body-mind) would be known to any practitioner.
clearly that rūpa-nāma was dukkham-aniccam-anattā (unbearable-unstable-uncontrollable); by seeing with insight he also knew clearly the difference between actuality and supposition. Knowing rūpa-nāma, his understanding of “religion,” “Buddhism,” “sin,” and “merit” changed completely. After a while all the young scorpions returned to their mother’s back, and Por Teean used a stick to carry them away to a safe place.

At this point, his mind was carried away by a flood of emotions and thought, but eventually he returned to his practice, taking note of the body’s movements. His mind soon returned to normal. By evening Por Teean’s awareness was sufficiently continuous and fast that he began to “see,” rather than merely know, thought. Thought was “seen” as soon as it arose, and was immediately stopped. Soon, practicing in this way, he penetrated to the source of thought and realization arose. His mind changed fundamentally. Por Teean was now independent of both scriptures and teachers. As he continued to practice that day, his mind was changed step by step. In later years, much of his teaching would be concerned with the details of the steps and stages through which the mind progressed on its way to the ending of suffering.25

Later that evening a deeper realization arose, and his mind changed for the second time. Early the next morning,

25 The explanation of these steps and stages is presented in the second part—The Teachings of Luangpor Teean.
the 11th day of the waxing moon (July 8, 1957), as he walked in meditation, his realization went even deeper, and his mind changed for the third time. Soon afterwards the state of arising-extinction was realized, and with that all of Por Teean’s human conditioning and limitations dissolved and lost their taste, body-mind returned to its “original” state.

A few days later Achan Pan arrived from Laos on a short visit in order to examine the progress of the meditators. Por Teean was the last person to be interviewed. When asked what he knew, Por Teean said that he knew himself. Asked how he knew himself, he answered that in moving, sitting, and lying he knew himself. Achan Pan commented that in that case only dead people did not know themselves. Por Teean replied that he had already died and had been born anew.

“I have died to filth, wickedness, sorrow, darkness, and drowsiness, but I am still alive,” he explained.

Achan Pan then asked him whether salt is salty. “Salt is not salty,” Por Teean replied.

“Why?”

“Salt is not on my tongue, so how can it be salty.” Achan Pan then asked whether chilli is hot and sugar cane sweet. Por Teean responded in a similar way to each of these questions.
Achan Pan went on to ask: “Among the black colors, which one is more black?”

“Black is black, no black can be beyond black; white is white, no white is beyond white; the same is true for red and every other thing—nothing is beyond itself,” Por Teean answered.

Achan Pan was silent for a long time. Then he spoke again, “Suppose here is a forest, and a person came to see me, and then walked back home. On the way back home he carried a gun, and coming upon a tiger he shot it. Being wounded, the tiger became very fierce. If I had asked that person to tell you to come and see me here, would you come?” Achan Pan used a story to pose a profound question.

“Yes, I would. Being asked by you, I would come. If I did not come, it would be disrespectful to you,” Por Teean answered.

“If you come, the tiger will bite you.”

“Eh, I do not see the tiger.”

“Will you come along the path or use a short-cut?” Achan Pan asked.

“I will not use a short-cut. I will use the path. When I walk on the path and the tiger comes, I can see it and avoid it. If I do not walk on the path and the tiger comes, I cannot see it, and
therefore cannot avoid it,” Por Teean replied.26

After this, Achan Pan had nothing more to say. Por Teean continued to train himself until the end of the retreat in October, and then he returned home. There he taught his wife to practice the dynamic meditation he had just discovered during the retreat. Respecting him very highly, she followed the practice strictly, and after two years she came to know the Dhamma. It was late morning while she was picking vegetables in the garden when she exclaimed,

“What has happened to me?”

“What?” Por Teean asked her.

“My body has lost all its ‘taste’! It shrank like beef being salted!”

Por Teean told her not to do anything with it, but to let it be; afterwards she told him that she no longer experienced suffering.

He taught Pa Nom and Lung Nom, his sister and brother-in-law, to practice dynamic meditation until they both knew the Dhamma. He also taught other relatives, neighbors, friends, and fellow villagers to practice dynamic

26 In Theravada Buddhist meditation as in many other forms of Buddhism, there is a tradition of testing monks through interviews. Por Teean answered Achan Pan's questions and riddles by referring to the present moment in the harmony of body-mind where awareness is the dominant power over thought. Salt is salty only when it is on one’s tongue at the present moment, otherwise there is just the concept (or thought) that salt has a salty quality. Concerning the riddle of the tiger, Por Teean chose to walk on the path of awareness; when the tiger (representing thought) came, he could see it immediately and it would not harm him.
meditation. Because of their respect for him, they followed the practice, many obtaining deep results. It was as a layman that Por Teean held his first meditation retreat open to the public at Buhom for ten days. He spent his own money to feed the thirty to forty people who attended. Thereafter, he devoted all his energy and wealth to teaching people. In a short time he built two meditation centers in Buhom, as well as centers in a nearby village.

Since he felt a responsibility to teach what he called the Dhamma of “an instant” to as wide a circle as possible, after two years and eight months as a lay teacher, Por Teean entered the monkhood, at the age of 48, in order to be in a better position to teach. On February 3, 1960, he was ordained a monk at Wat Srikunmuang in his hometown by a senior monk named Vijitdhammacariya. At his ordination he was given the Pali name “Cittasubho” (the brilliant mind), but people usually called him “Luangpor Teean” (Venerable Father Teean). He was known by that name throughout the rest of his life.

As a monk, Luangpor Teean taught dynamic meditation to monks and lay people in his hometown for over a year. He then moved to Chiangkhan and built two meditation centers there at Wat Santivanaram and Wat Phonchai. He also crossed the border to Laos and built a meditation center there as well. Because he taught Buddhism outside of the scriptures and traditions, Luangpor Teean was once mistakenly accused of being a communist
A young, high-ranking policeman, having a strong anti-communist sentiment, came as a monk to spy on Luangpor Teean. Luangpor Teean taught him how to practice meditation. After, meditating for some time, he began to know the Dhamma. He then paid homage to Luangpor Teean and confessed to him about his earlier purpose. Afterwards the false rumors and accusations about Luangpor Teean gradually ended.

Luangpor Teean devoted the rest of his life to single-mindedly teaching Dhamma practice. He worked constantly, ate little, rested little, and eschewed all diversions and distractions. Having found Dhamma, and having found it so close at hand, he was fiercely determined to do his utmost to point the way for others to follow.

As the founder of dynamic meditation, the unique method for the developing of awareness through bodily movements, Luangpor Teean’s reputation spread in the Northeast. He built major meditation centers at Wat Paphutthayan outside of the town of Loei in 1966 and Wat Mokkhavanaram outside the town of Khonkaen in 1971. He also travelled to Laos and taught dynamic meditation there from 1961 to 1963, and once again in 1974 when he stayed and taught in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. As more and more people practiced under his guidance, a number of monks came to be in a position to teach in their own right and helped Luangpor Teean by teaching at the various
meditation centers he had founded. Among them was Achan Da Sammakhato.

After practicing many forms of meditation without any real result, Achan Da, a monk from the Northeast, heard about the teachings of Luangpor Teean and after a long search he finally met Luangpor Teean and practiced under his guidance. It took Achan Da only three days to know rūpa-nāma (body-mind). He then progressed rapidly toward the end of suffering and has become a dynamic meditation teacher. He has taught at Wat Mokkhavanaram as an abbot of this meditation center.

In 1975, Luangpor Teean was invited to teach meditation at Wat Chonlaprathan in Nonthaburi, a province adjoining Bangkok. As an illiterate monk from the countryside, he was of little interest to the people from Bangkok who often visited this well-known monastery. However, a scholar monk named Kovit Khemananda, whose talks attracted many intellectuals and students, was also teaching at Wat Chonlaprathan at that time and was puzzled by some of Luangpor Teean’s words and actions. Eventually Khemananda came to recognize his great enlightening wisdom. After his “discovery” by Khemananda, Luangpor Teean became a figure of interest to intellectuals and students in Bangkok and throughout the country.

In late 1976, Luangpor Teean founded a meditation center, Wat Sanamnai, on the outskirts of Bangkok, and
from this central location he accepted many invitations to
give talks and teach dynamic meditation at universities,
hospitals, schools, and Buddhist clubs at various
institutions, including government departments and
ministries. In 1986, Luangpor Teean resigned from all
administrative works and devoted himself to teach dynamic
meditation. All the while, Luangpor Teean continued his
teaching in the provinces. As his reputation grew, his
teaching was increasingly spread by pamphlets, books,
and audiocassettes. He also went to the south and taught
people at Hatyai, where a meditation center, Suan
Thammsakon, was built for the practice of dynamic
meditation.

Luangpor Teean went to Singapore twice in 1982 on
the invitation of a Buddhist group there. His first visit to
Singapore, June 8-24, marked a historical event when he
met Yamada Roshi, a Zen master from Japan.27 This
meeting of the two teachers raised the question of what
“sudden enlightenment” really was in the contemporary
context and what was the authentic method leading to that
“sudden enlightenment.” While Yamada Roshi emphasized
concentration and the silent recitation of a kōan (dhamma
riddle), Luangpor Teean emphasized awareness (without
either concentration or recitation) through bodily movement

27 Chusri Rungrotchanarak and I served as Luangpor Teean’s interpreters
during his first visit to Singapore when he met Yamada Roshi. Both teachers
were invited to teach in the same Buddhist center at the same time.
and the “seeing” of thought. Yamada Roshi guided his students to attain step-by-step sātori (sudden enlightenment) by breaking through a series of koans recorded in the Mumonkan. In this tradition, if a person cannot finish all the kōan within this lifetime, they can be worked on in the next life until final “sātori” is attained.

Luangpor Teean, on the other hand, guided his students step by step through the “object of practice” without referring to any scriptures or historical records. He insisted that people should diligently develop awareness until they realize the state of arising-extinction, the final sudden enlightenment, within this lifetime. Unlike many teachers within the various Buddhist traditions he never mentioned anything about the life after. The method of concentration and the silent recitation of a kōan is quite different from the method of developing awareness through bodily movement. The content of a series of kōan is also quite different from the content in the “object of practice” in dynamic meditation.

On his second visit to Singapore, October 16-31, Luangpor Teean taught and guided a dynamic meditation retreat for interested people there. During both visits, Luangpor Teean was sick and needed medical treatment in a

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28 The Japanese word mumonkan is the Sino-Japanese reading for the Chinese word wu-men-kuan ‘the gateless gate.’ It is a historical record of koan used in zazen (Zen sitting meditation) within the Rinzai Zen tradition.

29 See the second part–The Teachings of Luangpor Teean.
hospital—a sign that later revealed a more serious, threatening illness.

In late 1985 Luangpor Teean gained an important female disciple, Anchalee Thaikanond, a middle-aged Bangkok woman with two daughters. Unlike many other women at her age in Thai culture, Anchalee was never interested in religion, merit making, or keeping the precepts. She happened to read some of Luangpor Teean’s books and had faith in his teachings. She went to see him and practiced at home frequently seeking his guidance by visiting him at Wat Sanamnai. She attained the Dhamma in her daily life in the busy city of Bangkok and became a female successor to Luangpor Teean.

Luangpor Teean had been in poor health for some time when in mid-1983 he was diagnosed as suffering from cancer (*malignant lymphoma*). Despite extensive major surgery in 1983 and again in 1986, and despite repeated courses of radiation therapy and chemotherapy, Luangpor Teean was able to achieve an extraordinary amount of work in his last five years, giving considerable energy to providing personal guidance, giving public talks, and leading meditation retreats. He built his final meditation center at Thapmingkhwan in the town of Loei in 1983 and added Ko Phutthatham, a large nearby area, to it in 1986. He taught actively and incisively until the disease reached its advanced stages.
When he realized that the end was near, Luangpor Teean discharged himself from the hospital and returned to Ko Phutthatham in Loei province. Late in the afternoon on his fifth day back in Loei he announced that he was now going to die: He then turned his awareness completely inward. His wasted body which had been so stiff and brittle, became fully relaxed and fluid, and fully aware, unattached, holding to nothing, not even the breath, an hour later (at 6:15 p.m. on September 13, 1988) his breathing ceased like a tree coming to rest as the wind that moved it fades completely away.  

B. The Teachings of Luangpor Teean

Luangpor Teean’s dynamic meditation incorporates rhythmic bodily movements as a way to stimulate and develop awareness (sati). This practice is regarded as a way through which the body (rūpa or form) and the awareness of it (nāma or mind) are harmonized. The harmony between the body and the awareness of the body is, according to Luangpor Teean’s teachings, the very first result and the first step on the path to “seeing” thought.

Usually a human being collects a lot of mental images in daily activities, and these images reflect themselves in the process of thinking. With the dynamic

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30 I wish to thank Phra Charles Nirodho, who practiced under Luangpor Teean since 1980 and stayed with him in his final days, for helping me revise this biography and especially for his personal account of Luangpor Teean’s final minutes.
meditation of bodily movement, according to Luangpor Teean, the awareness becomes active and clear, and as a natural consequence it encounters the process of thinking and sees thought clearly. For Luangpor Teean, thought is the source of both human activity and human suffering.

In Luangpor Teean’s teachings, thought and awareness are two basic elements in a human being. When awareness is weak, thought drags us away to the past and the future, forming a strong chain. At any moment when awareness is strong, the chain of thought is immediately broken. In dynamic meditation, the practitioner seeks to stimulate, develop, and strengthen awareness to see thought and break its bonds.

For Luangpor Teean, thought is the root of greed, anger, and delusion—the three defilements of a human being. In order to overcome greed, anger, and delusion, Luangpor Teean suggested that we cannot simply suppress them by keeping precepts or an established discipline, nor can we suppress them by maintaining calmness through some form of meditation based on concentration. Though these activities are useful to some extent, we need to go to the root of the defilements: to let the awareness see thought and break through the chain of thought or, in other words, go against the stream of thought. In this way we know and see the true nature of thought.

31 In the Theravada tradition it is very common to list these three defilements together when describing the human condition of the common man or woman.

Tavivat Puntarigvivat
Luangpor Teean often warned practitioners that it is very important in meditation that we do not suppress thought by any kind of calmness or tranquility. If we do, though we might find some happiness, we will be unable to see the nature of thought. Rather, he taught that we should let thought flow freely and let our awareness know and perceive it clearly. The clear awareness will naturally go against the stream of thought by itself. All that we have to do is properly set up the mind and strengthen awareness through rhythmic bodily movements, one movement at a time.

Through dynamic meditation, the awareness that arises from bodily movement sees and breaks through the chain of thought resulting in the detachment of the inner six senses from outer objects. Detachment is not a deliberate attitude nor a conscious way of practice, but rather it is the result of a right from of practice. When awareness breaks through the chain of thought, thought loses its dominating power. Awareness becomes the dominating power over thought, over the three defilements, greed, anger, and delusion, and hence over suffering. The practice of Luangpor Teean’s dynamic meditation results in the arising of ñana-pañña (the knowledge that comes from the accumulation of direct knowing):

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32 In Buddhism, the inner six senses are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Their counterparts, the outer six objects, are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and perceiving mental objects.
Any time that thought arises we know it, even while sleeping. When we move our body while sleeping we also know it. This is because our awareness is complete. When we see thought all the time, no matter what it thinks, we conquer it every time. Those who can see thought are near the current (flowing) to nibbāna (the extinction of suffering). Then we will come to a point where something inside will arise suddenly. If the thought is quick, paññā will also be quick. If the thought or emotion is very deep, paññā will also be very deep. And if these two things are equally deep and collide, then there is the sudden breaking-out of a state that is latent in everybody. With this occurrence the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are detached from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects. It is like uncoupling the drive mechanism of a car. When the parts become independent of each other, the car, although it still exists, can no longer be driven.33

Luangpor Teean summarized the “object of practice” in dynamic meditation as follows:

**Stage 1: Suppositional object**

*Rūpa-nāma* (body-mind)

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33 Luangpor Teean, *To One That Feels*, pp. 6-7.
Rūpa-acting-nāma-acting, Rūpa-disease-nāma-disease
Dukkhaṃ-aniccam-anattā (unbearable-unstable-uncontrollable)
Sammati (supposition)
Sāsanā (“religion”), Buddhasāsanā (“Buddhism”)
Pāpa (“sin”), puññā (“merit”)

Stage 2: Touchable object
Vatthu-paramattha-akāra (thingness-touchable-changingness)
Dōsa-mōha-lōbha (anger-delusion-greed)
Vedanā-saṃñā-sankhāra-viññāna
(FEeling-memory/percept-conceiving-knowingness)
Kilesa-tanhā-upadāna-kāmma
(Stickiness-heaviness-attachment-action)
Sīla (normality)
Sīlakhandha-samādhikhandha-paṃñākhandha
(Container of normality-setting up the mind-knowing)
Samatha (concentration) and vipassanā (insight)
types of calmness

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34 Luangpor Teean freely used Pali terms to name the experiences from his practice of dynamic meditation. Most of them have more or less the same meaning as the standard translations of Pali. However, a number of them, such as kilesa (“stickiness”) and tanhā (“heaviness”) were used more freely by him. According to the standard translations, kilesa means “defilements”, whereas tanha means “lust” or “passion.”
Kāmasava-bhavāsava-avijjāsava
(The taint of “sensuality,” being, not-knowing)
The results of a bad bodily, verbal, and mental actions, and their combination;
The results of a good bodily, verbal, and mental actions, and their combination;
The state of koet-dap (arising-extinguishing).

The “object of practice” in dynamic meditation is a series of experiences by which the mind progresses step by step towards the end of suffering. These experiences are those “inner as well as physical–discovered by Luangpor Teean. They now serve as guideposts for the practitioners of dynamic meditation.

During the first stage of dynamic meditation, the suppositional object, one is supposed to know rūpa-nāma, its acting and its disease. Rūpa-nāma is known when the body (rūpa) and the awareness of the body (nāma) are harmonized. Then each movement is the movement of rūpa-nāma (body-mind). Luangpor Teean explained that for a disease of the body, one needs medical care from a doctor or a hospital. For the diseases of the mind, whose symptoms are distress, frustration, anger, greed delusion, and so on, one needs awareness and a method to stimulate and develop awareness. In practicing dynamic meditation, the mind comes to know the rūpa-nāma characteristics of dukkhamañ-aniccamañ-anattā.
At this point in the practice, one is supposed to know the distinction between supposition (*sammati*) and actuality. One is supposed to know the actual meanings of phenomena “religion”, “Buddhism”, “sin”, and “merit”. In the suppositional world, they have many different meanings, interpreted by scholars and religious people. But in actuality, they all point to the immediate experience of awareness. Luangpor Teean explained that “religion” is every one of us without exception who has a body and the consciousness of the body. “Buddhism” is the awareness leading to insightful wisdom and the cessation of psychological suffering. “Sin” is the state of lacking awareness, hence it is full of suffering. And “merit” is the state of awareness that releases suffering. Knowing the suppositional object, one is free from all kinds of superstition.

In the second stage, the touchable object, a practitioner is taught to be attentive to the process of the awareness seeing thought. The well-developed awareness naturally encounters and sees thought, as a cat seeing a rat immediately pounces upon it. In seeing thought, a person is supposed to see *vatthu-paramattha-akarā*. For Luangpor Teean, *vatthu* means anything that exists inside or outside of the mind. *Paramattha* means the touching of things with the mind. *Akarā* means the flux witnessed by the mind. Then, in continuing the practice of dynamic meditation, the mind progresses to see “anger-delusion-greed,” and
Now, in the continuous practice, one is supposed to see *kilesa-tanhā-upadāna-kāmma*. Luangpor Teean metaphorically characterized the experience of seeing these phenomena as at least a 60% reduction in the weight of the psychologically oppressive burden he bore before beginning his practice. Then the mind progresses to see first *sīla*, and then *sīlakhandha-samādhikhandha-paññākhandha*. At this point, the distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā* types of calmness is realized. According to Luangpor Teean, the calmness of *samatha* suppresses thought, so it is temporary and unnatural—it is a deluded calm that is not truly calm. On the other hand, the calmness of *vipassanā* is beyond thought and exists all the time—it is calmness that is full of awareness and insight. The mind then progresses to see *kāmasava-bhavāsava-avijjāsava*, and their combinations, and good bodily, verbal and mental actions, and their combinations.

At this point, one sees the state of *koet-dap* in which the inner six senses detach themselves from outer objects. Luangpor Teean characterized this as being like a rope that, after having been tautly drawn between two posts, is cut in two in the middle. It is not possible to tie the rope together again so long as its two parts remain tied to the posts. The state of *koet-dap* is the end of suffering and the final goal of the practice.
C. Luangpor Teean in the Buddhist World

Luangpor Teean’s teachings and his dynamic meditation are a new phenomenon not only in the Thai Theravada tradition but also in contemporary Buddhism and meditation. Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Kampuchea, represents a more conservative trend in Buddhism. It has been trying to preserve, in the long history of its own tradition, the Buddha’s teachings, the monastic life, and the early traditions, without any significant change. By going back to the original sources of Buddhism whenever necessary, witnessed in many Great Buddhist Councils throughout its history, it has tried to “purify” the religion.

Theravada Buddhism has emphasized the keeping of the sīla (precepts), the practice of the samatha (concentration) and vipassanā (contemplation on the nature of things) forms of meditation, and the study of the Pali Canon. In keeping the sīla, a person aims to have bodily control over greed, anger, and delusion; in practicing the samatha form of meditation, a person aims to purify the mind; and in practicing the vipassanā form of meditation and studying the Canon, a person aims to gain wisdom.

Luangpor Teean’s dynamic meditation has little to do with traditional Theravada practices. The rhythmic bodily movements of dynamic meditation directly stimulate and develop awareness (sati), which, in due course, encounters
and sees thought and breaks through the chain of thought—the root cause of greed, anger, and delusion. When awareness has become the dominating power over thought, true *sīla* appears. It is *sīla* that “observes” a human being, rather than a human being “observing” *sīla*. When awareness has become the dominating power over thought, true *samādhi* (the quiet mind that sees a thought and the extinction of a thought, or sees a thing directly as it is outside of thought) and *paññā* (knowledge from this direct “seeing”) appear. Silent recitation in concentration, contemplation of a corpse, contemplation on the impermanence, suffering, and void nature of things; and reading of the scriptures are all one form or another of thought.

Mahayana Buddhism, including Ch’an (*Zen*) and Vajrayana, in the Far East represents a more liberal trend in Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism has had the flexibility to adjust itself to the indigenous cultures of Bhutan, China (including Tibet), Mongolia, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam and the openness to add new ideas to its doctrines. It has emphasized the idea of *bodhisattva* (“one who embraces self-sacrifice for the welfare of others.”) From a theoretical point of view, Mahayana doctrines are quite different from those of Theravada Buddhism. But from a practical viewpoint, they are quite similar.

Besides placing emphasis on different *suttas* (the discourses of the Buddha) and some different ideas about
keeping the precepts, contemporary Mahayana meditation, be it Ch’an (Zen) or Vajrayana, is essentially the same as Theravada meditation: involving the concentration of the mind. In Ch’an (Zen) meditation, the practitioner is taught to concentrate on a koan. The specific practice is the silent recitation of the koan. In Vajrayana meditation, visualization of religious images, sometimes together with the recitation of a mantra, plays an important role. The visualization of a mental image is, however, another form of thought.

The teachings of Luangpor Teean and his dynamic meditation are unique in the contemporary world of meditation. His meditation technique is not a form of concentration, visualization, or mental recitation; rather it is a way of developing awareness so that the mind directly encounters, sees, and breaks through thought. Accordingly, once a human being has gone beyond the confines of thought, psychological suffering ceases to exist.
Chapter 4

BUDDHADASA’S THEORY OF DHAMMIC SOCIALISM

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993) was one of the most important Buddhist reformists in Thai history. His interpretation of Buddhism is considered to be part of an ongoing attempt to reform Buddhism in Thailand begun earlier by King Rama IV. Buddhadasa interpreted Theravada Buddhist teachings and the tradition of Thai Buddhist practice with wisdom and rationality which is a result of present-day scientific advancement and the expansion of the middle-class in Thai society, which includes professionals and scholars. The result is that Buddhadasa created a framework of alternative social and political theories. From a religious point of view, his emphasis on studying the Tipitaka and interpreting Buddhism with intelligence and rationality made his teachings the representative of “wisdom” in Thai Buddhism.

His series “Dhammaghosa,” which compiled his lectures into more than fifty volumes, may be considered the largest corpus of thought ever published by a single
Theravada thinker in the entire history of the tradition.\textsuperscript{35} After the compilation and publishing process is completed, this series could be even longer than the Tipitaka itself. Donald K. Swearer, an American expert on Thai Buddhism, has evaluated the role and status of Buddhadasa in the history of Theravada Buddhism as follows:

History may well judge him as the most seminal Theravada thinker since Buddhaghosa, and may evaluate Buddhadasa’s role within the Buddhist tradition to be on a par with such great Indian Buddhist thinkers as Nagarjuna with whom he has been compared.\textsuperscript{36}

Some of Buddhadasa’s lectures are related to political, economic and social problems from a Buddhist point of view, and this ultimately led to his “dhammic socialism” theory.

\section*{4.1 Theory of Dhammic Socialism}

In response to rapid social change in Thailand, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, a contemporary Thai Buddhist thinker, has interpreted Buddhism not only from a religious point of view but also from a socio-political perspective. After devoting most of his life to reforming Buddhism in Thailand, Buddhadasa found it necessary to address

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  \item \textsuperscript{35} Swearer, “Introduction,” p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Swearer, “The Vision of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa,” p. 14.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
socio-political issues from a Buddhist perspective. In the 1960’s, he articulated his socio-political position in terms of “dhammocracy” (*dhamma-thipatai*): the social and political order should follow the law of Dhamma--the teachings of the Buddha. Later on in the atmosphere of the student led Revolution in Thailand from 1973 to 1976, Buddhadasa presented his unique theory of “dhammic socialism” (*dhammika sangkhom-niyom*).

Buddhadasa bases his theory of dhammic socialism on nature. To him, nature represents the state of balance for the survival and well-being of human beings, animals, plants, and the ecology of the world. In the state of nature, every being produces according to its capacity and consumes according to its needs. No being, whatever form it has, hoards “surplus” for its own sake. Buddhadasa calls this balanced state of nature socialistic. Problems arise, however, when human beings begin to hoard a “surplus” for the sake of their own profit. This leaves others facing scarcity and poverty. According to Buddhadasa, human beings can and should produce a “surplus,” but the “surplus” should be distributed for the well-being of everyone, and Buddhism provides the ethical tools for this fair distribution.

Philosophically, dhammic socialism is based on this principle: none of us should take more than we really need. We should share whatever extra we have with those who have less. Social problems are fundamentally a result of
greed. In other words, greed is at the heart of scarcity and poverty.\textsuperscript{37} Buddhadasa’s individualistic approach to social and economic problems, solved by the personal practice of self-restraint (\textit{sīla} ‘precepts’ and \textit{vinaya} ‘discipline’) and giving (\textit{dāna}), is, in many respects, reflective of his Theravada Buddhist worldview. Within the modern economic situation, however, it remains to be seen whether such an approach can address the issue of scarcity and poverty at the structural level caused by the global market economy. I propose to present, analyze and critique Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism and his interpretation of liberation.

The term “socialism” (\textit{sangkhom-niyom}) in the Thai language is interesting in itself as it reflects a Buddhist perspective on socialism. The term \textit{sangkhom} comes from the Sanskrit root \textit{sangha} (community), and \textit{niyom} from the Sanskrit root \textit{niyama} (restraint). So \textit{sangkhom-niyom} literally means the restraint of each member of the society for the benefit of the community. The restraint of oneself is one of the most basic teachings of the Buddha: \textit{sila} (normality, “precepts”). As Buddhadasa understands it, the Buddhist \textit{sangha} (community of monks) is a living example of the socialist way of life and the socialist community in Buddhism. For him, “dhammic socialism” is a socialism of the Dhamma. Buddhadasa bases his idea of dhammic socialism on his insights into nature, the teachings of the

\textsuperscript{37}Buddhadasa, \textit{Dhammic Socialism}, p. 107.
Buddha, and the practice of the Buddhist Sangha. In this section I propose to analyze and critique various aspects of Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism.

A. Dhammic Socialism and the State of Nature

According to Buddhadasa, the spirit or essence of socialism is rooted in nature (Thai: *dhammajati* “born of dhamma”). The state of nature in its pure sense is an example of pure socialism. Buddhadasa sees that:

> The entire universe (*cakravala*) is a socialist system. Countless numbers of stars in the sky exist together in a socialist system. Because they follow a socialist system they can survive. Our small universe with its sun and planets including the earth is a socialist system. Consequently, they do not collide.\(^{38}\)

Buddhadasa further develops his conception of the state of nature by introducing the Western theory of evolution, but while always keeping in mind the Buddhist notions of “conditionality” (*idappaccayatā*), and “interdependent co-arising” (*paticcasamuppāda*). He sees that after the earth became separated from the sun, it gradually cooled and hardened. As years went by this stone-like matter eroded into soil and dust, and various elements took shape. Nothing existed or came into being independently.

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The primordial waters gave rise to the first single-celled organisms we call life. Over time this life evolved into multi-celled forms and then into plants and animals. All aspects of nature combine in an interdependent relationship. Buddhadasa maintains that,

Even an atom is a socialistic system of interdependent parts. A molecule also exhibits socialistic characteristics in that it is made up of several interdependent atoms. On and on it goes; molecules combine to form tissue, tissues combine to form flesh or leaves or whatever, all interdependent and in balance, according to the principles of Nature’s pure socialism.

Buddhadasa observes that among all forms of life in the natural world, no one species takes more than its share. In all these various levels of living beings, none ever consumes more than it needs. Even the first cellular organisms took in only what their simple cell structures required to survive. Groups of cells consumed only enough to sustain the colony. Then plant life evolved, each plant consuming only what it needed to maintain itself. Then followed animals--types of fish, birds, and others. All consume only as much as their systems require. A bird eats only what its stomach will hold. It is incapable of taking more than it must have to live.

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40 Ibid., p. 118.
Throughout the process of evolution, according to Buddhadasa, from single celled organisms right up to the appearance of the first primitive human being, the natural world remained inherently socialistic. Nature did not provide any of its various forms with the means of hoarding more resources than were necessary for survival and development. Buddhadasa argues that in this state of nature:

Birds, insects, trees—all consume only as much as Nature has given them the means to take in, a level of consumption perfectly adequate for their needs. It is precisely this limiting..aspect of nature that has allowed the plant and animal world to survive and multiply in such profusion and diversity.\footnote{Buddhadasa, \textit{Dhammic Socialism}, pp. 59-60.}

Buddhadasa points out that in this condition of normalcy, stones, sand, trees, and insects simply are. No artificial theory or social system directs their interrelationships. They exist in a natural state of balance, or pure socialism.\footnote{Ibid., p. 87.} To elaborate more of his theory, Buddhadasa argues from the anatomical point of view that,

In these realms nothing exists independently: eyes work in conjunction with the ears, the ears with the nose, the nose with the mouth... All organs, big and small, need to work together performing according to their true nature
(dhammasacca) as bodily components. Similarly, the spirit of socialism exists in everyone: the necessity of living together in a properly harmonious, balanced way.\textsuperscript{43}

When human beings first evolved, argues Buddhadasa, and inhabited the forests and jungles, they had no granaries nor storehouses. They ate only what was necessary to survive; they gathered daily whatever food they needed. Buddhadasa claims that in this earliest period, no person or group stockpiled a surplus of anything, so social problems as we know them today did not yet exist. They lived according to a natural socialism for hundreds of thousands of years. We are here today because nature has maintained a harmonious socialistic balance through the entire evolutionary process. Buddhadasa argues that this natural balance was threatened, when a few “un-natural” human beings began to hoard more products for themselves than they needed. This hoarding left others with a shortage and gave rise to rivalry instead of cooperation. Human intelligence was then applied to methods of hoarding resources--grain, food, and other products--and accumulating wealth and power in order to take advantage of others. Buddhadasa contends that,

\textit{Nature would have each of us use no more than we actually need. For years people have failed}

\textsuperscript{43} Buddhadasa, “A Socialism Capable of Benefiting the World,” p. 104.
to heed the way of Nature, competing with one another to take as much as they could, causing the problems that we live with to this day. If we were to take only what is enough, none of these problems would exist, because then people would not be taking advantage of others and oppressing them.\textsuperscript{44}

The question, then, is how much is enough? Buddhadasa suggests that there is no set rule. It varies according to the time, place, and situation. He complains that these days it seems nothing is ever enough: “Even two entire mountains of gold are not enough to satisfy the desires of a single person”\textsuperscript{45} Human desires keep multiplying, increasing our wants at the expense of other people. Once supplies were hoarded, problems of unequal distribution and access arose. The problems multiplied over time. Leaders of various groups would be in charge of stockpiling supplies for the group, and fighting among the groups was inevitable. To maintain control over society and to limit human greed (\textit{kilesa}), laws and moral systems were developed.

Social justice, according to Buddhadasa, can be obtained when people “return” to the balanced state of natural socialism. To him, socialism is based on a principle in accord with the way of nature, that none of us should take

\textsuperscript{44} Buddhadasa, “Democratic Socialism,” p. 60.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 61.
more than we really need, and we should share our surplus with those who have less. We all have a natural right to take as much as we need, but not more. People all over the world should learn to share a portion of what they have even if they consider what they share to be essential to their own well-being. Such sharing would be in accordance with morality (sīla-dhāmma), and everyone would benefit from it. After all, this does not mean that we should not produce a surplus. People have a right to produce more than they need, and it is even appropriate to do so if the surplus is shared with others.

From a religious perspective, Buddhadasa’s argument contends that in the state of nature there exists the perfect essence of morality (sīla-dhāmma), the condition of harmonious balance and normalcy. Buddhadasa calls this balance and normalcy the plan or intention (cetana) of nature. People existed in this condition for ages until they lost morality and natural socialism as a consequence of their ignorance (avijjā). When they transgress the natural balance in the cosmos they suffer the consequences of their ignorance. Nature punishes them for their ignorance and the destruction they inflict on it. This was the beginning of sin (pāpa). For Buddhadasa, socialism was not actually the creation of human beings, but rather the original state of nature which encompassed both the human and animal worlds. Social problems arose when human beings acted against this original intention of nature. More and more
problems arose over time as a result of human effort--more and more distinctions were made among people. At some point it became necessary for human beings to construct a socialist system themselves because they had so separated themselves from nature.  

From a Buddhist perspective, the truth (*dhammasacca*) or the essence of nature (*dhammajati*) is the essence of the dhamma. It is simply this. Things are imbued with the spirit of socialism, miraculously, all things exist in unity with one another even though we may not have the eyes to see this truth or the wisdom to comprehend it. Nothing can exist independently. Everything exists interdependently. Socialism, from a Buddhist perspective, includes not just human beings, but also all living beings and the entire natural environment. Buddhadasa argues that if each of us were to exercise our natural rights to the extent allowed by nature, this world would be filled with a contentment such as we attribute to the realm of Buddha Maitreya (the Buddhist Utopia), where there is no suffering (*dukkha*) or dissatisfaction. For Buddhadasa, this is the highest law of nature and the basis of his theory of dhammic socialism.

Buddhadasa’s theory that the natural state of plants, animals, and human beings is socialistic is insightful and well received. One may argue, however, that his inter-

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46 Ibid., pp. 87-88.
pretation of cosmic and atomic systems are also socialistic is problematic. The movement of stars and planets in the cosmos and of atoms in a molecule are mechanical and do not reflect ethical or social values. The same is true for the functioning of cells and organs in living beings. But here Buddhadasa uses “socialism” as a comprehensive term for all levels of being. His view of nature, however, is similar to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. In his book, *The Origin of Species*, Darwin writes:

> It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working, *whenever and wherever opportunity offers*, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic condition of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the lapse of ages, and then so imperfect is our view into long-past geological ages, that we see only that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were.⁴⁸

Yet, what is behind Buddhadasa’s state of nature is quite different from Darwin’s theory of natural selection.

According to Darwin, man not only evolved, but evolved by natural selection. Natural selection pictures the world in a constant process of change, but without any apparent prior intention of going anywhere in particular or of becoming anything in particular. In other words, Darwin’s principle of evolution is without what Buddhadasa calls the plan or intention (cetana) of nature. According to the Darwinian theory of natural selection, living organisms are all engaged in a “struggle for existence” in which only the fittest survive. But some Darwinians have also found among plants and animals some forms of “mutual aid” and “mutual support” for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species, and its further evolution.49 This modification of the survival of the fittest would align Darwinism to a certain degree with Buddhadasa’s view of nature as “socialistic cooperation.”

Darwin’s zoological conceptions of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest reinforce Thomas Hobbes’s (1588-1679) socio-political theory of the human state of nature. Hobbes maintains that nature has made human beings equal in their faculties of the body and mind. For the physical body, even the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest by various means. For the faculties of the mind, prudence is but experience which, with equal time and opportunity, equally bestows on all human beings the same capacities. From this equality of

ability, argues Hobbes, arises equality of hope in attaining one’s ends. Therefore, if any two men desire the same things which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies. In his book, *Leviathan*, Hobbes maintains that in the state of nature,

> if one (person) plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossess, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty. And the invader again is in the like danger of another.⁵⁰

According to Hobbes, three principal causes of strife among human beings are competition, diffidence, and glory. The first makes men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. Hobbes writes:

> Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.⁵¹

And again,

> To this war of every man, against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be

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⁵¹ Ibid., p. 82.
unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no justice.\(^{52}\)

According to Hobbes, the passions that incline human beings to peace are fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them. For these reasons, human beings drew up agreements and made laws in order to obtain peace. Hobbes’ state of nature is fundamentally at odds with Buddhadasa’s. While Hobbes maintains that in the state of nature, human beings are at war against each other; law and order and peace are the creation of human beings. Buddhadasa’s theory of the state of nature is just the opposite. Buddhadasa says that in the state of nature, human beings are socialistic, cooperative, and at peace. War is the creation of mankind out of the unnatural desire for “surplus.” While Hobbes discusses only the socio-political dimension of the human state of nature, Buddhadasa’s theory is more holistic: it embraces the entire world of nature--cosmos, plant and animal species as well as human beings.

Buddhadasa’s theory provides a positive foundation for solving today’s world-wide ecological crisis. In his book, *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry, a contemporary American eco-theologian, writes:

\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 83.
we are beginning to move beyond democracy to biocracy, to the participation of the larger life community in our human decision-making processes... we must now understand that our own well-being can be achieved only through the well-being of the entire natural world about us.\textsuperscript{53}

With the contemporary environmental crisis—the destruction of the tropical rain forests, the expanding pollution in the atmosphere, and the extinction of many living species—Buddhadasa’s theory of the socialistic, balanced state of nature represents a progressive ecological worldview.

**B. Dhammic Socialism and Religion**

Buddhadasa argues that Buddhism, and all world religions for that matter, are essentially socialistic in nature. Buddhism in particular is a socialist religion, both in its principles and its spirit. Buddhadasa maintains that the Buddha was born into this world to help all beings—not to benefit any one person or even himself. If we consider the Buddha’s compassionate behavior toward all living beings, we can see the highest form of socialism. The socialistic ideal of Buddhism finds expression in the concept of the bodhisattva.\textsuperscript{54} The bodhisattva is one who not only helps

\textsuperscript{53} Berry, \textit{The Dream of the Earth}, pp. xiii-xv.

others, but sacrifices himself or herself, even his or her own life, for others.

From Buddhadasa’s interpretation, the founders (sasada) of all religions have affirmed that they came to the world for the benefit of all beings; all have spoken out against excessive consumption. Buddhadasa claims that the founders of every religion have wanted people to live according to socialist principles in order to act in the interest of society as a whole. He also maintains that Buddhism and all religions are founded on the ideal of love and compassion toward all beings. This attitude engenders equality and freedom, and the sense of the essential interrelatedness of all beings. All religions are, therefore, socialistic in this sense.

