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Ferrying Across the Flood: The Ethics of the Dhamma-Vinyana as the Basis of Buddhist Development Theory and Practice

Sam Grey, *University of Victoria*



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Ferrying Across the Flood

The Ethics of the *Dhamma-Vinyana* as the Basis of
Buddhist Development Theory and Practice

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Honours Thesis
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“Life is lived in mutual dependence, for ferrying across the flood, for the utter cessation of suffering.”

~Phra Rajavaramuni (1985, p.37)

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Introduction

Unfolding from the Inside Out

The question of what makes life good, from the perspective of the person living it, has been a central issue in ethics since the Greek philosophers first began to contemplate *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing. Development is, in its most general sense – and indeed, at its very core – about such human flourishing, and the struggle to define and secure ‘the good life’. Boiled right down, the simplest and most widely accepted definition of development may well be, as Dower offers, “a process of socio-economic change which ought to happen” (1998, p.154). And if development can be conceived of normatively, as *desirable* socio-economic change, then advocacy for certain types of change is best described using the language of ethics (Crocker, 1998b). It does not take an exhaustive examination of the history of development to reveal that, in fact, moral language has always played a part; the discourse is rife with positive adjectives such as ‘good,’ ‘equitable,’ ‘sustainable,’ and ‘justified.’ There can even be said to be a rough moral consensus on the issue of the desirability of upwardly-oriented socio-economic change, evidenced by the drafting of the United Nations *Declaration on the Right to Development* (1986). In development theory and practice, normative goals would seem to abound. These goals are forfeit, however, when development erodes local values, institutions, ways of knowing, networks of solidarity, natural environments, and the many and diverse elements of culture that give life meaning. Unfortunately, the question is not *whether* this happens, but *why*.

Ethics, Development, and Human Flourishing

A robust theory of development will have prescriptive, descriptive, interpretive, explanatory, and predictive tasks to perform (Crocker, 1991b). Each of these possesses strong valuational dimensions. In the effort to more meaningfully engage with questions of social and economic improvement, then, a coherent ethical framework is a decided asset. Normative theories help to make legible the many and varied accounts of the values and norms involved in development, how these vary across contexts, and how they are impacted by (and in turn impact) local and global phenomena (Dower, 1998). These normative theories aspire to describe a “desirable harmony and integration of several different areas of human concern,” including identifying which of these have an overriding claim on our attention and resources (Premasiri, 1996, par.3). Grounding ethical criteria in an underlying theory of justice, rather than allowing them to exist merely as a scattered set of ad-hoc principles, not only provides coherent

moral justification for action, but also reveals any dissonance between professed intent, embedded virtue, and concrete outcome. This proves especially useful in penetrating the kinds of alternatively banal and hyperbolic rhetoric to which development policy and practice have been particularly vulnerable. Finally, the use of ethical theory permits movement away from a strict focus on those moral issues that are relevant only to the poorest countries, to consider development as a continual process in which all societies are engaged. Such a shift counters the tendency to, as Loy puts it, “[reduce] the *good* to the *amount*.” (2003b, p.9). By focusing the goals of development through an ethical lens, human needs are perceived not as merely physical or material, but also cultural, affective, social, spiritual, and psychological.

There has been significant resistance to the substantive and explicit inclusion of ethics in development, emanating from the fortified domains of “moral scepticism, political realism, [...] moral relativism, value neutrality in the social sciences, and the utilitarian assumptions of economics” (Crocker, 1991b). Many of these ideologies are the ‘problem children’ of Anglo-American secular rationalism, conditioned with a prudentialism that has allowed some rather poor philosophical habits to flourish in Western applied ethics. The bifurcation of ends and means, for example, has effectively created two distinct, stepwise processes of analysis in development ethics. This kind of ‘moral reasoning by degrees’ has greatly hindered any substantive, whole-cloth assessment of development theories, tools, or paradigms. An accompanying shift to the empirical and practical, away from the normative, has been marked by a proliferation of micro-level and hyper-specific analyses, fragmentation of potentially holistic approaches, theoretical abstraction, and a panoply of professional and academic specializations. In development theory and practice, moral claims and arguments are used principally in mounting a critique, which may or may not lead to tinkering with the prevailing paradigm(s). Seldom, if ever, are they used to invoke a *tabula rasa* and foster a renewal of ethical reflection.

Needless to say, different development theories are founded upon distinct views of human nature, legitimate authority, deprivation, the roots of ‘underdevelopment,’ and the norms that should guide societal interaction – all of which combine to produce a particular idea of ‘the good life.’ Any thick conceptualization of this ‘good life,’ or of what is necessary to foster human flourishing, is very likely heavily influenced by local traditions and cultural values. As a result, it seems likely that the process of desirable socio-economic change would be best mediated by those same traditions and values. Of course, this mediation should not be framed in terms of authenticity, a concept which is principally employed to

create divisions and which relies on problematic appeals to authority and the erroneous assertion that any modern culture is insular to a significant degree. Recognizing that ‘today’ is the bridge that links ‘tomorrow’ and ‘yesterday,’ we find every culture engaged in a perpetual dialogue with its own past and future. Unfortunately, the dominant discourse has, through deployment of overly narrow terms, presented a false dichotomy in which ‘underdeveloped’ societies must either erase the past (tradition) or forego the future (development). This kind of claim – typically implied, rather than uttered plainly – is best countered from *within* than *without*. Such a realization moves the reader to seek out development ethics formulated outside of the Anglo-American philosophical climate.

Introduction to the Work at Hand

The work contained herein sets itself the task of analysing the theory and practice of Buddhist development at various levels of abstraction: from fundamental tenets, to the general goals and models that describe those tenets, to the specific strategies that flesh out the goals and models. Buddhist ethics find expression in development in both theory (as development critique, social theory, and economics) and practice (typically as localized initiatives). Revealed to be a unique form of virtue ethics, they are the foundation of the many development approaches and frameworks categorized as essentially ‘Buddhist.’ The approach taken in this analysis is both philosophical (in that the paradigm is presented through careful elaboration from basic principles) and anthropological (in that this elaboration terminates in a series of case studies). This method differs substantially from most other development ethical approaches, in which the value assumptions of a given paradigm are made visible through criticism from a different theoretical ‘camp’ or rival paradigm. This method also departs from much of the theory-building in development, since theory (and subsequently, practice) is here explicitly formulated in terms of ethical principles. This investigation necessarily takes place at the nexus between religion, ethics, and development, which is not well-travelled terrain either within or outside of academia. In this investigation an approach via ethics is purposefully adopted, not in order to circumvent the transmundane or to assert that all ontological needs can be reduced to the secular and psycho-social, but in order to reveal the rational moral basis for faith-based advocacy aimed at desirable socio-economic change. Such a method dissolves claims that ‘religious’ understandings and initiatives are illogical, inscrutable, or worship-centred, and thus champions their inclusion in normative, contemporary views of human flourishing.

Because there is no separate sphere of ethics in Buddhism thought or action, Buddhist development is – quite simply – the application of ethics to the issues of ‘underdevelopment.’ All Buddhist practice, regardless of the specific form or tradition, is the search for release from suffering, while Buddhist ethics “orient [...] virtue at the intersection between the lesser goods of the day-to-day world and the greatest good or highest goal of human flourishing” (Swearer, 1998, p.97). This strongly suggests that Buddhist ethics can be framed as development ethics proper, since it is possible to map remarkably similar concepts across both fields: ‘flourishing’ and ‘development;’ ‘suffering’ and ‘underdevelopment;’ a link between the satisfaction of material/physical needs and the pursuit of the greater good; and the idea that both ‘cultivating virtue’ and ‘developing’ are lived processes rather than static goals. This work responds to such a suggested connection by establishing not that Buddhist ethics *may*, but that it *does* give rise – with a surprising immediacy and fluidity – to a particularly robust ethics of development.

An obvious caveat is that there is no one Buddhist voice or view – even more so because there is no international organization, no governing body, and no leader that unites all of the Buddhist traditions. Indeed, there is no one ‘Buddhism.’ The values, assumptions, goals, and strategies discussed in this work are those common to the many different approaches to development that may be cogently, broadly categorized as ‘Buddhist.’ The general question that runs through the whole of this piece is ‘what normative ethical principles does Buddhism provide, and how do these find expression in development theory and practice?’ To this end, Chapter One provides a detailed account of Buddhist ethics, beginning at the level of the individual and moving on to examine the societal level, as well as the interplay between the person and the community. This progression is thoroughly Buddhist; development theorists informed by the *dhamma* (Buddhist doctrine) assert that “[w]ithout a strong sense of personal ethics, societies require an unacceptable level of policing and contracts; and without a strong sense of personal responsibility it is inevitable that costs will be shunted out on to the natural environment and on to future generations” (Sivaraksa, 1998, par.13). This chapter is both lengthy and detailed, in recognition of the fact that the Buddhist value system, including the *dhamma* (doctrine) and *vinyana* (practice), is frequently misunderstood by Western readers and misrepresented by Western authors. In addition, this section introduces the foreign (and quite complex) terms, concepts, and frameworks that are used throughout the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two presents the preliminary strokes of a Buddhist theory of development by combining Buddhist critiques of mainstream development with relevant aspects of Buddhist social theory and Buddhist economics. Because each of these three separate endeavours is firmly rooted in Buddhist ethics, the

resulting theory is both highly internally consistent and explicitly ethical in nature. These characteristics set Buddhist development apart from other paradigms – including those that are best positioned to make claims of ethical content and philosophical consistency (such as ‘sustainable development’ and ‘participatory development’). In devising economic and social theories, and bringing them to bear on development-related issues, Buddhist scholars are always cognisant of the fact that Western society has not proved able to solve its problems in a way that lives up to its own expressed socio-political ideals, and yet has exported those ideas all over the world. It is important, however, not to portray Buddhist development theory as merely reactive, or as positioning itself as the antithesis to the conventional Western model(s). Sivaraksa (1996), in explaining the danger of adopting such a reactive pose, writes, “[t]he West has both strengths and weaknesses, but those who admire or despise the West uncritically are bound to misunderstand it or wrongly imitate it” (p.2). Chapter Two identifies key sites of Buddhist struggles for desirable socio-economic change, including, *inter alia*: the natural environment; local, national, and global politics; class and gender hierarchies; and economic systems. Relatedly, the principal tensions driving change (and inspiring resistance to change) are posited as consumerism vs. voluntary simplicity; communalism vs. individualism; internal focus vs. social engagement; tradition vs. modernity; and the rural-urban divide; among others.¹

Crocker (1991a) calls the application of a specific ethical system to questions of development a “prima facie right” of cultures (p.158). Many other development ethicists, theorists, and practitioners agree, maintaining that desirable social change can only be defined using local, familiar concepts and values, and with reference to the historical processes at work in a given socio-cultural setting. Accordingly, Chapter Three presents a series of focused case studies culled from the same milieu: that of Thai Theravada Buddhist communities in the 1980s and 1990s. Locking down this many aspects of the context (using a fixed national, religious (sect), cultural, and temporal space), reveals how Buddhist development is enacted differently by different individuals even when drawing upon similar cultural understandings and acting under comparable political and social pressures. It also throws into sharp relief the ‘unfixed’ aspects of the context, since in these cases, the class and educational backgrounds of the actors vary considerably, as do the resource constraints they face. The case studies thus testify to the range of choices created when Buddhist ethical principles are applied by specific individuals and groups, using their own experiences, to questions of development. They also form the last link in the chain this work set about

¹ Acknowledging that these are, of course, imperfect binaries.

to fashion: showing how a relatively straightforward progression from ethical theory, to development analysis and planning, to development initiatives in the field results in the clarity and consistency of Buddhist development theory and practice.

Buddhist development theory and practice establishes that it is possible to deliberately ground theoretical and actual socio-economic change in clear normative principles, joining the inwardly-oriented realm of personal morality and the outwardly-oriented realm of ethical social engagement. Further, it reveals the sought-after link between theory and practice, the element that gives rise to consistency, to be ethics, which “translate thought into action, world views into movements” (Merchant, 1992, p.62). In Buddhist development theory and practice, as in Buddhist ethics, intention is carried forward to consequence in a clear, ‘mappable’ fashion, so that that the fruits of any goal, strategy, or action bear the stamp of the values that inspired them. This creates a truly alternative vision, in that it is highly internally consistent; that it is rational, and therefore legible to a wide array of development theorists and practitioners; and that it makes plain its ethical foundation and commitments. Deep inside, at the very heart of Buddhist conceptualizations of human flourishing, can be found the ethics of the *dhamma-vinyana* (Buddhist theory-practice) – and as Gohlert asserts, “development is the process of unfolding from the inside out” (1991, p.189).

Chapter One

From Religion to Morality: Elaborating Buddhist Ethics

In most Asian cultures there is no obvious (nor necessary) separation between religion and philosophy, and hence religion and ethics, since both are seen as integrated aspects of a life oriented toward “the greatest possible human perfection” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.133). Buddhism, one of the major Eastern religions, is non-theistic in the absence of a god figure; its founder, the Buddha, is held up as a teacher and exemplar who was thoroughly human, and whose insights were (and still are) theoretically possible for any human to attain. Hence Buddhism is often portrayed as a philosophy or psychology, or as having significant philosophical and psychological elements that can be applied outside of religious practice. The central doctrines of Buddhism, found in every tradition, are known as the Four Noble Truths (which explain the nature of reality and goal of human existence) and the Eightfold Path (the means by which anyone can achieve that goal). In these teachings-as-practices can be found the fundamental principles of Buddhist ethics, as they describe the role of wisdom, through right understanding and right thought; awareness, through right effort, right mindfulness, and right focus; and morality, through right action, right speech, and right livelihood; in the achievement of a teleological *summum bonum* (Keown, 1992). Although it shares certain features with Kantianism, rule utilitarianism, religious or ‘commandment-based’ systems, and the feminist ethics of care, it is this focus on the development of the individual-within-society that marks Buddhism as espousing a kind of virtue ethics. In this unique system, “the highest moral and spiritual ideals are acquired primarily through practice, example, and life in community” (Swearer, 1998, p.98). Indeed, given the profoundly social orientation of all of his teachings, it can be said that “the religion of the Buddha is morality” (King, 1964, p.177).

The Founding and Ontology of Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in what is now Nepal, some 2,500 years ago, by Siddhartha Gautama (“Buddhism,” 2006). Born into nobility in 563 BCE, Siddhartha was motivated by human suffering to abandon his life of extreme privilege and embark upon a lifelong personal investigation of the causes, nature, and possible cessation of that suffering. The specific forms of suffering that initially motivated Siddhartha to renounce the world were illness, old age, and death. This triad was soon extended to include the kinds of emotional and existential distress that are invariably a part of human life – those omnipresent conditions which are “unpleasant, depressing, and difficult to bear, always contrary, causing problems,

unsatisfaction, [...] pain and sorrow [...]” (Pongsapich, 1985, p.26). In short, his focus was on suffering as a phenomenon, rather than as an occurrence.

Siddhartha’s initial realization was that each of these conditions was known to every human being; no one was exempt (Koller & Koller, 1998). He noted that this realization, in itself, relieved a certain share of the individual’s suffering (Sivaraksa, 1992). Unfortunately, in addition to being vulnerable to suffering, human beings were also locked in a cycle rebirth, governed by the cause-and-effect dictates of *kamma*, that meant that all of life’s sufferings had to be endured again, and again, and again (Little & Twiss, 1992). A series of attempts at transcending suffering, including extremely demanding yogic and ascetic practices, proved to be little more than a distraction, merely blocking *awareness* of the inevitability of pain, illness, decrepitude, and death (Koller & Koller, 1998). Ultimately, after years of diligent effort, Siddhartha concluded that explanation of, and potential release from these phenomena would prove unattainable through known religious practices. Having experienced firsthand both extremes of the attempt to find fulfilment – the hedonism of his royal life and the asceticism of religious devotion – he resolved to follow a ‘Middle Way.’ Combining elements of the disciplines he had learned, including focusing the mind and restraining the passions, Siddhartha undertook an extended, deep meditative exercise in which he transcended ‘the world of appearances’ (*samsāra*), and realized both the cause of human suffering and the means by which any person might find permanent release therefrom (Koller & Koller, 1998; Little & Twiss, 1992).

The key insight gleaned from this meditation became the cornerstone of Buddhist thought and practice: that the life of the individual is neither discrete nor unchanging (Koller & Koller, 1998). Instead, “human life is a continuous process of change [*anicca*], rising and falling through interdependence with numerous other processes” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.138). All phenomena are interpenetrating, locked together in a web of cause and effect that encompasses the past, present, and future. This principle has become known as *paticcasamuppāda*, or ‘interdependent arising.’ Coincident with this insight was the realization that, when he looked around himself, Siddhartha observed no ‘selves’ whatsoever, but instead five interwoven and ever-changing processes (Pongsapich, 1985):

- (1) Material processes (corporeality)
- (2) Sensory processes (sensation)
- (3) Perceptual processes (perception)
- (4) Volitional processes (will or mental formulation)
- (5) Processes of consciousness (consciousness)

Of everything that constitutes human existence, “nowhere is there found a separate and unchanging self to whom the[se] processes belong” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.142). This has become known as the doctrine of *anattā*, or ‘no-self’ (Little & Twiss, 1992). Instead of a discrete and existent thing, the ‘self’ is a “continual process of consciousness trying to grab hold of itself and objectify itself” (Loy, 1991, p.303). Our sense of that ‘self,’ similarly, is a construct, “composed of automatized, mutually-reinforcing ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” (Loy, 1999, p.6). There is, then, significant confusion between the offerings of mental function and those of experiential reality, giving rise to a schism between the kinds of beings we perceive ourselves to be (individual, continuous, and lasting) and the kinds of beings we actually are (interdependent, mutable, and impermanent). The attempt to construct a ‘self’ (or ‘ego-self’) and fetter it to these five ‘groups of existence’ or ‘aggregates of attachment’ is, of course, doomed to failure – and this is the root of all suffering (Little & Twiss, 1992; Loy, 1991). In its simplest terms, the phenomenal world is characterized by impermanence, suffering, and ‘no-self;’ “this is the Buddhist view of life” (Pongsapich, 1985, p.27).

Rather than proving the impossibility of controlling the factors that shape one’s life, these insights led Siddhartha to intuit that the immediate conditions that cause suffering could, indeed, be observed, acted upon, and overcome. It is ignorance of the fact of interdependent arising that leads to selfishness, since it stems from the misconception that our existence is permanent and separate and can be satisfyingly enriched as such. Selfishness in the form of delusion, malice, or greed leads to the feelings, speech, and deeds that cause (or that we equate with) suffering. When perceptions and motivations stem from self-need (the urges of the ‘acquisitive ego’ or ‘ego-self’), even when one attempts to ‘do good’ one becomes a contributor to, and indeed an integral part of, the problem (Jones, 1992). By fostering awareness; controlling negative emotions and inclinations; curbing the acquisitive ego; and shifting motivation from greed, delusion, and malice to love and compassion; the root causes of suffering could be eliminated altogether.

This meditative revelation, dated at approximately 528 BCE, constitutes the enlightenment of Siddhartha, during which he realized *nibbāna*, “the state of liberation beyond craving, attachment (*upādanā*), defilement (*kilesa*), and suffering” (Swearer, 1998, p.88). From this point onward he was known as the Buddha, or ‘enlightened one’ (Koller & Koller, 1998). It is assumed, and of course taught, that in achieving *nibbāna* the Buddha managed to escape not only suffering, but also the cycle of rebirth to which all other human beings were subject. After his enlightenment the Buddha formulated his insights into the causes and elimination of suffering, known collectively as the *dhamma*, and disseminated these

personally up until his passing. Following his death, his immediate disciples formed the first ‘Buddhist’ community (*sangha*), and further edited, discussed, and disseminated the Buddha’s teachings (Matsunami, 1991). With the expansion of the *sangha* into new lands, Buddhism became culturally inflected – indeed, it is one of the strengths of Buddhism that, as it grew in both number of adherents and geographical range, it sought to embrace, rather than supplant, indigenous religions and traditions (Sheng-Yen, 1991). As was inevitable, given this tolerance, certain new adherents interpreted the canonical texts for themselves, either to “revive the founder’s original intentions” or imbue them with local relevance, giving rise to ‘sectarian’ Buddhism (Matsunami, 1991). Two main schools of Buddhism exist today:² *Mahayana* (or ‘Great Vehicle’) Buddhism, practiced in the northern and eastern parts of Asia;³ and *Theravada* (or ‘Lesser Vehicle’) Buddhism, practiced across Southeast Asia.⁴ Buddhism, then, is marked by a longstanding and intrinsic respect for other meta-narratives, whether religious or lay, stemming from a recognition of alternative values and the suitability of culturally-grounded systems. In its spread outward, Buddhism has typically allowed for the full range of expression of ‘competing’ narratives, with elements of a wide array of religious traditions subsequently playing a symbiotic role in Buddhist practice (including Confucianism, Taoism, and animism) (Lancaster, 1991).