In Buddhism, all members of the Buddhist community (sangha)–monks and laity–are not only taught but are required to consume no more than their fair share of material goods. Excessive consumption is wrong and demeritorious. True Buddhists, argues Buddhadasa, have an unconscious ideal of socialism. It has existed in the Buddhist doctrine as well as the practice among the Buddhist communities since the Buddha’s time. Buddhadasa recalls:

We must keep in mind that socialism is not something new and faddish. If we were to go back about 2000 years we would meet the finest socialist system which was part of the
flesh and blood of the Buddhist community. Consequently, if we hold fast to Buddhism we shall have a socialist disposition in our very being. We shall see our fellow humans as friends in suffering--in birth, old age, sickness and death--and, hence, we cannot abandon them. Everyone here should be able to understand this statement. The elderly, especially, may remember how our forefathers taught us to be altruistic, to consider others as friends in all aspects of life and death. This ideal of pure socialism must be acted out, not just talked about, and just for political purposes or for one’s selfish, devious and false gain. Buddhists need to become familiar with the socialism inherent in the Buddhist community, using it as a weapon against bloody forms of socialism which promote one’s own evil deeds and forces them on others.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 102-103.}

According to Buddhadasa, a good way to look at the meaning of socialism is to think of it as not taking more than one’s fair share--using only what is necessary so that the rest is available for other’s use. Both in the teachings of the Dhamma and in the rules for the monastic order (\textit{vinaya}), it is written that Buddhist monks must live with
only the bare necessities. All of these rules are given simply to guarantee that monks will not take more than their share, so that others will be sure to have enough to meet their needs. Buddhadasa argues further that the Dhamma teaches us to be content with what we have--to accumulate and own just enough to take care of our material needs. Accordingly, it places great emphasis on being generous with what we have. A true Buddhist community, according to Buddhadasa, would be content with the basic necessities of life. Whatever a person did not really need would be left available for the use of the entire community. Buddhadasa recasts the historical past of Thailand as a kind of the Buddhist Utopia:

Religion was the foundation of our culture, our siladhama. Countless generations of our ancestors have been practicing religion as a central part of their culture. It was a fundamental part of each person’s life, of every home, and even of the entire country.\(^56\)

He observes that when villagers in his home area went out to the fields to plant fruit trees, vegetables, or grain, they recited this little verse as they planted the seeds:

Food for a hungry bird is our merit;
Food for a hungry person--our charity.\(^57\)

\(^56\) Buddhadasa, “Democratic Socialism,” p. 68.
\(^57\) Ibid.
The villagers considered that they would receive merit (puññā) if a bird ate food from the plant; if a hungry person took food from their fields, they considered it alms-giving or charity. The villagers always planted enough food plants so that birds and hungry people could have what they needed.

For Buddhadasa, the socialist characteristics of dhamma manifest themselves in the harmonious balance of everything. He argues that when people fall out of harmony with this natural balance, they experience suffering in the form of social injustice, tension and anxiety. So, instead of putting emphasis on solving social problems at the symptomatic level such as food shortages and hunger, Buddhadasa suggests that we should lead the society back to the socialistic and harmonious principle of dhammic socialism. Buddhadasa believes that “life in the truest sense is sustained by the Dhamma not just by food.”

Buddhadasa’s proposal seems to presuppose a religiously grounded society not unlike the monastic sangha.

Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialistic ideal may be relevant, if it operates naturally and spontaneously on a voluntary basis. There is a problem, however, if the sangha’s rules are to apply to society at large. Louis Gabaude comments that,

A civil society is composed of members who

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58 Ibid., p. 54.
did not choose to get into it, who do not want to get out of it, and who do not have the same ideals. A society of “renouncers,” such as the religious disciples of the Buddha, is composed of members who chose to “get out” of a civil society and to live according to a given ideal embedded in precise rules. Is it valid to assume that the principles of a community of “renouncers” apply to the society from which they wanted to leave?  

In the modern context, if the Buddhist principles of self-restraint (ṣīla and vinaya), loving-kindness (mettakaruna) and giving (dāna) are voluntarily practiced by those Buddhists inside and outside of the sangha, they are acceptable to everyone in the society. But, from a modern socio-political perspective, to impose the religious rules and regulations of the Buddhist sangha onto a secular society would violate people’s freedom of religion. People should be left with their freedom of choice to accept or reject any religious rules or traditions. To impose the norms of a voluntary religious community in a society is both unrealistic and problematic. It would turn a dynamic modern society like Thailand into a static religious fundamentalist state. Furthermore, it is naive to think that a model of sangha government could order a diverse, pluralistic modern nation-state.

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C. Dhammic Socialism and Social Ethics

From a social and ethical point of view, Buddhadasa makes the distinction between “socialism” and “individualism.” For him, to carry out the task of social work, or services to society, we must embrace the “social-ism” of the work; otherwise we are advocating “individual-ism,” or service in the interest of individuals. Socialism, according to Buddhadasa, focuses on the welfare of people in all sectors of a society as well as the examination and correction of social problems at all levels. In a society that puts the interests of individuals above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed. Buddhadasa criticizes individualism holding that, as the basic principle of most democratic societies, it cannot provide a basis for the well-being of all people in the society because it promotes individual benefits rather than social benefits. He argues that dhammic socialism, on the contrary, is more concerned with social benefits and can save the world from what appears to be self-destruction—the world of individualism and material development which promotes consumerism, selfishness and the devastation of natural resources and the environment.

According to Buddhadasa, social problems arose as societies formed. When people lived isolated from one another or in small groups, as in the Stone Age, social problems did not exist or were very few. As the population increased and people began living together in larger and
larger groups, social problems began to appear. As societies grew and multiplied, people oppressed one another and the problems grew until they became crises. In this analysis, Buddhadasa’s concept of urban society differs from the German sociologist Emile Durkheim’s theory of the division of labor.

In his book, *The Division of Labor in Society*, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) explores how human beings, as social beings, create a division of labor and progress in civilization. Durkheim’s main thesis is that the volume and density of population are the cause of the expanding division of labor, and hence the cause of civilization. By the volume of population, Durkheim means the number of people living in one area. By the density of population, he means the dense and rapid social interaction among people in a given society. It is, for Durkheim, the volume and density of population that force people to specialize their work in order to improve survival in the new social environment. This division of labor is the cause of progress and civilization.\(^6\)

Like Durkheim, Buddhadasa sees the volume and density of population in a given society as the cause of social tensions. But, while Durkheim regards social tensions as the cause of the ever more diverse division of labor in society, which results in a progressly better civilization, Buddhadasa regards social tensions as the cause of social

\(^6\) For more details, see Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. 
conflicts and crises which need to be solved by returning to the spirit of sharing and loving-kindness under dhammic socialism. In short, Buddhadasa seems to propose a return to a pre-capitalist state.

Buddhadasa suggests that whatever system is laid out for the functioning of a social group, the principles of such a system must be for the good of the society as a whole, not just for individuals or for any one person. Buddhadasa argues that the content of society is social, not individual. Even the need to procreate and produce children is, after all, a social matter. Human survival depends upon the support of others in the spirit of cooperation and care. From his emphasis on the public good, it seems that Buddhadasa disagrees with the capitalist conception of private property. This would align Buddhadasa with Karl Marx on this specific issue. Marx describes Adam Smith as the “Luther of political economy.” According to Marx, Adam Smith did to political economy exactly what Luther did to religion. As Luther transformed the external theology into the inner essence of man, Adam Smith transformed external property into private property. Adam Smith, in Marxian terms, is the prophet of the “religion of private property.” Private property is embodied in a human being, and human beings have become the essence of private property. Marx comments that,

Just as Luther recognized religion and faith as the essence of the external world and in
consequence confronted Catholic paganism; just as he transcended *external* religiosity by making religiosity the *inner* essence of man; just as he negated the idea of priests as something separate and apart from the layman by transferring the priest into the heart of the layman; so wealth as something outside man and independent of him—and therefore only to be acquired and maintained externally—is abolished [*aufgehoben*]. I.e. its *external* and *mindless objectivity* is abolished inasmuch as private property is embodied in man himself and man himself is recognized as its essence—but this brings man himself into the province of private property, just as Luther brought him into the province of religion.\(^{61}\)

Ironically, whereas Buddhadasa disagrees with Adam Smith’s internalization of public property into private property, he finds himself on the same religious grounds as Martin Luther. Just as Luther internalized Christian teachings and deconstructed a formal priesthood into the inner essence of human beings, Buddhadasa internalizes Buddhist teachings and symbols into inner or psychological states.

Buddhadasa is openly backward-looking. In order for people all over the world to live in happiness, Buddhadasa

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suggests that we must go backwards and return to the way of the Dhamma: the harmony and balance of the socialistic state of nature.\textsuperscript{62} In performing any kind of social service, this basic principle should be borne in mind. At this point in history, according to Buddhadasa, the highest form of social work is to enable people to back up and get onto the right track. In his view, people nowadays have gone so far off course that the world seems headed for disaster: “We are about to fall into an abyss, if we have not gone over the edge already.”\textsuperscript{63} The problem of poverty, for example, is a result of people having gotten off the track. Even the current problems of illiteracy and ignorance of good health practices arise from having gone in the wrong direction.

By getting on track Buddhadasa means the recognition that human beings all face the same basic problem: overcoming suffering (\textit{dukkha}). The most fundamental problems are not material ones like overpopulation and poverty, but rather the increase in desires (\textit{tanha}), defilements (\textit{kilesa}) and ignorance (\textit{avijj\text{"a}}) which are the causes of psychological suffering. For Buddhadasa, solving social problems means returning to

\textsuperscript{62} This is one of Buddhadasa’s usages of paradox or contradiction: going “backward” to go “forward.” Buddhadasa believes that today people in the world are going in the wrong direction. They discard religious and traditional values which had sustained a peaceful social balance. To keep going in the wrong direction is to head for disaster. Buddhadasa, therefore, suggests that we need to go “backward” to the right kind of religious values first in order to go “forward” and make true progress in the right direction.

\textsuperscript{63} Buddhadasa, “Democratic Socialism,” p. 45.
these basic causes of suffering. Social work for the benefit of all humanity in the most basic sense is to overcome this suffering. Buddhadasa comments:

It is almost laughable simply to speak of solving the problems of hunger, illiteracy, and illness, because these are not the real problems at all; they are only symptoms. The fundamental problem is the lack of religion (sasana) and moral principles (sīladhāmma) in modern society. If we were to solve these basic problems, would illiteracy, hunger, and illness disappear? Even if they did not, people who had never learned to read could still be happier than the most literate among us.64

Again, he criticizes the current situation because many groups claim to be working for society, but they are actually after personal gain and glory:

How can people who form international organizations solve the world’s problems when they are made up of selfish people?... Why do we not, instead, solve the problem by becoming human in the fullest sense of the word, according to the way of God and Nature, that is, putting the welfare of others before our own selfish interests.65

64 Ibid., pp. 53-54.
65 Ibid., p. 64.
As a religious leader, Buddhadasa condemns killing, war, and the preparation for war. The cataclysmic nature of warfare threatens all forms of life. Even animals are unintentionally subjected to the brutal behavior of human beings. Instead, he suggests the practice of the Buddhist ethical principle of loving-kindness (*metta-karuna*):

Today people are so cruel that they have dropped a bomb knowing that it could kill [hundreds of] thousands of human beings... Both so-called socialist as well as capitalist countries are prepared to drop such bombs... If we want peace we should choose the path of peace. Killing others will only lead to being killed. The only way of living harmoniously together is to act out of loving-kindness (*metta-karuna*) ... We should overcome evil with good, for evil cannot be overcome by evil.66

For Buddhadasa, social problems are mainly concerned with social ethics. Solving social problems, according to Buddhadasa, depends largely on people following these moral principles. We should act in the best interests of the entire community, avoid the consumption of goods beyond our simple needs, share with others what is not essential for us, even if we consider ourselves poor, give generously of our wealth if we are well-to-do. Buddhadasa

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believes that following these principles will lead to the solution of various social and economic problems.

Although Buddhadasa believes that the nature of society is essentially social—set of complex social relationships—not simply a combination of individuals, and advocates the “social-ism” rather than “individual-ism,” his approach is still individualistic. For him, personal greed is the root of social problems. No matter how hard we have tried to change social systems, if we do not apply the Buddhist ethical principle of self-restraint to ourselves and to everyone in society, we are bound to fail in solving social problems. Buddhadasa’s individualistic approach might work well in a simple traditional society of the ancient past or in remote rural Thai society, but it would fail to solve any structural problems in a complex society like contemporary Thailand, which is influenced by the highly organized global market economy under capitalism.

**D. Dhammic Socialism and Capitalism**

Ideologically, dhammic socialism is different from capitalism in that it offers a different economic system and a different political ideology, and their leaders have different moral qualities. Buddhadasa makes the distinction between a “capitalist” in the Western sense and a “wealthy person” in the Buddhist sense. A person of great material wealth (Sanskrit: sresthi) in the Buddhist tradition differs significantly from the contemporary capitalist (Thai: nai-thun
‘master of capital’). A capitalist, according to Buddhadasa, is one who keeps accumulating material wealth far beyond what he or she actually needs. A sresthi, on the other hand, is a wealthy person who uses his or her accumulated wealth to build rong-than (almshouse) for the sake of social welfare. A rong-than was an almshouse or a communal place where the poor could come and receive what they lacked materially. The status of sresthi was measured by the number of their rong-than. If they had no almshouses they could not be called sresthi. The more rong-than one had, the wealthier one was considered to be.

Buddhadasa argues that during the Buddhist era, even such terms as slave or servant had a socialistic meaning. He portrays a Buddhist Utopia in which slaves did not want to leave the sresthi. On the contrary, under capitalism, “slaves” hate capitalists. Buddhadasa claims that, Sresthi during the Buddhist era treated their slaves like their own children. All worked together for a common good. They observed the moral precepts together on Buddhist sabbath days... In those days slavery was socialistic and did not need to be abolished. Slave and master worked for the common good. The kind of slavery which should be abolished, exists under a capitalist system in which a master treats slaves or servants like animals. Slaves under such a system always
desire freedom, but slaves under a socialist system want to remain with their masters because they feel at ease... Slaves were recipients of love, compassion, and care.\footnote{Buddhadasa, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” p. 94.}

Buddhadasa argues that Buddhists have espoused socialism since antiquity, whether at the level of king, wealthy merchant or slave. Buddhadasa claims that most slaves were content with their status even though they could not be ordained as monks.\footnote{Ibid.} According to Thai Buddhist tradition, however, the worst thing that could happen to a Thai man was the violation of his religious right to be ordained as a monk. Consequently, one can hardly agree with Buddhadasa that a male slave would be happy with his status without the right to ordination. Buddhadasa also claims that the slaves could be released from their obligations, or continue in them, as they chose. Buddhadasa has a too utopian and positive view of Thai slavery. He ignores the negative aspects of it, including parents abusing their children by selling them as slaves to pay the parents’ debts, being born into slavery and the arbitrary beating and torture of slaves. Buddhadasa’s claim that Buddhist socialism in those days was pure and totally different from the socialism of today is historically unfounded.

Buddhadasa maintains that without loving-kindness (\textit{metta-karuna}) and charity (\textit{dāna}), the rich are strictly

\cite{Buddhadasa, "A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism," p. 94.}
capitalists who simply accumulate wealth and power for themselves. They oppress their workers in order to make profit, accumulate excessive wealth, and reinvest for their own further profits. Buddhadasa places too much emphasis on the moral quality of the rich without asking the ethical basis of the prevailing social structure. Modern economists argue that the decision of the rich to make a profit and reinvest is rational. Under a market economy, economic laws and productivity take the place of moral responsibility. Adam Smith, for example, argues that the free market transforms private vice into public good. It turns greed into economic productivity. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith maintains that by following the logic of profits, those who hold capital and make economic decisions, however unintentionally, eventually help the poor through their economic activity. Adam Smith writes:

He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this case, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no
part of his intention.\textsuperscript{69}

For Adam Smith, people are rational and calculating when it comes to their own self-interest. So let these self-interested, free-market consumers associate with competing producers. Soon they will have products of high quality at the lowest possible price.\textsuperscript{70} Self-interest among consumers, combined with competition among producers, will transform individual greed into the fuel of an efficient economy.

This view differs radically from the economy of dhammic socialism. Buddhadasa proposes that the wealthy person (\textit{sresthi}) in dhammic socialism employs workers in a cooperative effort for the welfare of the entire community. Wealthy people during the Buddhist era, according to Buddhadasa, were respected by the proletariat rather than attacked by them. Thus, the rich should not be capitalists who exploit their workers and hoard wealth, but sresthi whose high economic and social position enables them to be benefactors to the workers and the poor. In contrast to Adam Smith, Buddhadasa depicts the ideal economy as rather static without economic competition and a market economy, but with a high level of social welfare based on the personal moral behavior of the wealthy.

\textsuperscript{70} Raines and Day-Lower, \textit{Modern Work and Human Meaning}, pp. 18-20.
Under contemporary capitalism, Buddhadasa rightly points out that people are destroying the earth’s raw materials, natural resources, and environment. Buddhadasa complains that the earth’s resources are being consumed in unnecessarily large quantities, only to be used carelessly and wastefully. Often times they are turned into instruments of harm. Minerals are taken from the earth and made into weapons of mass destruction. Eventually those resources will become depleted, having been used for wasteful and utterly useless ends. Buddhadasa comments that,

If we were to use the earth’s resources according to the laws of Nature and within its limits, we would not need to use as much as we do now. There would be plenty for everyone for years to come, or even indefinitely. Nowadays, however, we are squandering the earth’s minerals so destructively that before long they will be gone. Acting in such a way is contrary to the Dhamma... If we were to use them as we should, according to the laws of Nature, there would always be an abundant supply.\(^{71}\)

Buddhadasa maintains, furthermore, that if people would use only what is necessary, the world would have sufficient resources for all. According to Buddhadasa, excessive hoarding leads to scarcity, and scarcity leads to

\(^{71}\)Buddhadasa, “Democratic Socialism,” p. 51.
poverty. Therefore, not to take or consume in excess will lead to the elimination of poverty.

In Buddhadasa’s view, human beings have exploited and devastated nature until many species of animals and plants have become extinct. Even some races of homo sapiens have become extinct because of the selfishness and oppression of other human beings. In Buddhadasa’s view, selfishness has led to great disparities among people with some becoming excessively rich and others excessively poor. Both the rich and the poor, according to Buddhadasa, do not understand socialism correctly. This ignorance has been partially responsible for their respective conditions, the poverty of the poor and their exploitation by the rich. Buddhadasa maintains that wealth need not be condemned in and of itself. The rich should work to alleviate the conditions of the poor for the good of society. The poor, for their part, should improve their own conditions by working diligently and avoiding the kinds of misconduct which leads them to poverty.\footnote{Buddhadasa, “A Socialism Capable of Benefiting the World,” p. 108.} Buddhadasa’s class analysis here is based on personal moral grounds without any regard for the structural causes of social and economic class. Here again, he reveals his individualistic approach to social and economic problems.

Buddhadasa promotes the use of technology only if it is for the benefit of society at large. He agrees that modern technology should be used to produce a surplus, but this
surplus should be made available to all who are in need, not for the profit of individuals.\textsuperscript{73} He believes that if people were to use technology in producing the products they all need and if shared, there would be plenty to go around. For mass media technology, Buddhadasa proposes that communication technology such as radios, televisions, and computers not be used solely for personal gain, but for the welfare of society. If these inventions were used in a dhammic socialistic way, he believes that peace and happiness in the world could be achieved in a short time. In short, Buddhadasa supports the use of technology as a means to produce a surplus for the welfare of all people in society. But wasteful technology simply promotes greed and devastates the environment. Unfortunately, Buddhadasa does not indicate what is an appropriate use of resources beyond the limits of necessity. More importantly, he does not propose any measurement for the fair distribution of the surplus among various sectors of the society besides the personal voluntary charity of the rich.

**E. Dhammic Socialism and Democracy**

As Buddhadasa defines it, “True politics is a struggle against misunderstanding, wrong view, craving after defilements and the like.”\textsuperscript{74} All over the world politics has become a means to take advantage of others, and politicians

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\textsuperscript{73} Buddhadasa, “Democratic Socialism,” p. 75.

\textsuperscript{74} Buddhadasa, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” p. 79.
speak only for their own advantage. This, according to Buddhadasa, poisons the real meaning of politics (Thai: *kara-muang* ‘making a town’). He suggests that, “We need to see politics as a form of practical morality... when politics is seen as a form of morality, it can help the world.”

Buddhadasa argues that,

> Politics is a moral matter. For a political system to be moral it must be consistent with the truth or the essence of nature (the *sacca* of *dhammajati*). A moral political system embodies dhamma, whereas a political system not based in morality is dishonest, destructive and inconsistent with the essence or fundamental truth of Nature.

Buddhadasa links the terms “politics,” “socialism,” and “religion” together. The word “politics” in its root meaning, according to Buddhadasa, can be defined simply as “concerning many people or things.” Politics is a moral system based on social cooperation to solve the problems that arise from the increasing number of people living together. It is a strategy for addressing social problems. In this meaning of politics, argues Buddhadasa, “socialism” is a more moral political system than any other since it concerns social cooperation and the well-being of the whole society. In this sense, socialism is a system which brings

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75 Ibid., p. 80.

about balance (*prakati*) in society. Buddhadasa defines “religion” (*sasana*) as the most perfect state of morality. Since a political system should be essentially a system of morality, politics and religion have an essential relationship and share a common ground. As Buddhadasa understands it,

The study of society, the “social sciences” (*sangham-sastra*), should be seen as basically a moral enterprise. The term *sastra* originally meant that which is sharp, used for cutting... When *sastra* is applied to society as *sangham-sastra* (social sciences) we can see that it means something sharp which will cut through the problems of society whether political, economic or social. Politics, as one of the social sciences, can be seen as a method of cutting through social problems.\(^77\)

Again, Buddhadasa points out:

the “science of society” (*sastra-sangham*) is fundamentally ethical in nature for it proposes to “cut through” the problems of society in all its facets in order to bring about a natural harmony and balance among the parts. We need to see politics as a form of practical morality, not morality in the philosophical sense.\(^78\)

\(^77\) Buddhadasa, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” pp. 78-79.
\(^78\) Ibid., p. 80.
Concerning the political institution of “democracy,” Buddhadasa maintains that democracy, on the one hand, can be a means of taking advantage of and destroying others. On the other hand, it can be an instrument to create peace. “The term is used by both capitalists and the proletariat against one another. Capitalists use it to defend their acquisition of wealth and property, while the proletariats use it to deprive them of it.”79 In his own terms, Buddhadasa approaches “democracy” from two perspectives. From a social perspective, democracy increases the likelihood for economic prosperity, individual freedom and human rights. But from a spiritual perspective, individual rights and freedom for people governed by defilements (kilesa) are the rights and freedom to indulge themselves in material goods. In this sense, democracy leads to consumerism, and consumerism inevitably destroys Buddhist teaching of the welfare of all.

Buddhadasa classifies democracy into two categories: “liberal democracy” and “dhammic socialist democracy.” Liberal democracy is the type of democracy known in the West that provides equality, rights, and freedom for each individual in the society. It promotes material wealth and consumerism which, according to Buddhadasa, never satisfy the common people’s greed (tanhā), and it also devastates natural resources and the world’s ecology. Buddhadasa criticizes it saying:

79 Ibid., p. 81.
Liberal democracy, above all, upholds the ideal of freedom (*saeri*). But the freedom it upholds is so ambiguous that it seems always to be controlled by the power of human defilements (*kilesa*). Though the ideal of freedom is beautifully portrayed in the philosophy of liberal democracy, it is difficult to put into practice. The liberal philosophy or ideology of freedom does not have the power to resist the strength of human defilements. The ambiguity of the meaning of liberal democracy promotes the idea that anything one wants to do is all right... We must accept the fact that we all have defilements. That would be true even if all the people of the world were joined together. Liberal democracy cannot deal effectively with this fact.\(^{80}\)

Buddhadasa argues that “freedom” or “free democracy” in the Western sense is an individual matter which shifts the focus from social benefits to individual interests. An emphasis on personal freedom for individuals ruled by defilement or greed (*kilesa*) goes against the fundamental meaning of politics which is concerned with the good of the whole. Buddhadasa maintains that a political system should be concerned with the well-being of the whole society as well as the issue of individual

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
defilements. Any political system that does not emphasize the benefit of society as a whole is an immoral system.

Dhammic socialist democracy, in contrast to liberal democracy, promotes loving-kindness and compassion (metta-karuna) among people in a given society. According to Buddhadasa, all the material wealth produced in the dhammic socialist economy would be fairly distributed through the spirit of sharing and cooperation. He argues that the Buddhist spirit of giving (dāna) would enrich people’s spiritual wealth and reduce material consumerism, which is destructive to the world’s environment. Buddhadasa maintains that:

A more controlled form of democracy which is better able to cope with human defilement is socialism (sangham-niyama) which is opposed to the ideal of the individual freedom of liberalism. Socialism focuses on social utility, and the examination and correction of social problems... Dhammic socialism can save the world from what appears to be its self-destructive course... Worldly freedom which characterizes liberal democracy has a dangerous flaw, i.e., it fails to account adequately for kilesa or defilements. It contrasts with socialism in the most complete sense, “dhammic socialism” or socialism rooted in dhamma.81

Buddhadasa advocates a dhammic socialist form of democracy, not a democracy of individualism which, as he

81 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
sees it, fosters self-centeredness. He criticizes constitutional forms of democratic government which allow individuals to accumulate vast amounts of material wealth at the expense of the rest of the society. A dhammic socialist democracy, he argues, would put the needs of society as a whole first; individuals could not appropriate excessive amounts of wealth for themselves. A dhammic socialist democracy would adhere to the principle of natural balance, thereby respecting the rights of all beings.82

Buddhadasa’s idea of democracy is in vivid contrast to Western conceptions of democracy. Whereas Buddhadasa promotes a fair distribution of wealth through the personal Buddhist practice of loving-kindness and giving, Western thinkers would argue that a fair distribution of income could be achieved only through law and democratic political institutions. John Locke, one of the greatest spokesmen for political liberty, maintains that man is born with perfect freedom and all the rights and privileges of the law of nature and is equal to any other man, or number of men. In Locke’s terms, man by nature has the power not only to preserve his property—his life, liberty, and estate—against the injuries and attempted incursions of other men, but to judge and punish infractions of that law by others. When men formed a society, everyone of its members surrendered his natural rights to the community. Those who are united into one body and have a common established law and

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82 Buddhadasa, “Democratic Socialism,” p. 58.
judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another. Locke writes,

Men being...by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent. The only way, whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it... When any number of men have so consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest.\textsuperscript{83}

Similar to Adam Smith’s argument in the field of economics, Locke argues in the field of politics that men surrendered the equality, liberty, and executive power they had in the state of nature to society, to be disposed of by the authorized legislative powers as the good of society shall require, only with an intention to better preserve

\textsuperscript{83} John Locke, “Two Treatises of Government,” p. 166.
themselves, their liberty and property. Here, we find John Locke taking a position in opposition to Buddhadasa. Buddhadasa does not trust any political system or institution, but instead, he believes in personal ethical practice of reducing each individual’s greed (*kilesa*) for the good of the society. John Locke, on the other hand, believes in the rule of law, checks and balances of power to guarantee everyone’s right, equality, and liberty, and thus the good of the society.\footnote{It should be noted here that according to Locke, only property owners should have the vote.} Once again Buddhadasa proposes an individualistic rather than a structural or systematic solution to a problem.

**F. Dhammic Socialism and the Role of Leadership**

Buddhadasa proposes that in a dhammic socialist society a just government could be obtained by having moral rulers who care for the welfare of the people rather than for themselves. Buddhadasa portrays the ideal leader of a dhammic socialist country as *dhammaraja*, a leader with the “ten royal virtues” (*dasarāja-dhamma*). He bases his theory of the emergence of a political leader on the Pali scriptures:

According to the Pali scriptures it became necessary to extend natural socialism to the political foundations of the community when oppression in the community became into-
lerable. People saw fit to invest a particularly capable, just leader with their trust and power. This leader or raja would govern in such a way that no one could oppress anyone else and the community would thus enjoy contentment (Thai: po-cai). Indeed, the word raja actually means contentment. Socialism as a political system, then, is truly socialistic in so far as its leaders secure the contentment of the entire community.\(^8^5\)

Buddhadasa further clarifies his theory of the emergence of political leadership by referring to a legend from the Agganna-suttanta. According to this legend, in the olden days when people lived in the forests and jungles without culture they all had sufficient resources to meet their needs and they lived in peace. This original socialistic condition prevailed until they began to hoard, steal and quarrel, being incited by their greed (kilesa). People took advantage of one another causing widespread trouble. King Sammadiraja--the legendary first king in the world--appeared to bring peace and order. He was a strong, clever, and righteous leader who brought contentment to the people. He prevented quarrels, instructed the people, punished wrongdoers, and rewarded those who were good and righteous.\(^8^6\) This seems to be the basic model of

\(^8^5\) Buddhadasa, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” p. 89.
\(^8^6\) Ibid.
political leadership for Buddhadasa. Such leaders strictly observe the ten royal virtues, the Buddhist ethical principles of leadership. The ten royal virtues as given in the Jataka text are as follows:

1. **Dāna** (liberality, generosity, charity). The ruler should not have craving and attachment to wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people.

2. **Sīla** (a high moral character). He should never destroy life, cheat, steal and exploit others, commit adultery, utter falsehood, and take intoxicating drinks. That is, he must at least observe the Five Precepts of the layman.

3. **Pariccāga** (sacrificing everything for the good of the people). He must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his life, in the interest of the people.

4. **Ajjava** (honesty and integrity). He must be free from fear or favour in the discharge of his duties, must be sincere in his intentions, and must not deceive the public.

5. **Maddava** (kindness and gentleness). He must possess a genial temperament.

6. **Tapa** (austerity in habits). He must lead a simple life, and should not indulge in a life of luxury. He must have self-control.

7. **Akkodha** (freedom from hatred, ill-will,
enmity). He should bear no grudge against anybody.

8. Avihimśa (non-violence), which means not only that he should harm nobody, but also that he should try to promote peace by avoiding and preventing war, and everything which involves violence and destruction of life.

9. Khanti (patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding). He must be able to bear hardships, difficulties and insults without losing his temper.

10. Avirodha (non-opposition, nonobstruction), that is to say that he should not oppose the will of the people, should not obstruct any measures that are conducive to the welfare of the people. In other words he should rule in harmony with his people.⁸⁷

The character of the ruler is the crucial factor in Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism. If a good person becomes the ruler, then the whole system of dhammic socialism will be good. On the other hand, a bad ruler will produce an unacceptable type of socialism. Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialist state depends almost exclusively on the virtues, the responsibilities, and the decisions of its leadership. Buddhadasa cites a number of legendary and historical kings as the exemplary righteous rulers such as

King Sammadiraja (the legendary first king in the world), King Asoka of India, and some Thai kings of the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods. Kingship based on the ten royal virtues is, according to Buddhadasa, a pure form of socialistic leadership. He maintains that,

The best example is King Asoka... He purified the sangha by wiping out the heretics, and he insisted on right behavior on the part of all classes of people... He was a gentle person who acted for the good of the whole society. He constructed wells and assembly halls, and had various kinds of fruit trees planted for the benefit of all. He was “dictatorial” in the sense that if his subjects did not do these public works as commanded, they were punished.\(^88\)

Again, he argues that:

Rama Khamhaeng [a king in the Sukhothai period] ruled socialistically, looking after his people the way a father and mother look after their children. Such a system should be revived today.\(^89\)

This model might have worked well for some kingdoms in the remote past, but for a highly structured and complex society today, checks and balances on power are required for social justice.

\(^{88}\) Buddhism, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” p. 92.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., p. 99.
The question to be raised here is about the idea of the “common good.” Who decides what the common good is? In all contemporary societies there are tough moral questions involving the common good, such as the abortion debate. In the case of Asoka, it may be easy to look back and say that what he did was for the common good and therefore the punishments he imposed on those who refused to work for that goal were justified. Because none of us were there to experience Asoka’s rule, we can only idealize it. It is much easier to determine a generalized common good in retrospect than during the time the decisions are being made. In contrast to most Western thinkers, Buddhadasa’s approach lacks the perspective of a more structurally advanced model of society and its leadership. For Buddhadasa claims,

If a monarch rules with tyranny, of course such governments should be done away with. If, however, the monarch fulfills the Ten Royal Virtues, then his rule will embody the principles of socialism and bring about contentment in society. Under such rule there would be no capitalist oppressors or division of labor according to wealth and power; there would be no underclass of angry laborers resentful at being oppressed and at not having the power to accumulate wealth for themselves. A truly socialistic government would embody
the characteristics of dhamma. It would not allow for class distinctions based on wealth. Nor would it permit anyone to accumulate private wealth at the expense of others.\textsuperscript{90}

Louis Gabaude comments that Buddhadasa’s vocabulary is problematic: he uses common words but with his own special meaning. Gabaude argues that Buddhadasa’s model of rulership is unrealistic in the modern world:

“Socialism,” “democracy,” “dictatorship” have a common meaning affected by the historical implementations of their ideals. They refer not only to a precise set of ideas but to actual experiences. Buddhadasa’s new sets refer only to principles, to ideas and to dreams. As for experiences or facts, a Jataka King, a 3rd century B.C. ruler like Asoka, or a 13th century A.D. Sukhothai ruler, Ramakamheng, can hardly be realistic models for ruling our complex societies and our independent citizens.\textsuperscript{91}

The democratic process is a time-consuming one, often at the expense of the community’s good. Hence, Buddhadasa adds the concept of dictatorship, not in the sense of a tyrant, but in the sense of a protector of the

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., pp. 89-90.
\textsuperscript{91} Gabaude, “Thai Society and Buddhadasa: Structural Difficulties,” p. 220.
common good. As Buddhadasa understands it, the term “dictatorship” (Thai: \textit{phadetkan}) has two meanings. As a political ideology like those found in the authoritarianism of a military dictatorship, it is certainly undesirable. But as a means of leading to a desirable goal, it means to handle things expeditiously. Buddhadasa’s notion of “dictatorial”—meaning to obtain a desirable goal, especially peace and justice in the society—developed at a time of social turmoil during the 1973-1976 period of political unrest in Thailand. During that period, it seemed that democracy could not really solve the problems facing the Thai people, who were ideologically divided between the extremes of right and left. To be able to bring peace and justice to Thai society, Buddhadasa argued that “dictatorial” meant the exercise of virtue and wisdom (\textit{dasa-rāja-dhammā}) to end the hatred and turmoil, and to lead society to peace and order. Buddhadasa explains “dictatorial” as a means to obtain peace and justice in dhammic socialism thusly:

Let us examine a very controversial notion, “dictatorial democracy” (\textit{prajadhipatai-phadetjakara}). We tend to shy away from the word, “dictatorship,” because we are so infatuated with liberalism (\textit{saeri-niyama})...To sum up, there are various forms of democracy such as liberal democracy and socialist democracy. The ideal form is dhammic socialist democracy in which “dictatorial”
means are used to expedite solutions to social problems. We must not be misled by the usual associations of the word, “dictatorial.” Dictatorship in the sense of tyranny has no place in dhammic socialism. If dictatorial methods are consistent with dhamma, they will help expedite moral solutions to social problems, and should be used to the fullest extent. Our own country is currently in great turmoil, and we seem to have no clear vision of where we are headed. If we were more “dictatorial” in a dhammic way, we would be able to solve our problems quickly.\footnote{Buddhadasa, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” pp. 82-83.}

Generally speaking, the notion of a dictatorial dhammic socialist ruler in Buddhadasa’s thought is problematic because it is based almost exclusively on the personal “moral” qualities of the ruler. He seems to believe that with the ten royal virtues, the “dictator” would not go astray. Unfortunately, the justification of forcing people to do things for the common good comes frighteningly close to the old idea that the ends justify the means. One person is empowered to define the common good and then enforce it. This is a questionable approach to politics because it could potentially provide the opportunity for corruption and the misuse of power due to human fallibility. Furthermore, one may ask these questions: Does personal morality guarantee
political ability and efficient rule? Who will check the virtues of the ruler? Who will decide if he is lacking those virtues? When should he quit? And what if he is not willing to quit? And what about the other sub-powers in the society itself? Louis Gabaude has raised these questions and points to the European experience in discussing the question of dictatorship:

Buddhadasa understands that, lacking of a common ideal, dictatorial power is needed to rule society according to the Dhamma. The problem is to define what actually, precisely, fits with the Dhamma and what does not. He trusts the dictator to decide, in a rather Manichaean way, what and who should be “dhammic” and what and who should not. Europeans still remember that, between the two World Wars, joint refusal of liberal democracy and communism gave all dictatorial powers to a “Caudillo,” an “Il Duce” and a “Fuhrer” who were even supported sometimes by some religious groups in the very name of social order, morals, and efficiency.

Like many of Buddhadasa’s supporters among progressive Thai Buddhists, Sulak Sivaraksa is a strong proponent of democratic processes in government who finds

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93 Gabaude, “Thai Society and Buddhadasa: Structural Difficulties,” p. 221.
94 Ibid., p. 220.
it difficult to accept Buddhadasa’s claims about the desirability of a dictatorial form of Buddhist government. Sulak Sivaraksa comments:

I think a weak point of Buddhadasa lies in this matter of “dictator,” because dictators never possess dhamma, and it’s like this everywhere because we abandon ourselves to having dictators. Even the abbots at almost every temple are dictators, including Buddhadasa as well.\(^95\)

Buddhadasa sums up his political position saying, “I favor a Buddhist socialist democracy which is composed of dhamma and managed by a “dictator” whose character exemplifies the ten royal virtues (\textit{dasa-rāja-dhāmma}),”\(^96\) and “In particular, small countries like Thailand should have democracy in the form of a dictatorial dharmic socialism.”\(^97\) In discussing these views, Louis Gabaude further points out how unrealistic the political position taken by Buddhadasa is in terms of the actual world, observing that Buddhadasa’s political thought is not convincing because no one can see how the three components of his utopian regime—dictatorship, dhamma, and socialism—could possibly be implemented at the same time in modern Thai society as it is.\(^98\)

\(^{95}\) Quoted in Khanakammakan Sasana Phya Kanphatana, “Buddhadasa and the new generation,” p. 56.

\(^{96}\) Buddhadasa, “A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism,” p. 97.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., pp. 99-100.

\(^{98}\) Gabaude, “Thai Society and Buddhadasa: Structural Difficulties,” p. 221.
Donald Swearer maintains that Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism has three basic principles. Firstly, the principle of the good of the whole deals with political, economic, and social structures. Secondly, the principle of restraint and generosity governs individual behavior. And thirdly, the principle of respect and loving-kindness prescribes the right attitude toward all forms of life. He argues that Buddhadasa’s vision serves as a critique of both capitalism and communism and provides the basic principles for a political philosophy with the potential to help guide Buddhist Thailand to a more just and equitable social, political and economic order.99 Louis Gabaude takes a very different view. In developing his critique of Buddhadasa’s proposed political regime he argues that Buddhadasa is assigning all the good to his dictatorial dhammic socialism. At the same time he is assigning all the evil equally to liberal democracy and communism. Gabaude points out that the only difference is that liberal democracy and communism are real, actual regimes, while dictatorial dhammic socialism is a projection or mental construction.100

Buddhadasa’s dictatorial dhammic socialist leadership reminds one of the philosopher king in the Republic of Plato. In his socialist republic, Plato categorizes people into three classes: philosopher king(s), warriors, and merchants (including all kinds of laborers). The philosopher king is the

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100 Gabaude, “Thai Society and Buddhadasa: Structural Difficulties,” p. 221.
ruler who is the most virtuous and has the most wisdom. Plato’s philosopher king is similar to a ruler with the ten royal virtues in Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism. Plato’s republic, however, was criticized by his famous disciple, Aristotle, who advocates more democratic forms of government. In his fourth book of the Politics, after describing the four principal forms of government as monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, and aristocracy, Aristotle adds: “But there is a fifth... Constitutional government may be described generally as a fusion of oligarchy and democracy, but the term is usually applied to the forms of government which incline towards democracy.”101 Aristotle’s constitutional government serves as a more democratic contrast to the leadership of both Plato’s republic and Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism.

A more modern critique of the hierarchy of power explicit in Buddhadasa’s dictatorial dhammic socialism comes from the contemporary French philosopher Michel Foucault. In his book, *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault argues that the universal or superstructural theory of power has created problems in human civilization. As Foucault points out,

Where Soviet socialist power was in question, its opponents called it totalitarianism; power in Western capitalism was denounced by the

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Marxists as class domination; but the mechanics of power in themselves were never analysed.\textsuperscript{102}

What we need, argues Foucault, is not a political philosophy that is erected around the problem of sovereignty, or around the mechanism of law and prohibition, but a political theory that advocates the elimination of central power. Foucault analyzes the mechanics of power as something which circulates, or something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands. Power is exercised through a net-like organization. It is concrete power which every individual holds, existing only in action. Individuals are the vehicles of power and the individual is an effect of power and the element of its articulation. Foucault concludes that one needs to investigate historically, and beginning from the lowest level, how mechanisms of power have been able to function. By his new theory of power, Foucault has challenged not only a hierarchical structure of power such as that of a virtuous dictatorial ruler in Buddhadasa’s dhammic socialism, but also an institutional democratic structure of power. The best form of government for Foucault is probably the most decentralized which, being as abstract as Buddhadasa’s conception of dhammic socialism, has yet to be found.

\textsuperscript{102} Michel Foucault, \textit{Power/Knowledge}, p.116.
4.2 Buddhadasa’s View of Liberation

Buddhadasa’s view of “liberation” (Pali: nibbāna, Sanskrit: nirvāna) is more religious or psychological than socio-political. He bases his theory of liberation on his unique Buddhist interpretation—an interpretation more similar to Mahayana than traditional Theravada Buddhism. In referring to his psychological interpretation of liberation, two basic Buddhist conceptions emerge: saṃsāra (cycles of suffering, “bondage”) and nibbāna (extinction of suffering, “liberation”). I will present Buddhadasa’s view of saṃsāra and nibbāna, and the parallelism between his focus on the individual in both his political philosophy and understanding of spiritual liberation as well as point out his theoretical inadequacies with respect to socio-political liberation.

A. Saṃsāra and Nibbāna

In his book, Nibbāna Exists in Saṃsāra, Buddhadasa presents quite completely his doctrinal conception of “liberation.” He began his analysis of Buddhist liberation by referring to the Buddha’s saying: “The world, the cause of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way to the cessation of the world, I declare, exist within this fathom-long body with perception and mind.”103 As Buddhadasa understands it, the world here means suffering, the hardship of human existence, and “this fathom-long body with

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103 Buddhadasa, Me and Mine, p. 141.
perception and mind” simply means the living human body. Thus, the Buddha teaches that suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation can be found in the living human body. Since both suffering and its cessation exist in this living body, so do sam\text{sāra} and nibbāna.

Again, Buddhadasa recalls another saying of the Buddha: “The mind is crystalline; only the visiting defilements darken it.”\textsuperscript{104} According to Buddhist epistemology, the mind is troubled only when defilements come as guests. If defilements are turned away, the mind will remain in its natural translucence and clarity. It can remain peaceful, calm and still—this is a kind of nibbāna. In his unique interpretation of nibbāna, Buddhadasa argues that nibbāna can be either fleeting or firm. Nibbāna can either occur accidentally or be produced and maintained through conscious awareness. He has observed that:

If you examine your own existence as a body-mind compound, you will realize that the periods of sam\text{sāra}—periods of boiling over—are momentary and infrequent, while the periods of stillness and peace are more common and lasting... You are usually not possessed by love, hate, greed, anger, passion or the feeling of “me-and-mine.” When the cool of nibbāna is more common than the

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
vigorous boil of \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra, we are able to avoid insanity, nervous breakdown and other mental disorders. We should be grateful to \textit{nibbāna} for keeping us intact.\textsuperscript{105}

For Buddhadasa, \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra is fleeting. It exists only when we are careless or unaware enough to concoct the feeling of me-and-mine, the attachment to our egoistic self. \textit{Sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra, according to Buddhadasa, occurs whenever the mind responds with carelessness and ignorance to any stimulus which enters by way of any of the six senses.\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra will last as long as its conditions last. When the conditions cease, \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra will also cease to exist. When the mind responds again with ignorance to another of the sensory stimuli, the process of concocting begins again and \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra comes once more. To link it with the Buddhist theory of interdependent co-arising (\textit{patīcchasamuppāda}), when the mind concocts feelings, desires and convictions, it is experiencing a cycle of co-arising of the causes of suffering--it is one round of \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra.

Buddhadasa argues that merit and demerit both are in the realm of \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra. When people respond carelessly to sensory stimulus, they give rise to the boiling state of \textit{sam}\textsubscript{s}\textsubscript{ā}ra. If the results are beneficial, they will be called

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 142.
\item \textsuperscript{106} In Buddhism, the inner six senses are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind. Their counterparts, the outer six objects, are sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects.
\end{itemize}
meritorious or virtuous actions; if harmful, demeritorious or sinful. Both are concoctions; they are each in their own way *saṃsāra*, and hence suffering. For the lower level of *saṃsāra*, Buddhadasa says:

Consider first the demeritorious or woeful states. In the course of a day the mind may concoct different kinds of greed, anger and delusion which may be regarded as the four woeful states: the states of hell, animals, ghosts, and demons. Whenever greed, anger or delusion cause us to burn with excitement, we are creatures of hell; when they cause us to be foolish, we are animals; when lustful, we are hungry ghosts; when fearful of death or anything at all, we are cowardly demons. All of these states are results of demerits, *saṃsāra* instigated by greed, anger or delusion.\(^{107}\)

For the upper level of *saṃsāra*, Buddhadasa explains:

Now consider the meritorious or heavenly realms. There are times when our senses give us pleasure, as when we find pleasure in the opposite sex. When this happens, we are born into the heaven of sensuality. Whenever we are free from sexual desire and yet take pleasure in the beauty of forms, we are born as a Brahma

\(^{107}\) Buddhadasa, *Me and Mine*, p. 143.
in the realm of forms. When our mind is better trained and we take pleasure in simple abstraction or in things which have no form, such as honor, we enter the realm of the Brahma of no form.\(^{108}\)

According to Buddhadasa, in the course of a day, a person changes the level of his or her own existence back and forth many times in *saṃsāra*. Whenever a person experiences calmness, no matter what its causes or characteristics, we can say that he experiences *nībbāna*. Literally *nībbāna* means to be cooled off.\(^{109}\) Buddhadasa explains *nībbāna* in this way:

> Anything which has cooled off has “nībbanned.” A burnt-out piece of charcoal, a thoroughly trained animal and a man whose desires are completely extinguished, who is constantly cool, are all experiencing their particular *nībbāna*.\(^{110}\)

Buddhadasa suggests that there are three kinds of *nībbāna*. The first category of *nībbāna* which occurs naturally is called *tadanga-nībbāna*. The next higher category of *nībbāna* which results from suppressing the defilements is *vikkhambhana-nībbāna*. This form of *nībbāna* has the same clarity as the first, except that

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\(^{108}\) Ibid.


it is obtained and maintained through practice. The highest form of nibbāna, samuccheda-nibbāna, results from decisively uprooting the defilements and ignorance. This is nibbāna which can never revert to saṃsāra--it is nibbāna in its absolute sense. Those who have attained this form of nibbāna are called arahant (one who is free from suffering).

For Buddhadasa, nibbāna and saṃsāra exist together in our fathom-long body. If we have not yet attained perfect nibbāna, we continually switch back and forth, sometimes in nibbāna, sometimes in saṃsāra. He argues that nibbāna lies within us, obscured by saṃsāra. “Simply remove the concoction of me-and-mine and you will find sufferinglessness at the same point where once there was suffering.”

Is nibbāna only personal or individualistic for Buddhadasa? As Donald K. Swearer understands it, Buddhadasa does not see the quest for personal liberation or nibbāna only as one of isolated individuals pursuing their own greatest good. All human beings not only live in a shared natural environment, but are part of communities in the natural order of things--necessarily interrelated. Consequently, the good of the individual parts is predicated on the good of the whole and vice versa. In Buddhadasa’s view such a state is both the moral and normative condition of things. A just and peaceful dhammic socialist society balances the good of the individual and the good of the

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111 Ibid., p. 145.
Swearer points out that,

Non-attachment remains, in my estimation, the fundamental theme of Buddhadasa’s thought; ontologically it points toward emptiness; ethically it leads in the direction of dhammic socialism.  

Nonetheless, one cannot deny that the focus of the *nibbānic* quest is personalistic.

**B. Social Oppression and Social Liberation**

Buddhadasa’s social theory is closely link to his Buddhist view of the primacy of the personal. For him, the psychological oppression of defilement (*kilesa*) within oneself eventually leads to exploitation of others, hence social oppression. To solve the problems of social exploitation, in Buddhadasa’s view, is to let those oppressors, as well as the oppressed, overcome their own greed and selfishness, hence social liberation. Buddhadasa’s approach to social issues is quite traditional and individualistic. He maintains that liberation in the ideal sense is *nibbāna*-at both personal and social levels. Furthermore, freedom in the fullest sense is the freedom from defilements (*kilesa*)—again, both at personal and social levels.

Buddhadasa’s views on social liberation are, in fact, not so different from those of traditional Buddhists who

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113 Ibid., p. 7.
maintain that social liberation or social peace is obtained if all individuals are psychologically liberated or peaceful within themselves. Peter Jackson claims that Buddhadasa provides a more developed social analysis of the origins of social liberation and peace, but Jackson fails to provide more concrete and specific evidence in support of his claim. He writes:

While criticising the anti-capitalist workers and labour leaders for being as materialist as their capitalist opponents, he also acknowledges that the former’s materialism is conditioned by the self-centred greed of the capitalists, and that workers-capitalist conflicts are primarily caused by the latter and not by the former. For Buddhadasa peace is not only attained through inner, moral and meditative practice but also by combining this with morally guided social action directed towards ending the power of certain exploitative and self-centred sections of society.¹¹⁴

Buddhadasa does see peace as an important social goal. Peace is attained by both inner and outer action, not by either alone. Donald Swearer sees Buddhadasa as a peace advocate who condemns war and all forms of violence

toward human beings and the environment.115 Buddhadasa criticizes those Buddhists who do not act in the world—especially in politics because they regards politics as “dirty.” He also criticizes the capitalists and the communists who act only in the world without a religious base. However, Buddhadasa does not go beyond this criticism to suggest a concrete political program to overcome social conflicts.

Buddhadasa’s views cannot be categorized as following the pattern of any existing political ideology, nor as supporting the programs of any Thai political party or movement. His political philosophy is general and theoretical, and he avoids making remarks on specific political debates and current controversies. He is more concerned with setting out what he regards as correct Buddhist principles for the operation of politics rather than with acting as a Buddhist critic of political events. Fundamental to Buddhadasa’s conception of politics is the principle that all political doctrines and political activity should be judged against a spiritual criterion. Peter Jackson has pointed out that:

For Buddhadasa any political form is good and of benefit if it encourages the populace to reach towards nibbāna by uprooting self-centredness and establishing social and individual peace.116

What might be considered the traditional goals of political activity, such as promoting the production of wealth or attaining socio-economic equity and justice, according to Buddhadasa, are not regarded as having intrinsic value in themselves. Rather, for Buddhadasa, the production of material wealth and the promotion of social equity only have value inasmuch as their attainment permits or encourages the populace to further their spiritual interests. Buddhadasa considers all forms of “materialism” to be threats to social well-being and to peace, and does not regard either capitalism or communism as being inherently a better political form.

Buddhadasa takes a utilitarian approach to the traditional political systems, because he regards them as having no intrinsic value. For Buddhadasa, any political system, be it dictatorial or democratic, is acceptable as long as the leaders are moral and the system promotes dhamma in the world. Because of this stance, Buddhadasa is regarded as a political conservative. His views on social liberation are inadequate, since he takes an individualistic approach that lets everyone liberate himself or herself from the defilements (kilesa) first, assuming that the whole society will then be automatically liberated. This is a personalistic utopian view that will never happen in the real world. Nonetheless, despite its inadequacies Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism, as Donald Swearer has pointed out, is one of the few attempts on the part of an
original Theravada Buddhist thinker to propose a political philosophy for his time generated out of an Asian belief system within an Asian context.\textsuperscript{117}

In conclusion, Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism represents a particular Buddhist response to rapid social change in a modern Asian state. For an ideal political system and society, Buddhadasa always refers to the “golden age” of the historical past--whether it be a society during the time of the Buddha, King Asoka of India, or the kings of the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Bangkok periods in Thailand. Buddhadasa portrays those ancient societies as full of the spirit of dhammic socialism with the leadership observing the ten royal virtues, people practicing Buddhist ethical principles such as self-restraint (śīla and vinaya), loving-kindness (metta-karuna), and giving (dāna). As in any traditional society, people in those periods might have had more intimate social relations and have followed religious disciplines more strictly. But Buddhadasa forgets the historical fact that those societies contained various forms of social oppression such as slavery, annual indentureship, an inhumane and arbitrary legal system, and many assassinations in the recurring power struggles for the throne.

Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism reflects his view of a Buddhist Utopia. As a political program, it

\textsuperscript{117} Donald K. Swearer, “Dhammic Socialism,” p. 39.
fails to address realistically contemporary political, economic, and social issues facing Thailand today. The importance of Buddhadasa’s political thought lies in the fact that dhammic socialism serves as an indigenous traditional critique of modern economic and political theories as well as the constructing of a moral guideline to create a new political philosophy. Buddhadasa’s greatest contribution lies in his theory of the state of nature which provides a philosophical agenda for solving the environmental and ecological crises facing the world today. As a leading reformist Buddhist figure, Buddhadasa has laid a religious foundation for contemporary Thai thinkers to search for a more realistic political ideology which would link traditional Thai culture to the modern problems under the influence of the global market economy.
Chapter 5

BUDDHIST ECONOMIC THEORY

Buddhist Economic Theory, as an alternative economics to solve the world’s crises, will be explored from both the Buddhist scriptures and contemporary Buddhist thought. Buddhist Economic Thought will be presented from the Tipitaka—the Pali Canon—including private wealth management, the nature of work and employment, and Buddhist public policy. Buddhist Economic Ethics will be analyzed from modern context and contemporary issues such as the dignity of work, the principle of employment, unemployment and poverty, consumption and human well-being, the use of local and natural resources.

5.1 Buddhist Economic Thought

Buddhist economic thoughts will be presented from the Buddhist scriptures, including the teachings of the Buddha concerning the economic life of people, both privately and publicly, and the essential ideas of Buddhist economics which lie behind those words of the teachings. It should be noted that the economic system during the Buddha’s time was that of a feudal state over 2,500 years
ago in India. The Buddha taught people the economic aspects out of that social context. His teachings of economics are inseparable from his teachings of ethics; therefore, the economic teachings and the related ethical teachings are simultaneously presented in this paper. Behind those words of the Buddha lie the basic foundation of what is called “Buddhist Economics.”

A. Economic Thoughts from Buddhist Scriptures

The Buddha, from time to time, teaches people how to live a good economic life. Sometimes the Buddha teaches ordinary people the way to earn a righteous living and how to manage their economy. At other times, the Buddha teaches the king or the wealthy how to use their wealth for the benefit of the public. During the Buddha’s time, the king and the wealthy contributed significantly to the welfare of the people. From the scattered economic teachings of the Buddha, we can classify them into two parts: private economy and public economy.

1. Private Economy

The private economy was the teachings of the Buddha concerning the ethic and economic welfare of a household. The Buddha, from time to time, taught the lay people how to earn a righteous living, manage their income and property, and contribute to the welfare of others. The Buddha also valued work and skill as a part of self-development along the path of self-detachment and
interestingly pointed out that poverty was the cause of crimes and violence. Selected from the Buddhist scriptures, the private economy guides people in how to create a moral and healthy family.

1.1 The Six Quarters

Once the Buddha taught Sigala, a householder’s son, at Rajagaha about the worship of the various quarters as follows:

The following should be looked upon as the six quarters. The parents should be looked upon as the east, teachers as the south, wife and children as the west, friends and associates as the north, servants and employees as the nadir, religious teachers and priests as the zenith.\textsuperscript{118}

Children and Parents

In five ways, young householder, a child should minister to his parents as the east:
(1) Having been supported by them I will now be their support, (2) I will perform their duties incumbent on them, (3) I will keep up the lineage and family traditions, (4) I will make myself worthy of my heritage, (5) furthermore I will offer alms in honour of my departed relatives.

In five ways, young householder, the parents thus ministered to as the east by their children

show their compassion: they (1) dissuade them from what is bad, (2) persuade them to do good, (3) get them properly educated, (4) see them married at the proper age, (5) at the proper time they hand over their inheritance to them.

In these five ways do children minister to their parents as the east and the parents show their compassion to their children. Thus is the east covered by them and made safe and secure.

Teacher and Pupil

In five ways, young householder, a pupil should minister to a teacher as the south: (1) by rising from the seat in salutation, (2) by attending on him, (3) by listening to his instructions with attention and due reverence, (4) by personal service, (5) receiving instructions respectfully.

In five ways, young householder, do teachers thus ministered to as the south by their pupils show their compassion: (1) they train them in the best discipline, (2) they see that they grasp their lessons well, (3) they instruct them in the arts and sciences, (4) they introduce them to their friends and associates, (5) they provide for their safety in every quarter.

The teachers thus ministered to as the south by their pupils show their compassion towards them in these five
ways. Thus is the south covered by them and made safe and secure.

Husband and Wife

In five ways, young householder, should a wife as the west be ministered to by a husband: (1) by being very courteous to her, (2) by not despising her in any way, (3) by being faithful to her, (4) by handing over authority of domestic management to her, (5) by providing her with adornments.

The wife thus ministered to as the west by her husband shows her compassion to her husband in five ways: (1) she performs her household duties earnestly, (2) she is hospitable to the kith and kin of her husband, (3) she remains strictly faithful, (4) she protects his earnings, (5) she is skilled and industrious in discharging her duties.

In these five ways does the wife show her compassion to her husband who ministers to her as the west. Thus is the west covered by him and made safe and secure.

Friends

In five ways, young householder, should one minister to his friends and associates as the north: (1) by liberality, (2) by courteous speech, (3) by being helpful, (4) by being impartial, (5) by sincerity.
The friends and associates thus ministered to as the north by one show compassion to him in five ways: (1) they protect him when he is heedless, (2) they protect his property when he is heedless, (3) they become a refuge when he is in danger, (4) they do not forsake him in his troubles, (5) they show consideration for his family.

The friends and associates thus ministered to as the north by one show their compassion towards him in these five ways. Thus is the north covered by him and made safe and secure.

*Employer and Worker*

In five ways should a maser minister to his servants and employees as the nadir: (1) by assigning them work according to their ability, (2) by supplying them with food and wages, (3) by tending them in sickness, (4) by sharing with them any profits, (5) by granting them leave and special allowances.

The servants and employees thus ministered to as the nadir by master show their compassion to him in five ways: (1) they rise from their beds before the master, (2) they go to sleep after him, (3) they take only what is given, (4) they perform their duties to the highest satisfaction, (5) they spread his good name and fame.
The servants and employees thus ministered to as the nadir show their compassion towards him in these five ways. Thus is the nadir covered by him and made safe and secure.

_Householder and Ascetics_

In five ways, young householder, should a householder minister to ascetics and Brahmins as the zenith: (1) by lovable deeds, (2) by lovable words, (3) by lovable thoughts, (4) by keeping open house to them, (5) by supplying their material needs.

The religious teachers and priests thus ministered to as the zenith by a householder show their compassion towards him in six ways: (1) they restrain him from evil, (2) they persuade him to do good, (3) they love him with a kind heart, (4) they make him hear what he has not heard, (5) they clarify what he has already heard, (6) they point out the path to a heavenly state.

In these six ways do ascetics and Brahmins show their compassion towards a householder who ministers to them as the zenith. Thus is the zenith covered by him and made safe and secure.

1.2 _Four Things Conducive to Happiness in This World_

The Buddha tells a layman named Dighajanu that
there are four things which are conducive to a man’s happiness in this world:

(1) he should be skilled, efficient, earnest, and energetic in whatever profession he is engaged, and he should know it well (*utthana-sampada*); (2) he should protect his income, which he has thus earned righteously, with the sweat of his brow (*arakkha-sampada*); (3) he should have good friends (*kalyana-mitta*) who are faithful, learned, virtuous, liberal and intelligent, who will help him along the right path away from evil; (4) he should spend reasonably, in proportion to his income, neither too much nor too little, i.e., he should not hoard wealth avariciously, nor should he be extravagant, in other words he should live within his means (*samajivikata*).119

1.3 Four Virtues Conducive to Happiness Hereafter

Then the Buddha expounds the four virtues conducive to a layman’s happiness hereafter:

(1) *Saddhā*: he should have faith and confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values; (2) *Sīla*: he should abstain from destroying and harming life, from stealing and cheating, from adultery, from falsehood, and

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from intoxicating drinks; (3) Čāga: he should practice charity, generosity, without attachment and craving for his wealth; (4) Paññā: he should develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering, to the realization of Nirvana.120

1.4 Four Kinds of Happiness

Once the Buddha told Anathpindika, the great banker, one of his most devoted lay disciples who founded for him the celebrated Jetavana monastery at Savatthi, that a layman, who leads an ordinary family life, has four kinds of happiness:

(1) The first happiness is to enjoy economic security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means (atthi-sukha); (2) the second is spending that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds (bhoga-sukha); (3) the third to be free from debts (anana-sukha); (4) the fourth happiness is to live a faultless, and a pure life without committing evil in thought, word or deed (anavajja-sukha).121

It should be noted here that three of these kinds are economic.

120 Ibid., p. 83.
121 Ibid., p. 83.
1.5 Five Reasons for Possession of Means

It is clear from the preceding account that a high standard of duty is expected regarding one’s family, friends and associates generally; if one remains in the household life one must fulfill those duties. The Buddha gave five reasons why a moral person should desire to be possessed of means.

(1) By his work, diligence and clear-sightedness he could make happy himself, his parents, wife and children, servants and workpeople. (2) He could make happy his friends and companions. (3) He would be able to keep his property from the depredations of fire, water, rulers, robbers, enemies and heirs. (4) He would be able to make suitable offerings to his kin, guests, deceased (petas), kings and devas. (5) He would be able to institute, over a period, offerings to recluses and others who abstain from pride and negligence, who are established in patience and gentleness, and who are engaged in every way in perfecting themselves.122

1.6 Four Reasons for Failure

Having attained to some success, it is necessary to make it enduring. Four reasons are given for failure to do so, namely:

122 Saddhatissa, Buddhist Ethics, p. 143.
(1) failing to seek what has been lost, (2) not repairing what is decayed, (3) eating and drinking to excess, and (4) putting immoral and unreliable men or women in responsible positions.  

1.7 Income Management

The ideal disposition lies in a division into four parts:

(1) one part should be used by the householder for his own ease and convenience, (2)-(3) two parts for his business or occupation, and (4) the fourth should be saved in case of adversity.  

It is noticeable that no mention is made here of charitable contributions, and it is considered that the omission was intended since the amount of these is always left to the discretion and inclination of the giver.

Advice to one agricultural worker is less detailed, but it is stated that his fields should be well-ploughed and well-prepared, that sowing and watering should take place at the proper time, and that the worker should be quick at his work.  

1.8 Six Perils in Idleness

The Buddha tells Sigala the six evil consequences in being addicted to habitual idleness:

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123 Ibid., p. 144.  
124 Ibid., p. 145.  
125 Ibid., p. 146.
He does not work, saying that (1) it is extremely cold, (2) it is extremely hot, (3) it is too late in the evening, (4) it is too early in the morning, (5) he is extremely hungry, (6) he is too full. Living in this way, he leaves many duties undone, new wealth he does not acquire and wealth he has acquired dwindles away.\textsuperscript{126}

2. Public Economy

The “public economy” is the teachings of the Buddha concerning the ethic and economic welfare of the whole society. Sometimes the Buddha taught people how to avoid harming the society, both ethically and economically, and how to contribute to the welfare of the public. At other times, the Buddha taught the king, who had absolute power in his feudal state, how to train himself as a moral monarch and how to distribute the wealth of the nation among the people. Selected from the Buddhist scriptures, the “public economy” guides rulers and the ruled to ethically and economically create a just and healthy society.

2.1 Poverty as the Cause of Crimes

The \textit{Cakkavattisihanada-sutta} of the \textit{Dighanikaya} (no. 26) clearly states that poverty (\textit{daliddiya}) is the cause of immorality and crimes such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, and cruelty. Kings in ancient times, like governments today, tried to suppress crime through

\textsuperscript{126} Saddhatissa, \textit{The Buddha's Way}, p 102.
punishment. The *Kutadanta-sutta* of the same Nikaya explains how futile this is. It says that this method can never be successful.

Instead, the Buddha suggests that in order to eradicate crime, the economic condition of the people should be improved: grain and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators; capital should be provided for small traders and those engaged in small business; adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed. When people are thus provided with opportunities for earning a sufficient income, they will be contented, will have no fear and anxiety, and consequently the country will be peaceful and free from crime.\(^{127}\)

Because of this, the Buddha told lay people how important it is to improve their economic condition. This does not mean that he approved of “hoarding wealth with desire and attachment,” which is against his fundamental teaching, nor did he approve of each and every way of earning one’s livelihood. There are certain trades like the production and sale of armaments, which he condemns as evil means of livelihood.

### 2.2 Sale of Armaments Condemned

“Right Livelihood” means that one should abstain from making one’s living through a profession that brings

harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, trading in human beings, in flesh, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, cheating, etc., and he should live by a profession which is honorable, blameless and innocent of harm to others. One can clearly see here that Buddhism is strongly opposed to any kind of war, when it condemns trade in arms and lethal weapons as an evil and unjust means of livelihood.\(^{128}\)

2.3 Just Government

In the days of the Buddha, as today, there were rulers who governed their countries unjustly. People were oppressed and exploited, tortured and persecuted, excessive taxes were imposed and cruel punishments were inflicted. The Buddha had shown how a whole country could become corrupt, degenerate and unhappy when the heads of its government, that is, the king, the ministers and administrative officers, become corrupt and unjust.

For a country to be happy it must have a “just government.” A just government, during the Buddha’s time, could be realized by having a moral ruler who cares for the welfare of his people rather than himself. The Buddha’s teachings of the “Ten Duties of the King” (\textit{dasa-}rāja-\textit{dhāmma}), as given in the Jataka text, are (1) \textit{dāna} (liberality, generosity, charity), (2) \textit{sīla} (a high moral character), (3) \textit{pariccāga} (sacrificing everything for the good of

\(^{128}\) Ibid., p. 47.
the people), (4) *ajjava* (honesty and integrity), (5) *maddava* (kindness and gentleness), (6) *tapa* (austerity in habits), (7) *akkodha* (freedom from hatred, ill-will, enmity), (8) *avihimśa* (non-violence), (9) *khanti* (patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding), and (10) *avirodha* (non-opposition, non-obstruction).129

It should be noted here that there was one great ruler, well known in history, who had the courage, the confidence and the vision to apply this teaching of non-violence, peace and love to the administration of a vast empire, in both internal and external affairs—Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India (3rd century B.C.) “the Beloved of the gods” as he was called.130

**B. Buddhist Economics**

From the teachings of the Buddha concerning economics and the related ethics both privately and publicly as we have seen above, some basic principles of Buddhist economics can be found, namely, private wealth management, the nature of work and employment, and the Buddhist public policy. It should be noted here that it is not wealth “from the Buddhist economic perspective” that stands in the way of enlightenment, but the attachment to wealth, not the enjoyment of pleasurable things, but the craving for them.

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129 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
130 Ibid., p. 87.
1. Private Wealth Management

From the Buddhist economic point of view, a man should be skilled in his profession and earn his own living, gain economic freedom and independence, and be able to ethically and effectively manage his earning or wealth to the satisfaction of himself and his family, and contribute to the welfare of society.

1.1 Family Economic Management

It is the duty of parents to nourish their children, teach them to behave well, get them properly educated, transfer their skill of work and arts to them, see them married at the proper age, and hand over inheritance to them. On the other hand, a child during the time of growing up obeys the teachings of his or her parents, learns the lessons well from his or her teachers, and helps to do the work of his or her parents. When the person is grown up, he or she performs duties on behalf of his or her parents, masters the work skill transferred from the parents, supports his or her parents when they are aged, and keeps up the linage and family tradition. From this viewpoint, work skill has been transmitted from generation to generation, and it becomes the means of earning and producing meaningful to the family.

When a man gets married, he works and becomes the major source of income for the family, uses his income to support his wife and children, hands over authority of home
management to her, and provides her from time to time with adornments. On the other hand, a wife performs her household duties earnestly, she is skilled and industrious in discharging her duties, and protects her husband’s earnings. Schumacher argues that a woman needs to do recreative work rather than creative (or outside) work, a large scale employment of women in factories or offices is a sign of economic failure. In particular, to let mothers of young children work in factories while the children run wild would be “uneconomic” in the eyes of a Buddhist economist.\textsuperscript{131}

Thus, from the Buddhist perspective, a successful married life could be met not only by the fact that the couple love and are faithful to each other, but also that reasonable income is earned and well-managed to maintain the basic material needs of the family.

1.2 Income and Expenditure

When a man, through his just and righteous means of living, earns his income, it is suggested that he divides his income into four parts: one for the consumption of himself and his family, one to be saved in case of adversity, and two for the investment of his work. The suggestion from the scripture here implies that in “a just and righteous economic system,” ordinary people should be able to earn their living sufficiently so that they can spend their income for their family’s ease and convenience, have savings for their

\textsuperscript{131} Schumacher, \textit{Small Is Beautiful}, pp. 53-54.
family’s security in case of adversity, and still have two parts left for the further development of their own skill and work.

It is mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures that the first happiness of a layman, who leads an ordinary family life, is to enjoy economic security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means. From the portion for his consumption, he should spend reasonably, in proportion to his income, neither too much nor too little, i.e., he should not hoard wealth avariciously, nor should he be extravagant. He should spend that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds. He should voluntarily supply to monks and ascetics their material needs, and practice charity, generosity, without attachment and craving for his wealth. It is also important that he should be free from debts.

2. The Nature of Work and Employment

From the Buddhist perspective, work is regarded as not only the means of living but also the means in which man develops his skill and talent to the best of his ability, and provides him the community in which he dwells and to which he commits and belongs. So the working conditions should be provided to the health, creativity and social commitment of people. The nature of work and the nature of employment are closely related. Employment should be regarded as serving man’s purpose to the pursuit of excellence in his work.
2.1 The Dignity of Work

From the Buddhist perspective, a man should be skilled, efficient, earnest and energetic in his work. He should learn and cultivate his skill and ability from his work to a level of excellence. Work reflects his own capacity and talent; work provides him a chance to develop himself and his relationship to his community and environment. From his work or profession, he should have good friends who will help him along the right path of self-development and enable him to overcome his “ego-centeredness,” one of the essential teachings of Buddhism, by working with other people.

A man should protect his income, which he has thus earned righteously, with the sweat of his brow. He should be well informed and conscious of his work and income situation so that he is in a position to be able to protect his real income. He should be able to protect his wage or his righteous earning from not being exploited by his boss or his company or any other people. The Buddha’s teaching of protecting one’s own income implies that Buddhism supports the labor unions of workers to protect their wages and working condition in a more complex society like today’s. By his work, diligence and clear-sightedness, a man could make himself, his parents, wife and children, friends and companions happy. He would be able to keep his income and property from the depredations of fire, robbers and any kind of direct or indirect exploitation.
A man could fail in his work and economic life if he fails to seek what has been lost, does not repair what is decayed, eats and drinks to excess, or puts immoral and unreliable men or women in responsible positions. He could also fail if he is addicted to habitual idleness: he does not want to work by saying that it is too cold or too hot, it is too early or too late, he is too hungry or too full. However, these are personal aspects of failure which each individual should correct himself or herself.

The Buddhist point of view assumes the function of work to be at least threefold to give a man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his “ego-centeredness” by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for human existence.\(^\text{132}\)

2.2 The Principle of Employment

From the Buddhist perspective, an employer should assign his employees or workers to work according to their ability. He should put moral men or women in the responsible positions. The employer should create the sense of brotherly communion among himself and his workers, provide healthy work conditions, and treat his workers as equal human beings. The employer should provide for the welfare of the workers by supplying them with food and sufficient wages, tending them in sickness, sharing any

\(^{132}\) Ibid., p. 51.
profits with them, and granting them leave and special allowances. It should be emphasized here that, in Buddhist economics, the workers not only receive their adequate wages and work welfare, but also share the profits from their work with their employer.

Since the Buddha prohibited the trading of human beings, any kind or form of slavery is condemned as an evil against human right and dignity. Obviously, to let the employees work extremely long hours in a poor working condition as if they are slaves is strongly opposed to the Buddha’s teachings. The workers, as they are human beings too, should be treated as equal human beings, not as “things” counted as another economic unit. Whether it is slavery in old times or “mechanical slavery” in the global factories in the modern times—both are in violation of the basic principle of human nature and human rights from the Buddhist point of view.

3. Buddhist Public Policy

Since the basic principles of Buddhism are loving-kindness/compassion (metta-karuna) and non-violence (avihimsa), the Buddhist economist takes these two principles to create the so-called Buddhist public policy. The Buddhist economist regards exploitation, unemployment and poverty as “economic violence,” the waste of natural resources—both living and non-living, especially non-renewable—as “natural violence,” and the war and weapon business as “human violence.” In order to replace
those forms of violence with loving-kindness and compassion, a just and righteous government regards the local people’s need as the primary economic goal and carefully uses the local natural resources to serve the local people.

3.1 Unemployment and Poverty

Buddhism views unemployment as the lack of opportunity not only to make one’s living, but also to develop one’s own skill and talent. Because unemployment, underemployment, poverty and any form of economic exploitation are regarded as “economic violence” which in turn creates crimes and other forms of violence, one of the most basic Buddhist public policies is full employment with healthy working conditions and adequate wages. When people are fully employed, with their household agricultural or industrial work or outside work, they meet all their basic needs, have the chance to nourish and develop their faculties to a level of excellence, have the sense of belonging to a community, create happiness for themselves and their families. Only by having adequate material needs can people live peacefully and turn their interests to practice loving-kindness/compassion and non-violence—the basic teachings of Buddhism.

3.2 False Livelihood of Weapon Industry and Business

The first precept (sīla) in Buddhism is the abstention from killing. Killing is the most direct and evil form of
violence which is against the basic teaching of the Buddha. Buddhism is to make a living without harming others directly or indirectly. Therefore, the weapons industry and business are condemned by the Buddha as an evil and unjust means of living. The military industrial complex and weapon business can make a lot of money for a few wealthy but they create a lot of crimes, cruelties, sufferings and miseries to millions of people around the world. The businesses themselves, with a hunger for profit by a few weaponry industrial corporations, are one of the root causes of wars in this modern complex world.

In the Buddhist scriptures we can also find that the Buddha condemns trade in poisons as an evil means of living. In the modern context, poisons can take many forms, e.g., chemical and biological weapons. These are considered as evil as or even worse than conventional weapons. They all are prepared with the intention of killing other human beings, at the same time they could destroy the natural environment. In the weapon and poison industries, a lot of natural resources—many of them are non-renewable—are wasted, the natural environment is polluted, and when they are used they destroy human lives as well as other forms of life, e.g., animate beings and trees. From the Buddhist perspective, weapon/poison industry and business create human violence and natural violence which should be protested and condemned.
3.3 *A Just and Righteous Government*

From the Buddhist point of view, a just and righteous government is the government which is comprised of righteous persons who ethically and professionally train themselves well, abstain from luxurious life, do not crave wealth and profit for themselves, and represent the interest of people. A just and righteous government, being aware of the structural oppression and violence in society, builds a just and righteous political, economical and social structure so that nobody, including the government itself, can directly or indirectly oppress other members of the society. A just and righteous government has the duty to fairly distribute income among the people.

In particular, those persons who run the government should not have the craving and attachment to wealth and property, should never destroy life, utter falsehood, cheat, steal from, and exploit people. They must be free from fear or favor in the discharge of their duties and must not deceive the public. Those who rule must lead a simple life and should not indulge in a life of luxury. They should be prepared to give up all personal comfort, wealth and property for the welfare of the people, and should promote peace by avoiding and preventing war. They should not oppose the will of the people, harm the people or obstruct any measures that are conducive to the welfare of the people. These are the principles of a just and righteous government from the Buddhist perspective.
In conclusion, Buddhist economics is a humanistic approach to the economic issues of work, employment, distribution of income, wealth management, use of natural resources, public policy, etc. Buddhism is concerned with not only the spiritual path to enlightenment, but also the social welfare of people of which economics is one of the main issues. The teachings of the Buddha found in the Buddhist scriptures lay some basic humanistic principles of economics, the so-called Buddhist economics, which, I believe, are valuable not only in the simple economic system like one in the Buddha’s time, but also in the more complex economic system of the modern time.

5.2 Buddhist Economic Ethics

Capitalism, with its logic of minimizing cost and maximizing profit for the accumulation of private property, has caused economic, social, cultural and ecological crises not only in the Third World, but also in the First. There is an attempt among Buddhists both in the East and the West to establish a Buddhist economic model in response to the exploitative and destructive nature of capitalist economic structures. In this section I present a theory of Buddhist economics, an economic theory essentially derived from Thai Theravada Buddhism, an approach which stands in stark contrast to the modern capitalist economic perspective. Buddhist economics emphasizes the normative or the ethical elements found in Buddhist sources and
scriptures. Contemporary Eastern Buddhist economists like Phra Prayudh Payutto (P. A. Payutto) and Western Buddhist economists like E. F. Schumacher and Glen and Barbara Alexandrin will be discussed to facilitate the construction of a critical perspective on and a systematic analysis of a modern Buddhist theory of economics.

In the Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha mentions, from time to time, the economic aspect of life, such as: “Poverty is suffering in this world.”\textsuperscript{133} “Hunger is the most severe of all illnesses.”\textsuperscript{134} The Buddha explained that when people are overwhelmed and in pain through suffering, they are incapable of understanding religious teaching. Although the Buddha never specifically taught about the subject of economics, teachings about the four requisites—food, clothing, shelter and medicine—occur throughout the scriptures. In essence, all of the teachings concerning the four requisites are teachings on economics. According to Payutto, when talking about a Buddhist economics, we might find ourselves in fact discussing Buddhism with the language and concepts of Western economics.\textsuperscript{135}

Like other sciences in the age of specialization, economics has become a narrow and rarefied discipline; an isolated, almost stunted, body of knowledge, having little to do with other disciplines or human activities. Economics

\textsuperscript{133} Anguttara Nikaya, III. 351.
\textsuperscript{134} Payutto, Buddhist Economics, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 15.
strives for objectivity. In the process, subjective values, such as ethics, are excluded. Modern economics has been said to be the most scientific of all the social sciences. Some even assert that economics is purely a science of numbers, a matter of mathematical equations. In its effort to be scientific, economics ignores all non-quantifiable, abstract values. Payutto comments:

It may be asked how it is possible for economics to be free of values when, in fact, it is rooted in the human mind. The economic process begins with want, continues with choice, and ends with satisfaction, all of which are functions of mind. Abstract values are thus the beginning, the middle and the end of economics, and so it is impossible for economics to be value-free.\(^{136}\)

According to Payutto, the study of economics has up until now avoided questions of moral values and considerations of ethics, which are abstract qualities. However, it is becoming obvious that in order to solve the problems that confront us in the world today it will be necessary to take into consideration both concrete and abstract factors, and as such it is impossible to avoid the subject of moral values. If the study of economics is to play any part in the solution of our problems, it can no longer

\(^{136}\) Ibid., p. 27.
evade the subject of ethics.\textsuperscript{137} Given its dynamic view of the world, Buddhism does not put forth absolute rules for ethical behavior. The ethical value of behavior is judged partly by the results it brings and partly by the qualities which lead to it. Buddhism would say that it is not the end which justifies the means, but rather the means which condition the end. Payutto sees that:

...while they are subjective, we should not forget that our ethical choices inevitably play themselves out in the world according to the objective principle of causes and conditions. Our ethics--and the behavior that naturally flows from our ethics--contribute to the causes and conditions that determine who we are, the kind of society we live in and the condition of our environment... Unfortunately, most people are only vaguely aware of how their internal values condition external reality.\textsuperscript{138}

Buddhist economists would not only consider the ethical values of economic activity, but also strive to understand reality and direct economic activity to be in harmony with “the way things are.” While modern economics confines its regard to events within its specialized sphere, Buddhist economics would investigate how a given economic activity affects the three

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. ix.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 23.
interconnected spheres of human existence: the individual, society, and nature or the environment. Economics cannot be separated from other branches of knowledge. It is rather one component of an effort to remedy the problems of humanity. Buddhist economics is therefore not so much a self-contained science, but one of a number of interdependent disciplines working in concert toward the common goal of social, individual and environmental well-being.

In modern economics, well-being is usually measured in terms of per capita income and consumption, such as the amount of money expended on medical care and education. A growing number of people are dissatisfied with material growth models and have been searching for alternative measures of well-being with less materialistic and more qualitative goals. Buddhist economics arises out of this demand for new economic objectives. As Glen and Barbara Alexandrin put it,

A Buddhist Economics would take traditional Economics, econometrics, and planning techniques, and inject into them a so-called budhha-element which contains, among other things, the buddhist person, the Buddhist concepts of dhārma and sangha, etc.¹³⁹

“Right Livelihood” is one of the ethical requirements found in the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path. Right

livelhood calls for modes of production beneficial to the mutual well-being of all. An important Buddhistic element of right livelihood is the way or manner in which one works, produces, or acquires wealth. Schumacher argues that it is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation but the attachment to wealth, not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them. From the teachings of the Buddha concerning economics and related ethics, some basic principles of a Buddhist economics can be posited within the context of a contemporary interpretation. These principles deal with the nature of work and employment, consumption and human well-being, and the use of natural resources.