Buddhism in general is based upon the teachings of the historical figure Siddhartha Gautama, although the actual example of the Buddha is positioned as the true core of Buddhist practice and is followed as closely as (and in some cases, more closely than) his recorded words. This marks Buddhism as firmly experiential, since without faith, unaided by theoretical assumptions, without regard for ‘facts,’ and bereft of any clear line of inductive or deductive reasoning, “no claims of universal or eternal truth could be made for the Buddha’s [...] knowledge” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.139). The Buddha himself acknowledged that his insight was absolutely direct and personal; further, he asserted that the same epiphany could be had by any other human being.

² A century after the Buddha’s death the schism arose that broke Buddhism into its two main ‘schools.’ The Southern School (Theravada) follows the rules laid out by the First Elders Council, which was convened immediately after the body of the Buddha was cremated. The Northern School (Mahayana) follows, instead, the general advice given by the Buddha (Sivaraksa, 1988).

³ Including Bhutan, China, East Turkistan (Xinjiang), Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Russia, Taiwan, and the former nation-state of Tibet (Berzin, 2006).

⁴ Including Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam (Berzin, 2006).

Core Teachings of the Buddha

Cattāri Ariyasaccāni: The Four Noble Truths

The principle of interdependent arising (sometimes rendered as ‘dependent origination’) lays down the rational foundation on which the central teachings of Buddhism are built – indeed, Buddhism asserts rationality as one of the essential characteristics of humankind. This rationality does, however, differ from that assumed by modern Western (read: techno-scientific) approaches to knowledge, in that metaphysical speculation and experiential or intuitive insights are considered equally valid lines of inquiry. It also differs from the more casual use of the word ‘rational,’ signifying ‘reasonable,’ or that typically used to anthropomorphize economic and/or political phenomena with the intention of naturalizing them (for example, the ‘rationality’ of the market).

The Buddha’s first address after enlightenment, in Banaras (present-day Varanasi, North India), was fittingly called ‘Setting the Wheel of the Law in Motion’ (*Dhammacakkappavattana Suttanta*). In this lecture the Buddha spoke of the Four Noble⁵ Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*), the doctrine that lies at the heart of all subsequent Buddhist teachings. It is a composite principle containing four separate but interrelated aspects, which deal with the truth:

- (1) Of suffering (*dukkha*) – that all existence is suffering;
- (2) Of the conditioned arising of suffering;
- (3) Of the cessation of suffering – that it can be eliminated by addressing its conditions;
and
- (4) Of the path to the cessation of suffering – the ‘Middle Way,’ described by the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*, or simply *magga*).

The First Noble Truth

Dukkha is a Pali word normally translated into English as ‘suffering,’ yet in the Buddhist perspective this translation falls short. *Dukkha* has, for the Buddhist, at least three levels of meaning: ‘suffering,’ ‘unsatisfactoriness,’ and “the inability to live well when at odds with the truth of interdependent arising” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.141). It includes physical, emotional, and existential suffering. In that first address, the Buddha related that,

⁵ The term ‘noble’ here connotes something that, rather than praiseworthy in the abstract, is fundamentally and significantly valuable. See, among others, Koller and Koller.

Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering, dissociation from the pleasant is suffering, not to get what one desires is suffering – in brief the five aggregates of attachment are suffering (Koller & Koller, 1991, p.195).

Suffering, in other words, cannot be avoided. All sentient living beings are subject to it.

The Second Noble Truth

In this life, our intuition that we are without an ‘ego-self’ creates a powerful sense of lack (Loy, 1991). Our yearning for a separate and permanent self is the root of myriad cravings (sometimes given as ‘grasping’ or ‘thirst’), through which we grasp at the five ‘aggregates of attachment,’ trying to ground ourselves and become real. This leads, in turn, to attachment to the pleasures, powers, and possessions of life, in order “to make mine, to affirm me” (Jones, 1992, p.9) and to “incessantly flee the basic experience of angst” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.63). This is actually quite logical, though erroneous thinking, since when we mistake our impermanence and non-self for continuity and individuality, we seek out the conditions we believe will best serve that illusory condition, typically fame, wealth, power, and beauty. Conversely, some react to craving by seeking not self-gratification but a false sense of control through self-mortification, either in the form of religious asceticism or some other type of ecstatic self-denial (White, 1999). The great misfortune is, of course, that we crave to attain what cannot be attained (undeviating gratification) and to avoid what cannot be avoided (pain, loss, decline, and death) (Koller & Koller, 1998). Further, the desire for pleasures or distractions is, unfortunately, self-accelerating, so that instead of slaking our yearning it increases it with every pleasure achieved, every distraction experienced, with the end result that no lasting satisfaction may be gained. As Loy writes, “[t]he tragedy of these objectifications [...] is that (for example) no amount of fame can ever be enough if it is not really fame you want” (Loy, 1991, p.301). Ultimately, seeking continuity in what is essentially in flux cannot help but lead to delusion and unhappiness, since at our core we know that even the most profound happiness, robust health, or honourable achievement is fleeting.

In the West, where dualistic thinking is a habit, it is normal to categorize phenomena as bad or good, to be chased or avoided, and to map our paths accordingly, as though negative events or conditions were explosives in a minefield that should (or even could) be avoided. The problem with this way of framing experiential phenomena is, from the non-dualistic perspective of Buddhism, that “we distinguish between such opposites [...] in order to affirm one and deny the other, and, our tragedy lies in the paradox

that the two opposed terms are interdependent” (Loy, 1991, p.303). No matter how it is framed (either in terms of *desire for* or *avoidance of* pleasure/power/possession) (Payutto, 1994a), attachment to the five ‘groups of existence’ forms the foundation of suffering, upon which is seated the “resistance to change that characterizes the experience of suffering” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.141), and atop which can be found the worldly, emotional and physical sufferings that are a part of daily life. In the end, the irreconcilability of craving for permanent and separate selfhood and the truth of interdependent arising leads to a situation in which people

are engulfed in the loneliness and anxiety created by the chasm that separates their existence from the other on all sides. Now either they desperately crave the other, grasping at it, trying to bring it into themselves in order to maintain their selfhood, or else, when the other is seen as a threat to the self, they desperately create defenses to keep the other from destroying their selfhood. (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.144)

It is important to note that there is, in this view, nothing wrong with acting on mundane desires such as the urge to eat when hungry; Buddhism issues no call for self-mortification (identifying this urge as another craving, namely for self-annihilation), and is careful to distinguish between urges based on egoism or self-indulgence and those which are free of such unwholesome motivations.

The Third Noble Truth

Acknowledgement of the conditioned arising of *dukkha* leads to one inevitable conclusion regarding its alleviation: to become free of suffering, one must extinguish ignorance (of interdependent arising) and craving (for selfhood). The term for this extinguishment is *nibbāna*, which means, literally, ‘extinction’ (Koller & Koller, 1998). Rather than a negative condition, however, *nibbāna* is a positive goal, posited as ushering in persistent peace and happiness. As Loy has eloquently described it, “[w]hen consciousness stops trying to chase its own tail, I become nothing, and discover that I am everything – or, more precisely, that I can become anything” (Loy, 1991, p.305). Characterizations of *nibbāna* differ greatly, with modern heterodox Buddhists asserting, in an attempt to “universalize and contemporize liberation,” that not only is *nibbāna* attainable here and now, one should strive for precisely this (Swearer, 1998, p.89).

The Fourth Noble Truth

Of course, there is a great deal more to the elimination of ignorance and craving than the simple realization that they *can* be eliminated. Because Buddhism is a way of life, concerned as much with practicality as philosophy, it moves beyond exposition to present a means by which its goals may be reached. The ultimate goal of *nibbāna* is attainable if one walks the Noble Eightfold Path.

Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo: The Noble Eightfold Path

The elimination of ignorance and craving requires diligence in the cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and insight; conditioning physical, verbal, and mental behaviour (Pongsapich, 1985). These three areas together make up ‘right living’⁶ in the Buddhist tradition, and constitute the fourth aspect of the Four Noble Truths. The Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*, or simply *magga*), referred to as “the basic Buddhist guide to life” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.146) or ‘path to human flourishing,’ is thus the practical extension of the Buddha’s teachings (*dhamma*) (Sheng-Yen, 1991). It contains the following specific practices and aims:

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| (1) Right understanding (<i>sammā-diṭṭhi</i>) | } | Wisdom (<i>paññā</i>) |
| (2) Right intention (<i>sammā-saṅkappa</i>) | | |
| (3) Right speech (<i>sammā-vācā</i>) | } | Ethical Conduct (<i>sīla</i>) |
| (4) Right action (<i>sammā-kammanta</i>) | | |
| (5) Right livelihood (<i>sammā-ajīva</i>) | | |
| (6) Right effort (<i>sammā-vāyāma</i>) | } | Mental Discipline (<i>samādhi</i>) |
| (7) Right mindfulness (<i>sammā-sati</i>) | | |
| (8) Right concentration (<i>sammā-samādhi</i>) | | |

This list is not meant to portray the eight aspects of the path as sequential or hierarchical. They are, in fact, mutually supportive and are meant to be followed simultaneously, “for the aim of the path is to achieve a completely integrated life of the highest order” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.145). The interrelationship of the three main ‘arms’ of the path is relatively clear, and requires little elaboration. *Paññā*, or the pursuit of wisdom, aims for an understanding of the truth of interdependent arising and how to live in accord with this principle. It allows one to perceive the relationship between *dukkha*, ignorance, and craving; further, once wisdom has revealed existence as fundamentally interdependent, selfishness is rendered obsolete – much aiding the practice of *sīla*, or ethical conduct. Every Buddhist tradition notes the role of ethics in cultivating wisdom and self-discipline – indeed, the whole of the Noble Eightfold Path may

⁶ The term ‘right’ here, and throughout the following discussion, refers to the quality or condition given in its most perfect form, rather than an act or trait found praiseworthy by virtue of its accordance with some particular doctrine (Humphreys, 1962).

be seen as “[a]n everyday ethics [and] a guide for action” (Sheng-Yen, 1991, p.7). *Sīla*, more specifically, is a multifaceted undertaking described as “the traditional Buddhist system of training and lifestyle” (Jones, 1992, p.1). It is cultivated in order to purify one’s actions, speech, and livelihood, so that one may halt the cultivation of new cravings. It also sows the seeds of social stability, which is itself a prerequisite for the aforementioned cultivation of wisdom (Swearer, 1998). In turn, both wisdom and moral conduct require a disciplined approach to life and living, as outlined in the call for right effort, mindfulness, and concentration (*samādhi*). This mental discipline broadly aims at insight into the unwholesome inclinations (habits, dispositions) that have, in the past, fed craving and ignorance, as well as the task of supplanting one’s selfish or greedy motivations with ones that flow from love and compassion. The three broad ‘arms’ of the *magga* are thus interwoven, so that dedication in any one stream supports progress in both of the others. There are prerequisites, in Buddhist texts, to the realization of the Noble Eightfold Path. Called (appropriately enough) the ‘pre-*magga* factors,’ these “indicate the conditions for the arising and the support for the development of all the *magga* factors” (Rājavaramuni, 1990, p.47). The first is ‘association with good people’ (*kalyānamittatā*), the second, ‘systematic attention or reflection’ (*yonisomanisikāra*). In its simplest rendering: if the *magga* is meant to describe the (potential, and best) effect of the individual on society, the pre-*magga* describes the (potential, and best) effect of society on the individual.

Individual Aspects of the Path

‘Right understanding’ or ‘right view’ encompasses both direct insight, reminiscent of the Buddha’s own epiphany, and intellectual understanding, which is considered a lower form of comprehension. A lesser value is placed on intellectual understanding because it

takes place within a system of concepts and principles resting on underlying assumptions which necessarily reflect limited perspectives. Because intellectual knowledge is determined by the concepts, principles, and assumptions of the system, its truth is relative to the system in which it occurs. (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.146)

Typically, ‘right view’ is defined as an understanding of the principle of interdependent arising and the Four Noble Truths – it is “to know the world of appearances for what it is: impermanent, fraught with suffering, and bound up with an ultimately illusory belief in the existence of discrete, independent selves” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.57).

In certain forms of Buddhism, “selves are regarded as fictitious only in the ultimate sense” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.57). Little and Twiss (1992) describe that, in Theravada traditions, ‘empirical selves’ enjoy a provisional reality governed by the inescapable laws of *kamma*. *Kamma* is a concept Buddhism inherited from the Hindu/Brahmin context from which it arose, but for which they have a markedly different interpretation: “[f]or the Buddhist it does not matter who one is but what one does; whereas, for the Hindu, one does what one does because of who one is” (Pongsapich, 1985, p.35). *Kamma* dictates that a person’s actions in life determine, in part, his or her fate in subsequent incarnations, until the transitory ‘world of appearances’ or ‘world of phenomena’ has been escaped altogether through the attainment of *nibbāna*. Roughly speaking, positive begets positive, negative begets negative. (It does not, however, correlate with Calvinist notions of predetermination, since “within the generalized constraints of the position one occupies on the moral hierarchy, one has a freedom – indeed a responsibility – to act in morally positive ways” (Keyes, 1983, p.856).) Buddhist practice in Theravada traditions seeks to transcend this provisional reality of selves in understanding the ultimate reality of *anatta*. Somewhat paradoxically, the Buddha himself must have held similar views, since while asserting that there are no selves (and hence no others), he devoted his life to serving such ‘provisionally real’ individuals, whom he acknowledged as having clear material, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs. It is perhaps ironic, though, that ultimately Buddhism strives for a condition that transcends morality, since ‘selves’ are a requisite concept in framing moral behaviour (Little & Twiss, 1992).

‘Right intention’ flows from the realization that – owing to the truth of interdependent arising and the absence of a permanent and separate self – chasing after what will feed that self, avoiding what will harm it, and eliminating potential threats to it serve no real purpose. To have right intention is to seek freedom from craving, supplanting greed and selfishness with love and compassion.

‘Right speech’ has both positive and negative aspects, both of which spring from the realization that words have a great potential to either worsen or ameliorate suffering, both for oneself and others. The negative aspect of right speech is a prohibition on lying; character assassination; talk that encourages discord (including jealousy or enmity); harsh, impolite, or abusive language; and idle, malicious, or foolish gossip or chatter (Koller & Koller, 1998). In its positive form it involves a commitment to truthful, kind, meaningful, timely, and useful speech (in the absence of opportunities for which, one should opt for silence).

‘Right action,’ too, has a negative or prohibitive form, in which destroying any form of life, stealing or cheating, deception, ingesting intoxicants, and engaging in unwholesome sexual activity are avoided – these five guidelines are known collectively as the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*). Positively, one’s actions are oriented toward creating the greatest peace and happiness, guided by respect for all living beings. More specifically, one should practice restraint, mindfulness, sincerity, generosity, and benevolence (White, 1999).

‘Right livelihood’ entails the application of more general Buddhist principles to the workplace, rendering careers that cause direct or indirect harm, promote injustice, or entail fraud or deliberate deception strictly off-limits. Virtually every kind of profession provides potential opportunities for one to be of service (Boonyoros, 1991), though specific prohibitions exist against narcotics trafficking, weapons dealing, manufacture or use of poisons, usury, killing animals, and engaging in either prostitution or slavery (Koller & Koller, 1998; Jones, 1992). The ideal, however, is positive: engagement in a form of work that is both honourable and of real use, and helping others to achieve the same – since, in Buddhism, “it is as wrong to disregard the other’s material and spiritual welfare as it is to disregard one’s own” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.72). The Buddha emphasized the value of economic self-reliance, as well as lauding the ‘happiness’ that stems from rightfully acquired ownership (*atthisukha*), enjoyment of one’s possessions and means (*bhogasukha*), freedom from debt (*ananasukha*), and being blameless in one’s professional endeavours (*anavajjasukha*) (Koller & Koller, 1998; Payutto, 1994a).

The Buddhist view of poverty deserves special note here, particularly in light of the tendency to classify Buddhism as an ascetic religion. The goals of Buddhism are, with regard to the mundane, contentment and limited desires – meaning desires should be both numerically few and weak in intensity. In this, fruition is active rather than passive; it arises from diligence rather than apathy. Poverty per se is classified as a suffering, and is certainly not lauded (Rājavaramuni, 1990; Keyes, 1983), while wealth is not damned, as long as it is gained and utilized in a way consistent with the Noble Eightfold Path (Payutto, 1994a; Sizemore & Swearer, 1990b). It is unwholesome to either squander riches, greedily or foolishly, or to induce suffering by their use. Further, there is a time to “be independent or freed from wealth” (Rājavaramuni, 1990, p.53). In the Buddhist view, poverty severely limits one’s ability to act for the betterment of self and other, making it a significantly anti-moral (in the sense of hindering morality) state for any society to find itself in, or indeed to humour. The Pali scriptures are unequivocal: the *Anguttaranikaya* declares that, for the ordinary person, poverty is suffering, while the *Cakkavattisihanada-*

sutta of the *Dighanikaya* asserts that poverty is the root of social ills such as theft, violence, corruption, unnaturally shortened lives, deteriorated environments, and declining health and values. The basic necessities of life must be met for any moral progress to ensue – without them, peace is unimaginable. Many Buddhist thinkers, including Rājavaramuni (1990) and Buddhadasa state that, should individual ownership not serve the interests of the wider society, stronger methods of redistribution or even alternative systems of ownership should be sought, since “[i]n a society that puts the interests of any one individual above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed because the context of the problem is the way society operates as a whole” (Buddhadasa, as cited in Swearer, 1998, p.92). In short, wealth gained and shared properly is a boon for all, whether held individually or communally. Without this value it is worthless and unwholesome (Rājavaramuni, 1990).

‘Right effort’ describes the practice of purging oneself of already existent, unwholesome states of mind while preventing future ones from developing; and nurturing already existent, wholesome states of mind while encouraging future ones to develop.

‘Right mindfulness’ involves turning one’s attention outward, to one’s physicality, as well as inward, to consider the actions of one’s mind. Included in mindfulness is an awareness of the body, senses and emotions, perceptions, and thoughts and consciousness. As Koller and Koller explain, “[b]eing aware of and attentive to one’s activities means understanding what these activities are, how they arise, how they disappear, how they are developed, controlled, gotten rid of, and how they are linked together” (Koller & Koller, 1998, p.148). Often, right mindfulness is developed through meditation, during which the aim is to observe the rise and fall of thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, noting that they are transitory phenomena. (Actually, meditation and mindfulness are both ‘awareness exercises,’ one of which is merely more focused. (Jones, 1992).) This intellectual process, at its zenith, connects with direct insight into the true nature of existence, after which one is able to re-survey the lived landscape devoid of biased thoughts and beyond the intellectual mind. In this state, one realizes that “[w]hile things seem good or bad, right or wrong, this only proves how incompletely the mind views things” (White, 1999, p.118).