A. The Nature of Work and Employment

The Alexandrins have constructed a model of Buddhist economics by adding what they call “b-elements” (buddha-elements) to conventional economics. They define the adjective “buddhist” (with a small “b”) as embodying ethical and moral motivating forces which may guide individuals in their behavior, including their economic behavior. Although they address economic behavior, their approach to solving economic problems tends to be individually rather than structurally oriented. They use the “six paramitas” from the Buddhist scriptures as b-elements. The six paramitas are generosity (dāna), moral practice

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140 Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, p. 57.
(sīla), patience (ksanti), zeal (virya), mindfulness (dhyāna), and perspective (prajñā “wisdom”).

Production or work is an aspect of the individual’s behavior that should show the effect of the b-elements. The Alexandrins point out that the b-elements most relevant for the production aspect of an economy are mindfulness, zeal, patience and moral practice. Work, they maintain, is the realization of the principle of helping other individuals and oneself at the same time. It should not be seen as a necessary evil, inimical to the attainment of leisure or pleasure. Work is part of the unity of daily life and spiritual practice. They argue that,

The buddhist individual would mindfully choose an occupation where work is conspicuously productive and helpful to other people—meditation in action—which would bring him great psychic income. He would avoid, for example, becoming a butcher, a procurer, a soviet-style “expediter,” a socially unproductive researcher or a Madison-Avenue type executive. He would attempt to work for non-exploitative companies producing useful goods, industries offering important services. He would, at the very least, do his “work,” whatever it might be, in the most “mindful” and least destructive way.\(^{142}\)

\(^{142}\) Ibid., p. 138.
From a Buddhist economic perspective, work is regarded as not only the means of achieving an adequate standard of living, but also the medium in which human beings develop their skills and talents to the best of their ability. Work, in this view, also becomes the medium through which people contribute to building the community to which they belong. Working conditions, therefore, should provide for the health, creativity and social commitment of everyone. The nature of work and the nature of employment are closely related. Employment should be regarded primarily as serving the purposes of human beings in the pursuit of excellence in their work, rather than merely being for the production of profit. John C. Raines develops the concept of work and the related notion of tools in a more profound way:

Work is fundamentally social and historical. Each worker in taking up his or her work inherits the whole legacy of human tools, and the skill to use those tools developed and passed on from a thousand generations of previous tool-users. This inheritance is a gift, unmerited and unearned, a common grace which belongs to us simply because we are human in the long journey of all who have worked in society and time.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{143} Raines, “Tools and Common Grace,” p. 315.
As John Raines points out, human work and tools are closely associated. Tools are seen as the way human beings “play” with nature, involving the capabilities of receptivity and reciprocity in the creative process of tool development, and not just control and mastery. The whole vast legacy of tools developed through thousands of generations of human work can be regarded as a “generosity” inherited by us, rather than simply as instruments with which to make a living. In short, work, employment, and even tools involve much more than mere economic livelihood.

1. The Dignity of Work

From a Buddhist micro-economic perspective, human beings should be skilled, efficient, earnest and energetic in their work (*utthana-sampada*).\(^{144}\) They should learn and cultivate their skills and abilities from work to a level of excellence. Work reflects individuals’ capacities and talents and provides them with a chance to develop themselves and their relationship to the community. From work or a profession, individuals develop friendships with others (*kalyana-mitta*) who give mutual support along the path of self-development, a mutual enabling to overcome “ego-centeredness” by working with other people.\(^ {145}\) However, this insight, crucial to a Buddhist view of economics, is not the case for most work today.

From a modern economic point of view, the

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\(^{144}\) Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught*, p. 82.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., p. 82.
employer usually assumes that employment is simply an item of cost, to be reduced to a minimum if it cannot be replaced by machinery. The worker, on the other hand, regards work as a “disutility.” To work is to make a sacrifice of one’s leisure and comfort, and wages are a kind of compensation for the sacrifice. In modern economics, the ideal from the point of view of the employer is to have output without employees, and the ideal from the point of view of the employee is to have income without employment. Schumacher criticizes these concepts of work and leisure in modern economics writing:

To organise work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-racking for the worker would be little short of criminal; it would indicate a greater concern with goods than with people, an evil lack of compassion and a soul-destroying degree of attachment to the most primitive side of this worldly existence. Equally, to strive for leisure as an alternative to work would be considered a complete misunderstanding of one of the basic truths of human existence, namely that work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process and cannot be separated without destroying the joy of work and the bliss of leisure.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{146} Schumacher, \textit{Small is Beautiful}, p. 55.
While Buddhism accepts the fact that it is natural for people to have cravings for things (tanha), it also recognizes the human desire for quality of life or well-being, the desire for self improvement and goodness (chanda). Problems arise when life is lived from ignorance and at the direction of craving. Problems can be solved by acquiring knowledge. Human development thus hinges on the development of knowledge. When ignorance is replaced with wisdom, it is possible to distinguish between what is of true benefit and what is not. With wisdom, desires will naturally be for that which is truly beneficial. As Payutto puts it,

Modern Western economic theory is based on the view that work is something that we are compelled to do in order to obtain money for consumption. It is during the time when we are not working, or “leisure time,” that we may experience happiness and satisfaction. Work and satisfaction are considered to be separate and generally opposing principles.

Buddhism, however, recognizes that work can either be satisfying or not satisfying, depending on which of the two kinds of desire is motivating it. When work stems from the desire for true well-being, there is satisfaction in the direct and immediate results of the work itself.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{147} Payutto, \textit{Buddhist Economics}, pp. 46-47.
Modern economics is based on the assumption that it is human nature to compete. Buddhism, on the other hand, recognizes that human beings are capable of both competition and cooperation. According to Payutto, when people are striving to satisfy the desire for pleasure (tanha), they will compete fiercely. This competitive instinct can be redirected to induce cooperation. True cooperation arises with the desire for well-being (chanda). Human development demands that we understand how tanha and chanda motivate us and that we shift our energies from competition towards cooperative efforts to solve the problems facing the world and to realize a nobler goal.148

Buddhist economics regards human work in terms of human fulfillment and community rather than as a strictly economic activity of cost, income, and production. When work is conducted under the proper conditions, it enhances human dignity and freedom as well as producing useful products. J. C. Kumarappa, an Indian philosopher and economist, maintains that,

If the nature of the work is properly appreciated and applied, it will stand in the same relation to the higher faculties as food is to the physical body. It nourishes and enlivens the higher man and urges him to produce the best he is capable of. It directs his free will along the proper course and disciplines the

148 Ibid., pp. 53-54.
animal in him into progressive channels. It furnishes an excellent background for man to display his scale of values and develop his personality.\textsuperscript{149}

According to a Buddhist economics, people should protect their income, which they have earned righteously with the “sweat of their brow” (\textit{arakkha-sampada}).\textsuperscript{150} They should be well informed and conscious of their work and income situation so that they are in a position to protect their real income. They should be able to protect their wages or righteous earnings from expropriation by corporations or the workings of the economic system. The Buddha’s advocacy of protecting one’s own income implies that Buddhism should support labor unions to protect the workers’ wages and to improve working conditions in a complex society like today’s. From a Buddhist economic perspective, a government needs to actively support labor unions and to have humanistic labor and investment policies.

Buddhist economics as a system, as summarized by Schumacher, assumes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give people a chance to utilize and develop their faculties, to enable them to overcome their “ego-centeredness” by joining with other people in common tasks, and to bring forth the goods and services needed for

\textsuperscript{149} Schumacher, \textit{Small is Beautiful}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{150} Rahula, \textit{What The Buddha Taught}, p. 82.
human existence (*samajivikata*).\textsuperscript{151} But in the final analysis, the nature of human work, not just the labor of individual Buddhist workers, is what a Buddhist economics must address.

2. The Principle of Employment

In the *Sigalovada Sutta* the Buddha states that an employer should assign his employees or workers to work according to their ability. He should put proven moral men or women in responsible positions. The employer should create a sense of brotherly communion among himself and his workers, provide healthy work conditions, and treat his workers as equal human beings. The employer should provide for the welfare of the workers by supplying them with food and sufficient wages, tending them in sickness, sharing any profits with them, and granting them leave and special allowances.\textsuperscript{152} It should be emphasized here that, in a Buddhist economic system, the workers are not only to receive adequate wages and safe working conditions, but are also to share with their employers the profits from their work.

As noted above, Glen and Barbara Alexandrin develop their Buddhist economic model by emphasizing the b-elements which they consider relevant to economic activity: mindfulness, generosity, zeal, perspective, and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{151} Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, p. 51.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, pp. 105-107.
\end{itemize}
patience.\textsuperscript{153} They set up several examples for the b-entrepreneur (buddhist-entrepreneur) in his or her economic operation. One example is the following:

The b-entrepreneur runs a small non-unionized foundry producing brass door knobs. The demand for them falls and, following the rule of traditional economics, he should lay off elderly Sam, the least productive man. We hypothesize that he would keep Sam, perhaps cutting Sam’s wage or the wages of all the workers involved as well as his own rewards. He would attempt to stimulate demand, perhaps by coming up with another useful product. He would thus absorb the social cost of unemployment.\textsuperscript{154}

Although the b-entrepreneur does not disregard profitability or other economic criteria, he or she brings the “buddhist elements” into play in choosing and running the business. The Alexandrins’ proposal may be realistic in small-scale economic contexts but it does not seem adequate to address systemic economic problems such as, for example, the case of a government’s policy to insure full-employment.

According to Payutto, all actions have results that

\textsuperscript{153} Alexandrin, \textit{Buddhist Economics}, p. 140.  
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p. 141.
arise as a natural consequence. For example, the natural result of sweeping the street is a clean street. In the contract between employer and employee, however, a stipulation is added to this natural result, so that sweeping the street also brings about a payment of money. This is a man-made, or artificial, consequence. Oftentimes workers and employers are trapped in a game of one-upmanship, with each side trying to get as much for themselves as they can for the least possible expense. This tendency can be seen in the modern workplace. It is a result of the unchecked growth of *tanha* (the desire for pleasure objects) and the lack of any viable alternative. Payutto argues that:

In rare cases, however, we hear of employers and employees who do work together with *chanda* (the desire for well-being). This happens when the employer is responsible, capable and considerate, thus commanding the confidence and affection of employees, who in return are harmonious, diligent, and committed to their work. There have even been cases of employers who were so caring with their employees that when their businesses failed and came close to bankruptcy, the employees sympathetically made sacrifices and worked as hard as possible to make the company profitable again. Rather than making demands for compensation, they were willing to take a
From a Buddhist perspective, the trading of human beings, in any kind or form of slavery, is condemned as an evil against human rights. Obviously, to require employees to work extremely long hours in poor working conditions as if they were slaves runs contrary to Buddhist principles. Workers should be treated as equal human beings, not as “things” counted as another economic unit. Schumacher maintains that there are two types of mechanization: one that enhances a human being’s skills and power, and one that turns the work of a human being into that of a mechanical slave. In global factories ordinary specialization is taken to the extreme by dividing the process of production into minute parts, so that the final product can be produced at great speed without anyone contributing more than a completely insignificant and, in most cases, unskilled movement of his or her limbs. Schumacher contends that,

From a Buddhist point of view, this is standing the truth on its head by considering goods as more important than people and consumption as more important than creative activity. It means shifting the emphasis from the worker to the product of work, that is, from the human to the subhuman, a surrender to the forces of evil.\(^{156}\)

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\(^{155}\) Payutto, *Buddhist Economics*, pp. 51-52.

\(^{156}\) Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, p. 57.
Whether it is the slavery of earlier times or the neo-slavery of today’s global factories, from a Buddhist point of view, each is in violation of the basic principles of human nature and human rights.

3. Unemployment and Poverty

Buddhist economics views unemployment as the lack of opportunity not only to make one’s living, but also to develop one’s own skills and talents. Unemployment, underemployment, poverty and any other form of economic exploitation are regarded as “economic violence,” which in turn creates crimes and other forms of physical violence. Full employment, with healthy working conditions and adequate wages, is therefore basic to a Buddhist economic policy. When people are fully employed they have a chance to nourish and develop their faculties to a level of excellence. They have a sense of belonging to a community and can create happiness for themselves and their families. If people have no chance of obtaining work they are in a desperate position, not simply because they lack an income but because they lack this nourishing and enlivening factor of disciplined work, which nothing else can replace. Only by having meaningful work and by adequately meeting basic material needs can people live peacefully and turn their interests to more refined activities like the practice of the Buddhist principles of loving-kindness, compassion, and non-violence.
A Buddhist economics regards poverty as a structural crime. Poverty (daliddiya) is nowhere praised or encouraged in Buddhism. The Buddha said, “Poverty is a suffering in the world for a layman.” He also said, “Woeful in the world is poverty and debt.”157 Though monks should be content with little and have few wishes, poverty is never encouraged even for monks.158 Because of poverty, people may be too preoccupied with the struggle for survival to do anything for their inner development. But when basic living needs are satisfied, there is no reason why one cannot cultivate inner maturity. For laity, there is no instance in which poverty is encouraged. On the contrary, many passages in the scriptures exhort lay people to seek and amass wealth in rightful ways. Payutto contends that:

The main theme in the Scriptures is that it is not wealth as such that is praised or blamed but the way it is acquired and used. For monks, as mentioned above, it is not acquisition as such that is blamed, nor poverty that is praised. Blame-worthy qualities are greed for gain, stinginess, grasping, attachment to gain and hoarding of wealth. Acquisition is acceptable if it is helpful in the practice of the Noble Path or if it benefits fellow members of the Order.159

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158 Rajavaramuni, Buddha-dhamma, p. 40.
159 Payutto, Buddhist Economics, p. 61.
The *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* states that poverty is the cause of immoral behavior, such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred and cruelty, behavior which often results in crime. Walpola Rahula argues that the attempt to suppress crime by punishment is futile and can never be successful. He refers to the Buddha’s teaching that:

in order to eradicate crime, the economic condition of the people should be improved: grain and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators; capital should be provided for small traders and those engaged in small business; *adequate wages* should be paid to those who are employed. When people are thus provided with opportunities for earning a *sufficient income*, they will be content, will have no fear and anxiety, and consequently the country will be peaceful and free from crime.\(^{160}\)

From this perspective we can say that Buddhist economics regards it as important that structural poverty be overcome and an equitable economic system be worked out. Buddhism’s middle way philosophy does not advocate poverty, but rather a simple and non-violent way of life which adequately meets our material needs.

**B. Consumption and Human Well-Being**

Modern economics and Buddhism both agree that

natural resources are limited but mankind has unlimited want. The Buddha said, “There is no river like craving.” Rivers can sometimes fill their banks, but the wants of human beings can never be filled. Modern economics defines consumption as simply the use of goods and services to satisfy demand. Buddhism, however, distinguishes between “right” consumption and “wrong” consumption. Right consumption is the use of goods and services to satisfy the desire for true well-being. Wrong consumption is the use of goods and services to satisfy the desire for pleasing sensation or ego-gratification. For example, in the basic need for food, the biological purpose of eating is to nourish the body, to provide it with strength and well-being. Supplanted over this biological need is the desire for enjoyment, for delicious tastes. Payutto comments:

At times, the desire of tanha may be at odds with well-being, and may even be detrimental to the quality of life. If we are overwhelmed by tanha when we eat, rather than eating for the purpose of nourishing the body and providing it with well-being, we eat for the experience of the pleasant taste. This kind of eating knows no end and can lead to problems in both body and mind. The food may be delicious, but we may end up suffering from indigestion or obesity. On a wider scale, the social costs of
overconsumption, such as depletion of natural resources and costs incurred by health care, not to mention crime, corruption and wars, are enormous.\textsuperscript{161}

With meditation, Payutto argues, we gain perspective on our motivations; we sharpen our awareness and strengthen free will. Thus, when it comes to making economic decisions, decision about our livelihood and consumption, we can better resist compulsions driven by fear, craving, and pride and choose instead a moral course that aims at true well-being. In this way, we begin to see how mental factors form the basis of all economic matters, and we realize that the development of this kind of mental discernment leads the way to true economic and human development. Payutto criticizes that:

For the most part, advertising promotes this artificial value. Advertisers stimulate desires by projecting pleasurable images onto the products they sell. They induce us to believe, for example, that whoever can afford a luxury car will stand out from the crowd and be a member of high society, or that by drinking a certain brand of soft drink we will have lots of friends and be happy.

The true value of an object is typically over-

\textsuperscript{161} Payutto, \textit{Buddhist Economics}, p. 30.
shadowed by its artificial value. Craving and conceit, and the desire for the fashionable and sensually appealing, cloud any reckoning of the true value of things. How many people, for instance, reflect on the true value or reasons for eating food or wearing clothes?\textsuperscript{162}

Many modern economists assume that people who consume more are “better off” than those who consume less. They measure the “standard of living” by the amount of annual consumption. Buddhist economists would consider this approach quite irrational. Schumacher argues that since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain \textit{the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption}. The ownership and the consumption of goods is only a means to an end. Schumacher maintains that an economic philosophy which minimizes consumption and competition, and maximizes human well-being and non-violence is most appropriate to self-sufficient local community:

Simplicity and non-violence are obviously closely related... As physical resources are everywhere limited, people satisfying their needs by means of a modest use of resources are obviously less likely to be at each other’s throats than people depending upon a high rate of use. Equally, people who live in highly self-

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., p. 40.
sufficient local communities are less likely to get involved in large-scale violence than people whose existence depends on worldwide systems of trade.¹⁶³

The Alexandrins’ understanding of b-elements also correlates with such an understanding of consumption and human thriving. They suggest that individuals practicing compassion might cease eating meat, for example, out of regard for all beings. Minimally, their demand for meat will decline while their demand for substitute goods such as various grains will increase.

While Schumacher believes that his “small is beautiful” economic model is most appropriate in small scale communities, the Alexandrins contend that Buddhist economics can be incorporated into current economic policy in the West. Buddhist economics makes each individual more of a decision maker than do many contemporary economic models, and less subject to external pressures like advertising. Still, in a manner not unlike Buddhadasa’s individualistic approach, the Alexandrins hold that a Buddhist economic system depends on individuals implementing their so-called “b-element” into their economic systems. Thus, while both Schumacher and the Alexandrins contribute useful insights regarding the nature of Buddhist economics, the emphasis still falls on the individual in small scale communities.

¹⁶³ Schumacher, Small is Beautiful, pp. 58-59.
C. The Use of Local and Natural Resources

Buddhist economics maintains that production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life. Dependence on imports from afar, and the consequent need to produce for export to unknown and distant peoples, is uneconomic, and is justifiable only in exceptional cases and on a small scale. Schumacher argues that,

the Buddhist economist would hold that to satisfy human wants from faraway sources rather than from sources nearby signifies failure rather than success. The former (modern economist) tends to take statistics showing an increase in the number of ton/miles per head of the population carried by a country’s transport system as proof of economic progress, while to the latter—the Buddhist economist—the same statistics would indicate a highly undesirable deterioration in the pattern of consumption.\(^{164}\)

The use of natural resources is another difference between most modern economic theories and Buddhist economics. Modern economics has tended to focus on human economic activities in relative isolation from the broader ecosystem. Buddhist economics, on the other hand,

\(^{164}\) Ibid., p. 59.
takes a more holistic approach and a non-violent attitude not only toward all sentient beings but also toward the natural environment.\textsuperscript{165} From a Buddhist perspective, economic principles are related to the three interconnected aspects of human existence: human beings, society and the natural environment. Payutto says:

To be ethically sound, economic activity must take place in a way that is not harmful to the individual, society or the natural environment. In other words, economic activity should not cause problems for oneself, agitation in society or degeneration of the ecosystem, but rather enhance well-being in these three spheres.\textsuperscript{166}

In this regard, long run and short run goals are essentially linked, therefore taking care of our environment for our great grandchildren is in fact taking care of the same environment for ourselves. Schumacher makes the distinction between renewable and non-renewable materials. Renewable materials are materials such as wood and water-power, while non-renewable materials include coal, oil and the like. He argues that modern economics equalizes and quantifies everything in terms of a price; the

\textsuperscript{165} The destruction of rain forests in Thailand as well as in other Southeast Asian countries is a violation of the basic Buddhist teachings. However, some Thai Buddhist monks such as Phra Khamkhian Suvanno and the former Phra Prachak Khuttacitto, have been struggling to protect the rain forest and the environment in Thailand.

\textsuperscript{166} Payutto, \textit{Buddhist Economics}, p. 26.
major difference between things in the calculus of modern economics is relative cost per equivalent unit. The most profitable is the one to be preferred as rational and economic, with little attention to such issues as renewable and non-renewable materials.

In Buddhist economics, non-renewable goods must be used only if they are indispensable, and then only with the greatest care and concern for conservation. To use them heedlessly or extravagantly is an act of violence. Buddhist economics would regard a population basing its economic life on non-renewable fuels as living parasitically. In other words, they live on capital instead of income. Schumacher contends that,

As the world’s resources of non-renewable fuels—coal, oil and natural gas—are exceedingly un-evenly distributed over the globe and undoubtedly limited in quantity, it is clear that their exploitation at an ever-increasing rate is an act of violence against nature which must almost inevitably lead to violence between men.\(^{167}\)

According to Payutto, the word “production” is misleading. We tend to think that through production new things are created, when in fact it is merely changes of state which are affected. One substance or form of energy is converted into another. These conversions entail the

\(^{167}\) Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, p. 61.
creation of a new state by the destruction of an old one. Thus production is always accompanied by destruction. He sees that:

Production is only truly justified when the value of the thing produced outweighs the value of that which is destroyed. In some cases it may be better to refrain from production. This is invariably true for those industries whose products are for the purpose of destruction. In weapons factories, for example, non-production is always the better choice. In industries where production entails the destruction of natural resources and environmental degradation, non-production is sometimes the better choice... In this light, non-production can be a useful economic activity.¹⁶⁸

The results of modern economic development appear to be disastrous: the collapse of rural economies, structural unemployment in town and country, and the growth of an urban lower class and an underclass, two socio-economic groups structurally denied nourishment for either the body or the mind. Pursuing Buddhist economics is not a question of choosing between “modern growth” and “traditional stagnation,” but rather a question of finding the right path for development: the middle way between materialistic heedlessness and traditionalist immobility.

Chapter 6

BUDDHIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Buddhism is often criticized as a religion mainly concerned with personal salvation and lacking a social ethics that leads to social liberation. Although it seems so, Buddhist teachings on personal conduct contain principles that could be reinterpreted and extended to a social ethical theory as well as praxis leading to social liberation, hence the so-called “Buddhist Liberation Theology.”\(^{169}\) The experience of Thailand is a good framework in which to approach Buddhist Liberation Theology, offering an opportunity to examine socio-political issues under the global market economy at a structural level and from a Third World point of view.

Buddhist monks in Thailand are part of a unified hierarchical sangha (community of monastics) which in turn is controlled by the government. Everyday Buddhist monks

\(^{169}\) In contrast to a monotheist religion like Christianity or a polytheist religion like Hinduism, Buddhism is classified as atheistic as its devotees believe in no god. Literally, the term “theology” cannot be applied to Buddhism, but for the sake of interfaith dialogue, I will use “Buddhist Liberation Theology” as a provocative term for Buddhist social ethics leading to social liberation.
all over Thailand eat food given to them by Thai people, the majority of whom are poor and oppressed. This makes it possible to look at Buddhism from a socio-political perspective that aims at social justice, thereby adding a new dimension to the Buddhist hermeneutics for the poor. Greed is thereby seen not just in individual terms but also as a built-in mechanism of oppressive social structures. If greed is to be reduced or eliminated, therefore, personal self-restraint will not be enough; these social structures need to be changed as well. Many Buddhists seek liberation (Pali: *nibbāna*, Sanskrit: *nirvāna*) by practicing meditation, but do not pay sufficient attention to the way the society in which they live is organized. I wish to offer a challenge to Buddhist ethical values by interpreting liberation as necessarily involving social as well as personal liberation.

### 6.1 Structural Poverty in Thailand

Thailand has world-wide fame—or rather shame—for its well-established prostitution, sex trade and trafficking industry. Many Western and Japanese male tourists come to Thailand simply for a “sex tour.” A great number of young women in Thailand, desperate in their search for a better life, have been drawn into the sex industry.\(^{170}\) In the past, many of them were tricked or even forced into prostitution

\(^{170}\) Although prostitution and the transnational sex industry exploit adults and children of both sexes, the vast majority of prostitutes in Thailand are women and girls.
by mafia gangs. Today they have been pressured by structural poverty, consumerism, and sometimes a distorted idea of “filial piety.” Although prostitution is illegal in Thailand, the government, because of the present inefficient and corrupt bureaucratic system, seems unable to help those unfortunate young women.

Under the capitalist system, Thai farmers find it hard to sustain their families through agriculture. The harder they work, the deeper they find themselves in debt because of their dependency as tenant farmers. Both sons and daughters are driven to leave home in search of work, but it is easier for women to find a “job” than men because they can quickly become prostitutes, earning more money than factory workers. This has led poor rural families to send their daughters to towns and cities for “jobs” to support their families and in some case to sell their daughters into the sex trade.

In the Thai local tradition, especially in the north, parents prefer the birth of a daughter to that of a son. While a son can help his parents in the rice field, a daughter can help in both household work and farming. After marriage, the daughter continues to serve her parents because a Thai couple traditionally establishes their family close to the woman’s parents. Usually both a Thai son and daughter hold to the traditional values of filial piety, but a daughter is especially valued because she can do more for her parents. Unfortunately, this traditional Thai attitude fits in quite well
with the exploitative structures in which young rural women can find “jobs” in the urban areas, even if such exploitation exposes them to the threat of AIDS.Prostitutes send more money back home than do male or female factory laborers. Their sins are forgiven and they are treated well in their villages.

Prostitution is basically a byproduct of unjust economic and social structures and most obviously is a complete form of gender oppression. Although the phenomenon is well-known in Thailand, few Thai people talk about it openly. Today Thai feminists and Buddhist social activists are beginning to speak up and defend the rights of their mothers, sisters and daughters, reminding society that prostitution represents a distortion of traditional cultural values and is caused by modern structural poverty. Prostitution and other economic, social, and political problems must become part of a new systematic code of Buddhist social ethics—the core of Buddhist Liberation Theology—which addresses the whole range of national issues, including human rights, drug abuse, economic exploitation, patriarchy, and environmental degradation.

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171 The proportion of people in Thailand infected with HIV is quite high, although the government seems to be able to cope with the problem in the 2010s.

172 For a Thai feminist view of prostitution, see Kabilsingh, Thai Women in Buddhism.
Outsiders may argue that these young women could live a simple life at home in the country, and could survive by working at their traditional tasks in the household and rice fields without having to resort to prostitution. Contemporary pressures, however, are extremely powerful. Development projects undertaken by the central government have brought roads, radio, television, popular magazines, and electronic media to the villages, spreading the religion of consumerism, and people are no longer happy with former traditions.\textsuperscript{173} Traditional values are threatened by structural poverty, the inability to possess land, and the exploitation from agribusiness. In addition, the new values increase the demand for consumer goods. Most rural Thai families are torn apart by these two forces, and under these circumstances, it is hard for young men and women to stay home and be happy in rural areas. Most rural villages, especially in the north and northeast, are populated only by those left behind, old people and children.

Today economic hardship and poverty have been gradually improved by the popular policy of Thai government; fewer Thai rural women have resorted to prostitution. However, Thailand is still a center of the sex industry, trafficking girls and young women from poor neighbouring countries to sex trade both in the country and abroad.

6.2 Thai Buddhist-Based Communities

In the past, before the modernization of Thailand under capitalism, the Buddhist monastery was the center of village life and Buddhist monks were its cultural leaders. The Buddhist sangha provided villagers not only with Buddhist teachings, culture and rituals, but also education, medical care and occupational advice. In such a community, the spirit of sharing and cooperation prevailed and villagers shared a common local Buddhist culture. However, this Thai rural social structure, with the Buddhist sangha at its center, has collapsed under the impact of economic dependence, social dislocation and cultural transformation.

What is needed in Thailand today is a revitalization of Buddhist values fostered in so-called “Buddhist-based communities.” With leadership from well-educated or well-informed Buddhist bhikkhu or laity, such communities will seek to promote the enduring values of Thai culture, which are ultimately rooted in a religious worldview. Cultural identity would be fostered through the adaptation of such values, and a Buddhist social ethics would become the guidelines for action, leading to a Buddhist Liberation Theology. The economic model of such Buddhist-based communities would be self-sufficiency rather than market

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174 I have refrained from defining “Buddhist-based communities” in hopes that this concept, conveying the notion of a community of study and praxis, will be more adequately explicated by the examples in this section. The term itself is obviously one adapted from the concept of Christian-based communities in Latin America.
dependency. Buddhist teachings, as well as, the increased self-respect and self-confidence of such a society, would reduce the impact of consumerism, which in recent years has been exacerbated by the omnipresence of transnational fast food restaurants and big discount stores, as well as advertising–on television, radio, in popular magazines, as well as, in the cyber world. A renewal of cultural values, along with practical advice from well-informed professionals, would help rural Thais regain economic independence and improve their physical well-being.

Buddhist-based communities would offer a more participatory democratic model for society. By regaining cultural and economic independence, the rural sector of Thai society can take a more active role in promoting Thai democracy. Once relative economic self-sufficiency, political decentralization, and local cultural independence are established, rural villages would be able to solve many local problems in a new way. The task of rebuilding a healthy rural society belongs to all Thais, with a pivotal role undoubtedly to be played by Thai Buddhist bhikkhu, who should be widely respected, demographically representing the rural people, and residing throughout the country.

It will be useful to look more closely at different types of Buddhist-based communities in contemporary Thailand. Some of them were active at a certain period of time and no longer exist, but paved the way for later communities, while others have been active and creating
new opportunities and possibilities to strengthen local communities with Buddhist values. Some of them are centered around individual activist monks, while others are organized more as networks of people. Some of them have been solving the overall socio-economic problems of their communities, while others have emphasized specific issues such as protecting rain forests and the environment, and building Buddhist temple-based health care systems.

A. Buddhist-Based Communities of the Past

In the past, there were a number of Buddhist-based communities in different parts of Thailand. Although these communities no longer exist, they paved the way and laid the foundation for later Buddhist-based communities. Three such communities are presented as the exemplars for nowaday Buddhist-based communities.

1. Phrakhru Sakorn’s Community

Before Phrakhru Sakorn Sangvorakit came to Wat Yokkrabat at Ban Phrao in Samutsakorn, most people who lived there were impoverished illiterate farmers. The area was often flooded with sea water which destroyed the paddies and left the people with no means of subsistence. Realizing that poverty could not be eradicated unless new crops were introduced, since salt water was ruining the rice fields, Phrakhru Sakorn suggested planting coconut trees, following the example of a nearby province.166

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Once the people of Yokkrabat started growing coconuts, he advised them not to sell the harvest, because middlemen kept the price of coconuts low. With assistance from three nearby universities that were interested in the development and promotion of community projects, the people of Yokkrabat began selling their coconut sugar all over the country. In addition to the coconut plantations, Phrakhru Sakorn led the villagers to grow vegetables and fruits, encouraged the growing of palm trees for building materials, and the planting of herbs to be used for traditional medicine. Fish raising was also encouraged. Under his guidance, within a few years the people’s livelihood improved significantly.\footnote{Phongphit, Religion in A Changing Society, p. 48.}

Phrakhru Sakorn believed that a community’s basic philosophy should be self-reliance and spirituality. He encouraged Yokkrabat residents to first determine what they need in their family before selling the surplus to earn money and buy things they could not produce by themselves. In this way, villagers depended less on the market. This principle of self-reliance also underlied the community’s credit union project; members were encouraged to borrow money for integrated family farming rather than for large enterprises in cash crops. Since Phrakhru Sakorn was convinced that there could be no true development unless it is based on spirituality, in addition to the projects in economic development, he taught the villagers Dhamma-
the teachings of the Buddha—and meditation.\textsuperscript{177}

Phrakhru Sakorn has trained the younger generation of monks and novices for leadership and encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their own local communities. Although he “disrobed” some twenty years ago, he has continued to support the community.\textsuperscript{178} The self-reliance and ethical values he has inculcated have made Yokkrabat an exemplary Buddhist-based community in Thailand.

\textbf{2. Phra Prachak’s Community}

In 1991, when Thailand was under a military dictatorship, the Thai military threatened Phra Prachak Khuttacitto, a Buddhist monk who was campaigning to preserve a large rain forest, Pah\textsuperscript{179} Dongyai, in Buriram from further destruction. He was arrested and thrown in jail. It was the first time in the history of Thai Buddhism that a monk in robes was jailed by the authorities.\textsuperscript{180} Although Phra Prachak was later released, he had to defend himself in court and was left in a position in which he could hardly resume his work.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., pp. 51-52.
\item\textsuperscript{178} In Thai Buddhism there is a tradition that if a monk no longer chooses to live a monastic life, he can disrobe and become a layman. The status of monkhood does not follow him after he disrobes.
\item\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Pah} is the Thai word for forest.
\item\textsuperscript{180} In the past, Buddhist monks in Thailand who were arrested by the police were forced to disrobe first before being put in jail. Most of them wore white robes to defend themselves and their status.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In 1992, during the civilian government of Chuan Leekpai, the deputy Interior Minister went to see Phra Prachak at Dhammachitra Buddhist Center in Buriram and promised him and the villagers that the government would cooperate in protecting the remaining forest in the area. He asked Phra Prachak to leave the forest but promised to build thirty cottages for monks, along with a hall, a water tank and a road in an area of 40 acres outside the forest. He promised Phra Prachak that the Forest Department would send fifteen laborers to help him look after the forest, working twenty days a month for eight months during the initial stage of the project.\(^{181}\)

Until now, this promise seems hollow. A hall was built, but only through the personal effort of Phra Prachak, and with financial backing from the people. Phra Prachak asked the Forestry Department to send tools, a car, and a communication radio to help in the task of protecting the forest, but to no avail. Without such equipment, the fifteen assistants could do little to stop the felling of trees and protect the forest. After the first eight months, the Forest Department reduced their work schedules to only fifteen days a month for the next six months, and then stopped the project. Meanwhile the forest-destroying gangs intensified their operations and the cutting of trees has sharply increased. In other words, under the supposed cooperation

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between Phra Prachak and the Forestry Department, the forest has increasingly been destroyed. The government even publicized this situation to convince the public that monks and villagers did not have the capacity to protect the forest.

There were many attempts to discredit Phra Prachak and to erode his support. A rumor was circulated that he was paid a lot of money by the government, which caused people to stop making donations for his work. Government officials gave money to some villagers and not to others, with the intention of causing misunderstandings between them. The villagers finally divided into three groups. The first, the majority, turned their attention to new plots of land provided by the government. The second group accepted patronage from the influential people who were behind the illegal loggers and withdrew support from Phra Prachak. The third and smallest group continued to support his forest-conservation efforts, since they realized that if the forest was completely destroyed, villagers would find it extremely difficult to survive, and the area would face serious problems of drought and water shortage.

Although Phra Prachak’s campaign was held back by government authorities, his campaign represents a grassroots Buddhist Liberation Theological struggle in response

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to environmental problems. Under Thailand’s military dictatorship, the government openly used its authority to destroy the forest for its own benefit. This prompted people to organize and protest. Today, under an elected civilian government, the process is more subtle yet equally destructive, since the bureaucracy remains unchanged and influential people use covert tactics to invade the rain forest.¹⁸³ Through his campaign against environmental degradation, Phra Prachak has helped awaken the ecological conscience of Thai people at the national level.

3. Thamkaenchan Community

In 1985 a group of people interested in Buddhism and concerned about social and ecological problems came to live together on twelve acres along the Kwai river in a partially destroyed forest at Thamkaenchan valley.¹⁸⁴ They helped develop the area, which is in the western province of Kanchanaburi. They built a number of buildings and boathouses, grew vegetables and planted trees for reforestation. They were committed to the creation of a self-sustaining Buddhist-based community by engaging in natural farming and raising cows, goats and other farm animals. They planted part of the land with herbal plants for the purpose of making traditional herbal medicines. They

¹⁸⁴ The data in this section is based on my visit to the Thamkaenchan community and my interview with the people there.
tried to preserve forest trees and wild animals and were careful to prevent forest fires. Buddhist meditation retreats were held in the community from time to time. The community also produced paintings as well as books on Buddhism and spirituality.

In 1992 the Riverside School, a school for children from poor families, was established. Paiboon Teepakorn, the leader of the community, was convinced that the right form of education is an important factor in altering the way people think and in creating a new direction for society. Besides the formal curriculum, the students were given occupational training in animal husbandry, organic farming, local handicrafts, and some technical skills, as well as training in Buddhist ethics and local culture. After their training, the students were supposed to return to their villages and help their own communities. After visiting the Thamkaenchai community in December 1992, James Halloran, an Irish Catholic priest, reported:

The Buddhist spirituality of the members gives them a tremendous regard for creation. Consequently they are deeply reverent towards the natural vegetation of the place, yet have separated a space for some organic gardening... You could say that the environment is a major issue for the community... There is also a concern with genuine education, reflected by
the fact that they are helping a group of needy boys who are not just imbibing school subjects, but a wonderful set of values too. They are courteous, high-minded, and deeply involved with the chores of the community.\textsuperscript{185}

In a way, Thamkaenchan represents a Buddhist ashrama, hoping to help rural people struggle for a more just society under an exploitative system.

\textbf{B. Buddhist-Based Communities at Present}

Today there are more extensive Buddhist-based communities in the north, the northeast, the south, and the central part of Thailand. Buddhist-based communities at present have learned the obstacles from their predecessors, and found their own solutions to cope with the problems. Four exemplar communities are presented and analyzed as role models of Buddhist-based communities today.

\textit{1. Santi Asoke Communities}

The Santi Asoke communities were established by Samana Bodhiraksa\textsuperscript{186} within the Thai social environment in search of the original purity of Buddhism and in response to the influence of western consumerism which has devalued

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Formerly Bodhiraksa was entitled by the term “Phra” which means Buddhist monk. After renouncing from the Thai Sangha Hierarchy (Maha-thera-samakom), he and his clergy disciples are referred as “Samana” which means religious clergy.
\end{itemize}
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Buddhist ethics among Thai people. Judging from his perspective, most monks within the Thai Sangha (community of monks) are far below the level of purity of sila (morality) set by the Buddha. Bodhiraksa criticizes the lax behaviour, superstitions, and consumerism of most monks and the self-indulgence, corruption, and violence of Thai society. To alleviate Thai society from the domination of transnational capitalism and the influence of western consumerism, Bodhiraksa set up the network of Santi Asoke communities in the central and northeastern parts of Thailand by putting Buddhist Economics and “Sustainable Economy” Theory into practice at the community level.

Bodhiraksa, whose original name was Monkol Rakphong, was ordained in 1970 at the age of 36 in the Thammayut tradition187 at Wat Asokaram in the central province of Samut Prakan. He observed a strict vinaya (discipline) by being vegetarian, eating only one meal a day, wearing no shoes, and living a simple life. Being ascetic and pious, he gained a lot of support and followers among serious Buddhists who helped set up the Santi Asoke movement. Bodhiraksa puts the Thai Buddhist reformist rationality, such as the teachings of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa,

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187 There are two nikaya (orders) in Thai Buddhism: Thammayutika Nikaya and Maha Nikaya. The Thammayutika Nikaya was established by King Mongkut (Rama IV) in his attempt to reform Thai Buddhism. It is believed that the minority Thammayut monks (approximately 10%) are more strictly in vinaya (discipline) than the majority order of Maha Nikaya monks in the Thai Sangha.
into practice on the institutional and organizational levels by announcing independence from the Thai Sangha Hierarchy (*Maha-thera-samakama*) in 1975, which makes his movement radical within the Thai Sangha.

There are at least nine communities in the Santi Asoke network. These communities hold the same principle and philosophy, but each community has its own characteristics due to the different environments and circumstances. For example, Sisa Asoke community in Sisaket province is well-known for its unique local *Isaan* cultural products. Rachathani Asoke community in Ubon Rachathani is famous for its fresh vegetation because it is located by the River Moon. Pathom Asoke community in Nakhon Pathom is prominent in herbal products because there are a lot of herbs in the province. Lacking agricultural area, the Santi Asoke community in Bangkok is excellent in communication and trade—becoming the trade center for the community network. *Bun* (merit) and mutual support, not profit, are the main concern of the activities at Santi Asoke. Being outside of the Thai Sangha Hierarchy, Santi Asoke is one of the most rapidly expanding Buddhist movements in Thailand.

The statistics in 2006 reveals that there are 134 monastics—including 104 monks, 3 novices, and 27 female monks (*sikhamatu*)—in the Santi Asoke movement. In all the communities combined, there are 1,800 residents, 800 students, 9,000 active supporters, and tens of thousands of
members at the vegetarian clubs within the network.\textsuperscript{188} According to the Santi Asoke philosophy, sila or ethical purity is central on the path towards enlightenment whereas a Self-Sustained Economy is crucial for the economic survival of the community and the country within the context of contemporary transnational capitalism. Bodhiraksa and the Santi Asoke movement represent the ethical dimension—both personal and social—of contemporary Thai Buddhism.

2. Phra Khamkhian’s Community

Phra Khamkhian Suvanno’s community at Tahmafaiwan in northeastern Chaiyabhum is another exemplary Buddhist-based community centered around a charismatic leader. Through Khamkhian’s leadership, the Tahmafaiwan community has significantly improved life in nearby villages, both physically and spiritually. It has become a grass-roots movement, struggling to achieve a relatively self-sustaining local economy and self-determined local polity, while constantly working to alleviate environmental problems.

Khamkhian, a forest monk and meditation teacher, has campaigned to help poor people in the northeastern rural areas where he has established “rice banks” and “buffalo banks,” which function as independent local

\textsuperscript{188} For more details on Santi Asoke, see Sangsehanat, \textit{Integrated Wisdom on Buddhist Philosophy}.
cooperatives where poor people can borrow the necessities for agriculture, such as grain and water buffaloes. If necessary, they can borrow rice for their own consumption. When they produce a surplus of rice, they deposit it in the rice bank. When a borrowed buffalo gives birth, half of the young buffaloes belong to the farmer and the other half belong to the buffalo bank.

Khamkhian believes that the villagers’ constant battle with poverty and hunger is due to their being caught up in the mainstream, greed-motivated economy. He encourages the villagers to be self-sufficient by raising their own vegetables, digging family fishponds, and growing fruit trees, instead of producing and selling a single crop like tapioca or eucalyptus and buying food from outside the village. Near his forest monastery, he gave a plot of land to one family to try organic vegetable gardening without the use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides, and the experiment was successful. To broaden the villagers’ perspectives, he has encouraged them to go on study trips to other northeastern villages that have been successful in this kind of integrated farming.

Khamkhian has managed to preserve about 250 acres of lush, green forests atop the mountain against encroachment. It is now the only greenery visible amid vast tapioca fields that stretch as far as the eye can see. He plans to send monks to stay deep in the forest, so that villagers will not dare damage the sanctified area, which has been
declared a forest monastery.\textsuperscript{189} Khamkhian has also led the villagers’ fight against local authorities who have supported illegal logging, a struggle which has gained some degree of self-determination for the community in regards to local polity. By attacking consumerism with a renewed affirmation of Buddhist social and ethical values, he has helped the Tahmafaiwan community win some measure of local cultural independence.

Although he is sick with cancer and his health is deteriorating in late 2006, he has inspired a number of younger monks to follow in his footsteps to build a more just society in rural Thailand.

\textbf{3. Buddha-Kasetra Communities}

The Buddha-Kasetra\textsuperscript{190} communities are a group of Buddhist-based communities in northern Thailand organized under common leadership. They established a number of schools to care for orphans, juvenile delinquents and economically deprived children in the north and northeast of Thailand. Their goal is to build strong Buddhist-based communities in rural Thailand in order to fight poverty, consumerism and the structural exploitation.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{189} Ekachai, \textit{Behind the Smile}, pp. 65-69.

\textsuperscript{190} The term \textit{Buddha} refers to the Buddha—the founder of Buddhism. \textit{Kasetra} means agriculture. Thus \textit{Buddha-Kasetra} literally means the Buddha’s way of agriculture.

\textsuperscript{191} The data in this section is based on my visit to the Buddha-Kasetra communities and my interview with the people there.
The first Buddha-Kasetra school, established at Maelamong in the northern province of Maehongsorn, began its self-supporting program by growing their own rice and vegetables, producing organic fertilizers, raising cows to produce milk for the school children as well as to supply milk at a cheap price to the local communities. They also initiated some small commercial projects, including a bakery, the production of traditional foods and desserts, weaving and sewing clothes, and producing bricks and concrete posts for construction.

All the teachers and school children, in addition to school work, participated in occupational training and manual labor. There was a project to establish a public health center within the community to care for the health of the local people. The Buddha-Kasetra school was able to be self-sufficient in most aspects of its work. Three more Buddha-Kasetra schools were established—at Nongho in Chiangmai, at Khunyuam in Maehongsorn, and at Nonmuang in Korat, and the number of school children and teachers keeps growing.

The Buddha-Kasetra communities are especially interested in the issue of the exploitation of women and children. It has campaigned to protect women’s and children’s rights and to alert people to the problems of prostitution and child abuse in northern Thailand. At the Buddha-Kasetra school at Nongho, the school for female students, girls and young women from poor, marginal
family backgrounds are admitted to the school for education and occupational training as well as instruction in Buddhist ethics. There are six teachers, all female except the principal, Phasakorn Kandej, and eighty-six female students range in age from thirteen to eighteen. If these students were not admitted to the school, it is likely that most of them would have resorted to prostitution.

The Buddha-Kasetra Foundation was founded in Chiangmai in 1989, with Phra Chaiyot as coordinator of all its schools and activities. The foundation has its own printing press, publishing a monthly newspaper, as well as a number of books on Buddhism and social issues. The foundation has been trying to alleviate the causes of social ills by working with the poor and the unfortunate in a Buddhist-based community context, as well as by training young men and women to be leaders of their own communities in rural Thailand. Although the number is still limited, Buddhist-based communities like Buddha-Kasetra are important in their own right and serve as examples of a new vision of a more humane, cooperative and service-oriented way of life.

4. Ban Pak Community

The Ban Pak community is located in the northeastern region of Thailand, which makes up one-third of the land mass of Thailand and is known collectively as Isaan. This term describes the local people, culture, and language, which are influenced by the Lao and Khmer traditions.
In addition to its unique cultural influences, *Isaan*, which is largely rural, is also the poorest region of Thailand. This region, where 34% of the country’s total population lives, also bears twice the average national burden of poverty as a consequence of its harsh climate, reliance on rainfed agriculture, and soil degradation. Though it is the northern region of Thailand, not the northeastern region, which has been hit hardest by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, prevention and care in northeastern Thailand is complicated by poverty and the subsequent out-migration of its youth and constraints on life opportunities and resources.

Located on land belonging to a forest temple, the Ban Pak opened on September 29, 1996 with the support of the temple, the government sector, mainly through the Ministry of Public Health, sub-district level organizations, private organizations, and a committee of local village headmen. Luang-pu Somchai, the abbot of the forest temple, served as project chairman. Between 1996 and 1999, the Ban Pak housed over 200 PLWHA. The Ban Pak statistics claim that 70% of these PLWHA have returned home after experiencing alleviation of symptoms, 20% have died at the Ban Pak, and the remaining 10% continue to live at the Ban Pak.

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192 HIV is the abbreviation for “Human Immunodeficiency Virus” whereas AIDS is the acronym for “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.”

193 PLWHA stands for “People Living with HIV/AIDS.”

194 This section is based on the field research by Laura Hollinger whose project I joined in as an advisor.
After visiting the Ban Pak community in September 1999, Laura Hollinger reported:

The Ban Pak roster listed 24 people. Of this total, 13 were male, 8 were female, and 3 were male children. Eleven were residents of the province in which the Ban Pak was located while the rest were from nearby provinces of northeastern Thailand. The population of the Ban Pak fluctuates as residents die or occasionally return home and new people arrive requesting shelter. Changes occur so often, that it is difficult to keep track if one is not present at the Ban Pak on a daily basis. During the three month study period, roughly five deaths occurred, one couple returned home, two children were sent out to live with family members or adoptive parents, one child was placed in the care of a PLWHA couple at the Ban Pak who were unrelated to him (one month later this child was returned to his family when they failed to supply baby formula as promised), a few people came and stayed for a short period and then returned home, while several other new residents came and were still present.¹⁹⁵

A budget of 270,000 Baht was provided by the government in 1999, but it was unclear whether this money was earmarked specifically for education and training programs or could be used for the costs of caring for the residents. Consequently, the Ban Pak no longer has sufficient funding to support its operational budget and therefore, beginning in 1999, the Abbot has provided the operational budget by using a portion of the donations made to the temple. Food is also provided by the temple and by occasional donations from families of PLWHA and private organizations, while basic medications are available at Ban Pak through the support of the district hospital.

In light of the enormous psychosocial consequences of HIV/AIDS to the residents of Ban Pak, care of the heart and mind (jitjai), encompassing counseling and spiritual nurturance, is the primary goal of Ban Pak. It is important that Ban Pak also provides care for the physical needs of its residents, and it does so through the use of herbal medicines, access to medical care and nutritious food. Care of the heart and mind (jitjai) is accomplished through emotional encouragement and meditation practices at Ban Pak. By addressing the needs of the heart and mind, Ban Pak is realizing a holistic mission, which is essential for those suffering from a physically incurable disease, especially in the context of a Second World country where advances in medical treatment are not equitably available.

The use of Buddhist teachings and practices is an
essential medium for emotional and mental support at Ban Pak. Three main practices are utilized: chanting (*suatmon*), respecting the Buddha and monks (*wai pra*), and meditation (*samadhi*). Chanting and meditation are credited with improving the condition of the heart and mind (*jitjai*) and achieving a peaceful, anxiety-free state of mind. The visiting monks and residents all emphasize that Buddhist practices keep them from worrying too much, which was considered to be very important as worrying has negative affects on physical health. The Dhamma, or teachings of the Buddha, are also used to encourage the residents to do good deeds and to prepare their hearts for death. Spiritual care encompasses Buddhist principles and practices, which offer explanatory models for suffering, death and dying, and calming the hearts and minds of the patients and caregivers.

In addition to the physical care and emotional/mental care provided at Ban Pak, another important element of their program which emphasizes comprehensive care for PLWHA is their outreach to families, the surrounding communities, and Thai society at large via education about HIV/AIDS prevention and care and acceptance for persons living with AIDS. The PLWHA residents view participation in workshops to educate students, village leaders, and community members about HIV/AIDS as a positive outlet for making meaning of their suffering and being useful to society, doing good deeds, and thereby affirming their value, rights, and ability to work. Education programs are
also a means for linking Ban Pak residents to the outside society so that they may attest that they are a part of society rather than an ostracized, alienated group.

C. Overview of Buddhist-Based Communities

Thailand has faced systemic structural problems, as shown by the economic crisis of late 1997 and the political crisis of 2010. Although the country is presently administered by a civilian government, the political and bureaucratic patronage system has remained unchanged and constitutes a major obstacle to the decentralization of power and to significant social and economic reforms. Despite these circumstances, the Thai Buddhist *sangha* remains silent and inactive. Most monks maintain that if all individuals were ethical, problems would be solved naturally. While there is an element of truth to this approach, it naively ignores the impact of modern economic, political and social structures on the everyday lives of individuals.

Although Buddhist-based communities in Thailand, as grass-roots movements, are going in the right direction, their approaches are still limited attempts at structural reform as most of them are concerned with the micro-level of solving the immediate needs or the day-to-day problems of their communities. Macro-perspectives and praxis, therefore, are needed at the local, national, as well as, transnational levels in order to construct a more serious
Buddhist social ethics leading to Buddhist Liberation Theology. The Bhikkhuni Movement, whose aim is to empower women and alleviate the suffering of women and children, has a macro-philosophical approach based on Buddhism and feminist-liberation theory. Although the movement faces some obstacle at the national level, it is networking quite well internationally. Buddhist Liberation Theology is, therefore, the hope of Thai Buddhists to cope with contemporary problems at a structural level in Thai society.

6.3 Buddhist Liberation Theology

Historically, Buddhism arose in India at a time when the Aryan civilization flourished. Unlike Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the main concern of religious leaders and philosophers during the time of the founder was not political liberation due to the social conditions at the time, but rather personal liberation from human psychological suffering arising from the physical cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death. Although the Buddha also taught social ethics concerning the social, economic and political well-being of people, the main theme in Buddhism was personal liberation from psychological suffering. Today, as social and political conditions have changed tremendously, I propose that Buddhism needs a structural vision and a new emphasis on social liberation, hence the need for a Buddhist Liberation Theology.
A. Buddhist Social Liberation

Before the country became modernized, Siam—the original name of Thailand—was a traditional society whose values were articulated in terms of Buddhism. The name was changed to Thailand in 1939 as a step toward westernization or modernization.\textsuperscript{196} Although Siamese people, measured by modern economic standards, were poorer in terms of material wealth and public health, members of older generations report that they were generally happier and more humane than Thai people nowadays.

The contrast between yesterday’s Siam and today’s Thailand, however, developed over time as a consequence of basic economic and social changes, and as a by-product of the government’s efforts to modernize the country. This modernization has shattered the self-sufficient economy of local communities and centralized the polity of the provinces. Ultimately, this process has tied the country economically to the global market economy under transnational capitalism, and politically to the new international order. These economic and structural changes have had a great impact on all social and cultural aspects of Thai society, and consequently have affected the social values and well-being of Thai people.

If the life of Thai people in the past was “better” than it is today, this was mainly because of the self-sufficiency of

\textsuperscript{196} The name was changed by the government of Phibun Songkhram, shortly after he became prime minister at the end of December 1938.
their local economies and the decentralization of political power—and hence the integrity of local culture and social values. Buddhist Liberation Theology has to do more than advocate mindfulness and the ideal of simplicity. To construct a healthier Buddhist society requires a change of the economic structure into one of more local self-sufficiency, and the political structure into one of more local decentralization, with local moral and cultural values adapted to a contemporary context. Only then can a Buddhist social ethics take root in society as it did in the historical past. The Buddhist spirit of loving-kindness, compassion, sharing and cooperation will then prevail, at both personal and structural levels.

**B. Toward A Buddhist Liberation Theology**

The mind is not an independent entity, human beings also have bodies. Where the body is, the mind is. They are mutually dependent. Without the mind, the body is not different from other non-living things. Without the body, the mind cannot exist. Physical activities affect the development and quality of the mind. At the same time, the quality of the mind also affects the well-being of the physical body.

We are not born in a vacuum but in a society and a culture. We grow up and live not in an abstraction but in a particular social and cultural environment. Our life is affected by the quality of food, health care and our physical and emotional environment, as well as the social, cultural,
economic and political environment. We do not live alone, but in a network of complex social relationships. These truisms bear repeating because many Buddhists believe that they can automatically overcome socio-political problems through inner liberation from psychological suffering. Such a conception of Buddhism lacks a structural perspective from which to address social, economic, and political problems of the modern world.

Such an individualistic attitude might work for a hermit who renounces the world, but most Buddhists are not hermits. Most Buddhists live in a complex, interconnected world. Indeed, today even a hermit cannot avoid this complex nexus. The Thai Buddhist sangha has been controlled by the government since the 19th century. Buddhist monks all over Thailand eat their daily food given to them by Thai people, the majority of whom are poor and oppressed. Their sons become poorly paid laborers in construction and factories, and their daughters are exploited laborers, or even become prostitutes. Under such circumstances, how can Buddhists avoid their social responsibility? In the light of these socio-political issues and the underlying structures of contemporary life, Buddhist Liberation Theology needs to be integrated so as to include social as well as personal liberation.

From a Buddhist Liberation Theological perspective, the solution of Thailand’s structural problems is threefold. First, Buddhist-based communities all over Thailand need to
be linked, forming a grassroots movement to combat social injustice and environmental destruction. Their more self-sustaining economies and decentralized polity can serve as models for a better society.

Second, Buddhist intellectuals and social workers at all levels should learn more from the oppressed. The Thai government’s popular policies, such as “village loans” and “socialized health care,” should be worked out together with the poor to obtain a genuine structural solution to meet their needs. Thailand’s broad-based reforms can occur by: listening to the poor, helping raise people’s consciousness in regards to structural problems, organizing all those conscious of existing structural injustices—the underprivileged, the middle class, the intellectuals, and the affluent to work together for meaningful change.

Third, a more just society could be obtained on the national level by pushing for political reforms advocated by Buddhist thinkers such as Praves Wasi.¹⁹⁷ The 1997 Popular Constitution, which includes a reformed democratic process with structural check and balance of power—including elections, government administration, parliament and a judicial system—should be used as a basis, with modifications to prevent abuse of power, for any of the nation’s

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¹⁹⁷ Praves Wasi was the chairman of the Committee of Democratic Development that set the concepts and agendas for Thailand’s political reform supported by Thai intellectuals and the middle class. For more details, see The Committee of Democratic Development, The Political Reform of Thailand (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 1995).
new constitution. The Thai bureaucracy, one of the biggest obstacles to social and political reforms, needs restructuring in order to become more efficient and decentralized. All those who advocate Buddhist Liberation Theology must continue to work for political, economic and social reforms and structural changes at the national level, as well as, changes in the laws to cope with transnational capitalism. By supporting the grassroots movements of Buddhist-based communities, Buddhist women’s empowerment movements, and a broad-based consciousness-raising process, we can help build a healthier and more just society which can keep transnational capitalist invasion at the minimum.

As a major world religion, Buddhism deals with the issues of human suffering and liberation thereof. There are three main types of human suffering: physical suffering, psychological suffering, and socio-political suffering. Buddhism provides a unique treatment for the problem of inner human suffering through meditation. So, liberation (nibbāna or nirvāṇa) in Buddhism is basically liberation from psychological suffering. As Leonard Swidler puts it, Buddhism uses the language “from below” or “from within,” whereas religions with God-centered orientations like Christianity use the language “from above” or “from without.”198 From this perspective, Buddhist language and concepts are closer to those of modern critical thinkers, which emphasize an internal locus of control rather than an

198 For more details on interfaith dialogue, see Swidler, *After the Absolute*. 
external locus of control. Or as Antony Fernando puts it, the way the Buddha dealt with his disciples is similar to the way a psychotherapist deals with his/her patients in a clinic, as a psychotherapist works to strengthen a patient’s inner locus of control.

Buddhism seems to lack a precise theory and praxis to address the concrete issues of contemporary socio-political suffering and its liberation. Traditional Buddhism provides guidelines for personal moral conduct such as self-restraint, patience, zeal, compassion, generosity and mindfulness, but these moral concepts need to be reinterpreted in a modern context and integrated into a social ethical theory. Buddhadasa’s theory of dhammic socialism tends to be too utopian and abstract. Although his theory addresses the issue of “surplus” in a manner similar to Karl Marx’s “surplus value,” it still needs interpretation and clarification as a social praxis. A comprehensive perspective on socio-political suffering and liberation from the existing exploitative system of transnational capitalism, will manifest via a consciousness-raising process in regards to socio-political suffering and its structure, and the emergence of Buddhist-based communities struggling for social justice in solidarity with women, the poor, and the oppressed. These are steps, in the Thai experience, towards a Buddhist Liberation Theology.

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199 See Fernando, *Buddhism Made Plain*.
Chapter 7

BUDDHIST SOCIAL ETHICS

Buddhist Social Ethics will be presented both domestically and globally as a new social dimension of Buddhist ethics. Buddhist ethics and world peace will be explored from personal and structural perspectives, including the Buddhist concept of loving-kindness (*metta*) and the modern controversy of “the clash of civilization.” Theory of the Thai family system will be presented as a “female-centered” family system—especially in the north and the northeast of Thailand. Marriage and sexual ethics will be analyzed from the Buddhist scriptures as well as contemporary Buddhist thoughts.

7.1 Buddhist Ethics and World Peace

*Metta* (loving-kindness; friendliness) is one of the basic concepts in Buddhist ethics. It is a part of *Brahmavihara* (sublime states of mind) that comprises of *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudhita* (sympathetic joy; altruistic joy) and *upekkha* (equanimity; neutrality; poise). *Metta* is an ethical quality of the mind—the essential part of a human being. As the UNESCO has
pointed out, “War begins at the mind of people.” To stop war, we need to establish peace at the mind of people. Here metta can play an important role for peace at the mind and hence in the world.

A. Metta and World Peace: A Structural Approach

There are at least two different approaches to the concept of metta. Most Buddhists take that if we cultivate loving-kindness in our mind and try to persuade other people to do the same, then the whole society or the world will be peaceful. This is an individual approach that emphasizes, like in Confucianism, the extension of loving-kindness from an individual to individual, family, community, society and the world. They argue that if each person in the society practices metta, then the whole world will be in peace. Although there is some truth in this approach, it is too simplistic and overlooks the socio-political structure of the world.

Metta and karuna are the other side of the same coin as Panca-sila (the Five Precepts; rules of morality). A structural approach will use these Buddhist concepts to address the system or structure of a society.

The first precept is to abstain from killing and harming living beings. In applying this to a country like Thailand, for example, it becomes clear that the military budget, which comprises a large portion of the GNP, should be reduced. The violation of human rights, including
political or economic assassinations, the torture of prisoners and child abuse, has to be halted. There must be an end to the slaughter of wild animals, especially endangered species. The rain forests that shelter wild animals need to be recovered and preserved. The moral precept forbidding killing would be made more meaningful by implementing these measures.

The second of the Five Precepts is to refrain from stealing. If we look at the situation in Thailand, we will see that a more just social structure is needed in order to prevent politicians, the military, police, civil servants and businessmen from engaging in corruption and systematically “stealing” from the common people. Furthermore, destruction of the rain forests and degradation of the environment and the world’s ecology are “stealing” the future of our children and grandchildren.

The third precept is to refrain from sexual misconduct. Prostitution is a systematic violation of this rule, a problem Buddhists need to take more seriously. At the basic structural level, among other things, a substantial improvement in economic well-being in rural areas, as well as the enforcement of laws punishing those profiting from the business of prostitution, are needed to reduce pressure on rural young women—including women from neighbor countries—in order to halt their resorting to or being sold into prostitution.
The fourth of the Five Precepts is to abstain from false speech. Buddhists need to advocate truthfulness, even when this means challenging the status quo and a corrupt system that often violates this demand. Political and bureaucratic reforms, laws guaranteeing a free press, multiple political parties and grass roots participation in democracy are required to establish and maintain this precept at a structural level.

The fifth precept, to refrain from intoxication causing heedlessness, is systematically violated by the widespread alcohol and drug trade. The use of alcohol widespread throughout the villages and in the urban areas leads to domestic violence and the plundering of hard-earned, meager wages needed to support families’ basic survival needs. The smuggling of drugs through and from Thailand has contributed to the worldwide drug problem, and this must be stopped. In general, if a Buddhist ethics is to have any significant meaning for our contemporary society, Buddhists must reexamine the Five Precepts not just on a personal level but also at the structural level.

*Metta-karuna* is the opposite of the three defilements (*kilesa*): greed, anger and delusion. If we consider Buddhist ethics in a contemporary world from a more structural perspective, we are forced to recognize that greed, anger and delusion, which Buddhism identifies as the root of all harmful things, currently prevail. A systematic and structural *greed* can be found in the current Transnational
Capitalism, in which millions of traditional farmers, especially in the Third World, have been uprooted from their farmlands by tenancy and agribusiness, causing massive dislocation, unemployment and poverty. Centralized political power and an economic system of dependency have caused structural hatred to arise as elites grow richer while the vast majority of people in the world are driven into greater poverty. A structural delusion comes from the expanding influence of commercial advertising in the mass media, leading local people to discard their cultural values and embrace consumerism.

In order to overcome greed, hatred and delusion, a person needs to change not only his or her personal conduct or life-style, but also the system that creates structural greed, hatred and delusion. If these kilesa (defilements) have been removed from the social structure as well as the mind of people and the Five Precepts have been practiced both at personal and structural levels, then metta will take firm root in the mind of people and the socio-political structure of the world will become more just. Metta will then prevail and successfully contribute to the world peace.

B. The Clash of Civilizations: A Buddhist Perspective

In his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel P. Huntington pointed out in 1990s that after the

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Cold War, the United States would face a threat from either the Islamic Civilization or the Confucian Civilization, because both are expanding and are so different from Western Civilization. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001 in New York City, it has become clearer to the West that the threat is from the Islamic World rather than China.

The contemporary world crisis may be viewed from at least two perspectives: the global economic-political crisis, and the *so-called* clash of civilizations. From the global economic-political perspective the world was temporarily united by the global market economy under transnational capitalism. The ideology of capitalism as “free competition” is quite an ideal. In the real world, transnational capitals rule out Third World local capitals, and to a certain extent, national capitals, lead to “monopoly capitalism” which is imperialistic in its very nature. Consequently, the global economic structure has made the rich countries richer, the poor countries poorer. And within the boundary of a country, the rich get richer and the poor poorer. Usually, the poor will not revolt unless they are experiencing extreme conditions. In the Third World many Muslims live in poverty. Out of their extreme poverty and fueled by the Middle East conflict, Muslims who represent the poor Third World struck out at the United States—the center of world capitalism. Hence, guerilla war or terrorism on a global scale broke out between the poor Third World and the rich First World.
When viewed from the second perspective, the clash of Islamic and Western civilizations can be seen as rooted in different values and ideologies. Islam, as a religion, provides a certain world view and set of values for its adherents. Most Muslims regard their religion as the *only* religion that occupies the absolute truth. So its world view and values are perfect and cannot be changed. This leads to the conception of “Fundamentalism.” The West, on the other hand, is the leader of “Modernity” that has brought about rapid social change—especially through science and technology that has led to changes in world view and values globally. So, part of the clash is the clash between Fundamentalism and Modernity.

Religious ideology sometimes may be a crucial factor that leads to either peace or violence, depending upon its interpretations. For example, during World War II, Japan utilized Shinto ideology to mobilize the Japanese army to invade Asia and later on to defend the country. According to the interpretation of Shinto scriptures, the Japanese emperor was a descendant of the Sun Goddess. So the emperor was a god and the Japanese were the chosen people who were destined to rule the world. If this celestial mandate could not be done peacefully, it would not be without reason to get it done through war. Facing the two atomic explosions in Japan at the end of World War II, Emperor Hirohito made an announcement that shocked the Japanese people, namely that the relationship between the emperor and his people

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could no longer depend upon the legendary scripture. The emperor was not a god, but a man. After World War II, Shintoism was divided into two parts: “State Shintoism,” which provided the ideology leading to militarism, was abolished by the Allies, and “Sectarian Shintoism,” which functions as a peaceful personal faith, was allowed to continue as a religion. The new Japanese Constitution, written by the Allies, makes clear the separation of state and religion to assure that religion can no longer provide an ideology leading to war.

The present-day suicidal bombing attacks by Muslim terrorists against the Jews and the West have reminded the world of the Japanese kamikaze during World War II. Some questions have been raised. Would some of the interpretations of Islam today provide an ideology leading to militarism—be it conventional war or terrorism—in a similar way that Shintoism did in Japan during World War II? What did President George W. Bush mean when he announced that he would bring “Democracy” and “Freedom” to the Islamic World? Is the conflict today between Muslims and the West a purely economic-political conflict or a new Holy War?

As a peaceful religion, Buddhism would call for three modes of change for peaceful resolution of the present conflict. First, the global market economy under transnational capitalism should be gradually transformed into an alternative economic system—one for example is
Buddhist economics—for a more just global economic structure so that people in the Third World—including Muslims—have a better standard of living. Second, people of all races, sexes, ages, nationalities and religious beliefs are to peacefully co-exist in this pluralist world with mutual respect and understanding, without any discrimination or division. All human beings are brothers and sisters. Third, the modern interpretation of religious scriptures should be done in such a way that it provides ideology for peace, rather than violence or war, and loving-kindness for all humankind.

C. Buddhist Social Development

There are at least two main issues in Buddhist Social Development: human rights and women’s rights.

1. Buddhism and Human Rights

Caste system, regarded as violation of human rights, was historically constructed by wars, racism, and religious ideology. The Aryan, the Caucasoid nomad originally from Europe, invaded and won the war over the Dravidian, the local Mongoloid in the land of today India. With Brahman religious ideology, the Aryan established the caste system (varnas) as follows:

Aryan:  
Brahmins (priests)  
Kshatriyas (warriors)  
Vaishyas (traders)
Dravidian: **Shudras** (laborers)  
(Dalit) **Chandals (Harijans)** (untouchables)

The **Brahmins** (priests), the **Kshatriyas** (warriors) and the **Vaishyas** (traders) belonged to the Aryan race. The **Shudras** (laborers) belonged to the Dravidian (or Dalit). Cross racial marriage between Aryan and Dravidian was condemned, and the children from such cross racial marriage belonged to **Chandals (Harijans)**, the untouchables.

For Human Rights, the Buddha disagreed with the caste system in India by announcing that “To be good or evil depends on one’s own *karma* (actions), not on one’s birth.” The Buddha established an equality among different castes within the Sangha. In the Sangha, monks are respected according to their seniority, not to their castes.

Inspired by the Buddha’s teaching, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), an untouchable, has become the first person in modern history to bring Buddhism back to India. He has inspired millions of Dalit people to become Buddhists. Besides designing Buddhist symbols to Indian flag and government seal, Dr. Ambedkar has written Indian Constitution that guarantees Human rights and Women’s Rights.

Dr. Ambedkar was born an outcaste in the city of Mau, Madhya Pradesh, India. His original name was Bhimrao Ramji. Inspite of being treated badly for most of his life, he tried his best to pursue his studies. He had a kind
teacher whose Brahmin surname, Ambedkar, was lent to him to hide his identity for the sake of further education. Finally he received a scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda to study abroad at Columbia University in the United States of America, and later on at the London School of Economics in England. After receiving doctorate degrees both in Law and Economics, Dr. Ambedkar returned to India to work for the welfare of the poor and the oppressed, and gradually became their leader.

Among the atmosphere of political struggle against the British, there were three major groups working towards India’s independence. The first was Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence movement, which maintained the caste system. As Gandhi saw it, the caste system was the identity of Indian culture. The second was the Muslim League which wanted to divide the country and establish a new Muslim state. The third was Dr. Ambedkar’s movement, which wanted to abolish the caste system and maintain the integrity of the country.

During World War II, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar disagreed on the issue of which side India should take between England and Germany. Gandhi wanted India to join Germany against England, because he reasoned that although India helped England in World War I, the British never rendered independence to India. Dr. Ambedkar, however, supported England against Germany. For him, World War II was an ideological war between Fascism and
Democracy. If Fascism won, India would be under even more dictatorial rule. Because of these agreements, Mahatma Gandhi cooperated with the Muslim League to work against Dr. Ambedkar.

In 1932, the British Prime Minister announced the Communal Award in India that entitled the minority communities to separate representation for Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Europeans and the oppressed classes. Mahatma Gandhi disliked it and went on a fast unto death. Dr. Ambedkar needed to compromise for the sake of Gandhi’s life. After India received its independence, the Muslim League, which had continuously worked to divide the country (and Mahatma Gandhi had never stopped them), established a new state called Pakistan amidst people’s relocation chaos. Mahatma Gandhi was sorrowful as to what was happening. Five months later, he was assassinated by a Hindu who strongly condemned him regarding the country’s separation.

Yawaharan Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, invited Dr. Ambedkar to be the Minister of Justice in his government. Dr. Ambedkar took a leading role in writing the Constitution that makes India the largest Democratic country in the world. The Constitution guarantees the equal rights of all people regardless of caste and gender. He also brought the Ashokan wheel to the center of Indian national flag and the Ashokan pillar as the national symbol.
Today, the “Dr. Ambedkar International Peace Award” was established to honor Dr. Ambedkar who devoted his life to upholding human rights—especially for the oppressed outcaste people, and for the independence of India. He was the first person in modern history to bring Buddhism back to India. In his opinion, if India has to reform its society, particularly abolishing its caste system, then the restoration of Buddhism is inevitable. Because of his efforts and devotion, today India has more than 50 million Buddhists (more than 5 percent of the total population) and Buddhism has been growing, especially among low caste and outcaste people in India.

2. Buddhism and Women’s Rights

Women have been oppressed in the long history of Indian patriarchy. Women have been excluded by Brahman-Hindu religion; so, their spiritual liberation depends on how good they have served their husbands. At marriage, women have to pay bridal payment to men’s family. At men’s death, women were pressured to die in the fire of her husband’s cremation.

For Women’s Rights, the Buddha disagreed with the ill treatments of men to women. He has raised the status of women in two ways:

1. By announcing that “women are equal to men in attaining nirvāṇa (nibbāna).”
2. By establishing Bhikkhuni Sangha, the first Nun Institution in the history of world’s religions.
Maha Pajapati Gotami’s ordination was refused twice by the Buddha, but it was eventually granted by the Buddha: “religious liberation is more important than socio-cultural practice.” Bhikkhuni Sangha has been prosperous for almost a thousand years in India and Sri Lanka before it disappeared in Theravada culture.

7.2 Women and Buddhist Ethics

The contemporary issue of women’s rights will be explored from at least two perspectives. The theory of Thai family system by Sulamith H. Potter portrays that Thai family system is neither patriliny nor matriliny, but rather “female-centered”–the family lineage passed from mother to daughter, rather than from father to son. Authority, however, is passed affinally, from father-in-law to son-in-law. Buddhist ethics towards marriage will be presented from Buddhist texts. It includes the duties of husband and wife as well as women’s qualities to win power. Sexual ethics of Buddhism will be analyzed within contemporary world from Buddhist texts as well as modern Buddhist thoughts.

A. A Female-Centered Family System in Thailand

Like in any society, family–the most basic social unit–plays an important role in Thai culture. There were many attempts among anthropologists to define the Thai family system, but without a clear structural explanation. The most influential was John Embree’s “Loosely
Structure” theory. He defined that the Thai family was so loosely structured that “considerable variation of individual behavior was permitted.”\footnote{Embree, “Thailand: A Loosely Structured Social System,” p. 4.} It was a social system relatively lacking in social roles and hence in forms of social organization, any attempt to elucidate Thai social structure would prove fruitless. Embree’s theory was so influential in the 1950s and 1960s that it obstructed any kind of structural analysis.

In 1977 Sulamith Heins Potter presented her “Female Centered” theory of the Thai family system. It was a breakthrough of Embree’s theory. Potter points out that northern Thai family structure can be understood as a system in which lineality is traced through women, rather than men, and authority is passed on affinally, from father-in-law to son-in-law, by virtue of their relationships to the line of women. The key factor in understanding the system is the recognition of the structural importance of women; without that, the system is unintelligible.\footnote{Potter, \textit{Family Life in a Northern Thai Village}, p. 123.}

The Thai family is ordered in a delicate and complex way. It is based on the dynamic interplay of two factors: the relationships between women which define the social structure and determine the important relationships between men, and the higher social status and formal authority of the men. Authority is passed from man to man, but by virtue of relationships to a line of women: it is passed affinally, from
father-in-law to son-in-law. It is a sort of mirror image of patriliny, in which the important consanguineal links are between mother and daughter rather than father and son.

Potter says:

I am describing a system in which the people who are redistributed in affinal groups are men. The structurally significant people are female, not male. I call this a female-centered system in contrast to patriliny and matriliny which, as they are understood currently, would both be male-centered systems.\(^{203}\)

Another important element is the cultural expectation that marriage will be matrilocal for at least a token period. This means that a married man is living with his wife’s consanguines, who are his own affines. The important other men with whom he is likely to reside are his wife’s father and brother-in-law, all of whom have also married in. Chatsumarn explains how this type of family structure was formed:

Under the system of corvee labor in the Ayudhya period, men would be away from their homes at least every other month, sometimes for as long as three months. During their absence, women took care of the families. Because of this, it was customary for newly married couples to live with the wife’s family.

\(^{203}\) Ibid., p. 20.
This led to a matrilineal social system and also to relative financial independence for women.204

According to Potter, social relationships in the northern Thai family are ordered on three important principles. First, formal authority belongs to men rather than women. Second, juniors must defer to seniors, and seniors take responsibility for the welfare of juniors. Third, family relationships are a lineality traced through women, where men are merely affinal members of a matriline of which women consanguineally related to one another are the core.205 As far as marriage is concerned, parents may make suggestions and apply pressure, but it is the custom for a man and a woman to choose one another, and marry for love. In a system like this, the wife is in a most important position. Her husband's status in the family is conferred by her. The effect of all this is to give a woman an important voice in the management of family life, a position of power which comes from her place in the structure of the family. However, the rule of respect for seniors tends to reinforce the position of the husband.206

It is also important that inheritance rules in northern Thailand divide property equally among all children, both male and female, with the house usually goes to the youngest daughter. John E. deYoung reports:

204 Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, p. 18.
Both sons and daughters inherit rice land equally, but the house and house compound frequently are inherited by right of succession by the daughter who with her husband expects to make her home in the family household. The custom of one married daughter remaining in the house of her parents and inheriting the family house is so widespread throughout the north that it suggests a system of specialized matrilocal residence at an earlier period, although at present the system no longer is consistent.\textsuperscript{207}

According to deYoung, the social position of the Thai peasant woman is powerful. She has long had a voice in village governmental affairs. She often represents her household at village meetings. Through their marketing activities Thai farm women produce a sizable portion of the family cash income, and usually act as the family treasurer and hold the purse strings. But deYoung observes that in the commercialized delta area in central Thailand where large amounts of money are brought in by the sale of rice, the farmer seems to keep control of this rice income himself.

\textbf{B. Marriage and Sexual Ethics: A Buddhist Perspective}

A Buddhist passage states that women are subject to five woes: she must leave her family at marriage; she must

\textsuperscript{207} DeYoung, \textit{Village Life in Modern Thailand}, p. 23.
suffer the pain of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth; and she must always work hard taking care of her husband. (Samyutta Nikaya, XVIII, 297) Three of these “woes”—menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth—are simply properties of the female body. The Buddhist attitude is that men should have sympathy with women on these regards. Men should particularly share the sufferings—at least mentally—and take care of women on their pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy and childbirth are the mutual responsibilities of both sexes. The other two “woes” were social conventions about roles and behavior which should be changed in contemporary society on the basis of the equal rights of men and women. While the text speaks of the “five woes” of women, it also states that women bring five strengths to a marriage: attractiveness, wealth, virtue, vigor, and the ability to bear children.

1. Buddhist Ethics towards Marriage

Even though Theravada Buddhists tried to describe love and marriage in the bleakest possible terms, we can find plenty of love stories and examples of happy marriages in the Buddhist literatures. For a successful marriage, the Buddha suggests the well matching of a couple in five ways:

This husband and wife are indeed well-matched—well-matched in faith, well-matched in virtue, well-matched in generosity, well-matched in goodness, well-matched in
wisdom. A perfect pair and a wonderful example of wedded bliss, surely they will be together for eternity, enjoying great felicity.\textsuperscript{208}

So, true love prevails in Buddhism too.

1.1 The Duties of Husband and Wife

Instructions to girls about to marry are recorded in \textit{Anguttara Nikaya}. The Buddha advised them to rise early, work willingly, order their affairs smoothly, and to cultivate gentle voices. They should honour and respect all persons honoured and respected by their future husbands, whether parents or recluses, and on the arrival of these should offer them a seat and water. Other instructions were similar to those given to wives, namely, skill in the various handicrafts, care of servants and sick people, and care of the wealth brought home by the husbands.\textsuperscript{209}

The \textit{suttanta} gives five ways in which a wife should be ministered to by her husband:

(i) by being courteous to her,
(ii) by not despising her,
(iii) by being faithful to her,
(iv) by handing over authority to her, and
(v) by providing her with necessary adornments.

In return, the wife should minister to her husband:

(i) by ordering the household well,

\textsuperscript{208} Woodward and Hare, \textit{The Book of Gradual Sayings}, pp. 69-70.
\textsuperscript{209} Saddhatissa, \textit{Buddhist Ethics}, p. 135.
by hospitality to their relatives,
(iii) by fidelity,
(iv) by taking care of his wealth, and
(v) by her industry.210

1.2 Women’s Qualities to Win Power

In Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha enumerates the four qualities by which woman wins power in this world and has this world in her grasp. These are as follows:

She is capable in her work; whatever her husband’s home industries, whether in wool or cotton, she is skillful, gifted with an inquiring mind into the work, and able to carry it out. She is able to manage her servants, knowing the duties of each and seeing these are carried out; further, she knows something of sickness and is able to allot the food suitably. She studies the approval of her husband and keeps safe whatever money, corn, silver or gold he brings home.211

With these qualities, said the Buddha, “she wins power and this world is within her grasp.”212 The Buddha suggests further that woman may win power in the world beyond by establishment in confidence, virtue, charity and wisdom:

210 Ibid., p. 134.
211 Ibid., p. 135.
212 Ibid.
For confidence she knows the arising of a Tathagata and such and such is so. She is accomplished in virtue by the keeping of the Five Precepts. She is accomplished in charity, living at home with thought free from avarice, delighting in alms-giving. She is wise in the penetration into the rise and fall of things and in the complete destruction of suffering.²¹³

It should be noted here that Buddhism arose in the agricultural age within the Indian socio-cultural context. As a human being, the Buddha was partly influenced by the culture and society of his time. Some of his ethical teachings, therefore, may seem to be not so relevant to the post industrial age of today.