‘Right concentration’ is the process of achieving happiness through purifying one’s mental activities. Buddhism teaches that the mind is the outrider of everything one does, placing it at the centre of efforts to attain *nibbāna*:

Mind is the forerunner of all actions.
 All deeds are led by the mind, created by the mind.
 If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, suffering follows,
 As the wheel follows the hoof of the ox, pulling a cart. (Maitreya, 1988, p.1)

Specific practices proceed in a stepwise fashion, beginning with the elimination of unwholesome mental states (lust, malice, sloth, anxiety, and doubt) and replacing them with bliss. That joy is preserved, as a focus, through the second stage, which involves transcending all mental activities, while in the third one also seeks to move beyond the mental activities associated with bliss (Koller & Koller, 1998). Happiness fills the interval, along with growing sense of equanimity and awareness that is, itself, the goal the fourth and final stage. At the last, both happiness and unhappiness are left behind.

Buddhist Ethics as Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics, a tradition most often given Western roots in ancient Greece, can be found in the East far predating Aristotle (Hursthouse, 2007). Eastern formulations are sparse in translated textual form, but a robust system can be found in Meng Zi, a fourth-century BCE philosopher and the second most important thinker in the Confucian tradition (after Kung-Fu Tse himself) (Richey, 2005). Eastern virtue-ethical traditions share many features with the Aristotelian; an elaboration of those similarities specific to Buddhism is greatly aided by founding it upon Yearley's influential comparison of Aristotle and Mencius (Meng Zi). The proximate definition of 'virtue ethics,' based on his comparison, is an inclination "to act, desire, and feel that involves the exercise of judgment and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human flourishing" (Yearley, 1990a, p.12). It is an acquired, rather than innate, disposition, which posits the good as an end in itself, rather than pursuing it for utilitarian, contractarian, or purely pragmatic reasons. Identifying common characteristics, Yearley (1990b) defines 'virtues' as:

- [...] a set of related, well-defined, admirable qualities or characteristics [...];
- [...] chosen within some sort of life plan; [and]
- [...] correct[ive of] some inherent difficulty or weakness in human beings, enabling the agent to resist temptations or strengthening motivations toward the good. (p.2)

Despite the obvious existence of broadly universal virtues, the content of specific virtues "has a social location and cultural context" (Yearley, 1990b, p.3). These variations show up in the different virtues included in any one tradition – whether they are ranked or seen as unified; how they intersect with rules and principles; how they are related to happiness; the nexus (or conflict) between group and individual benefit

arising therefrom; and how the virtues are impacted by historico-cultural factors (Yearley, 1990b). In other words, even though the concept of ‘virtue’ may be seen as a free-floating commonality, and does include “distinguishable virtues linked to a common vision of human flourishing” (Swearer, 1998, p.96), virtues are embedded within a specific moral philosophy, and are inculcated and played out according to the ontology of that tradition (Swearer, 1998; Ichimura, 1991). Like other virtue traditions, Buddhism asserts that while virtue can be honed through mundane experience, it most often requires instruction (either actively by teachers or passively by exemplars and texts) and dedicated, sustained reflection. This is what Swearer (1998) refers to as ‘deliberative virtue.’ It also holds that “[v]irtue serves as the foundation for all good (mental) states and also [...] gives consistency to bodily actions,” creating individual virtue as the cornerstone of a stable, healthy society (Swearer, 1998, p.84). Unlike other traditions, though (particularly Aristotelian/Thomistic virtue ethics), Buddhism asserts that “one does not become a truly moral person without having practiced being one. *But neither does one practise morality solely out of a concern eventually to become a moral person*” (Jones, 1992, p.6, emphasis added).

As a form of virtue ethics – indeed, as does any ethical tradition – Buddhism provides “accepted statements and cues regarding happiness, conduct, concepts of perfection” (Lancaster, 1991, p.347). The states, motivations, actions, and aspirations provided by Buddhism are far from inscrutable, no matter how much difficulty Buddhist ontology has had finding a foothold in the West. Jones writes that Buddhist ethics may initially seem to parallel, or even perfectly resemble, other religiously-based ethical codes (Jones, 1992). It is true that normative conceptions of both ‘good’ and ‘the good’ may coincide to a surprising degree across relatively diverse cultures and societies. Murder, for example, is almost universally abjured – though exceptions, in the form of justifications for killing, can certainly be found. These exceptions are emblematic of a tension inherent in any normative social ethics: “a conflict of ideals arising when we must choose between good and the Good, between right and Right” (Lancaster, 1991, p. 348). Of this conflict, Jones writes that one of the great ironies of the ego-driven modern world is that it has “increased our sense of choice whilst making it more difficult to choose” (Jones, 1992, p.15). It is in this context, against this difficulty, that Buddhist ‘moral training’ positions itself and seeks to be of use. Such a virtue ethical system emphasizes – somewhat surprisingly, given portrayals of Buddhism – the dual goals of cognitive and social development (Guruge & Bond, 1998).

In short, then: the virtues are locally determined, they ground society itself, and virtue must be practiced. This is as true of Buddhism as any other virtue ethical system.

Sīla, Dana, and Karuṇā: Training for – and Living – the Buddhist ‘Moral Life’

Sheng-Yen (1991) writes that of the two defining characteristics of Buddhism, “the first is that, from its beginning, Buddhism emphasized ethics” (p.7). This is, in his interpretation, interlocked with the second characteristic – that rationality and tolerance are foundational elements of Buddhist doctrine and discipline (Sheng-Yen, 1991). Despite this rationality, Prebisch (1992) describes Buddhist ethics as “rather nebulously defined,” and attributes their difficulty in acculturating to Western settings to this characteristic (p.viii). Of course, this is a criticism that may be levelled at virtue ethics generally, or any virtue ethical system that expands beyond its place of origin, rather than Buddhist ethics in particular.

In Buddhism, virtue ethics is found housed within the Noble Eightfold Path – more specifically, within *sīla*, or the ‘arm’ of the path concerned with right conduct in the world. As training and lifestyle both, it is bolstered by the inspiration and guidance afforded by the myths, ceremonies, exemplars (living and dead), meditation, ideals, and traditional practices found in the various Buddhist traditions and cultural contexts (Jones, 1992). Exemplars are of particular importance, since they “not only embody life-enhancing cultural values but who also point to a timeless truth and meaning” (Swearer, 1996, p.215). *Sīla*, in turn, is fleshed out by a set of guidelines called the Five Precepts, in particular, and more generally by the Buddha as an exemplar. Swearer describes *sīla* as “a foundation for the Buddhist life pattern that leads to the highest levels of human flourishing [and] also a constant companion on that journey” (Swearer, 1998, p.79). Although a significant part of its content is found in the form of precepts, *sīla* is neither a rule-set nor part of some wider code (Rājavaramuni, 1990; Keyes, 1983), but a system, often providing salient questions rather than concrete answers.

There is no defining list of virtues in the Buddhist tradition – this has been cited as both a negative and a positive aspect of Buddhism’s training for (and living) a moral life. Several candidates are available, though none definitive. The Four Grounds of Social Harmony (*sangaha vatthu*), for example, are generosity, kind speech, service, and equal treatment (Guruge & Bond, 1998). The Four Noble Abodes (*brahma vihāras*) are loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity (Guruge & Bond, 1998). The Ten Perfections (*parāmitā*) that must be achieved on the path to enlightenment are generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truth, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity (Guruge & Bond, 1998). Some of these certainly count as ‘virtues’ in the moral sense, while others (particularly ‘morality’ in itself) merely confuse the issue. Some categorize Buddhism as expounding a negative

morality (Guruge & Bond, 1998) because of this dearth of clear candidates for ‘virtue,’ the argument being that because it is concerned with rules-based self-restraint (in the form of precepts), Buddhism is incapable of providing any positive ideals, including ‘virtues.’ On this reading, Buddhist ethics has more in common with rule utilitarianism or religious ‘commandment’ systems – but this is a simplistic and unnecessarily pejorative interpretation. Swearer resolves the apparent conundrum simply: by pointing out that the moral values that emerge from the precepts *followed in combination with the Buddha’s life as an example* are those associated with, on the one hand, renunciation and restraint, and on the other, generosity and compassion (Swearer, 1998). Little and Twiss echo this line of thinking, asserting that “[w]hile there is room, then, for discretionary interpretation on the part of ‘spiritual experts,’ spiritual expertise is itself determinable according to commonly available standards of enlightenment and rectitude manifested in the life and teachings of the Buddha” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.86).

Ontologically, Buddhist ethics are grounded in the truths of impermanence, interdependent arising, and non-self. Recognition of the fact of interdependent arising, of the interconnectedness of well-being, profoundly affects both what one chooses to do and what one chooses *not* to do (Swearer, 1998). Accordingly, Buddhist ethics are based upon an understanding of, and effort addressing, these principles (rather than some fatalism or accidentalism, as is often asserted) (Rājavaramuni, 1990). Buddhist ethics is, fundamentally, a social, applied, and *active* ethics. At the core of this system, *sīla* (meaning, variously, ‘ethical conduct,’ ‘good character,’ ‘social responsibility,’ and ‘moral practice’) (Swearer, 1998; Rājavaramuni, 1990) is designed to erode the acquisitive ego-self and bring about a “reunion with all that was previously experienced as self and other” (Jones, 1992, p.1). That reunion, in turn, triggers a compassionate regard for, and spontaneous response to, the needs of others. The result of cultivating ‘right conduct’ is thus twofold: curbing an obsession with the self, leading to individual fulfilment, and increasing social well-being, fairness, and justice (Swearer, 1998; Little & Twiss, 1992). As with other virtue ethical traditions, morality is cultivated or practiced, rather than taught or arising spontaneously from within the individual. *Sīla*, then, is the Buddhist way of training or practicing to be moral.