2. Sexual Ethics of Buddhism

One of the most basic teachings of the Buddha is “to refrain from sexual misconduct.” Its widely-accepted meaning is to have no sex outside of one’s marriage. Another text states, “to be content with just one wife.”²¹⁴ So, monogamy is recommended in Buddhism. In contrast to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in which sexual relations are regulated in detail. Buddhism focused on the essentials. It is the motive, not the act itself, which must be ethical. John Stevens claims that:

²¹³ Ibid.
²¹⁴ Stevens, Lust for Enlightenment, p. 137.
If the act of sex is consummated selflessly and with compassion, if it is mutually enriching and ennobling, if it deepens one’s understanding of Buddhism, promotes integration and spiritual emancipation, and is, above all, beneficial to all the parties involved, it is “good.” If, on the contrary, sex erupts from animal passion, is based purely on physical pleasure, and originates in the desire to possess, dominate, or degrade, it is “evil.”

According to Stevens’ research, although there may have been superstitious or cultural reasons for avoiding certain kinds of sexual behavior in some Buddhist communities, there are no formal prohibitions against sex acts, conducted between consenting, nonmonastic, heterosexual adult couples. There is, however, a special Buddhist hell reserved for adulterers, rapists, and other sex criminals. Divorce is rarely mentioned in Buddhist literature. Since most Buddhist countries have become more modernized, divorce is more and more acceptable among Buddhists. In Thailand, the Sangha hierarchy does not set any rule against divorce.

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215 Ibid., p. 140.
216 Ibid., p. 137.
Since birth control could be interpreted as an interference with the "law of karma,"\textsuperscript{217} there was a tendency in Buddhism to discourage artificial contraception. However, the necessity of birth control in contemporary Buddhist countries has been tacitly recognized. Today most Buddhist countries have open policy on birth control without any interference from the Sangha.

Abortion was traditionally an abomination—it was viewed as a violation of the precept against killing a living being. But precept itself cannot be considered outside of a social context. If pregnancy will eventually lead to the mother’s death, earliest stage of abortion is desirable and acceptable among Buddhists. The same may be applied to the case of impregnation by rape, if the woman concerned so desires. In contemporary social context, therefore, abortion should be reconsidered on the basis of woman’s rights. Woman has the rights to obtain all the necessary information, medically and ethically, regarding her own body including the abortion issue. Well-informed woman herself is the person who knows what is best for her: to have the baby and socially take the responsibility for it; or

\textsuperscript{217} "Karma" means action. The law of karma in Buddhism is, therefore, the "law of action" in such a way that one action is the cause for another action. The effected action is then the cause for still another action. It goes on in this way as the chain of cause-and-effect of one’s own activities. There is, however, a belief in popular Buddhism that one’s own actions in the previous life was the cause for one’s social status in this life; and one’s actions in this life will effect the social status in next life.
to have an abortion--release herself from having a child at the time she is not ready--and take the moral or psychological responsibility for it. Woman as a subject should have the rights to make decision on her own body, because it is she who takes the consequent responsibility. Society as a whole should not make the decision for her and should not make the judgement on her.\textsuperscript{218}

According to Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), bhikkhuni in the West have been doing good work for society. For rape victims and women who have had abortions, bhikkhuni can perform religious rituals that help to reestablish them mentally and spiritually. This has a great psychological effect on women who have experienced trauma and suffering. Ven. Sangye Khadro, an American nun ordained in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, has suggested purification practices involving four steps, by adopting four mental attitudes: regret, refuge, resolution, and counter-measure. By generating these four states of mind sincerely with compassion, women can help to heal the pain and guilt experienced after an abortion.\textsuperscript{210}

Although homosexuality may have been officially proscribed, John Stevens reports that it in fact flourished in

\textsuperscript{218} It is generally accepted that where abortion was illegal, the number of women who suffered from abortion because of the ill-treatments by non-professionals was high. The number, however, decreased significantly in the countries where abortion was legalized. This social reality should be taken into account in considering the issue of abortion.

\textsuperscript{219} Kabilsingh, \textit{Thai Women in Buddhism}, p. 84.
Buddhist monasteries throughout the centuries. Whenever there is a sex scandal in a Buddhist community—and there have been many over the centuries—the primary cause of the trouble is to be deceit: people deceiving their disciples, families, and friends, deceiving their communities, and lying to themselves. Therefore, one absolute standard is that no one involved be harmed or deceived in any way. Regarding the ethics of sex, love, and marriage, good Buddhists have always relied on this essential moral standard: “If your heart is pure, all things in your world will be pure.”

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Chapter 8

BUDDHIST THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

The Buddhist theory of human nature will be explored from the perspectives of Mahayana (including Ch’an or Zen), Vajrayana (or Tantra), and Theravada Buddhism. Theory of Buddha-nature is prominent in Mahayana and Vajrayana, although a parallel can be found in Theravada Buddhism. Theory of human nature in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism will be compared and contrasted with Theravada Buddhism. Dogen, the founder of Japanese Soto Zen, will be presented not only from the perspective of Buddha-nature theory, but also the oneness of practice and attainment.

8.1 Buddhist Theory of Human Nature

Mahayana Buddhism will be analyzed from a philosophical perspective, including the concepts of human nature and destiny, sin and repentance, suffering and happiness, and salvation or liberation. Vajrayana Buddhism will be presented from a doctrinal and historical perspective with the emphasis on Tibetan Buddhism. The original mind of “Buddha-nature” in Mahayana and Vajrayana will be compared with Theravada’s original mind of “Ignorance” (avijja) as two sides of the same coin.
A. Mahayana Buddhism

Although Mahayana Buddhism arose in India some 2,000 years ago, it was transmitted to China and melted with Chinese culture. Mahayana Buddhism has become one of the three Chinese religions, including Confucianism and Taoism. It has been transmitted from China to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Mahayana Buddhism as we know it today is the synthesis of those Asian cultures.

1. Human Nature and Destiny

The essence of human-nature in Buddhism—especially in Zen and Mahayana Buddhism—is called Buddha-nature. It is the nature of purity, tranquility and illumination. Buddha-nature is the real original nature of all men and as mentioned in many places of all sentient-beings.

All beings by nature are Buddha,
As ice by nature is water,
Apart from water there is no ice,
Apart from beings, no Buddha.221

(Hakuin Zenji: Song of Zazen)

All human-beings—whether a Buddha or an ordinary man, male or female, civilized or barbarian—possess the same Buddha-nature. When Hui-neng (638-713), who later became the Sixth Patriarch of the Chinese Zen tradition came to see Hung-jen (601-674), the Fifth Patriarch, he was reproved, “You are from Ling-nan, and, furthermore, you

are a barbarian. How can you become a Buddha?” Hui-neng answered, “Although people are distinguished as northerners and southerners, there is neither north nor south in the Buddha-nature. The physical body of the barbarian and (that of) the monk are different. But what difference is there in their Buddha-nature?”

It is because of this Buddha-nature that one can become enlightened. Everyone has the potentiality to become a Buddha because he himself originally is a Buddha. There is a common saying in Mahayana that “a Buddha is an ordinary man, an ordinary man is a Buddha.” A Buddha is not different from an ordinary man because they both possess the same Buddha-nature. The only difference is that the Buddha has full realization of his original nature while an ordinary man has not yet realized his own nature and is still deluded by ignorance.

Hui-neng said “Without enlightenment, even Buddha is a living being. If enlightened in the time of a thought, even a living being is Buddha. Therefore, we know that all Dharmas are inherent in our self-mind. Why do not we (try to) perceive instantly our fundamental Bhutatathata mind which is immanent in our self-mind?” The Bodhisattvavasila Sutra says, “Fundamentally our own nature is pure and clean; if we know our mind and perceive our self-nature, we

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222 Chan (tr.), *The Platform Scripture*, p. 31.
223 Lu K’uan Yu, *Ch’an and Zen Teaching*, p. 35.
will all attain Buddhahood.” The Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra says: “Instantly (the Bhiksus) obtained a clear understanding and regained their fundamental minds.”

Ignorance (avijjā) is the root cause of all delusive, dualistic and conceptual thoughts which bring all kinds of discrimination and suffering. But ignorance or delusion can never destroy the Buddha-nature in our own mind. Buddha-nature is like the full moon and ignorance is like the cloud. The cloud can never spoil the full moon, it just hides the full moon’s brightness. We have to get rid of all the cloud of ignorance in order to realize our full moon of Buddha-nature. When an ordinary man gets rid of ignorance and delusion, he becomes a Buddha. Therefore, in Mahayana, everyone is respected because everyone is a potential Buddha.

In order to get rid of ignorance, one has to be aware of “conceptual thought” which brings greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha). To be aware of conceptual thought, one has to develop total awareness (sati) in one’s own mind. One has to practice until one has full total awareness of oneself. All conceptual thoughts vanish and so vanishes ignorance: greed, hatred and delusion.

Guard yourself against the easy conception of “this is good, that is bad.”

Your sole concern should be to question

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224 Ibid., p. 35.
225 Ibid.
yourself continuously,
“Who is it that is above either?”
Buddha-nature consummate as the full moon,
is represented by your position as you sit in Zen.226

Self-realization is very important in Zen and Mahayana Buddhism. We cannot find any Buddhahood or Enlightenment outside ourselves. The more we go outwardly, the less we cultivate the truth. Truth is there in our own mind, in our essential nature. By ignorance we wander around, but by wisdom we see into our original nature. Once we find our own Buddha-nature, we become enlightened and gain liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

How sad that people ignore the near
And search for truth afar!
Like a man in the midst of water
Crying out in thirst;
Like a child of a wealthy home
Wandering among the poor.
The karma of our transmigration
Is our dark path of ignorance;
From dark path to dark path we wonder,
When shall we be cut from birth and death? 227

(Hakuin Zenji: Song of Zazen)

227 Ibid., p. 7.
Human-nature is originally the nature of Truth. Once we realize this inner Truth, we are also awake to the Truth of the whole universe. There is no discrimination between subjectivity and objectivity. Once the Truth is realized, the egoistic self vanishes; and there is only Truth within and without. This is the harmony of man and nature. This is the state in which all the conflicts and sufferings cease. This is Nirvana, the extinction of suffering. This is the Buddhahood for which all beings are striving. And it is there in the very nature of all beings.

In this world of Suchness
there is neither self nor other-than-self.
To come directly into harmony with this reality
just simply say when doubts arise, “not two.”
In this “not two” nothing is separate,
nothing is excluded.
No matter when or where
Enlightenment means entering this truth.228

2. Sin and Repentance

In Buddhism there is no conception of “sin” in the Western sense. There is no Buddhist theory concerning what the Christians call “original sin.” In Christianity and other monotheistic religions, man is sinful from his birth because mankind has sinned starting from the very first ancestors. Since man is born sinful, he cannot help himself; he

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228 Ibid., p. 21.
requires some redeemer like Jesus Christ to redeem him from his sin. So the concept of “sin and repentance” is very important in religion like Christianity.

According to Buddhism—especially Zen and Mahayana Buddhism, man is originally pure, tranquil and luminous. The qualities like greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha) are not our real self; they come from ignorance (avijja). Is “ignorance” then the same as original sin? D. T. Suzuki makes a very good comment on this point:

Ignorance is inherent in Buddhas as well as in all sentient beings. Every one of us cannot help perceiving an external world (visaya) and forming conception and reasoning and feeling and willing. We do not see any moral fault here. If there is really anything wrong, then we cannot do anything with it, we are utterly helpless before it, for it is not our fault, but that of the cosmic soul from which and in which we have our being.\(^{229}\)

Ignorance, as the cause of all defilements, is something different from original sin. It is not rooted in the essence of human nature. It is not a real part of man. When we have total awareness (sati), wisdom (paññā) arises and we realize our real nature. When we realize our original essential nature, ignorance disappears by itself. Ignorance

\(^{229}\) Suzuki, *Outline of Mahayana Buddhism*, p. 123.
has no real existence.

Is there any “sin” at all in Buddhism? The law of “karma” (action) pays an important role in ethical Buddhism. There are three kinds of karma: good karma, evil karma and karma of no-karma. Good karma brings good effects, evil karma brings evil effects. Karma of no-karma brings no-effect; it is beyond any law of causality—including law of karma, it is the karma of an enlightened person. “Evil karma” can be considered a “sin.” So one who commits evil karma is sinful and a sinful person requires “repentance.” Therefore, “sin and repentance” can be explained differently from the Buddhist point of view.

Concerning sin and repentance, Hui-neng (638-713) the Sixth Patriarch of the Chinese Zen tradition, once ascended to his seat and addressed the assemblage as follows: “Now I teach you the immaterial repentance and reform so as to eradicate all your sins committed in the past, present and future and to purify your three karmas (of deed, word and thought). Learned friends, please follow me and repeat:

May our past, present and future thoughts, (that is to say) all our thoughts, be free from the taints of ignorance and delusion (arrogance, deception, envy and jealousy). We now (sincerely) repent of our former evil conduct in deed, word and thought due to our ignorance and delusion (arrogance, deception,
envy and jealousy); may all these sins be obliterated at once and may ignorance and delusion (arrogance, deception, envy and jealousy) never arise again (within us).^{230}

In the very beginning of a Zen Buddhist sutra to be recited daily, there is a purification before any chanting:

All the evil karma, ever created by me since of old, On account of my beginningless greed, anger, and folly, Born of my body, mouth, and thought, I now confess and purify it all.^{231}

“Repentance” and “reform” are explained differently by Hui-neng. He said –Repentance is contrition for former sins, for evil conduct in deed, word and thought due to ignorance, delusion, arrogance, deception, envy and jealousy so that there shall never arise again (within us). Reform concerns sins which we may commit in future. Henceforward, since we are awakened from evil conduct in deed, word and thought, due to ignorance, delusion, arrogance, deception, envy and jealousy which we (vow to) cut off forever, we will never commit these sins again.

Ordinary men who are ignorant and deluded, only know how to repent of their past sins but not how to reform in respect of future sins. Since they do not so reform, their past sins

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^{230} Lu K’uan Yu, *Ch’ an and Zen Teaching*, p. 51.

cannot be obliterated and will be repeated in the future. As former sin are not obliterated and since new ones are again committed, how can this be called repentance and reform? \(^{232}\)

Hui-neng had a hymn and he told his disciples to repeat and to observe it. They are told if they repeated and observed it, they would, at a stroke, obliterate all sins accumulated during aeons of delusion. Part of the hymn was:

They should in their own mind destroy the cause of sin By repentance and true reform within their nature. Suddenly they awaken to the Mahayana’s repentance and reform Obliterating sin by their right conduct and all heresies forsaking.\(^{233}\)

While we repent our own sins and reform ourselves, we should help others repent and reform themselves as well; and if possible we should be able to share their sufferings so that they would be saved from their sins. There comes the Mahayana idea of “bodhisattva”—one who would save others before himself. The bodhisattva who is selflessly working for the welfare of all beings becomes the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism.

“All creatures are in pain,” the bodhisattva resolves, “all suffer from bad and hindering karma...so that they cannot see the Buddhas or

\(^{232}\) Lu K’uan Yu, *Ch’ an and Zen Teaching*, pp. 51-52.
\(^{233}\) Ibid., p. 57.
hear the Law of Righteousness or know the Order... All that mass of pain and evil karma I take in my own body... I take upon myself the burden of sorrow; I resolve to do so; I endure it all. I do not turn back or run away, I do not tremble... I am not afraid...nor do I despair. Assuredly I must bear the burden of all beings... I must set them all free, I must save the whole world from the forest of birth, old age, disease and rebirth, from misfortune and sin.

“I resolve to dwell in each state of misfortune through countless ages...for the salvation of all beings...for it is better that I alone suffer than that all beings sink to the worlds of misfortune... I must be their torchbearer, I must be their guide to safety... I must not wait for the help of another, nor must I lose my resolution and leave my tasks to another. I must not turn back in my efforts to save all beings nor cease to use my merit for the destruction of all pain. And I must not be satisfied with small successes.”^{34} (Siksāsamuccaya)

Nagarjuna, the great Indian Buddhist thinker, in his work on the Bodhicitta elucidates the Mahayanist notion of bodhisattva as follows:

\^{34} deBary (ed.), The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan, pp. 84-85.
Their great hearts of sympathy which constitute the essence of their being never leave suffering creatures behind (in their journey towards enlightenment). Their spiritual insight is in the emptiness (suññatā) of things, but (their work of salvation) is never outside the world of sins and sufferings.235

3. Suffering and Happiness

The term “suffering” is specially important in Buddhism. It is the first of the Four Noble Truths which are considered especially by Theravada Buddhists to be the highest teaching of the Buddha. The Four Noble Truths are: “suffering,” “cause of suffering,” “cessation of suffering” and “the way leading to the cessation of suffering.” It is notable that Buddhist do not use the term “happiness” as their final goal; instead they use the term “cessation of suffering” because there is no real happiness from the Buddhist perspective.

“Suffering” and “cessation of suffering” cannot be separated into two stages in Mahayana Buddhism. There is a common saying in Mahayana that “saṃsāra is nirvāṇa, nirvāṇa is saṃsāra.” “Suffering” is the characteristic of saṃsāra and “cessation of suffering” is the characteristic of nirvāṇa; so they cannot be dualistic. It is amidst suffering that one finds the cessation of suffering; and in the midst of

235 Suzuki, Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism, p. 294.
samsāra that one finds nirvāna. Therefore non-dualism is mainly important in Mahayana Buddhism.

We read in the Vimalakirti Sutra (chap. VIII):

Vimalakirti asks Manjusri: “How is it that you declare all (human) passions and errors are the seeds of Buddhahood?”

Manjusri replies: “O son of good family! Those who cling to the view of non-activity and dwell in a state of eternal annihilation do not awaken in them supremely perfect knowledge. Only the Bodhisattvas who dwell in the midst of passions and errors, and who, passing through the (ten) stages, rightly contemplate the ultimate nature of things, are able to awaken and attain Intelligence (prajñā).

“Just as the lotus-flowers do not grow in the dry land, but in the dark-colored, watery mire, O son of good family, it is even so (with Intelligence). In non-activity and eternal annihilation, there is no opportunity for the seeds and sprouts of Buddhahood to grow. Intelligence can grow only in the mire and dirt of passion and sin. It is by virtue of passion and sin that the seeds and sprouts of Buddhahood are able to grow.

“O son of good family! Just as no seeds
can grow in the air, but in the filthy muddy soil, and there even luxuriously, O son of good family, it is even so (with the Bodhi). It does not grow out of non-activity and eternal annihilation. It is only out of the mountainous masses of egoistic selfish thoughts that Intelligence is awakened and grows to the incomprehensible wisdom of Buddha-seeds.

“O son of good family! Just as we cannot obtain priceless Pearls unless we dive into the depths of the four great oceans, O son of good family, it is even so (with Intelligence). If we do not dive deep into the mighty ocean of passion and sin, how could we get hold of the precious gem of Buddha-essence? Let it therefore be understood that the primordial seeds of Intelligence draw their vitality from the midst of passion and sin.”

Seeing the non-duality of all things, the bodhisattva, which is the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism finds his way in the world of sin and suffering. He will not escape to non-activity and eternal annihilation, but remain in this material world as the suffering savior. The bodhisattva not only resolves to pity and helps all mortal beings, but also to share their intensest sufferings.

236 Ibid., pp. 350-352.
“Just as the rising sun..is not stopped..by all the dust rising from the four continents of the earth...or by wreaths of smoke...or by rugged mountains, so the bodhisattva, the Great Being, ...is not deterred from bringing to fruition the root of good, whether by the malice of others...or by their sin or heresy, or by their agitation of mind... He will not lay down his arms of enlightenment because of the corrupt generations of men, nor does he waver in his resolution to save the world because of their wretched quarrels... He does not lose heart on account of their faults...

“I shall bear all grief and pain in my own body,” the bodhisattva resolves, “for the good of all things living. I venture to stand surety for all beings, speaking the truth, trustworthy, not breaking my word. I shall not forsake them.. I must so bring to fruition the root of goodness that all beings find the utmost joy, unheard of joy, the joy of omniscience.”\textsuperscript{237} (Siksāsamuccaya)

In the midst of sin and suffering, the bodhisattva can still find joy and happiness in fulfilling his tasks of saving other beings and sharing their sufferings. The bodhisattva has so trained his mind that even in the most painful and

\textsuperscript{237} deBary (ed.), \textit{The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan}, pp. 84-85.
unhappy situations it is still full of calm inner joy. “Consciousness of sorrow and joy comes by habit; so, if whenever sorrow arises we make a habit of associating with it a feeling of joy, consciousness of joy will indeed arise. The fruit of this is a contemplative spirit full of joy in all things.

So the bodhisattva...is happy even when subjected to the tortures of hell... When he is being beaten with canes or whips, when he is thrown into prison, he still feels happy... For...this was the resolve of the Great Being, the bodhisattva: “May those who feed me win the joy of tranquility and peace, with those who protect me, honor me, respect me, and revere me. And those who revile me, afflict me, beat me, cut me in pieces with their sword or take my life, may they all obtain the joy of complete enlightenment, may they be awakened to perfect and sublime enlightenment.” With such thoughts and actions and resolves he cultivates...and develops the consciousness of joy in his relations with all beings, and so he acquires a contemplative spirit filled with joy in all things... and becomes imperturbable—not to be shaken by all the deeds of Mara.\(^{238}\) (*Siksāsamuccaya*)

\(^{238}\) Ibid., pp. 90-91.
Suffering, from another point of view, is a process of refining and purifying oneself from the accumulated sins of the past. Nichiren (1222-1282), who is one of the great Japanese Buddhist leaders, expresses himself on his fate thus:

Is it not by forging and refining that the rough iron bar is tempered into a sharp sword? Are not rebukes and persecutions really the process of refining and tempering? I am now in exile, without any assignable fault; yet this may mean the process of refining, in this life, the accumulated sins, and being thus delivered from the three woeful resorts.\(^{239}\)

Those who are only capable of feeling their own selfish sufferings may seek their own benefits and happiness in final emancipation and not trouble themselves with the sufferings of other creatures like themselves. The act of so doing results in failure and suffering. “With people who are not kindhearted, there is no sin that will not be committed by them. They are called the most wicked whose hearts are not softened at the sight of others’ misfortune and suffering.”\(^{240}\)

Suffering really consists in pursuing one’s egoistic happiness, while Nirvana is found in sacrificing one’s welfare for the sake of other.

\(^{239}\) Ibid., p. 352.
\(^{240}\) Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, p. 365.
People generally think that it is an emancipation when they are released from their own pain, but a man with loving heart finds it in rescuing others from misery.\textsuperscript{232} (Devala, \textit{Mahāpurusa})

\textbf{4. Salvation or Liberation}

“Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence!”\textsuperscript{233} These last words of the Buddha as recorded in the \textit{Mahānibbāna} Sutta tells us what he wishes his disciples to do. Salvation or liberation is the ultimate destiny for the followers of all great religions of the world—including Buddhism. The Buddha himself, after a long search and many difficult experiments, attained the Great Liberation. In a Mahayana sutra called \textit{Buddhacarita (Fo pen hing ching)}, Buddha is reported to have exclaimed this:

\begin{quote}
Through ages past have I acquired continual merit, \\
That which my heart desired have I now attained, \\
How quickly have I arrive at the ever-constant condition, \\
And landed on the very shore of Nirvana.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., p. 365. \\
\textsuperscript{242} Suzuki, \textit{Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism}, p. 333.
The Lord of the Kamalokas, Mara Pisuna,
These are unable now to affect, they are wholly destroyed;
By the power of religious merit and of wisdom are they cast away.
Let a man but persevere with unflinching resolution,
And seek Supreme Wisdom, it will not be hard to acquire it;
When once obtained, then farewell to all sorrows,
All sin and guilt are forever done away.²⁴³

“Nirvāṇa” is the term which Buddhists use for their liberation. Nirvāṇa literally means “extinction” or “dissolution.” It is often misunderstood to be the extinction of life or the dissolution of all human passions and aspirations in nihilistic quietude. Nirvāṇa is not the negation of life, nor an idle contemplation on the misery of existence. It is not the total annihilation of the world disregarding all the forms of activity that exhibit themselves in life. Nirvāṇa is rather the extinction of the dualistic conceptual thoughts or the dissolution of the egoistic self in this very activity of life. It is full of positive activity and energy of love and wisdom.

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. 337-338.
D. T. Suzuki summarizes the idea of nirvana in a very vivid way: “He who is in this Nirvana does not seek a rest in the annihilation of human aspirations, does not flinch in the face of endless transmigration. On the contrary, he plunges himself into the ever-rushing current of Samsara and sacrifices himself to save his fellow-creatures from being eternally drowned in it.”

Nirvana is here and now. Nirvana, the highest state, Pure Being, the Absolute, the Buddha’s Body of Essence, is present at all times and everywhere, and needs only to be recognized. It is possible for the ordinary layman, living a normal life in every respect, to achieve liberation simply by recognizing the Buddha within himself and all things. Ultimate Being is to be found in one’s own home as one goes about one’s daily work.

Do not sit at home, do not go to the forest,
But recognize mind wherever you are.
When one abides in complete and perfect enlightenment,
Where is Samsara and where is Nirvana?

In the *Dasabhūmika Sūtra*, there is a very clear analogy of one who is awake from the illusive consciousness of living to enlightenment here and now. To quote the sutra: “It is like a man who in a dream finding himself in a great river, attempts to go to the other side; he musters all

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244 Ibid., pp. 349-350.
245 de Bary (ed.), *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, p. 121.
his energy and strives hard with every possible means. And because of this effort and contrivance, he wakes from the dream, and being thus awakened all his strivings are set at rest."  

Nirvana and samsara are one. This is one of the most remarkable features in Mahayana Buddhism, "What is sin or passion, that is Intelligence, what is birth and death (or transmigration), that is Nirvana"  

Nagarjuna repeats the same sentiment in his Madhyamika Sastra, when he says: "Samsara is in no way to be distinguished from Nirvana; Nirvana is in no way to be distinguished from Samsara"  

or "The sphere of Nirvana is the sphere of Samsara, not the slightest distinction exists between them."  

When we are in delusion, there is samsara from which we have to escape and there is nirvana to which we have to attain; the world is dualistic to us. But when we are awakened, the dualism of samsara and nirvana vanishes; there is no samsara and there is no nirvana at all. The world or the universe is in harmony. There is only the Awakening Mind or the Buddha Mind that pervades the whole universe.  

In the Visesacinta-brāhma-pariprccha Sūtra, it is said (chap. II): "The essence of all things is in truth free from attachment attributes and desires; therefore, they are  

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246 Suzuki, On Indian Mahayana Buddhism, p. 115.  
247 Suzuki, Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism, p. 352.  
248 Ibid., p. 354.  
249 Ibid.
pure, and, as they are pure, we know that what is the essence of birth and death that is the essence of Nirvana and that what is the essence of Nirvana that is the essence of birth and death.”

The following verses are taken from the Treasury of Couplets ascribed to Sahara:

As is Nirvana so is Samsara.
Do not think there is any distinction.
Yet it possesses no single nature,
For I know it as quite pure.

The two trees spring from one seed,
And for that reason there is but one fruit.
He who thinks of them thus indistinguishable,
Is released from Nirvana and Samsara.

In nirvana we have found all-embracing love (karunā) and all-seeing wisdom (prajñā). Enlightenment is considered to be the combination of wisdom and love. One without the other results in imperfection. Wisdom is the eye, love is the limb. Directed by the eye, the limb knows how to move; furnished with the limb, the eye can attain what it perceives. Love alone is blind, wisdom alone is lame. It is only when one is supplemented by the other that we have a perfect complete man. Therefore says Devala, the author of the Discourse on the Mahapurusa (Great Man): “The wise

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250 Ibid., p. 353.
251 deBary (ed.), The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan, pp. 121-122.
do not approve loving-kindness without intelligence, nor do they approve intelligence without loving-kindness; because one without the other prevents us from reaching the highest path.”

Vasubandhu, one of the great Mahayana teachers says:

By virtue of Prajña (intelligence or wisdom), our egoistic thoughts are destroyed; by virtue of Karuna (love), altruistic thoughts are cherished. By virtue of Prajña, the (affective) attachment inherent in vulgar minds is abolished; by virtue of Karuna the (intellectual) attachment is abolished. By virtue of Prajña, Nirvana (in its transcendental sense) is not rejected; by virtue of Karuna, Samšāra (with its changes and transmigration) is not rejected. By virtue of Prajña, the truth of Buddhism is attained; by virtue of Karuna, all sentient beings are matured (for salvation).”

It is through all-embracing love and all seeing wisdom that the bodhisattva sacrifices himself for the welfare of all sentient beings. “When an only son in a good family is sick, the parents feel sick too; when he is recovered they are well again. So it is with the

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252 Suzuki, Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism, p. 361.  
253 Ibid., p. 360.
Bodhisattva. He loves all sentient beings as his own children. When they are sick, he is sick too. When they are recovered, he is well again.”²⁵⁴ (*Vimalakīrti Sūtra*)

On the way to liberation, the Mahayana Buddhists take the Four Vows: to save all sentient beings as well as to devote themselves to the path. “The Four Vows” show the way of love and wisdom leading to liberation:

Sentient beings, however innumerable,  
I take vow to save;  
Evil passions, however inextinguishable,  
I take vow to destroy;  
The avenues of truth, however numberless,  
I take vow to study;  
The way of the Enlightenment, however unsurpassable,  
I take vow to attain.²⁵⁵

B. Vajrayana Buddhism

Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism originated in India through the influence of Tantricism. At the time of its greatest popularity, Tantricism influenced most of Indian philosophy and religion—including Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Tantricism emphasized the equal importance of femininity in the spiritual world. Hence, each god or deity

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 366.  
²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 368.
had its consort (Tara) to embrace as expressed in Tantric arts.

Tantric Buddhism as the synthesis of Buddhism and Tantricism has a positive view of sexuality. Laypeople, who observe the five precepts, can have sex with their spouse without violating Buddhist teachings. The third precept prohibits sexual relationships outside marriage. Tantric Buddhism, however, regards sexuality as a means of overcoming sexual desire itself. Instead of indulging in sensual pleasure, Tantric Buddhism has taught its followers to approach sexuality with awareness (sati) in order to learn its true nature and to eventually overcome it on the path toward enlightenment. A number of parallels are expressed. To remove water in your ear, you need to pour some more water into it. To remove a thorn in your skin, you need another thorn for that purpose. Therefore, to overcome sexual desire, you need to know the true nature of sexuality. Anyone who has never known its true nature cannot truly be beyond sexuality.

For monastics who have taken the vow for celibacy, however, a different strategy is introduced. Since defilements—including sexual desire—arise out of thought, Buddhism has taught its clergy to see the true nature of thought. In order to “see” thought and break the chain of thought, awareness (sati) is needed. Therefore, to develop awareness is the essence of Buddhist practice. In Tantric Buddhism, however, some symbolic visualizations are
introduced in meditation in order to overcome sexuality.

Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism successfully settled on the plateau of Tibet. Tibetan people were originally nomadic and skillful in warfare. Their indigenous religion was a form of primitive religion called Bon. Influenced by Hinduism, Bon has the concept of reincarnation and the institution of clergy. However, Buddhism has greatly influenced Tibetan culture for almost 2,000 years and turned this fierce nomadic race into peaceful Tibetan of today.

There are three main schools of Tibetan Buddhism: Adi-yoga (*Ning-ma-pa* in Tibetan), Mahamudra (*Kargyu-pa*) and Madhyamika (*Gelug-pa*). Founded by the Indian monk Padmasambhava, *Ning-ma-pa* has been the mainstream for the majority of Tibetan Buddhists. Since the monks in this sect wear red robes and caps, sometime they are called the “Red Caps.”

Emphasizing meditation and self-discipline, *Kargyu-pa* is the ascetic sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The most important teacher (*guru*) was Milarepa who was the second-generation successor of Naropa. Monastics (*lamas*) were not allowed to have sex or produce children. This sect first noted the reincarnation of lamas, particularly in its Karma-*Kargyu-pa* sub-sect. The *Kargyu-pa*, which is called the “Black Caps” or “Black Crown” sect, was therefore the first to have a reincarnated leader in Tibet.

Although *Gelug-pa* was not the majority sect in Tibet, it became the most influential sect. *Gelug-pa* is
sometime called the “Yellow Caps” following the color of its monk’s robe and cap. “Reincarnation Culture” is prominent in Tibetan identity. The Dalai Lama—who is believed to be the reincarnation of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva—took power only after a long political struggle and the help of the Mongolian army. The sovereignty of the successive reincarnated Dalai Lamas, however, has been challenged by either their own regent, or the Mongolian or Chinese army.

In the past there was striving for power between the sects. The Kargyu-pa sect widely received support from the people and gradually became the most powerful in Tibet. The outstanding role of its leader the reincarnated Gyalwa Karmapa created discomfort for the Gelug-pa sect leader. So in 1617, the 5th Dalai Lama (Ngawang Labsang Gyatso) of the Gelug-pa sect asked for help from the Mongolian military to overtake the Kargyu-pa leader (the 10th Gyalwa Karmapa). The 5th Dalai Lama then established himself as the king of the Tibetan empire. Since then, the Gelug-pa has established its religious and political leader through the supreme position called “Dalai Lama” who would formally govern Tibet.

Vajrayana Buddhism is a religion of peace. The arising and disseminating of the teachings have been done peacefully. The feminist view of equal relationship between male and female deities contributes to modern gender equality. Throughout history, Vajrayana Buddhists
have engaged in philosophical debates to accommodate all interesting aspects of other religious belief—including the indigenous Bon deities. Vajrayana Buddhism has transformed the once fierce nomadic race into the nowadays peaceful Tibetans. In their political struggle against the Chinese occupation, the Tibetans have chosen the strategy of non-violence; hence, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

The immigration of H.H. the Gyalwa Karmapa and H.H. the Dalai Lama and a large number of Tibetan lamas and people from the Tibetan plateau to northern India marks an historical event bringing Vajrayana Buddhism to the outside world. In effect, the Tibetans have transmitted Buddhism back to northern India—the original land of the Buddha.

C. Buddhist Theory of Human Nature

After Mahayana Buddhism originated in India, it became prosperous for many centuries. On the one hand, it was transmitted to Southeast Asia, especially in Khmer Empire and Sri Vichaya Empire. On the other hand, it was transmitted northward to Central Asia for more than 700 years. There was much Buddhist evidence both sacred places and sacred objects in Central Asia, including the tallest and oldest standing Buddha image at the cliff of Bamiyan Mountain range which was recently destroyed by the savage Taliban government amid the protest of the more civilized world.
Although India and China share the same long border, they were separated by the high and long Himalaya Mountain range. In ancient time, India and China hardly contacted each other, so Indian and Chinese civilizations have become greatly different. Mahayana Buddhism from India had to travel to Central Asia first, and through the Silk Road eventually to China.

China is an ancient country and a civilization cradle of the world. China has her own great philosophy and religion, namely, Taoism and Confucianism. When Indian Buddhism arrived in China, it had to peacefully encounter the “Clash of Civilization” with Chinese Philosophy. This was one of the most important events in the history of World Religion, contributing to new ideas and phenomena. When Indian Buddhism encountered Chinese Taoism, the result was the creation of the new form of Buddhism–Chan (Zen) Buddhism–the content of which contains the Enlightenment of the Buddha and expresses itself in the direct, abrupt, and sudden way of Taoism. When Indian Buddhism encountered Chinese Confucianism, the result was also the new idea of “Buddha-nature Theory.”

Chinese philosophers had long been interested in the issue of human nature. Some philosophers believed that human nature is neutral, neither good nor bad. Goodness and evil are social creations. Some believed that human was born with both good and bad elements. Different levels of goodness and evil are innate in each of human beings. Other
philosophers believed that some human was born with goodness, but some was born evil. Yet other philosophers believed that human was born evil. Everyone is basically selfish, so society needs to create tradition, religion, and law to prevent human from harming each other.

Mencius, an important Confucian philosopher, presented his theory of “Goodness of Human Nature.” He believed that human was born with “seed of goodness.” It is like seed of a tree. If the seed is planted in good environment, with fertile soil, water, and sunlight, it will grow to a big and fruitful tree. If it falls to an unsuitable place, like a desert, it will not grow and yield fruit.

The same can be applied to a human being. If a baby was born in a good environment, for example, in a good family, with a chance for education and ethical training, he or she will grow up to be a good man or woman. On the contrary, if a baby was born in an unsuitable environment, for example, in a broken family, lack a chance for education and ethical training, he or she may grow up to be a problematic person. Therefore, social environment—including family, education and ethical training—are important in moulding the personality of people.

Although there were various theories of human nature in Chinese philosophy, Mencius’ theory of “goodness of human nature” has eventually won in Chinese history and has become the Confucian theory and Chinese worldview on human nature. As mentioned earlier, when Buddhism
from India arrived in China, it had encountered this Chinese worldview on human nature. The synthesis is a new idea in the world of philosophy and religion—the Buddha-nature Theory.

According to Buddha-nature theory, every baby was born with a “seed of Buddhahood” without exception. The problem is what kind of environment the baby will be raised in. If the baby was raised up in a good family, with proper education and a chance for Dharma practice, he or she will eventually become an “enlighten one” (or a Buddha). If the baby was raised in a broken family, without proper education and without a chance for Dharma practice, he or she will be an “empty” person, without the wisdom of enlightenment.

After Buddhism from India arrived in China, it was blended with Chinese Civilization until it became “Chinese Buddhism” which is one among the three great religions in China. Chinese Mahayana Buddhism has been transmitted to Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and eventually to the West.

Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist Theory of Human Nature will be analyzed as followed:

1. **Theravada Buddhist Theory of Human Nature**
   From Ignorance to Enlightenment:
   
   $\text{Ignorance} \rightarrow \{\text{Sīla, Samādhi, Paññā}\} \rightarrow \text{Enlightenment}$

2. **Mahayana Buddhist Theory of Human Nature**
   From Buddha-nature to Enlightenment:
3. Ignorance vs. Buddha-nature: A Pseudo Difference

While a human being has “ignorance” (avijjā), he or she still has a natural level of “awareness” (sati). This natural level of “awareness” enables him or her to have the full potentiality to attain Enlightenment. This full potentiality to attain Enlightenment is the same as “Buddha-nature.”

“Buddha-nature” is not a mere metaphysical concept of what inherits in a human being since birth. Empirically, Buddha-nature is the “awareness” that nature gives every one of us since we were born. Therefore Buddha-nature is the natural level of “awareness” (sati) that we all have which enables us to have the full potentiality to attain Enlightenment.

We all have “Buddha-nature” or “Natural level of Awareness (sati)”–the potentiality to attain Enlightenment. But potentiality to attain Enlightenment is not the same as Enlightenment itself. We all have a certain level of “ignorance” (lack of awareness) in our daily life. Therefore, all of us, be it Theravada or Mahayana or a mere human being, need to develop this natural level of awareness to the full level of awareness. Once we reach the full level of awareness, the full potentiality is realized and the Enlightenment is attained.
8.2 Dogen: The Oneness of Practice and Attainment

One of the most crucial teachings of Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in Japanese Buddhism, namely, “the oneness of practice and attainment” will be analyzed. In the attempt to do so, first, the concept of “practice” in Dogen’s teachings will be discussed. Secondly, Dogen’s concept of “attainment” or “enlightenment” will be interpreted in connection with “theory of Buddha-nature.” Finally, the concept of “oneness of practice and attainment,” which is one of the most important ideas in Dogen’s philosophy, will be analyzed.