It is not, however, regarded as training in the sense of (eventual or inevitable) accomplishment – in fact, if one undertakes it in such a spirit power accrues to the acquisitive ego-self, defeating the entire purpose. It is for this reason that *sīla* is typically thought of as a way of life, without end, consciously chosen and diligently pursued. As the socially active portion of the Noble Eightfold Path, it also helps one

to avoid spiritual greed and arrogance, which may well flow from a personal quest that fails to engage with community and other (Jones, 1992). As Rājavaramuni explains,

A minimal amount of responsibility to oneself for betterment and perfection is required of all individuals, and at the same time they must maintain an appropriate degree of social responsibility. Beyond this minimal requirement, the range of variation in an individual's specific responsibilities is very wide, depending on his or her place in society, relationship to others, aptitude, and mental inclinations. (Rājavaramuni, 1990, p.31)

This social orientation of Buddhist ethics is, however, carefully qualified. Working for someone else's 'own good' is strictly avoided, since to do so entails manipulation at some level. As Jones writes, "one of the most exalted delusions is the lust for power over others to be used in what we believe to be their best interests" (Jones, 1992, p. 9). Being truly other-regarding, by comparison, means "caring for [things] as they are intrinsically, rather than as I might benefit from them or as we might like them to be" (Swearer, 1998, p.95). This conceptualization excludes even the most subtle and passive force exuded by a stronger personality or more advanced mind, which lend an aura of authority (Jones, 1992).

The Five Precepts: The Path of Renunciation and Restraint

Sīla is generally assumed to consist of the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*), which are incumbent upon all Buddhists regardless of race, gender, spiritual attainment, or social status (Swearer, 1998). Little and Twiss describe these as "the most elementary stage" in the Buddhist system of practical morality (Little & Twiss, 1992), while others prefer to position these as guidelines or "ethical foundations" rather than rules (Jones, 1992, p.7). Additional precepts are observed by *bhikkhus*⁷ (ten for novices and upwards of 300 for advanced monks) and those engaged in religious observance of fast or feast days and high holidays (eight precepts for laypersons) (Swearer, 1998; Little & Twiss, 1992).

The word 'precept' can be misleading. Buddhist morality lacks commandments or prohibitions in the strict sense, since there is no authority to command one action or prohibit another. Neither is there any real culpability or penalty for transgression – the tendency is, except in the most dire cases, for failures to be acknowledged by the individual and forgiven by the group. One is expected to do the best one can, and perhaps gain ground as one learns and tries again. Thus, "since Buddhist 'precepts' do not derive from an external authority, it is crucial to see how one's living in accordance with a precept is an expression of one's

⁷ *Bhikkhu* is Pali for 'monk,' although one should take care to assume neither the Catholic nor the colloquial use of the English word in defining this term.

self-understanding” (Reilly, 2003, p.118). While the list of prohibitions is technically enforceable within the institutional *sangha* (although it has never had a strict administrative structure or a unified system, authority being vested in the whole of the community) (Sheng-Yen, 1991), no such weight stands behind lay precepts, which act instead as practical guidance (Little & Twiss, 1992; Keyes, 1983; Rājavaramuni, 1990). Indeed, even within the *sangha*, “[t]he precepts are neither internal commandments nor external legislation to provide a Buddhist ‘party line;’ they are delicate instruments for subtle investigation within and without” (Jones, 1992, p.10).

The Pali word for disposition is *catanā*, and Buddhist ethics, like other virtue traditions, holds that since action is rooted in this faculty, it is a ‘right’ or ‘wholesome’ *catanā* that must be cultivated, rather than the virtues themselves. As Sivaraksa asserts, “the important thing in an individual who acts is not his action but his personality” (Sivaraksa, 1981, p.111). It is perhaps more accurate, then to view the Buddhist virtues as intertwined, and as resulting from *sīla* as practice, rather than a set of specific, ranked character traits one is obliged to pursue and exhibit. Swearer characterizes them, in this context, as “highly regarded mental dispositions and concomitant modes of action” (Swearer, 1998, p.80). Each of the Five Precepts is therefore practiced, rather than simply enacted or adhered to:

The emphasis in Buddhist morality is therefore on the cultivation of a personality which cannot but be moral, rather than focusing upon the morality of particular choices and acts. But, to repeat, it is not the will that can create such a personality, no more than I can pick myself up by my own collar. It is to the training that the will must be applied, from which virtue will naturally flow. (Jones, 1992, p.5)

The intention in Buddhism is to find a moral basis for action and decision-making – a system for which is inculcated through *sīla*, after which ‘right action’ is *natural* action.

In *sīla*, acts (where acts are implied, that is) are immoral only insofar as they are motivated by partiality, hatred, ignorance, or fear (Little & Twiss, 1992). Similarly, the inverse of these acts are ‘moral’ only insofar as they involve moral attitudes. The absence of a wholesome and well-considered volition leaves the door open for unforeseen negative consequences, for example acts of aid that harm the virtue, or material, spiritual, or emotional welfare of either the giver or the receiver (Little & Twiss, 1992). Thus, in Buddhist morality, “the condition of the agent is indispensable in assessing practical behaviour” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.62). At the same time, one is not faulted simply for having unwholesome thoughts or ambitions, as no precept is violated simply by virtue of ‘wishing’ (Reilly, 2003). Taking this one step

further, Buddhism recognizes that it may be too much to expect any one person to act wholly on behalf of all others at all times. Thus living in accordance with the Five Precepts has, at times, been distilled to a single principle: that one ought to, at the very least, refrain from causing harm (Reilly, 2003). The Buddhist ‘principle of impartiality’ provides considerable guidance in determining what constitutes ‘harm.’ This principle is strikingly similar to Kant’s categorical imperative (Reilly, 2003), “[a]ct as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature” (Kant, 1785, p.753).

At its heart, *sīla* is, like all Buddhist teachings, about cause and effect. Unwholesome actions (*akusala*) rooted in delusion (*moha*), malice (*dosa*), or greed (*lobha*) lead to the feelings, speech, and deeds that cause (or that we equate with) suffering (Pongsapich, 1985). These are, not surprisingly, also the qualities that impede the individual’s attainment of wisdom (Guruge & Bond, 1998). By contrast, *kusala* (‘good’ means), “a profound and pervasive notion,” describe every action that seeks the end of delusion, malice, and greed (Swearer, 1998, p.77). Ultimately, then, wrongdoing and failure to cleave to the precepts is the product of ignorance of our fundamental unity with everyone and everything; it stems from the delusion of separateness and the alienation that this delusion breeds.

Evidence of the deliberate, cultivated nature of Buddhist virtue can be found in the very etymology of the term ‘*sīla*’ itself: in the original Pali, *sīla* meant ‘habitual action;’ in the Buddhist context, the more nuanced translation is ‘a virtue or norm to be practiced’ (Sheng-Yen, 1991). To affirm the precepts thus requires determination, attentiveness, and moral commitment. The Five Precepts are regarded as a way of life, ‘training,’ or ‘practice’ not only because Buddhism emphasizes the development of character, but also because it recognizes that prohibitions or rules often become muddy, or break down altogether, in the face of the complexities and ambiguities that make up real, lived life. It is for this reason that the precepts have been laid out in the way Prebisch (1992) describes as “nebulous” (p.viii) – a way that, in fact, allows them to be interpreted and reinterpreted as individuals, homes, communities, and societies change (Sheng-Yen, 1991; Rājavarāṃuni, 1990). This is a fully intentional situational responsiveness, embedded by the Buddha himself, who “established the various precepts [gradually] in response to practical needs that arose” (Sheng-Yen, 1991, p.3-5) and adapted the *dharmā* to the different groups he taught. Since his time, one of the main strengths of Buddhist ethics has been its persistent ability to adapt to and deal with the kind of radical pluralism that now stands as a hallmark of the modern (principally urban) life.

The First Precept: “I Undertake to Refrain from Taking the Lives of Living Beings”

More than murder or manslaughter, this precept entails cultivating the urge, “[w]ithout stick or sword, conscientious, full of sympathy, [to be] anxious for the welfare of all living things” (*Anguttara-nikaya* x, n.d., as cited in Jones, 1992, p.7). In *Socially Engaged Buddhism*,⁸ the prohibition against killing per se is expanded to include “the cultivation of appropriate attitudes and practices to protect life, [...] to extend one’s reverence to plants and minerals, [...] to not ‘let’ others kill, and [...] to not condone any killing in one’s thinking and way of life” (Reilly, 2003, p.121). The first precept thus enjoins one not to harm any living being – for the purposes of religion, convenience, or consumption – thereby affirming one’s interrelationship with all of creation (Sivaraksa, 1992). The necessity of *some* compromise is acknowledged, since, for example, Theravada Buddhism technically prohibits the felling of trees or clearing of land, even in order to build a modest home (Sivaraksa, 1992).

Once modern marketing, production, and consumption patterns arise, of course, it becomes significantly more difficult to assess adherence to the first precept (Sivaraksa, 1992). Eating meat today, for example, may be seen as harmful in several distinct regards: for the individual and family, owing to negative health effects of modern farming techniques; for the animal itself, both in its inhumane treatment during life and its premature mortality; for the world’s hungry, on the view that replacing rangeland and feedlots with crops significantly increases grain yields for human consumption; and for the world itself, considering the ecological damage caused by the clearing and degradation of land used for raising food animals. Also relevant is the fact that alternatives now abound – today, one may consume an ideally healthy diet without the inclusion of flesh foods. In the past, the ethical issue would have been the untimely death of the animal, alone. Beyond this meagre example, the struggle to situate and build a non-violent society, in accordance with the first precept, is one in which contemporary Buddhists of all traditions are engaged.