A. The Concept of “Practice”

According to Dogen, the “practice” of Buddhism, particularly in Zen Buddhism, is “zazen” (“seated meditation”). He regarded zazen as “the great way of the Buddhas and the patriarchs,” and “the dharma gate of great peace and joy.” Dogen is the master of zazen. Sometimes he is regarded as “the father of zazen” in Japan because he is one of the first Japanese Zen masters who initiated the way of practicing zazen which has been transmitted, almost without any change, from his time to the present day. His way of zazen is called shikantaza (“just sitting”) because of his emphasis on “just sitting zazen.” Dogen grounded his teachings and philosophy on the practice of shikantaza. For him, the “just-sitting” of zazen is the necessary condition for enlightenment.
1. “The Practice of Zen Is Zazen”

In the fascicle named Zazengi (Rules for Zazen) of his great work, Shobogenzo (A Treasury of the Right Dharma Eye), Dogen states clearly that “The practice of Zen is zazen”.\textsuperscript{256} In the same fascicle, he describes the way of zazen and gives the instruction of how to practice zazen in details. We will explore and discuss the practice of zazen, as described by Dogen, as follows:

For zazen a quiet place is recommended. Spread a thick mat for sitting. Do not allow any drafts and dampness to enter, or rain and dew to leak in. Keep the place you sit in secure and protected. There have been instances in the past of those who sat on the vajra seat or on a great rock, but they all laid thick grass to sit on. The sitting place should be light, not dark at all times, day and night. Keeping warm in winter and cool in summer is appropriate.\textsuperscript{257}

For the practice of zazen, a suitable place is required. In this suitable place, there should be no draft or dampness to enter, no rain and dew to leak in. The place should not be too cold nor too hot. It should give the sense of security and moderate comfort for the practitioner, so that he or she has no worry about the circumstances and can devote his or her effort single-mindedly to the practice. The place should be

\textsuperscript{256} Kim (tr.), Flowers of Emptiness, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid.
light, not dark, all day and night, because the practice of zazen is not only for the awareness of subjectivity (the “inner world”) but also for the awareness of objectivity (the “outer world.”) In the dark, one might be aware of the “inner world”, but not so much of the “outer world”. In the light, one is aware of both the “inner world” and the “outer world,” in this case the subjectivity and the objectivity become one. The light should not be too bright, but rather moderate or a bit dim. The sitting place should be laid a thick mat or a thick cushion because it will support the right posture of the sitting body and help the practitioner to be able to sit for a long time without much pain. It is the tradition of the Buddhas and the great masters to lay thick grass to sit on. It is called the vajra seat, i.e., the seat where the Buddha sat and attained enlightenment.

Cast away all conditions and put all matters to rest. Stop thinking of good; stop thinking of bad. [Zazen] is not of the mind, thought, or consciousness, not of recollection, imagination, or observation. Never attempt to become a buddha. Drop off sitting and reclining. 258

The place for zazen practice should be moderate comfortable and secure as mentioned above, the practitioner then has no worry about all the conditions and can “put all matters to rest.” The practice of zazen is not for the sake of morality, but rather for the enlightenment which is beyond

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258 Ibid.
goodness and badness, so the practitioner stops thinking of good and bad. Zazen is “not of the mind, thought, or consciousness, not of recollection, imagination, or observation.” It does not deal with any particular point in our body or mind, but rather it deals with the totality of our existence. “Never attempt to become abuddha” is the very important notion in the teachings of Dogen. We are not to separate means and end. We are not to practice zazen in order to attain enlightenment, or to become a buddha. Just sitting (shikantaza), nothing else. The means and end, or the practice and the attainment, are identical. We will discuss this important notion further in the section of “the oneness of practice and attainment.”

Eat and drink moderately. Treasuring your every moment, you should apply yourself to doing zazen as if you were putting out a fire from your head. The fifth ancestor of Mt. Huang-mei did nothing special except to practice zazen assiduously.\textsuperscript{259}

It is important to keep the body in proper condition, therefore to eat and drink moderately is required during the practice of zazen. If one eats and drinks too much, one can easily fall asleep and it can become an obstacle in the practice. During the practice of zazen, or even during the daily life, one should treasure every moment in the practice.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
The Fifth Patriarch of the Chinese Ch’an (Zen) tradition once said, “For people in this world birth and death are vital matters.” The problem of “birth and death” is the urgent problem, it is like a fire on one’s head, so one should devote oneself in the practice of zazen—the only way to solve the “birth-and-death” problem—as if one is putting out a fire from one’s own head. The Fifth Patriarch himself did nothing special except to practice zazen diligently.

When you do zazen you should wear a monastic’s robe and place a cushion [on the mat]. Do not sit in the middle of the cushion; [half of the cushion] should be put under the rear part of your body as you sit in a cross-legged position. Thus sit with your folded legs on the mat and the base of your spine on the cushion. This is the preferred posture for zazen among all Buddha-ancestors.

In doing zazen, the practitioner’s clothes should be loose, and a monastic’s robe is an ideal, because the loose clothes will make the body more comfortable and the circulation of bodily energy flow more naturally. Again, a cushion is quite important in zazen for it supports the sitting posture. Place a cushion on the mat and sit on half of the cushion so that the cushion can support the base of one’s spine as one sits in a cross-legged position. The correct position makes one able to sit in a more fruitful way and for

\[\text{260} \text{ Yampolsky (tr.), } The \text{ Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, p. 128.} \]
\[\text{261} \text{ Kim (tr.), Flowers of Emptiness, p. 153.} \]
a longer time without much pain. The correct posture is preferred by all the buddhas and the patriarchs in doing zazen.

Sit either in the half-lotus or the full-lotus posture. In the full-lotus, you first place your right foot on your left thigh and then your left foot on your right thigh. Make sure the tips of your feet are kept on a level with your thighs, avoiding unevenness. In the half-lotus posture, just put your left foot on your right thigh.\textsuperscript{262}

There are two postures in the formal practice of zazen, i.e., the half-lotus and the full-lotus postures. In the full-lotus posture, place the right foot on the left thigh and then the left foot on the right thigh, make sure that the posture is secure and in balance. In the half-lotus posture, just put the left foot on the right thigh. These two postures are the most preferred sitting postures among meditation practitioners since times of old.

Wear your garments loosely but properly. Put your right hand [palm up] on your left leg and your left hand [palm up] on your right palm, both thumb tips resting against each other. Hold your hands close to your body in this manner. Keep the tips of your thumbs in contact in front of your navel.\textsuperscript{263}

\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., p. 154.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
Again, the clothes for doing zazen should be worn loosely, but properly. Put the right hand with palm up on the left leg and the left hand with palm up on the right palm. It is important that both thumb tips rest against each other, because during the practice of zazen the bodily energy can circulate in full circle. Hold the hands close to the body and keep the tips of the thumbs in contact in front of the navel. These will keep the sitting posture proper, tidy and secure.

You should sit upright in correct bodily posture, not leaning to the left or right, nor tilting forward or backward. Be sure always to align your nose with your navel and your ears parallel to your shoulders. Place your tongue against the front roof of your mouth. Breathe through your nose keeping your lips and teeth together. Keep your eyes open slightly, neither too widely nor too narrowly. Having prepared your bodymind in this way, breathe out completely.\textsuperscript{264}

In the correct posture, one sits upright, not leaning to the left or right, nor tilting forward or backward, the nose should be in the same vertical line with the navel, and the ears should be parallel to the shoulders. In this upright position, the body now is in the most natural way for breathing, and one can sit in this posture for a long time without having much back-ache. Place the tongue against

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
the front roof of the mouth, and keep the lips and teeth together, now the breathing organs are ready for the effective breathing exercise. Keep the eyes open slightly, neither too widely nor too narrowly. By opening the eyes not too widely, one can see one’s inner world clearly. By opening the eyes not too narrowly, one does not omit the outer world surrounding oneself. In zazen, the subjectivity (the “inner world”) and the objectivity (the “outer world”) are one. Having prepared oneself in this way, one breathe out completely, so that all the bad energy will come out of the body as much as possible before one does the breathing exercise in zazen.

Sitting in meditation in an immobile state, think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? By nonthinking. This is the art of zazen.265

In this passage there are three important terms we will discuss, i.e., thinking (shiryo), not-thinking (fushiryo), and nonthinking (hishiryo). Thinking is regarded as any mental act, whether it be emotional, judgmental, believing, remembering, or assumptive, toward some object. Its noetic attitude is either affirming or negating, and its noematic content is conceptualized object. Not-thinking is the negation of thinking. Its noetic attitude is only negating, and its noematic content is ‘thinking’ as objectified. Nonthinking, however, is beyond both thinking and non-

265 Ibid.

Tavivat Puntarigvivat
thinking. Its noetic attitude is neither affirming nor negating, and its noematic content is pure presence of things as they are. It is equal to suñyatā (‘emptiness.’) In zazen practice, one is neither thinking nor not-thinking, but rather nonthinking. Sitting zazen in an “immobile state” implies that one sits in the nonthinking state, falls not into thinking nor not-thinking. This statement also reminds us of the “forgetting through sitting” in Chuang Tzu’s philosophy. “Think of not-thinking by nonthinking” is the art of zazen.

Zazen is not step-by-step meditation. It is the dharma-gate of great peace and joy; it is undefiled practice-verification.²⁶⁶

The practice of zazen is not gradual nor moving step by step toward an end, but rather it is complete in itself in each and every moment of practice. Here the distinction between means and end, practice and attainment, is dissolved. “It is the dharmagate of great peace and joy” implies that all the attainments, e.g., peace, joy, end of suffering, etc., are included in every single moment of zazen practice. “It is undefiled practice-verification” also implies the nonduality of means and end, of practice and verification or attainment.

2. “Sutra-reading Means Assembling All Buddha-ancestors”

In the fascicle named Kankin (Sutra-reading) of the

²⁶⁶ Kim (tr.), Flowers of Emptiness, p. 154.
Shobogenzo, Dogen talks about reading of the sutras (Buddhist scriptures) as a part of the practice. For him, to be one with the Buddha is the true reading of the sutras. The sutras do not confine themselves in the texts, but everything including trees, stones, empty sky, etc., is preaching the sutras. According to Dogen, the sutra is the Buddha, the Buddha is the sutra. We will discuss the sutra-reading as another aspect of the practice in the teachings of Dogen as follows:

For the practice and verification of supreme, perfect enlightenment, we follow mentors and use sutras. By mentors we mean Buddha-ancestors as the total self, and by sutras we mean sutras as the total self. This is so because all Buddha-ancestors are the self and all sutras are the self... Nevertheless, we do meditate on the sutras; we read them, chant them, copy them, receive them, and preserve them, and all [these activities] constitute the practice and verification of buddha-ancestors.\textsuperscript{267}

In the practice and the verification of the enlightenment, one follows the way of Buddha-ancestors and uses the sutras. But for Dogen, Buddha-ancestors and sutras are the “total self”, i.e., the true nature of all beings, the Buddha-nature. The Buddha-ancestors and the sutras are identical. Through the activities of reading, chanting,

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., p. 307.
copying, receiving, preserving, or meditating the sutras, one is practicing and verifying the Buddha. The sutras themselves are the Buddha.

Even so, it is by no means easy to meet the Buddha-sutras... Aside from buddha-ancestors, no one can ever see or hear, read or recite, understand or interpret the sutras; only through buddha-ancestors’ study do we learn even a modicum of the sutras.\textsuperscript{268}

From a Buddhist perspective, it is very difficult to be born a human-being, being born as a human-being it is still difficult to meet the teachings of the Buddha, meeting the Buddha’s teachings it is still difficult to learn and practice the Buddha way, learning and practicing the Buddha way it is still difficult to attain the Buddha enlightenment. According to Dogen, it is not easy to meet the “Buddha-sutras.” Only through the help of Buddha-ancestors that one can hear, read, understand and learn the sutras.

When we come to realization in this way, all our senses of hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, touching, and body-mind—as well as all the objects of our understanding, hearing, and speaking—realize the hearing, preserving, receiving, and expounding of the sutras. Those who “expound non-Buddhist doctrines for the

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
sake of seeking fame” can never practice the Buddha-sutras, because the sutras are such that trees and stones preserve them, fields and villages diffuse them, an infinitesimal world expounds them, and the empty sky preaches them.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 307-308.}

According to Dogen, the Buddha and the sutras are one and everywhere. For those who realize the Buddha way, all beings—including trees, stones, fields, empty sky, etc. “expound the sutras at all times. In Dogen’s words, “trees and stones preserve them [the sutras], fields and villages diffuse them, an infinitesimal world expounds them, and the empty sky preaches them.” But for those who do not realize the Buddha way, although they read and preach the sutras, they never “practice” the sutras. In other words, they have never become one with the sutras or the Buddha.

Sutra-reading means assembling all Buddha-ancestors and making them one’s own eyeballs in order to read the sutras with them. At such a moment, Buddha-ancestors actualize the Buddha, expound the Dharma, expound the Buddha, and engage in Buddha-making. With the expection of this occasion of sutra-reading, there can be no head or countenance of Buddha-ancestors.\footnote{Ibid., p. 310.}
In the true sutra-reading, there are three things involved, i.e., the reader, the sutras, and the Buddha. The reader and the Buddha are one in the reading of the sutras. As discussed before, the Buddha and the sutras are one. Therefore, in the real meaning of sutra-reading, the reader, the sutras and the Buddha are one. They “assemble” in the sutra-reading, expound the Buddha and the Dharma. Without this true meaning of the sutra-reading, there can be no Buddha.

B. The Concept of “Attainment”

In the previous section we have explored the idea, the method and the meaning of “practice” in Dogen’s teachings. Now we turn to the concept of “attainment” according to Dogen’s philosophy. There are at least four fascicles in the Shobogenzo which deal directly to the idea of “attainment” or “enlightenment.” These four fascicles are Sokushin-zebutsu (The Mind Is the Buddha), Juki (The Assurance of Enlightenment), Daigo (Great Enlightenment), and Maka-hannya-haramitsu (The Perfection of Great Wisdom). We will discuss some of the ideas concerning about “attainment” or “enlightenment” from these four fascicles in the following passages.

1. “The Mind Is the Buddha”

In the fascicle of Sokushin-zebutsu (The Mind Is the Buddha) of the Shobogenzo, Dogen writes:

Every buddha and every ancestor has
absolutely and unconditionally upheld that “The mind is the Buddha.”... A good many students, due to this misunderstanding, have failed to exploit it to their advantage, and because of their failure to do so, they have essentially been reduced to non-Buddhists.271

Dogen begins his teaching of “attainment” with the idea of “The mind is the Buddha.” He affirms that this is the teaching of every buddha and every patriarch. One’s mind is already a Buddha’s mind. The Buddha is the ground or the basis of the mind of each and every person. One does not need to seek the Buddha anywhere else, it is already there in his or her very mind. Because of the misunderstanding of this idea, many students have failed to grasp the true teachings of the Buddha, and get involved with the mistaken practices, so they have been reduced to “non-Buddhists”—those people who are ignorant of the Buddha-dharma.

The idea that “The mind is the Buddha” which Buddha-ancestors uphold is unconceived of by non-Buddhists and two vehicles. Only between Buddha-ancestors has there been complete communication and total experience of “The mind is the Buddha;” [consequently] they hear, enact, and verify [the Buddha-dharma].272

271 Ibid., p. 105.
272 Ibid., p. 108.
The teaching of “The mind is the Buddha” is unknown to non-Buddhists and those people in other Buddhist schools. This teaching is special to Buddha-ancestors [of the true dharma]. Among Buddha-ancestors, “The mind is the Buddha” has been experienced, communicated and transmitted. They teach only this doctrine of “The mind is the Buddha.” This doctrine is the most basic and important for the practice and the attainment of the Buddha-dharma. Outside of this doctrine, there can be no true teaching, true practice, nor true attainment.


In the fascicle of Juki (The Assurance of Enlightenment) of the Shobogenzo, Dogen elaborates the idea of “The mind is the Buddha” with the further idea of “The assurance of enlightenment.” He writes:

The great Way transmitted personally by Buddha-ancestors is an assurance of enlightenment. Those who have not studied under Buddha-ancestors have never dreamed of such a thing. The occasion for the assurance of enlightenment is such that this assurance is given even to those who have not yet aroused the thought of enlightenment, to those without the Buddha-nature, to those with the Buddha-nature, to those with bodies, and to those without bodies. Assurance of enlightenment is
given to buddhas, and buddhas uphold buddhas’ assurance of enlightenment.273

From the doctrine, “The mind is the Buddha” comes the further doctrine, “The assurance of enlightenment” is given to all beings. Because all beings are mind, and the mind is the Buddha, so all beings are assured of enlightenment. “The assurance of enlightenment” is given to buddhas, to those with and without Buddhanature, to those with and without bodies, to those who have not yet aroused the idea of enlightenment, in short, to all beings without exception. This cannot be thought of or dreamed of by those nonBuddhists who have never studied under true dharma teachers.

Even so, we must not assume that after obtaining the assurance of enlightenment one becomes a buddha, or that after becoming a buddha one obtains the assurance of enlightenment. At the moment one is assured of enlightenment, one becomes a buddha; at the moment one is assured of enlightenment, one commences training.274

The assurance of enlightenment does not mean that one will naturally become a buddha without any practice. Nor does it mean that one must become a buddha first before one obtains the assurance of enlightenment. The

273 Ibid., p. 235.
274 Ibid.
assurance of enlightenment simply means that one basically is a Buddha, or basically one is enlightened. The assurance of enlightenment, like Buddha-nature with which all beings are identical, is the ‘ground’ or ‘basis’, and the practice is needed as the ‘condition’ or ‘occasion’ to authenticate Buddhahood or enlightenment. Dogen makes it clear that at the moment of assurance of enlightenment, one is a buddha, and at the moment of assurance of enlightenment, one commences training or practice. It follows that at the very moment of assurance of enlightenment, one practices and one is a buddha. Practice, being a buddha, and being assured of enlightenment are not to be separated. They are but one.

3. “Great Enlightenment”

From the idea of “The mind is the Buddha” to the idea of “The assurance of enlightenment,” Dogen comes to the idea of “Great Enlightenment.” In the fascicle named Daigo (Great Enlightenment) of the Shobogenzo, Dogen talks about the “Great Enlightenment” as follows:

Great enlightenment is not something which exists in the public domain and which one encounters in old age, nor is it something which one forcibly extracts from oneself; even so, great enlightenment is unmistakably attained. [A person of great enlightenment] does not construe the absence of illusion as
great enlightenment; nor should s/he deliberately seek to become a person of illus-ion first in order to plant the seeds of great enlightenment.

A person of great enlightenment continues to attain great enlightenment; a person of great illusion continues to attain great enlightenment.\textsuperscript{275}

Great enlightenment is not something external. One cannot seek great enlightenment in the public domain. For example, one cannot obtain great enlightenment simply in doing good to others or making great charity, etc. Great enlightenment is not something to be obtained in one’s old age, it is not something which one has to practice step by step and finally to attain in one’s old age. Great enlightenment is not something which one can try to extract from within oneself, because great enlightenment is not the “essence” of oneself from which one can forcibly extract. Rather great enlightenment ‘is’ oneself–oneself with or without illusion. Because great enlightenment is oneself, so “great enlightenment is unmistakably attained.”

Great enlightenment does not mean the absence of illusion, because the very nature of illusion itself is the very nature of great enlightenment. From the enlightened perspective, there is no duality between illusion and great

\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., p. 147.
enlightenment. Even the moment of illusion is the moment of great enlightenment, so “[A person of great enlighten-
ment] does not construe the absence of illusion as great enlightenment.” But this does not mean that one seeks illusion in order to attain great enlightenment. At the moment of authentication, great enlightenment and illusion are one. A person of great enlightenment continues to attain great enlightenment, because all being (including the person of great enlightenment) is great enlightenment. A person of great illusion continues to attain great enlightenment, because all being (including the person of great illusion) is also great enlightenment.

One attains great enlightenment by exerting the triple world; one attains great enlightenment by exerting all things; one attains great enlightenment by exerting the four elements; one attains great enlightenment by exerting Buddha-ancestors; and one attains great enlightenment by exerting the koans. In all cases, one lives out great enlighten-ment, and thereby continue to realize great enlighten-
ment. Now is such a moment.  

One attains great enlightenment by various ways of practice, e.g., by “exerting the triple world,” by “exerting all things,” by “exerting the four elements,” by “exerting

276 Ibid., pp. 146-147.
Buddha-ancestors,” by “exerting the koans,” etc. In all cases, one ‘is’ great enlightenment and ‘continues’ to be great enlightenment. If one does not miss this crucial point, every moment of now is such the moment of great enlightenment—great enlightenment of here and now, great enlightenment of the “eternal now.”


From the idea of “Great enlightenment,” Dogen comes to the idea of “The perfection of great wisdom.” In the fascicle named *Maka-hannya-haramitsu* (The Perfection of Great Wisdom) of the Shobogenzo, Dogen explains and makes commentary of the Maha-prajna-paramita-hridaya Sutra, one of the most important and powerful sutras which contains the central idea or the essential teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, i.e., the *suññatā* or “emptiness.” Dogen writes:

> When Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva practices the perfection of profound wisdom, his whole body is the five *skandhas*, all luminously seen as empty. The five *skandhas* are form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness, which are the five modes of wisdom. The luminous seeing is itself wisdom.\(^\text{277}\)

In the “perfection of profound wisdom”, the Bodhisattva (‘being of wisdom’) sees things as they are. In seeing things

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\(^{277}\) Ibid., p. 61.
as they are, the “five skadhas”, i.e., form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness, are perceived as non-substantial, as lacking of any real self. All the five skandhas are “luminously seen as empty”; they are non-self, yet they exist conditionally. Their very nature is non-substantial. On the other hand, the five skadhas themselves are the “five modes of wisdom.” It means that wisdom arises out of these five skadhas, without the five skadhas there can be no wisdom. The “luminous seeing” of the “emptiness”, or non-substantial nature, of the five skadhas is also wisdom.

When this meaning is propounded in concrete expression, it is said: “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” That is, form is form, emptiness is emptiness. [This principle applies to] all things and all phenomena.\textsuperscript{278}

By the phrase “form is emptiness,” Dogen refers to the non-substantial nature of all ‘forms’, i.e., “all things and all phenomena,” or all beings without exception. In Samadhi (‘meditation’) experience, ‘form’ has been perceived as non-substantial, having no self nature; it is ‘empty.’ By the phrase “emptiness is form,” Dogen also refers to the experience in Samadhi. Once ‘emptiness’ is experienced in Samadhi, it is a part of oneself, so ‘emptiness’ is also in ‘form,’ ‘emptiness’ is ‘form.’ By the phrase “form is form,

\textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
emptiness is emptiness,” Dogen reaffirms their own position. Form is form, no more no less. Emptiness is emptiness, no more no less. Form is form as it is, emptiness is emptiness as it is. Everything is as it is. This is the ‘suchness’ (*tathagata*) of all things. In this ‘suchness,’ form and emptiness are not separated, but identical. This is the non-duality of form and emptiness.

There are twelve kinds of perfections of wisdom called the twelve sense-fields, or eighteen kinds [called the eighteen elements]: [the six organs of] eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; [the six objects of] form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea; and [the six consciousnesses of] seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. There are also four truths of perfect wisdom: suffering, the cause of suffering, the elimination of suffering, and the way that leads to the elimination of suffering. In addition, in the perfections of wisdom there are six virtues: giving, morality, perseverance, assiduity, meditation, and wisdom. There is the perfect wisdom of a single kind which is realized in the present: supreme, perfect enlightenment. Furthermore, perfect wisdom has the three periods of past, present, and future, as well as the six elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness. And there are four postures of wisdom practiced in everyday life: walking, standing, sitting, and reclining.²⁷⁹

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²⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 61-62.
By mentioning all these cardinal components, truths, virtues, periods, elements, and postures, Dogen points out that all these ‘dharmas’, in their very nature, are “empty” or non-substantial. No one should attach to these ‘dharmas’, even though all these ‘dharmas’ are the teachings of the Buddha. From the ordinary viewpoint, these ‘dharmas’ are so great, but in Samadhi, they are equally as non-substantial as all others in their very nature.

...perfect wisdom is not different from Buddha the Holy one; Buddha the Holy one is not different from perfect wisdom. Perfect wisdom is the Buddha, the Buddha is perfect wisdom. Why? Sariputra, the reasons are: the tathagatas and buddhas of unsurpassed wisdom all appear by virtue of perfect wisdom...

Perfect wisdom is all dharmas. These dharmas are empty in their form no arising or perishing, no impurity or purity, no increasing or decreasing. The realization of this perfect wisdom is the realization of Buddha the Holy one.²⁸⁰

Dogen infers that the seeing of all ‘dharmas’ as “empty in their form,” i.e., ‘form is emptiness, emptiness is form,’ is the seeing from the perfect wisdom. The realization of perfect wisdom makes one a Buddha. Perfect wisdom is the enlightening vision of the Buddha, so it is not

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 62.
different from the Buddha. The Buddha is not different from perfect wisdom. Perfect wisdom is identical with the Buddha, the Buddha is identical with perfect wisdom. This is the non-duality of Buddha and perfect wisdom.

To honor and revere [perfect wisdom] is indeed to respectfully meet and serve Buddha the Holy One; to meet and serve him is none other than to be Buddha the Holy One.\textsuperscript{281}

Dogen relates the phrase “to honor and revere [perfect wisdom]” with the phrase “to respectfully meet and serve Buddha the Holy One,” and “to meet and serve him [Buddha]” with “to be Buddha.” ‘To meet and serve the Buddha’ infers ‘to honor and revere perfect wisdom,’ i.e., to realize perfect wisdom. To meet and serve the Buddha is no other than to be a Buddha. This means that one cannot meet and serve the Buddha unless one ‘knows’ the Buddha, to ‘know’ the Buddha is to be a Buddha oneself. The practice of “meeting and serving” the Buddha is identical with the attainment of “being a Buddha.” In Dogen’s teachings, practice and attainment cannot be separated, they are always identical. This is the oneness of practice and attainment which we will discuss in the following section.

C. The Oneness of Practice and Attainment

In the first two sections of this paper, we explored and discussed each concept of “practice” and “attainment;”

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid., p. 63.
although they were individually discussed, they are not separated in their very nature. In this section we will discuss the more important idea of Dogen’s teaching, i.e., the non-duality between practice and attainment. We will use some passage from the biography of Dogen and several passages from the Shobogenzo to elaborate Dogen’s idea of “the oneness of practice and attainment.”

1. “Original Awakening” and “Acquired Awakening”

In Dogen’s biography, he was ordained a Buddhist monk, at the age of 13, by Koen, the chief abbot of the Tendai school, in 1213. On mount Hiei where he spent his early monastic life, Dogen encountered a question of the relationship between “original awakening” and “acquired awakening.” This question disturbed the inquisitive mind of the young Dogen and drove him from mount Hiei to take a long journey to China in search of the answer. He expressed his question as follows:

Both exoteric and esoteric Buddhism teach the prime Buddha-nature and the original self-awakening of all sentient beings. If this is the case, why then in the Buddhas of all ages did the longing for awakening arise and they engage in ascetic practices?\(^{282}\)

Dogen received the idea of “original awakening” (hongaku) from Tendai Buddhism on mount Hiei. It is the

doctrine that everyone is originally awakened or enlightened. But Dogen could not understand how the doctrine links to the idea of practice or “acquired awakening” (shikaku). Dogen’s initial question is restated by Masao Abe as follows:

If, as Tendai Buddhism expounds, all sentient being are originally endowed with Buddha-nature and are inherently awakened to their true nature, why is it necessary for so many Buddhists in the past, present, and future to set upon a religious quest and practice various forms of Buddhist discipline to attain enlightenment? Are not that resolve and practice unnecessary?283

When Dogen, in his earlier age, faced this question, he apparently took the Buddha-nature to be reality as it exists immediately without practice. He apparently grasped “original awakening” as something already achieved there in one’s very existence independently of all practice. Dogen misunderstood the point that Buddha-nature or original awakening, though it is the ground of one’s existence, need to be authenticated by practice. Therefore practice is indispensable condition for the authentication of the Buddha-nature.

Masao Abe raised the question from the opposite direction of Dogen’s as follows:

If our own resolution and practice are indispensable, we cannot legitimately say that we are originally endowed with the Buddha-nature or that all sentient beings are originally enlightened. Why then does Tendai Buddhism expound the primal Buddha-nature and the original awakening of all sentient beings?\textsuperscript{284}

In order to understand the above questions, we have to clarify the distinction between that which is a ‘ground’ or ‘basis’ and that which is a ‘condition’ or ‘occasion.’ From the Mahayana Buddhist point of view, both Buddha-nature and practice are indispensable to awakening. Buddha-nature is indispensable as the ‘ground’ or ‘basis’ of awakening, while practice is necessary as the ‘condition’ or ‘occasion’ for awakening. Without Buddha-nature, practice is impossible. Without practice, Buddha-nature does not reveal itself in one’s life.

After Dogen dissolved this disturbing question of practice and enlightenment, he expounded the Dharma from the standpoint of “the oneness of practice and attainment” throughout his lifetime. One of his writings goes as follows:

This Dharma is amply present in every person, but unless one practices, it is not manifested; unless there is realization, it is not attained.\textsuperscript{285}

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., p. 102.
It is clear in this passage that Buddha-nature is fully present in everyone’s existence. But both Buddha-nature and practice are indispensable, because unless one practices, Buddha-nature is not manifested, and unless there is Buddha-nature or ‘realization,’ one cannot attain anything through practice.

To think practice and realization are not one is a heretical view. In the Buddha Dharma, practice and realization are identical. Because one’s present practice is practice in realization, one’s initial negotiation of the Way in itself is the whole of original realization. Thus, even while one is directed to practice, he is told not to anticipate realization apart from practice, because practice points directly to original realization. As it is already realization in practice, realization is endless; as it is practice in realization, practice is beginningless.\(^{286}\)

According to Dogen, the dimension of practice and the dimension of attainment are united and dynamic. As realization already there in practice, realization is endless, and as it is practice in realization, practice is beginningless. Since both practice and realization are one, there is no beginning and no end in practice and realization. In other words, every moment of the genuine Zen life is practice and is realization. In this way, the distinction between ‘ground’

\(^{286}\) Ibid., pp. 102-103.
(realization) and ‘condition’ (practice) in the ordinary sense is overcome.

As for the truth of the Buddha-nature: the Buddha-nature is not incorporated prior to attaining Buddhahood; it is incorporated upon the attainment of Buddhahood. The Buddha-nature is always manifested simultaneously with the attainment of Buddhahood. This truth should be deeply, deeply penetrated in concentrated practice. There has to be twenty or even thirty years of diligent Zen Practice.²⁸⁷

Dogen here unites the three important notions together, namely, the ‘original awakening’ (Buddha-nature), ‘acquired awakening’ (the attainment of Buddhahood), and ‘practice.’ Buddha-nature does not manifest itself prior to the attainment of Buddhahood; in fact, Buddha-nature is always manifested simultaneously with the attainment of Buddhahood. The attainment of Buddhahood is authenticated by practice. So Dogen emphasizes the “diligent Zen practice” as the indispensable condition so that Buddha-nature manifests itself simultaneously with practice and the attainment of Buddhahood.

In the Great Way of Buddhas and patriarchs there is always continuous practice which is supreme. It is the way which is circulating ceaselessly. There is not even the slightest gap

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²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 103.
between resolution, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana. The way of continuous practice is ever circulating.²⁸⁸

In his guidance of zazen to the disciples, Dogen emphasizes what is called “practice in realization.” Practice in realization is the way of continuous practice which is circulating ceaselessly, i.e., without beginning or without end. In this continuous practice, means and end, practice and enlightenment are unified. One is not to anticipate realization out of practice; every moment of practice is the moment of attainment.

2. “Tile-polishing” Is Instantaneous “Mirror-making”

In the fascicle named Zazenshin (Admonitions for Zazen) of the Shobogenzo, Dogen deals the issue of “the oneness of practice and attainment” with the story of the Chinese Ch’an master Nanyueh Tahui (677-744) and the disciple Chiangsi Tachi (709-788), who later on became a great Ch’an master himself in China. The story goes:

Ch’an Teacher Chiangsi Tachi formerly studied under Ch’an Teacher Nanyueh Tahui. After receiving the seal of the mind personally, he daily engaged in zazen. Once Nanyueh visited Tachi, asking: “Your Reverend, what do you seek by doing zazen?”

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 103.
Chiangsi said: “I seek to become a buddha.”

Nanyueh picked up a piece of tile and polished it against a rock.

Tachi finally asked: “Master, what are you doing?”

Nanyueh said: “By polishing it, I am making a mirror.”

Tachi said: “How can you make a mirror by polishing a tile?”

Nanyueh said: “How can you become a buddha by doing zazen?”

Tachi asked: “How is that so?”

Nanyueh said: “If you cling to the sitting form, you cannot penetrate [the sitting buddha’s] principle.”

There are at least three points to make in this story. The first is the expression of Tachi, “I seek to become a Buddha.” From the ordinary viewpoint, this expression reveals the standpoint of duality between means and end, i.e., the duality between “seeking” and “becoming a Buddha.” But from Dogen’s perspective, this expression is interpreted in such a way that the “seeking” and the “becoming a Buddha” are one. The second point is the expression of Nanyueh, “By polishing it [the tile], I am making a mirror,” which is also interpreted by Dogen to be

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289 Kim (tr.), *Flowers of Emptiness*, pp. 158-161.
the oneness of means and end, i.e., “tile-polishing” itself is instantaneous “mirror-making.” The third point, according to Dogen, also reaffirms the oneness of practice and attainment when Nanyueh exclaimed, “How can you become a buddha by doing zazen?” i.e., the “how” of zazen and the “thusness” of Buddha-actualization (“becoming a buddha”) appear simultaneously. We will discuss each point by referring to the interpretation of Dogen. Now we come to Dogen’s commentary on the first point:

Chiangsi said: “I seek to become a buddha.”

We must thoroughly understand this utterance. What should this statement “becoming a buddha” mean? Do we mean that one is made a buddha by a [foreign] buddha? Do we mean that one makes a [nonexistent] buddha existent? Do we mean that this or that countenance of the Buddha appears?... Tachi’s saying, we must realize, is such that zazen is always that “Buddha-actualization” which is one with “seeking;” zazen is always that “seeking” which is none other than “Buddha-actualization.” “Seeking” is before and after “Buddha-actualization;” it is likewise at the very moment of “Buddha-actualization.”290

In this first point, Chiangsi Tachi’s expression, “I seek to become a buddha,” from the ordinary point of view,

290 Ibid., p. 159.
reveals the state of ‘duality’ between ‘means’ (“seeking”) and ‘end’ (“becoming a buddha.”) In this state of ‘duality,’ it is not possible for one “to seek to become a buddha” because one makes a distinction between ‘means’ and ‘end,’ i.e., one practices ‘means’ in order to achieve ‘end.’ In Dogen’s words, it is like one tries to be a buddha by seeking a foreign buddha, or one tries to make a non-existent buddha existent, which is impossible. Dogen interprets this sentence, “I seek to become a Buddha,” from the ‘non-duality’ standpoint. From Dogen’s perspective, “seeking” and “Buddha-actualization” are identical in the practice of zazen. In zazen the dichotomy of ‘means’ (“seeking”) and ‘end’ (“Buddha-actualization,”) or ‘practice’ and ‘attainment’, is dissolved. “Seeking” is none other than “buddha-actualization”, the moment of “seeking” is the very moment of “buddha-actualization.” This is the true or non-dual meaning, according to Dogen, of the expression “I seek to become a Buddha.” Now let us consider Dogen’s commentary on the second point:

Nanyueh said: “By polishing it, I am making a mirror.” We must understand the import of this utterance. The statement “By polishing it, I am making a mirror” has its unambiguous truth, the realization koan; it cannot be a fabrication. Even if a tile is no more than a tile, a mirror no more than a mirror, in endeavoring to penetrate the essence of “polishing,” we will find that
there are a good many examples of this truth. The primordial mirror [of Hsuehfeng Its’un] and the luminous mirror [of Huineng] were both made by “tile-polishing.” Unless we understand that all mirrors are products of “tile-polishing,” there are no Buddha-ancestors’ expressions, there are no Buddha-ancestors’ discourses; nor do we see or hear any of the Buddha-ancestors’ utterances.291

In this second point, the expression of Nanyueh, “By polishing it [the tile], I am making a mirror,” reveals the standpoint of ‘non-duality’ between ‘means’ (“polishing the tile”) and ‘end’ (“making a mirror”). Dogen affirms that a tile is no more than a tile, a mirror is no more than a mirror; tile does not become a mirror, nor is it transformed into a mirror, at the end of polishing. The act of polishing itself is intrinsically the mirror. Hence, tile does not become mirror, but is mirror. This passage of Dogen points to the non-dual identity of “tile-polishing” and “mirror-making.” In zazen, “tile-polishing” itself is instantaneous “mirror-making.” Now we come to Dogen’s commentary on the third point of the story:

Nanyueh said: “How can you become a buddha by doing zazen?” We clearly know the truth that the act of doing zazen does not

291 Ibid., p. 160.
anticipate becoming a buddha; thus it is always apparent to us that becoming a buddha has no relationship whatsoever to doing zazen... The “How” [of zazen] and the “thusness” [of Buddha-actualization], therefore, appear simultaneously.²⁹²

In this third point, Nanyueh’s expression, “How can you become a buddha by doing zazen?” reveals the deepest meaning of the ‘non-duality’ between ‘means’ (“doing zazen”) and ‘end’ (“become a buddha”). From Dogen’s perspective, the act of doing zazen has nothing to do with the anticipation of becoming a buddha, and becoming a buddha has no relationship whatsoever to doing zazen. Just as tile does not become mirror, so one who practices zazen does not anticipate becoming a buddha. The practice of zazen has absolute significance in itself. In zazen, the practice (“tile-polishing”) itself identifies with the attainment (“mirror-making”). This is why Dogen says, “The ‘How’ [of zazen] and the ‘thusness’ [of Buddha-actualization], therefore, appear simultaneously.” It implies that the practice of zazen (“the ‘how’ of zazen”) and the attainment (“the ‘thusness’ of Buddha-actualization”) are identicle and appear simultaneously.

In conclusion, Dogen, as a master of zazen (“seated meditation”), based his teachings upon the ground of zazen,

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 160-161.
particularly *shikantaza* ("just sitting"). Dogen expounds the Dharma, especially in his great work *Shobogenzo* (A Treasury of the Right Dharma Eye), from various perspectives, but all his teachings point to the same thing—the enlightening experience grounded in zazen.

The first part deals with the concept of "practice" of Dogen. From Dogen’s standpoint, "the practice of Zen is zazen." Dogen elaborates the method of practice in details which includes the right posture of sitting, the breathing exercise, the environment of sitting, clothes, food, etc. Dogen also talks about the reading of sutras as a part of practice, but he interprets the sutra-reading as identified with the Buddha. In the second part, we discuss the concept of "attainment" in Dogen’s philosophy. The passages from several fascicles of *Shobogenzo* have been referred in the discussion, these fascicles include "The Mind is the Buddha," "The Assurance of Enlightenment," "Great Enlightenment," and "The Perfection of Great Wisdom." Because the mind is basically the Buddha, all beings without exception are assured of enlightenment. In great enlightenment, there lies the perfection of great wisdom which perceives all things as they are, i.e., *suññatā* ("emptiness"), the central teaching of Mahayana Buddhism.

In the final part, we come to the idea of "the oneness of practice and attainment." The question of Dogen, when he was in his younger age and when he was not yet enlightened, was raised to point out the ideas of "original
awakening” and “acquired awakening.” As we have discussed, the Buddha-nature (“original awakening”) is the ground or basis and the practice (“acquired awakening”) is the condition or occasion, both of which are indispensable for enlightenment. The story of Chinese Ch’an master Nanyueh Tahui and the disciple Chiangsi Tachi about the “tile-polishing” and the “mirror-making” was referred with the commentary of Dogen to point out the non-duality between practice (“tile-polishing”) and attainment (“mirror-making”). The moment of “tile-polishing” is instantaneously the moment of “mirror-making.” This is “the oneness of practice and attainment” in Dogen’s teaching.
Chapter 9

THEORY OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The term “interfaith” here is used in the broadest meaning. It includes “interreligious” dialogue like Buddhist-Christian dialogue, “inter-ideological” dialogue, like Buddhist-Marxist dialogue; as well as “comparative philosophy,” like Buddhism and Western Philosophy. Theory of interfaith dialogue will be explored with an emphasis on dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. A comparison between Buddhism—particularly theory of Paticcasamuppāda—and Alfred Whitehead’s Process Philosophy will be discussed and analyzed. In so doing, it is an attempt to dialogue between Eastern and Western cultural and philosophical perspectives.

9.1 Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

I will describe what bearing each of them have on interfaith dialogue and on the involvement of the major kinds of Christianity and Buddhism in a Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Then I will analyze what Buddhism might have to gain from, and problems it might meet, in dialogue with
Christianity and vice versa. A social theory of interfaith dialogue will be presented with an emphasis on the dialogue between psychological liberation and socio-political liberation, of which Christianity and Buddhism can learn from each other.

A. Theory of Interfaith Dialogue

Theory of interfaith dialogue will be presented, for cross-cultural understanding, to include the theologies of “Christocentrism,” “Buddhacentrism,” “Theocentrism” and “Soteriocentrism.” Christocentrism includes evangelical Christianity, mainline Protestant model, and Catholic model. For Buddhacentrism, it includes traditional Theravada and traditional Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. Theocentrism and Soteriocentrism will be presented in an attempt to overcome the restriction of religious beliefs for the purpose of interfaith dialogue.

1. Christocentrism

Christocentrism asserts that Christ is the center of salvation. God revealed Himself through Jesus Christ so that human beings might be saved. This theology is based on the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God, and the Son of God. Hence, knowledge of God and salvation, through God’s grace, comes from faith in Jesus Christ and the events of his life. There are at least three models of Christocentrism which I will describe in the following.
1.1 Evangelical Christianity

The first model of Christocentrism is the Evangelical Christianity represented by Karl Barth. This conservative Christocentrism holds that there can be only one true religion, i.e., Christianity. The reason is that revelation and salvation are offered only in Jesus Christ. This one religion is justified in such a way that nothing is really affirmed or answered in the world of religions. Christianity is the only true religion.

1.2 Mainline Protestant Model

The second model of Christocentrism is the mainline Protestant model. It says yes to the revelation in other religions, but says “no to the salvation of other religions. Althaus holds that outside of Christ there is indeed a self-manifestation of God, therefore knowledge of God, but it does not lead to salvation, to union between God and man. Christ remains final, normative, the universal ultimate truth. But it is an ultimate truth that recognizes and affirms the existence of truth outside Christianity. In summary, it holds the position that outside the word, no salvation.

1.3 Catholic Model

The third model of Christocentrism is the Catholic model represented by Karl Rahner and Hans Kung. Rahner asserts that religions are ways of salvation. To know God in these different ways is for Rahner not just revelation. It includes salvation: a communion with the one true God, an
experience of purpose, peace, and growth for the individual and society. But Rahner clearly sets a time limit for the validity of the religions. Once a religion really confronts the gospel--once the gospel is translated into the new culture and embodied in community--then that religion loses its validity. It must make way for the religion which is greater. Rahner understands Christ as the final cause of salvation. Christ and the church are normative.

For Hans Kung, to be a Christian means to recognize and proclaim Christ as normative, not only for Christian but for all peoples. Jesus Christ is ultimately decisive, definite and archetypal for human’s relations with God, with his or her fellows, with society. Without Christ’s revelation, the other religions cannot really understand and appropriate the salvation at work within them. For Kung, Christians can go only so far in recognizing the value of other religions and in learning from them, for in Christ they hold the normative, the final, word. Christ is “the norm above all other norms. In short, this Catholic model represents the position of many ways, one norm.

Christocentrism presents stumbling blocks in interreligious dialogue. It is difficult to maintain that Christ is the normative revelation and salvation of God without making all other religions inferior. From this Christocentric perspective, there is nothing much to dialogue about with a non-theistic religion like Buddhism.
2. **Buddhacentrism**

Buddhacentrism asserts that the Buddha is the center of liberation from human suffering. Most traditional Buddhists—whether Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana—hold that the Buddha was the Enlightened One. He was the first human being who discovered the Dhamma, or the Truth. Once he discovered the Dhamma, he became one with the Dhamma. From this perspective, there arises the idea of Buddha-nature. The true Buddha is in fact the inborn nature of all human beings. Buddhists need to follow the path pointed out by the historical Buddha in order to realize the Buddha-nature within them.

2.1 **Traditional Theravada**

From the traditional Theravada perspective, a Buddhist needs to keep the *sila* (precepts), to practice *samādhi* (meditation), and to obtain *paññā* (insight, wisdom). These are the path pointed out by the Buddha, witnessed in the Pali Canon (the Buddhist scripture). Outside of these practices and the Pali Canon, there is no other way to liberation. This is the religion of self-help or self-realization; there can be no outside god (whether God or gods) who can help anyone to attain the Enlightenment. This conservative Theravada perspective presents an obstacle for interreligious dialogue, especially with Christianity, a God-centered religion.
2.2 Traditional Mahayana and Vajrayana

From the traditional Mahayana and Vajrayana perspective, especially Pure Land Buddhism, a Buddhist needs to devote himself or herself to the Buddha in the paradise, namely, the Amitabha Buddha in the Sukhavati paradise. All they need to do is to pray to the Amitabha Buddha with the repeated chanting of the phrase *namo omi to fo* (I take the refuge of Amitabha Buddha). Amitabha Buddha became a God in traditional Mahayana. On the one hand, it has become the obstacle to dialogue with the Theravada tradition—the tradition of self-realization without any God. On the other hand, it provides a bridge of dialogue with other theistic religions, especially Christianity.

Mahayana means “great vehicle” in bringing all sentient beings to the other shore of non-suffering or the Sukhavati paradise. The sense of superiority in Mahayana sometimes becomes an obstacle in the dialogue with other traditions, both in the intra-religious dialogue and inter-religious dialogue.

3. Theocentrism

Theocentrism is the theology which places God at the center of the cosmos. God is the creator, the continuing sustainer, and the ultimate reality of the universe. It is only through God that human beings receive revelation and salvation. In short, Theocentrism holds the position that there are many ways to the center.
John Hick proposes his Copernican revolution of theology. It parallels Copernicus’ model of the universe. It demands a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths. Hick works out a solution that allows Christians to continue to adhere to Christ as their unique savior without having to insist that he is necessarily unique or normative for others. By understanding the incarnation as a myth, Hick comes to the conclusion that God is truly to be encountered in Jesus, but not only in Jesus. Jesus is the center and norm for Christians’ lives, without having to insist that he be so for all other human beings. Panikka even states that it is not simply that there are different ways leading to the peak, but that the summit itself would collapse if all the paths disappeared.

Theocentrism is a move to overcome the obstacles to dialogue presented by Christocentrism. Since it is God who is central to this theology, Jesus may be understood as one of many revelations from God to the diverse peoples of the world. From this Theocentric perspective, an interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism is possible and rather smooth. God in Christianity and Amitabha Buddha in Pure Land Buddhism are understood as the manifestation of the same God in the different cultures and historical settings.

However, Buddhism is not Pure Land Buddhism. With the exception of Pure Land Buddhism, all other
traditions of Buddhism are non-theistic, especially Theravada and Zen (an important school in Mahayana Buddhism.) This Theocentrism still presents an obstacle to interfaith dialogue with the many traditions of Buddhism.

4. Soteriocentrism

Soteriocentrism is a more inclusive term which provides a more universal interpretation of religions. It grew out of the experience of interreligious dialogue. It deals with what Paul Knitter calls “praxis of dialogue” or “hermeneutics of praxis.” Soteriocentrism is the view that a person passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions, and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back is the spiritual adventure of our time. Such a spiritual adventure is not only a new possibility but a new necessity.

According to Knitter, truth will no longer be identified by its ability to exclude or absorb others. Rather, what is true will reveal itself mainly by its ability to relate to other expressions of truth and to grow through these relationships. More importantly, the model of truth-through-relationship allows each religion to be unique.

Soteriocentrism is a move closer to a unitive pluralism. It provides the essential key of dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. The essential difference between theism of Christianity and non-theism of Buddhism is overcome. A Christian-Buddhist dialogue is possible at this soteriocentric level.
The paradigm shifts from Christocentrism, Buddha-centrism, and Theocentrism to Soteriocentrism, however impressive they may seem, are still lacking something practically meaningful. Whether God in Christianity and the Dhamma (Truth) in Buddhism are the same or not does not really matter. The more important thing is that when human suffering—either psychological suffering or socio-political suffering—occurs, how a Christian or a Buddhist responds to those concrete issues of human suffering. When injustice occurs among people in a society, how Christian God or Buddhist Dhamma responds to those issues of social injustice—both at the personal level and in the socio-political structure. This approach is more practical and meaningful.

B. Social Theory of Interfaith Dialogue

In my perspective, three ways of promoting interfaith dialogue can be drawn from:

(1) a Metaphysical or Ontological perspective,
(2) a Psychological perspective and
(3) a Socio-political perspective.

The metaphysical or ontological dialogue is a more conventional way of doing interreligious dialogue. The Christocentrism, Buddhacentrism, Theocentrism, and Soteriocentrism discussed above are all one form or another of metaphysical or ontological dialogue. It makes the dialoguers retreat to the abstraction of God or Truth in any religion, and overlook the concrete issues of human
psychological suffering and socio-political suffering—the very essential issues in religion—in this contemporary world of suffering and injustice.

The psychological and socio-political dialogues are a more “radical,” or rather more authentic, way of doing interfaith dialogue. Facing the human concrete issues of suffering—be it psychological or socio-political (e.g., social, economic, and political oppression and injustice), how a Christian, a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Hindu, or any religious believer responds to them. I believe that the psychological and socio-political perspectives of interfaith dialogue will provide a solid ground for peace and justice—the aim of all religions—to all humans in the world.

I will present an interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism on human liberation. My proposition is that Buddhism provides a unique psychological treatment of the problem of human inner suffering, whereas Christianity, particularly Liberation Theology, provides a comprehensive perspective and social praxis applicable to the problem of socio-political suffering, especially for Third World people. Thus, Buddhists and Christians can learn much from each other.

1. Psychological Liberation

Buddhism is well-known for its major emphasis on human suffering, or more specifically on human
psychological suffering. As Leonard Swidler puts it, Buddhism uses the language “from below” or “from within,” whereas religions with God-centered orientations like Christianity use the language “from above” or “from without.” From this perspective, Buddhist language and concepts are closer to those of modern critical thinkers. Or, as Antony Fernando puts it, the way the Buddha dealt with his disciples is similar to the way a psychotherapist deals with his patients in a clinic.

According to Luangpor Teean (1911-1988), a contemporary Buddhist meditation teacher in Thailand who introduced Dynamic Meditation, there are two basic psychological elements in a human being: “thought” and “awareness” (sati). Luangpor Teean argues that people usually think all the time, intentionally or unintentionally. When we work or talk, we think intentionally. But when we are alone and have no intention to think, thought does not stop; we continue to think unintentionally. At night thoughts appears in the form of dreaming. If we do not know how to deal with the unintentional or “random thoughts,” Luangpor Teean maintains it could cause troubles or psychological suffering for us.

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293 For more details on interfaith or interreligious dialogue, see Swidler, After the Absolute.
294 See Fernando, Buddhism Made Plain.
295 For more details, see Luangpor Teean, To One That Feels.
Thought is very beneficial to human beings; it has created the entire world of human civilization. But at the same time thought also brings a unique human suffering to humankind, unknown to any other species. Thought creates pleasure, joy, and hope, but it also creates misery, loneliness and despair. According to Luangpor Teean, thought is the root cause of greed, anger, and delusion—the three root defilements of human beings often indicated in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

The main purpose of Buddhist practice, as for example in Luangpor Teean’s Dynamic Meditation, is to stimulate and develop awareness so that awareness, as a natural consequence, encounters and ‘sees’ thought. When awareness sees thought, thought immediately disappears. In Buddhist meditation practice, full awareness breaks the chain of thought. In other words, it goes against the stream of thought. When awareness breaks through the chain of thought, according to Luangpor Teean, we experience the world as it is outside of thought at that very moment. This experience is sometimes called “emptiness” (Theravada: anattā, Mahayāna: suññatā) in Buddhism. When awareness overcomes thought and sees the world as it is, psychological suffering ceases to exist. Liberation (Pali: nībbāna, Sanskrit: nirvāṇa) in Buddhism is the liberation from this psychological suffering. This Buddhist emphasis on the psychological roots of suffering can bring a critical perspective to Christian notions of suffering conceptualized
primarily in Theocentric or Christocentric terms.\textsuperscript{296}

2. Socio-Political Liberation

Although Christianity deals with personal, spiritual liberation, as a tradition it has tended to emphasize the historical and the social. Liberation Theology in Latin America is a particular form of that trait. In particular, it has conceptualized suffering not only as personal but as \textit{socio-political}, and it has dealt directly with the concrete issues of social and political liberation.

As Gustavo Gutierrez puts it, in doing theology, critical reflection comes first, theology second. Critical reflection is an important tool for Liberation Theologians both in reading the Bible and in dealing with the concrete human suffering arising from social-structural oppression. In reading the Bible, a new interpretation is introduced. According to Liberation Theology, salvation cannot be gained apart from Socio-Political Liberation. In other words, salvation is the result of Socio-Political Liberation together with personal liberation. For Gutierrez, there is only one human destiny in which all share.

Another new emphasis in Liberation Theologians’ interpretation of the Bible is that the central teaching of

\textsuperscript{296} Hans Kung draws a parallel between the Buddhist emptiness and what the Christian theologians call God. See Kung, \textit{Global Responsibility}. For more details on interfaith dialogue, see Knitter, \textit{No Other Name}? For a more universal interfaith dialogue, see Swidler (ed.), \textit{Toward a Universal Theology of Religion}. 

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Jesus Christ is not Jesus himself, nor the universal Christ, nor even God, but rather the “kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God, furthermore, has been reinterpreted as social justice among human beings and among nations. A good Christian is one who struggles for justice for the poor, the oppressed, the unprivileged people who are the majority of the world, so that the kingdom of God can be established right here on earth.

Liberation Theologians have made explicit use of Marxist social analysis. Although Pope John Paul II declared in his encyclical from the Vatican on 3 May 1991, that “the Marxist solution has failed” in Eastern Europe and elsewhere (while he also cautioned against unregulated Capitalism and materialism),\textsuperscript{297} we still can learn much from Liberation Theology’s adaptation of Marxist social critique. Liberation Theology is \textit{not} Marxism. Liberation Theology is, rather, a form of Christianity with a Marxist perspective on Capitalism and economic development. In their social praxis, Liberation Theologians always refer to the Bible, even though their interpretation of the Bible is from a new perspective indebted to a Marxist social and economic analysis.

Buddhism can learn a great deal from the socio-political perspective associated with Liberation Theology. Buddhism still lacks a precise theory and praxis to address the concrete issues of contemporary socio-political suffering.

and the struggle of the oppressed in Buddhist countries. Theory of Dhammic Socialism by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993), a modern Thai Buddhist thinker, tends to be too utopian and abstract. Although his theory addresses the issue of “surplus” in a manner similar to Marx’s “surplus value,” it still needs interpretation and clarification as a social praxis. Dhammic Socialism has not yet been worked out within the context of a base-community struggling for social justice in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In short, Dhammic Socialism can learn much from Liberation Theology, especially from the practical perspective. Today a Buddhist country like Thailand has the beginnings of a parallel to the Christian Base Communities of Latin America. Their influence can be enhanced by the development of a more coherent philosophy of Buddhist social praxis worked out through a self-conscious networking of the broad range of emergent Base Communities.

Historically Buddhism arose in India at the time when the Aryan civilization flourished. Unlike Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the main concern of religious leaders and philosophers during the time of the founder was not political liberation due to the social conditions at that time, but rather personal liberation from human psychological suffering arising from the physical cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death. Although the Buddha also taught social ethics concerning the social, economic and political well-being of people, the main theme in Buddhism was personal
liberation from psychological suffering. Today the social and political conditions have changed tremendously in Buddhist countries in Asia. Thus, Buddhism needs a more structural vision as well as a new emphasis on social liberation.

9.2 Buddhism and Process Philosophy

In an attempt to compare Buddhism and Process Philosophy, Alfred N. Whitehead’s Process Philosophy and Theology will be first introduced. Theory of *Paticcasamuppāda*—one of the central teachings of the Buddha—will then be described. A comparison between Process Philosophy and the Paticcasamuppada, the theory of cause-and-effect in Buddhism, will be finally analyzed.

A. Alfred Whitehead’s Process Philosophy

In his book, *Process and Reality*, Alfred North Whitehead began his work by explaining the scope and function of speculative philosophy. He said, “Speculative Philosophy is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”

In his framework of thought, the universe is the system of necessity whose process every particular element or event fall upon. “This doctrine of necessity in universality means that there is an essence to the universe which forbids

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relationships beyond itself, as a violation of its rationality. Speculative philosophy seeks that essence.\textsuperscript{299}

In seeking the essence of the universe, speculative philosophy needs to jump from particular facts to universal truth, so it requires the method of “empiricism.” At the same time, the very tool of speculative philosophy is rationalization, so it requires the method of “rationalism” as well. Whitehead said, “...this idea of speculative philosophy has its rational side and its empirical side. The rational side is expressed by the terms ‘coherent’ and ‘logical.’ The empirical side is expressed by the terms ‘applicable’ and ‘adequate’.”\textsuperscript{300} In a sense, speculative philosophy is overambitious, because it always tries to cope with everything beyond immediate facts or experiences. “Whenever we attempt to express the matter of immediate experience, we find that its understanding leads us beyond itself, to its contemporaries, to its past, to its future, and to the universals in terms of which its definiteness is exhibited.”\textsuperscript{301}

In his preface of the book, Whitehead termed his philosophical perspective as the “Philosophy of Organism.” His essential idea is that the whole universe is in relativity, continuity and in the process of becoming. “The ancient doctrine that ‘no one cross the same river twice’ is extended. No thinker thinks twice; and, to put the matter

\textsuperscript{299} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., p. 14.
more generally, no subject experiences twice.”³⁰² He elaborated his essential philosophy thus:

Every ultimate actuality embodies in its own essence what Alexander terms “a principal of unrest,” namely, its becoming... the notion of an “entity” means “an element contributory to the process of becoming”... the obligations imposed on the becoming of any particular actual entity arise from the constitutions of other actual entities.³⁰³

A multiplicity merely enters into process through its individual members. The only statements to be made about a multiplicity express how its individual members enter into the process of the actual world.³⁰⁴

“Relevance” must express some real fact of togetherness among forms. The ontological principal can be expressed as: All real togetherness is togetherness in the formal constitution of an actuality.³⁰⁵

Whitehead saw the relationship between science and religion in his process philosophy. He said,

³⁰² Ibid., p. 29.
³⁰³ Ibid., p. 28.
³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 29.
³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 32.
Religion is centered upon the harmony of rational thought with the sensitive reaction to the percepta from which experience originates. Science is concerned with the harmony of rational thought with the percepta themselves... Science finds religious experiences among its percepta; and religion finds scientific concepts among the conceptual experiences to be fused with particular sensitive reactions.  

It is interesting to find out that, in his system of thought, though he might be viewed as a modern atomist, Whitehead sees the process of becoming of the whole universe not only in the physical dimension, but also in the humanistic dimension. It is not only the atoms which are in the process of becoming, but all human experiences—mental, ethical, aesthetical, religious, etc.—are also valued in the process of becoming of his philosophy.

B. Process Philosophy and the Paticcasamuppāda

The comparison will be made between Process philosophy, particularly the metaphysical theory of “relatedness of all realities,” and the Paticcasamuppāda, or dependent origination, in Buddhism. First, we will discuss the main concepts in Process philosophy and theology, mainly from the works of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, on the relatedness or penetration of

306 Ibid., p. 16.
all actual entities and their relation to the creativity of God. Secondly, the idea of *Paticcasamuppāda*, (dependent origination) or the circle of causation in Buddhism will be introduced and discussed. Finally, the comparison between Process philosophy and theology and the *Paticcasamuppāda*, will be discussed and analyzed both in their common ground and different ground.

1. **Process Philosophy and Theology**

We will discuss the metaphysics of Process philosophy, particularly from Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*, and its application to the concept of God in Process theology, especially in the work of Charles Hartshorne. We will analyze Process philosophy and theology in the essential points as follows:

(1) The most fundamental element is called ‘actual entity’ or ‘actual occasion.’ One of the most basic ideas in Process philosophy is that “to be actual is to be a process.” Therefore, all actual entities, or all actual occasions, are in process. In Whitehead’s words, “That the actual world is a process, and that the process is the becoming of actual entities. Thus actual entities are creatures; they are also termed ‘actual occasions.’”

Every actual entity is a ‘transition’ from the previous actual entity. It comes into being and it perishes. At the time of perishing, it transits to the next actual entity. All actual

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entity is just momentary event. “The temporal process is a ‘transition’ from one actual entity to another. These entities are momentary events which perish immediately upon coming into being. The perishing marks the transition to the succeeding events.”

(2) The series of transition from one actual occasion (‘actual entity,’ ‘true individual,’ or ‘occasion of experience’) to another actual occasion is called ‘society’ (or ‘nexus’) of actual occasions. The society is temporal process. The true individuals are momentary experiences. “What we ordinarily call individuals, the sorts of things that endure through time, are not true individuals, but are ‘societies’ of such. Personal human existence is a ‘serially ordered society’ of occasions of experience.”

(3) The actual occasions are themselves processes. From the coming into being of an actual occasion to its perishing is “to become,” or in Whiteheadian term ‘concrecence’ (becoming concrete), and the becoming (‘concrecence’) of an actual occasion itself is process. “They are not to be understood as things that endure through a tiny bit of time unchanged, but as taking that bit of time to become.”

(4) In the moment of concrescence, each unit of process ‘enjoys’ ‘subjective immediacy.’ In the concres-

309 Ibid., p. 15.
310 Ibid.,
ence of an actual occasion, i.e., from its beginning to its perishing, the actual occasion has ‘enjoyment’ of its ‘subjective immediacy’ (its very momentary existence). The ‘enjoyment’ of the actual occasion is not necessarily conscious. “All experience is enjoyment. To be actual is to be an occasion of experience and hence an occasion of enjoyment... All actualities experience, but only a few experiences rise to the level of consciousness.”

(5) A momentary experience is essentially related to a previous experience. The relations are primary. In the transition from the previous actual occasion to the present actual occasion, the present occasion receives influence (or ‘essence’) from the previous occasion. In Whiteheadian terminology, the actual occasion ‘prehends’ or ‘feels’ the previous occasion (datum). The ‘prehension’ or ‘feeling’ is the primary relation of the present occasion towards the past occasion. At the perishing of the past occasion, it ‘opens window’ to the new occasion. At the beginning of the present occasion, it also ‘opens window’ to receive ‘essence’ from the datum, then it ‘closes window’ to enjoy its subjective immediacy in the moment of concrescence, and ‘opens window’ again to pass the essence to the next occasion. As Cobb and Griffin put it,

In such a stream of occasions, a ‘defining essence’ of that stream may arise, representing the characteristics that apply to each member

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311 Ibid., p. 17.
of the stream. But this enduring stream with its stable essence is an abstraction in comparison with the individual occasions themselves, which alone are fully concrete individuals.\textsuperscript{312}

...the perfection of human life involves maximizing our relatedness to others, and hence our dependence upon them... our concrete moments of experience are richer to the extent that they include others and are thereby dependent upon them... Humans are understood as essentially belonging to a community.\textsuperscript{313}

(6) To prehend a past experience is to include (or to ‘incarnate’) it. When the present occasion prehends the past occasion, the former includes in itself the ‘essence’ of the later. The ‘essence’ to be included is called ‘objective immortality.’

We influence each other by entering into each other... Interrelations are internal to things.\textsuperscript{314}

The notion that the causation between two actualities involves the incarnation of the cause into the effect also has obvious relevance to the question of how God influences the world in

\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., pp. 21-22.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid. p. 24.
general, and of how God was related to Jesus in particular.315

(7) The processes of enjoyment are partially self-creative and self-expressive. The present occasionprehends the essence of the past occasion, and in the moment of concrescence the present occasion enjoys ‘self-creation’ within itself and has ‘self-expression’ for the next occasion. The self-creation and self-expression are called ‘subjective aim.’ ‘Subjective aim’ is ‘novelty’ from God. God provides the lure (‘initial aim’) with ‘novelty’ to the ‘subjective aim’ (self-creation and self-expression) of the actual occasion. Cobb and Griffin say:

Whitehead allows us to conceive both freedom and efficient causation without contradiction.316

The possibilities that were previously unactualized in the world are derived from the divine experience... the divine reality is understood to be the ground of novelty.317

(8) God-relatedness is constitutive of every occasion of experience. The self-creation and the self-expression of an actual occasion which are the novel elements come from God, the divine reality. So ‘novelty’ is the constitutive element from God-relatedness. Charles Hartshorne, one of the greatest Process theologians, stated:

315 Ibid.
316 Ibid., p. 25.
317 Ibid., p. 28.
...that man contains God, and that God contains man... God is more inclusive than man in that the God who coexists with man is only God during a certain portion of his everlasting endurance.\textsuperscript{318}

God, as well as man, is a social being... He is in earnest when he enters into social relations with us creatures. These relations go to the center of his being, as they go to the center of ours.\textsuperscript{319}

For Hartshorne, God provides the novelty to an actual occasion with freedom and persuasion, not with control.

This does not restrict the freedom of the occasion. On the contrary, apart from God there would be no freedom... Although this divine power is per-suasive rather than controlling, it is nevertheless finally the most effective power in reality.\textsuperscript{320}

**B. The Paticcasamuppāda**

In this section, we will discuss the law of “relativity” in Buddhism in order to provide the ground for its comparison to Whitehead’s Process philosophy. The law of “cause and effect” plays a great role in Buddhism, i.e., from

\textsuperscript{318} Hartshorne, \textit{The Divine Relativity}, pp. 93-94.
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{320} Cobb and Griffin, \textit{Process Theology}, p. 29.
Buddhist perspective nothing can arise by itself without any previous cause, nothing absolutely exists without being related to all other things. All the dharmas (‘entities’) are subjected to the law of “cause and effect.” In Buddhist terminology, this law of “cause and effect” is named in many different ways, e.g., Tathatā (objectivity), Avitathatā (necessity), Anaññathatā (invariability), Idappaccayatā (conditionality), and Paticcasamuppāda (dependent origination).321

The Idappaccayatā (conditionality) provides the most basic principle for every dharma (‘entities’) in the whole universe. Its principle schematizes the abstract formula of the whole sequence of the law of “cause and effect,” showing the logic of it without the contents, as follows:

That being thus this comes to be;
from the coming to be of that, this arises;
that being absent, this does not happen;
from the cessation of that, this ceases.322

To put it into a modern logical form:
When A is, B is;
A arising, B arises;
When A is not, B is not;
A ceasing, B ceases.323

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321 Rajavaramuni, Buddha-dhāmma, p. 33.
322 Saddhatissa, Buddhist Ethics, p. 37.
In this formula we can see clearly that the first two lines are the “cause and effect” of things arising, and the last two lines are the “cause and effect” of things ceasing. This formula is very important in Buddhism, because it can explain not only the relatedness of all things in the universe, but also the practical aspect of Buddhism, i.e., the teachings of the Buddha pointing directly to the arising and the ceasing of dukkha (suffering).

The Idappaccayatā (conditionality) is the universal law of relativity in Buddhism from which the Paticcasamuppāda (dependent origination) derives. The Idappaccayatā (conditionality) is broader in the sense that its principle of relativity covers anything whatsoever in the universe, while the Paticcasamuppāda (dependent origination) specifically refers to the principle of relativity in the realm of sentient-beings, particularly human being, both in the cosmological and the psychological aspects.

On this principle of conditionality, relativity and interdependence, the whole existence and continuity of life and its cessation are explained in a detailed formula of the Paticcasamuppāda (dependent origination), consisting of twelve factors:

1. ‘Ignorance’ (avijjā) arising, ‘volitional activities’ (sankhāra) arise.
2. ‘Volitional activities’ arising, ‘consciousness’ (viññāna) arises.
(3) ‘Consciousness’ arising, ‘animated organism’ (nāma-rūpa) arises.

(4) ‘Animated organism’ arising, ‘the six sense organs’ (salāyatana) arise.

(5) ‘The six sense organs’ arising, ‘contact’ (phassa) arises.

(6) ‘Contact’ arising, ‘feeling’ (vedanā) arises.

(7) ‘Feeling’ arising, ‘craving’ (tanha) arises.

(8) ‘Craving’ arising, ‘attachment’ (upadāna) arises.

(9) ‘Attachment’ arising, ‘process of becoming’ (bhava) arises.


(11) ‘Birth’ arising, ‘decay and death’ (jarā-marana), including sickness, sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair, arise.

(12) ‘Decay and death’ (sickness, sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair) arising, ‘ignorance’ arise again.\(^{324}\)

This is the Paticcasamuppāda in the arising aspect—the aspect analyzing how dukkha (suffering) arises in one’s life. There is, however, another aspect of the Paticcasamuppāda, i.e., the ceasing aspect, which leads to the cessation of dukkha (suffering) in one’s life. The ceasing aspect is just the reverse dimension of the arising aspect. It goes like this:

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\(^{324}\) Rajavaramini, *Buddha-dhāmma*, pp. 67-68.
When ‘ignorance’ ceases, ‘volitional activities’ cease, and so do ‘consciousness,’ ‘animated organism,’ ‘the six sense organs,’ ‘contact,’ ‘feeling,’ ‘craving,’ ‘attachment,’ ‘process of becoming,’ ‘birth,’ ‘decay and death’ (including sickness, sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair) respectively.

We can see from this circle of causation that ‘ignorance’ is the root cause of suffering. When ‘ignorance’ arises, the whole circle of Paticcasamuppāda arises and it results in ‘suffering.’ When ‘ignorance’ ceases, the circle of Paticcasamuppāda ceases accordingly, and it results in the cessation of suffering. It should be remembered that each of these factors is conditioned (Paticcasamuppāda) as well as conditioning (Paticcasamuppāda). Therefore they are all relative and interdependent. Although we start with ‘ignorance,’ ‘ignorance’ is also conditioned by ‘decay and death,’ etc.; hence no first cause is accepted by Buddhism. The Paticcasamuppāda should be considered as a circle, and not as a chain.325

As mentioned earlier, the Paticcasamuppāda has been viewed both in the cosmological aspect, i.e., the endless circle of birth and death (saṃsāra) of all sentient-beings who still have ignorance, and in the psychological aspect, i.e., the endless circle of mental suffering of those who still have ignorance. It is from the cosmological aspect

325 Rahula, What The Buddha Taught, p. 54.
that some Buddhist schools, both in Theravada and Mahayana traditions, have attempted to render a metaphysical and ontological explanation of the circle of rebirth based on the circle of *Paticcasamuppāda*. The circle of rebirth repeats itself until one is enlightened, i.e., one is completely free from ignorance.

From the psychological aspect, the circle of *Paticcasamuppāda* is a circle of dukkha-arising in one’s mind. It is the psychological rebirth which occurs every time one has dukkha arising in one's mind in this very life. From this psychological perspective, the circle of *Paticcasamuppāda* can occur many times a day in one’s mind. The *saṃsāra* (rebirth) is there at any moment that dukkha (suffering) arises in one’s mind, and the *nirvāna* (cessation of suffering) is also there at any moment that dukkha ceases in this very life. So *saṃsāra* is the arising aspect and *nirvāna* is the ceasing aspect of the *Paticcasamuppāda* in this very life, they are the two sides of the same coin and are not to be separated. This psychological interpretation of the *Paticcasamuppāda* is mainly based on the works of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, one of the greatest thinkers in contemporary Thai Buddhism.326

**C. The Comparison**

In this section the attempt will be made to compare Whitehead’s Process philosophy to Buddhist doctrine of the

326 For more details, see Buddhadasa, *Paticcasamuppāda Khe Arai* (What is *Paticcasamuppāda*).
There are various ways to look at the issue. First, while Whitehead’s Process metaphysics of the relatedness of all actual entities is regarded as “chain” of penetration from past to present and from present to future in a linear way, the *Paticcasamuppāda*, on the other hand, is regarded as a “circle” in which one factor conditions another factor respectively in such a way that the last factor conditions the first factor again.

Secondly, while the Process philosophy of the relatedness or penetration of all actual entities is metaphysical and ontological, the *Paticcasamuppāda*, or the dependent origination, is rather cosmological and psychological. Both the cosmological and psychological aspects of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, are successfully viewed from the Process metaphysical theory.

Thirdly, while the arising aspect of *Paticcasamuppāda*, is within a space and time dimension, the ceasing aspect—the reversed side—is beyond space-time dimension; hence the Hua-Yen Buddhist principle of ‘interpenetration’ can be introduced here to parallel with the ceasing aspect of the *Paticcasamuppāda*. By viewing the *Paticcasamuppāda*, into two dimensions, the comparison between Whitehead’s ‘cumulative penetration’ and Buddhist ‘interpenetration’ can be made.

**3.1 The ‘Chain’ in Process Metaphysics and the ‘Circle’ of Paticcasamuppāda,**

The relatedness or “cumulative penetration” in
Whitehead’s Process metaphysics is like a chain. One actual entity ‘transits’ to another actual entity in a linear way like a chain. The present actual occasion (or actual entity) ‘feels’ or ‘prehends’ the past occasion; in other words, the past occasion ‘objectifies’ the present occasion. In the process of ‘prehension’ or ‘objectification,’ the past occasion passes on its essence to the present occasion. When the present occasion receives essence from the past occasion, it ‘enjoys’ its own ‘subjective immediacy.’ This ‘enjoyment’ is its becoming or ‘concrescence.’ The essence which has been passed on is the occasion’s ‘objective immortality.’ In this way, the relation of all actual occasions is like a chain, their relatedness is “cumulative penetration,” i.e., they penetrate from past to present and from present to future.

On the contrary, the relation of the twelve factors in the *Paticcasamuppāda*, is like a circle. We start the circle of *Paticcasamuppāda*, with ‘ignorance.’ Through ‘ignorance’ are conditioned ‘volitional activities.’ Through ‘volitional activities’ is conditioned ‘consciousness.’ Through ‘consciousness’ is conditioned ‘animated organism.’ Through ‘animated organism’ are conditioned ‘the six sense organs.’ Through ‘the six sense organs’ is conditioned ‘contact.’ Through ‘contact’ is conditioned ‘feeling.’ Through ‘feeling’ is conditioned ‘craving.’ Through ‘craving’ is conditioned ‘attachment.’ Through ‘attachment’ is conditioned the ‘process of becoming.’ Through the ‘process of becoming’ is conditioned ‘birth.’
Through ‘birth’ are conditioned ‘decay and death,’ including sickness, sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair. And through ‘decay and death,’ etc., is conditioned ‘ignorance’ again. So the circle of *Paticcasamuppāda*, moves in this circular direction endlessly.

Even though both theories are different in the way they move, they share something in common, i.e., the factors or the ‘occasions’ are *conditioned* as well as *conditioning*. The present occasion is influenced by the previous occasion and at the time of its completion it influences the next occasion.

### 3.2 The *Paticcasamuppāda* as Viewed by Process Metaphysics

As mentioned earlier that the *Paticcasamuppāda*, has been interpreted in two aspects: the first is cosmological aspect, and the second is psychological aspect. By cosmological aspect, it is the metaphysical speculation of the continuity of life after death in such a way that unless one is completely free from ‘ignorance,’ and thus is enlightened, one falls into the endless circle of birth and death represented by the circle of *Paticcasamuppāda*. By psychological aspect, this endless circle of birth and death is interpreted as the endless circle of sufferings in one’s own mind, also represented by the circle of the *Paticcasamuppāda*.

From Process metaphysical perspective, each
occasion of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, prehends the previous occasion. After it completes its enjoyment or concrescence, it objectifies the next occasion. For example, the ‘volitional activities’ prehends ‘ignorance,’ and after it enjoys its subjective immediacy or the concrescence, it objectifies or conditions the next occasion, ‘consciousness.’ Again ‘animated organism’ prehends ‘consciousness’ and at the moment of its completion it objectifies ‘the six sense organs,’ etc. Finally, ‘decay and death’ prehend ‘birth’ and at the time when they are completed, they (‘decay and death’ including sickness, sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair) objectify ‘ignorance’. And the whole process repeats itself. In this way the whole circle of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, can be explained through Process metaphysics. Process metaphysics can fit very well in explaining the “cause and effect” or the conditioning and conditioned of each occasion of the *Paticcasamuppāda*.

3.3 “Cumulative Penetration” and “Interpenetration”

The arising aspect of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, as it falls into the law of “cause and effect,” is regarded as within the space-and-time dimension. In this dimension, each occasion in the *Paticcasamuppāda*, orderly penetrates the next occasion. Though all the occasions in the *Paticcasamuppāda*, penetrate in circular order, they can be successfully applied by theory of “Cumulative Penetration” in Process metaphysics.
On the other hand, the ceasing aspect of the _Paticcasamuppāda_, as it goes beyond the law of “cause and effect” at the end of the process, is regarded as beyond the space-time dimension. In this dimension, the “non-self” (_anattā_) experience and all the actual entities in the universe are identical. Here the principle of “interpenetration” in Hua-Yen Buddhism can be introduced. The “interpenetration” in Hua-Yen and the ceasing aspect of the _Paticcasamuppāda_, are identical. Within the arising aspect of the _Paticcasamuppāda_, all occasions fall into the endless circle which is within space-time dimension. In this case we can call the way, in which all occasions orderly influence one another in the same direction, “cumulative penetration.” Therefore, the _Paticcasamuppāda_, within space-time dimension shares the same characteristics with the “cumulative penetration” in Process metaphysics.

However, the other aspect, i.e., the ceasing aspect of the _Paticcasamuppāda_, has a totally different dimension. In the process of its ceasing, it follows the law of “cause and effect,” e.g., ‘ignorance’ ceasing, ‘volitional activities’ cease, etc. Once the circle of _Paticcasamuppāda_, is broken, it no longer exists for that particular person or being. This means that he or she is beyond the circle of _Paticcasamuppāda_, hence he or she is the Dharma (‘Truth’) which is beyond space-time dimension. In the experience of the Dharma, there is no past, present, or future; the time dimension is totally overcome. In the Dharma experience, every where is
the land of the Buddha; hence the space dimension is also overcome. In this dimension, all occasions in past, present, or future interpenetrate one another. This is parallel to the principle of “interpenetration” in Hua-Yen Buddhism.

Now we turn to Process metaphysics, where each occasion in the chain of Process metaphysics penetrates the next occasion in the order of time, i.e., past, present, and future. This chain falls within the space-time dimension, so the aspect of penetration of all occasion is what Steve Odin calls “cumulative penetration.” However, there is another aspect in this chain of Process metaphysics, i.e., the ‘novelty’ from God. God’s novelty is totally beyond the “cumulative penetration” of the chain; it is totally new and creative. From this perspective, God’s novelty is beyond space-time dimension.

God has two characteristics, i.e., Primordial Nature (God prehends ‘eternal object’), and Consequence Nature (God is ‘actual entity’). In the Primordial Nature, God is the source of all novelty and creativity. God’s ‘initial aim,’ i.e., novelty and creativity, is the source and inspiration for an actual occasion’s ‘subjective aim,’ i.e., self-creativity and self-expression. God in his Primordial Nature is beyond space-time dimension, so is His ‘initial aim;’ hence novelty and creativity are beyond space-time dimension. If an actual occasion is totally ‘open’ to God’s ‘initial aim,’ its novelty

327 Odin, Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism, p. ix.
and creativity will be beyond space-time dimension as well. So in the chain of “cumulative penetration,” an actual occasion might have two aspects, i.e., it prehends the past occasion (within space-time dimension) as well as God’s novelty (beyond space-time dimension). Therefore, the difference between Buddhist “interpenetration” and Process metaphysical “cumulative penetration” is not as sharply contrast as pointed out by Steve Odin in his book *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism*.328

In conclusion, the first part presents the central ideas of Whitehead’s Process metaphysics and some notion from Hartshorne’s Process theology. In the relatedness of all actual occasions, each actual occasion receives ‘novelty’ from the Primordial Nature of God; hence in the relativity of all actual entities, there is also creativity. In the second part, the concept of *Paticcasamuppāda*, (dependent origination) and the more general concept of *Idappaccaya-yatā* (conditionality) in Buddhism are introduced and discussed. All the factors in the *Paticcasamuppāda*, are conditioned as well as conditioning, so the *Paticcasamuppāda*, moves in a circular order rather than in a linear order. Two aspects of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, are discussed, i.e., the cosmological and the psychological aspects.

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328 Ibid., p. 3.
The third part is devoted to present the comparison between Process metaphysics and the *Paticcasamuppāda*, under three topics:

(1) The different characteristics of the relatedness between Process metaphysics and the *Paticcasamuppāda*, are pointed out. While the relatedness of all actual occasions in Process metaphysics is in linear order, like a chain, the relatedness of all factors in the *Paticcasamuppāda*, is in circular order, like a circle, it moves without beginning and end.

(2) *Paticcasamuppāda*, both in the cosmological and psychological aspects, can be explained by Process metaphysics. Each actual occasion in the *Paticcasamuppāda*, prehends the previous occasion, hence is conditioned by the previous occasion. In the completion of its conscrecence the actual occasion objectifies the next occasion, hence conditions the next occasion. The related characteristics of both theories can fit each other very well.

(3) Two dimensions are introduced, i.e., the space-time dimension and the beyond space-time dimension, in order to explain the different between “cumulative penetration” and “interpenetration.” The arising aspect of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, which is within space-time dimension, can fit very well with the “cumulative penetration” in Process metaphysics as discussed in the second topic. However, the ceasing aspect of the *Paticcasamuppāda*, which is regarded as beyond space-time...
dimension for it overcomes space ("everywhere is the Buddha land") and time ("in the Dharma experience there is no past, present or future"), is "interpenetration."

In Process metaphysics there is some notion of beyond space-time dimension as well because an actual occasion receives ‘novelty’ from God in his Primordial Nature which is beyond space-time dimension. So the relatedness among all actual occasions is “cumulative penetration,” but the relatedness of an actual occasion to the initial aim (‘novelty’) of God is “interpenetration” in some sense as well.


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