The Second Precept: “I Undertake to Refrain from Taking What is Not Freely Offered”

Admittedly, adherence to this precept was also simpler in the world in which it was first offered – in late-stage capitalism, particular as fed by the recent globalization of markets, it becomes harder and harder to distinguish between more and more subtle grades of ‘theft.’ It is for this reason that many modern-day interpretations differentiate between the ‘fact of’ and ‘moral right to’ possession, asserting that amassing

⁸ “The term ‘Socially Engaged Buddhism’ refers to active involvement by Buddhists in society and its problems. Participants in this nascent movement seek to actualize Buddhism’s traditional ideals of wisdom and compassion in today’s world” (Brown, n.p.).

material wealth beyond one's needs amounts to a violation of Buddhist principles (Jones, 1992). Some argue that stealing is now actually inherent to the economic system, making it difficult (if not impossible) to avoid some level of complicity, merely by virtue of being a consumer.⁹ Additionally, the passive violence of poverty and an unjust international economic order may be cogently likened to the active violence addressed by the first precept, making economic justice an imperative along the lines of non-violence. This is, rather than a recent realization, a longstanding concern, as attested to by the words of the Buddha himself: "once a king allows poverty to arise in his nation, the people will always steal to survive" (*Cakkavatti Sahananda*, n.d. as cited in Sivaraksa, 1992, p.74). In seeking to live in accordance with the second precept, measures pursued at the individual level include right livelihood and voluntary simplicity. From the Buddhist perspective, today "[i]t is best to weed even the edges and corners of a lifestyle as far as we are able, since weeds tend to spread" (Jones, 1992, p.8). At the aggregate level, Buddhist scholarship and activism deploy a Buddhist lens in their analyses of development models and consumption patterns (including natural resources), resulting in a robust, if under-read, corpus on normative economics, voluntary simplicity, and ethical business practices.¹⁰

The Third Precept: "I Undertake to Refrain from Sexual Misconduct"

Adultery, rape, and sexual exploitation are specifically targeted by the third precept, which calls for sexual behaviour to honour, always, the rights, needs, and commitments of others. Some Buddhists go further, asserting that this precept enjoins individuals to look closely at patriarchy, male dominance, and the exploitation of women at the local and global level. Sivaraksa writes that "Buddhist practice points toward the development of full and balanced human beings, free from the socially learned 'masculine' and 'feminine' patterns of thought, speech, and behaviour, in touch with both aspects of themselves" (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.77).

The Fourth Precept: "I Undertake to Refrain from False Speech"

The fourth precept attends to the behaviours that impede communication and warp understanding, a focus that results from the Buddhist idea that responsible action in the world is based on being sufficiently and accurately informed, and maintaining a critical view of one's own beliefs and perceptions (*Cakkavatti Sahananda*, n.d. as cited in Sivaraksa, 1992). Naturally, in the 'information age,' refraining from lying,

⁹ See, for example, Aitken (1984).

¹⁰ Some of this scholarship has filtered through to the 'mainstream,' in particular via Schumacher's work in economics.

slander, gossip, and generally sowing dissent can take on new meaning – take, for example, marketing and advertising, and government and corporate participation in ostensibly impartial media. Some assert that *sīla* enjoins one to speak truthfully, constructively, and courageously, but without engaging in partisan politics. This means that, in general, anywhere information is withheld or manipulated to serve particular interests the fourth precept is being violated. Because of the danger of others violating this principle, claims emanating from all corners must be, in the Buddhist view, subject to serious scrutiny. The Buddha himself instructed adherents to believe nothing that did not resound with their experiences and hold up under their critical faculties:

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumor, nor upon scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon bias toward a notion pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know: "These things are bad, [blameworthy], censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them. [...] When you yourselves know: "These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them. (*Kalama Sutta* Anguttara Nikaya III.65, n.d., as cited in Bodhi, 1998, par.3)

The Fifth Precept: "I Undertake to Refrain from Intoxicants, which Lead to Heedlessness"

While the first four precepts are obviously other-impinging, the fifth (a seemingly 'victimless crime,' as it were) is seen to be other-impinging in its secondary effects (Little & Twiss, 1992). It seeks to curb use of substances that diminish awareness, mindfulness being a necessary factor in responsibility, as well as prized in its own right in Buddhist thought. Again, causality is of concern, so that the roots of intoxicant abuse (including individual and societal factors, such as economic and social marginalization) beg to be addressed in any Buddhist analysis of the fifth precept and how best to honour it in modern society.

The Buddha's Example: The Path of Generosity and Compassion

Swearer's observation that Buddhist values are derivative of both renunciation and restraint, as encoded in the Five Precepts, and generosity and compassion, as found in the life of the Buddha, is especially apt (Swearer, 1998). As has been mentioned, the life of the Buddha stands alongside the written and spoken *dhmma* as a pivotal source of individual inspiration and guidance, while the implications of his compassion and acts of giving (or, more appropriately, his disposition to give) are central to Buddhist ethics.

“Without compassion,” writes Sheng-Yen (1991), “ethics becomes powerless and empty” (p.8). In the Buddhist sense, the term ‘compassion’ (*karuna*) connotes more than just empathy or sympathy – it is ‘true friendliness,’ which entails both ‘being of use’ and being motivated by selflessness (Sivaraksa, 1988), as well as “the wish that others be free from suffering” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.75). Its role in Buddhist thought and practice has been compared to that of love in Christianity (Sheng-Yen, 1991). Buddhist compassion is direct and personal, aimed toward a specific individual or group, rather than being a cognitive assessment of how that individual or group perceives itself. It is not, then, a kind of social objectivity, distant, passive, and critical (White, 1999). It is more than sensing the suffering of others; to be compassionate is to be motivated to act on that perception (Reilly, 2003). A common Buddhist image of compassion is the mother’s volition to protect her own child at any cost – but Buddhism aspires to embed such volition without it being either governed or inspired by blood ties (Reilly, 2003). Nor should it be an engulfing passion, ultimately directed toward the ego-self rather than others, as the example of the Buddha illustrates. In embarking upon his spiritual quest, although Siddhartha was motivated by a profound compassion for all living beings, his was an ideal form, in which he “was not taken over by [it] and bound to it, which is the case with worldly individuals” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.74).

The alignment of compassion with ‘true friendliness’ yields other insights. Friendship receives special attention in Buddhist writings on practical morality, being seen as a powerful attitudinal model (Little & Twiss, 1992). On a broader canvas, social harmony, based on amity, is found at the centre of Buddhist ethics, with all of the possible virtues linked to positive, functioning relationships between persons and groups, in which every individual treats every other as a friend’ (Rājavarāṃuni, 1990; Sizemore & Swearer, 1990b; Guruge & Bond, 1998). As Rājavarāṃuni writes, “[w]e can say that in Buddhist social ethics a good society is a society of good friends, or a society in which people are good friends to one another” (Rājavarāṃuni, 1990, p.48). This state of ‘true friendliness’ also plays a role on the soteriological path, since Buddhism speaks of the good of surrounding oneself with upright persons, with ‘good friends’ (*kalyāṇamittatā*), who are beneficial (if not absolutely necessary) to one’s spiritual advancement (Rājavarāṃuni, 1990). Interestingly, these ‘good friends’ need not call themselves Buddhist in order to serve in this function (Sivaraksa, 1992).

This characterization of interpersonal interaction in Buddhism may be broadly contrasted with the more mainstream Western portrayal. Inanda classifies these two traditions as ‘logo-centric,’¹¹ marked by

¹¹ Derived from the Greek ‘logos,’ meaning language or logic. In this mode of thinking, essence precedes existence.

‘hard relationships,’ and ‘onto-centric,’¹² the sign of which is ‘soft relationships’ (Inada, 1991). Buddhism holds that “human beings are primarily oriented in and governed by [...] relationships [...] manifested in terms of the intangible traits or virtues we ordinarily live by” (Inada, 1991, p.377) instead of the facts, atomistic identities, competitive or obligatory motivations, empirical data, and perfunctory actions that arise from relationships stripped of attention to context and the myriad factors that inform human existence. Interestingly, these were some of the same criticisms levelled at mainstream, putatively justice-oriented Western ethics by feminist thinkers, who proposed an ‘ethics of care’ as an alternative way of normatively conceptualizing relationships, motivations, and obligations. While it shares key principles with feminist ethics (such as inclusiveness, egalitarianism, interdependence, and concern for emotions), Buddhist ethics differs in certain others. The feminist concern for relationships is, in Buddhism, extended from the interpersonal to all beings, including nature. Instead of the subjectivity critical to feminism, one finds impermanence and non-duality; and instead of intuition, awareness and mindfulness (White, 1999). In Buddhist thought, as well, relationship- and justice-based positions are not mutually exclusive. Inada, for example, points to the essentially flexible character of ‘soft relationships,’ and hence their ability to accommodate the various aspects of ‘hard relationships,’ in pointing to a way through a seeming impasse between logo- and onto-centric modes of thinking about human interaction (Inada, 1991).

The Pali word for ‘giving’ is *dāna*, translated variously as ‘charity,’ ‘philanthropy,’ or ‘benevolence.’ *Dāna* follows from *karuna* because giving forms the first step in operationalizing compassion (Sheng-Yen, 1991). In the motivation to aid, Buddhism emphasizes that the act lack a sense of gain or expectation: ‘giving’ is not undertaken in order to accrue merit or acquire virtue, nor is it done to assuage the ego-self that one is ‘doing good.’ ‘Right giving’ is done out of an affinity or sense of kinship between donor and recipient, and “softens the heart” of both actors (Guruge & Bond, 1998). Suzuki (1968) defines *dāna*, then, as anything intentionally and beneficially emanating from the individual – arts, knowledge, financial support, social support, etc. – while beneficiaries, even in the classic texts, may range from monks to animals to the marginalized within society. In the time of the Buddha himself, *dāna* flowed to any deserving recipient, with the sick as particular foci (Guruge & Bond, 1998). As a virtue and a practice *dāna* is related to both the path and goal of Buddhism, to the individual and the greater good, with charitable and philanthropic practices playing a central role in lay Buddhism in several traditions (Guruge & Bond, 1998).

¹² Derived from the Greek ‘onto,’ meaning being or existence. In this mode of thinking, existence precedes essence.

Misconceptions about Buddhism and Buddhist Ethics

Having only recently come into the spotlight via public interest in the cause and culture of the Tibetan people, Buddhism has nevertheless been formally studied and practiced in the West for decades, to the extent that today many non-Buddhists are now quite familiar with select characteristics of the Mahayana (if not the Theravada) tradition. Despite this familiarity, the dominant image of Buddhism is that of an ascetic religion, defined by metaphysical and spiritual doctrine and best described by the lives of isolated monastics. Language itself has been a barrier here, since use of the term ‘monk’ for the Buddhist *bhikkhu* has conflated the unique identity of the latter with that of a cloistered member of a Christian order (itself a somewhat anachronistic image, even in the West). Further, the characterization of Buddhist ethics as either epitomized by or vested wholly in the monkhood, and concerned primarily with mind and meditation, is erroneous (Payutto, 1994a; Rājavaramuni, 1990; Sizemore & Swearer, 1990b). Buddhism has consistently been portrayed as either asocial, unconcerned with relationships and community, or actually anti-social (Prebisch, 1992). This is obviously at odds with the primary goals of Buddhism, which are the development of character *and* the cultivation of an ideal society (Sheng-Yen, 1991). Buddhism plainly asserts that “no person is moral in an isolated or independent sense” (Inada, 1991, p.381).

Texts in English (which are rare enough) (Prebisch, 1992), and especially those edited by Western scholars, have tended to over-emphasize doctrinal aspects of Buddhism, delving deeply and intellectually into the historical *dhamma* while overlooking or ignoring the community, lay, and modern aspects of Buddhism as a way of life (Rājavaramuni, 1990). This has been perhaps the strongest influence in the pervasive characterization of Buddhist ethics as an individualistic “ethics of the mind,” with little or no regard for relational or material welfare (Rājavaramuni, 1990, p.29). Rather than being essentially doctrinal, Buddhism is made up of both the *dhamma* and the *vinyana*. The *dhamma* (doctrine) contains the ideals and principles of Buddhism, while the *vinyana* (practice or discipline) addresses the context in which those ideals and principles are meant to find expression (Rājavaramuni, 1990, p.30). Buddhism teaches that spiritual progress is not possible without a certain level of material and social well-being, positing both mind and body as interdependent features of human existence (Rājavaramuni, 1990), and specifically encourages one to adopt attitudes and perform acts that “reflect a regard for the material integrity and welfare of others” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.78). In reality, the asceticism (or sensory self-mortification) that Buddhism is often accused of trumpeting was specifically identified by the Buddha as one of the extremes (along with hedonism, or sensory self-indulgence) that were to be eschewed (Rājavaramuni, 1990). Rājavaramuni

(1990) reminds readers that, “[i]n principle at least, a Buddhist monk cannot live even a single day without contact with lay people” (p.29).

Weber, in particular, was damning of the moral content of Buddhism. Like many writers and social scientists since, he divided Buddhist practice into karmic (concerned with mundane betterment through reincarnation) and nibbanic (concerned with enlightenment and the cessation of rebirth) streams, with the latter – the ultimate goal of Buddhism – available only to members of the monkhood.¹³ This bifurcation led him to label the moral content of lay Buddhism as “an insufficiency ethic for the weak who will not consider complete salvation” (Weber, 1921/1975, p.215). In actuality, even forms of Buddhism that have strong karmic components do not acknowledge either two separate paths or two distinct goals, nor do they rank lay and monk adherents in a hierarchy. Instead, Buddhism “understands the soteriological path to be a continuum [...] compris[ing] various practices and benefits suitable to persons at various spiritual levels” (Guruge & Bond, 1998, p.87). Further, the achievement of the ultimate goal of nibbana “requires neither the mastery of an arcane doctrine nor an elaborate regimen of asceticism” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.62). Theravada texts, for example, specifically laud moral attitudes and acts *over* religious ones (Little & Twiss, 1992).

An overarching focus on the ‘monkhood,’ by both academics and ‘seekers,’ has been more misleading than revealing. The relationship between the institutional *sangha* (*bhikkhu-sangha*) and the wider *sangha* (*savaka-sangha*), which includes spiritually dedicated persons both lay and ordained, is certainly complex, but it is not one of estrangement or isolation (Essen, 2005). Teachers of Buddhism typically come from within the monastic order, true, but the barrier between the two groups is semi-permeable, with influence flowing both ways – this effect is heightened by the fact that in many traditions monkhood is not a lifelong vocation. In Thailand, for example, most men will enrobe for anywhere from weeks to years (Jones, 1992). As well, ‘civic’ Buddhism and Buddhist social movements have been growing, while the educational attainment of lay Buddhists has steadily risen, meaning that members of the laity are increasingly in a position to contribute as peers to both the practice and study of Buddhism. The role of the *sangha* is, then, simpler than typically posited: to maintain the *dhamma* for society and, in the words of Rājāvaramuni, “[point] toward a transcendent aspect of life” (Rājāvaramuni, 1990, p.32).

Weber also spoke of Buddhism’s emphasis on the individual as his or her agent of salvation as evidence of its inability to unify or serve any good beyond the personal. About Buddhist practice he wrote,

¹³ After Weber, and building upon his work, this view was almost consistently voiced (Spiro, 1970).

“The specific antisocial character of genuine mysticism is here carried to its maximum” (Weber, 1921/1975, p.213). This resonates somewhat with the general view, found throughout the West, of Buddhism as a vehicle for meditative practice culminating in individual perfection. There are two aspects to this mischaracterization: a misinterpretation of the place of the individual in Buddhism, and a grafting of Western views of individualism onto Buddhist practice. It is true that “Buddhism emphasizes that one can attain nirvana or any level of achievement only through one’s own effort. [And] [t]his aspect of Buddhism is unique” (Pongsapich, 1985, p.28). However, this is not evidence of the ‘individualism’ that, in the West, is seen as antithetical to the common good (except where the two coincide) and therefore a barrier to the development of a positive social ethics. This individualism – if it may be so labelled – is simply an acknowledgement that “[j]ust as the analysis of personal experience is seen as the foundation of social theory, so much social action and social change [are] firmly based upon a perspective of personal and individual transformation” (Jones, 1992, p.1). The two ‘individualisms’ do not overlap in any significant sense, particularly since, in Buddhism, one’s relationship to self, other, and the ‘common good’ is always “qualified by the conviction that ultimately one does not exist” (Little & Twiss, 1992, p.76).

The conflation of these two ‘individualisms’ constitutes an obvious failure to accurately plot the outcomes of the doctrine of no-self. Following the Noble Eightfold Path promotes selflessness in the mind, which manifests as being truly other-regarding in one’s actions. As Swearer explains, “[r]enunciation of the self not only means overcoming suffering but also generates a state of equilibrium that [...] grounds morality [...]. On the personal level, the mind operates freed from selfish concerns; on the social level, one can then exercise benevolence towards others” (Swearer, 1998, p.89). To truncate the equation at the individual and his or her mind denies the principle of causation that forms the ontological core of Buddhist ethical thought. The fact that all positive change begins with the individual, who shoulders responsibility for shaping shared outcomes, does not erase the effects of individual action (whether internally- or externally-oriented) in the world, nor the intent that underlies those actions. The teachings of the Buddha himself are overwhelmingly concerned with the well-being and fate of others, of relationships, and of communities. As Sivaraksa asserts, “[a]ny attempt to understand Buddhism apart from its social dimension is fundamentally a mistake. [...] Buddhism can be regarded as a prescription for both restructuring human consciousness and restructuring society” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.66).

After Weber – though perhaps not because of his work per se – the most common mischaracterization of Buddhism has been this portrayal of the ‘faith’ as fundamentally mystical instead of

fundamentally social. Accusations similar to Weber's have come most vociferously from other religious traditions, who allege that Buddhism lacks an ethic sufficiently grounded in lived reality, rendering it cold, escapist, pessimistic, and individualistic. From Confucianism one may hear the claim that Buddhism "neglects the role of human relationships in maintaining order," while Christianity asserts that "its pessimistic worldview [...] sees life as simply an agonizing episode [...] depriv[ing] us of the strength necessary to pursue social justice" (Sheng-Yen, 1991, p.7). Arguments based on Buddhist metaphysics and Buddhist social action establish that these conceptions describe accurately neither the theory nor the practice of Buddhist ethics. In that ethical system, mental virtues are the basis of virtues of outward action (Rājavaramuni, 1990). Further, Buddhism is practice, rather than study, meaning that any understanding called for by, or gleaned from doctrine must be put into action – thus any of the virtues proposed may be accurately preceded by the adjective 'active,' with accompanying social implications. Even individual acts are seen as social in that, except in the rarest cases, they cannot help but have social effects (Little & Twiss, 1992). Buddhism does not endorse passivity – indeed, Buddhism's inclination toward non-violent civil action in the face of injustice has made headlines for decades (including, most famously, Vietnamese monks self-immolating to protest the Diem regime and the efforts of Tibetan Buddhists to non-violently resist the Chinese annexation of their nation). A long history of social activism and community development vacates Weber's assessment; Buddhism clearly has the 'ethic of action' that Weber refused to grant it.

At the other end of the spectrum, existing parallel to adherence to religious ethical metanarratives, can be found a pervasive distrust of normative ethics framed in religious terms, and a common dismissal of Buddhist ethics on these grounds. To a great extent this is a function of the more general secularization of academia and the separation of church and state, although Ichimura (1991) finds other, much earlier roots in the shift from Aristotelian natural to divine law, which he claims bred a tension in ethics that the Western mind is still struggling to overcome. In the East, however, ethics neither arose from, nor shifted into, a purely secular-rational discourse, and no such distrust of semi-religious (or religiously grounded) morality exists. Also important in this regard is the fact that Buddhism makes no pretence of a monopoly on truth, nor does it require religious devotion to any of its teachings or to its religious authority. Morality, in this case, is not vested in religious acts or states of mind. In fact, Buddhism is, itself, somewhat skeptical of metanarratives. As Nhat Hanh (1985) writes, "One should not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, any theory, any ideology, including Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought must be guiding means

and not absolute truth” (p.4). Matsunami (1991) goes even further, asserting that “Buddhism is not an ‘ism,’ nor is it an ideology in the strict sense of the word” (p.121).

Chapter Conclusion

The relationship between societal stability and individual flourishing is clear; Buddhism simply makes it explicit and places it at the centre of an ethical system. Thus in Buddhism, morality, rooted in social engagement, is built into the heart of personal liberation, uniting self and other in practice as well as theory and theology (Rājavaramuni, 1990). Buddhist *sīla*, in the words of Guruge and Bond (1998), “links the ethic of action to the goal of salvation” (p.87). Further, Buddhism provides a strong example of an ethical theory-practice, espoused through a spiritual doctrine-discipline (*dhamma-vinyana*), in which soteriological and social concerns are interwoven:

The *vinyana* is consistent with the *dhamma* as the social good is compatible with individual [development and] perfection. [...] With the *vinyana* the Buddha puts people into reciprocal or interdependent relationships, and with the *dhamma* the individual’s internal independence and freedom are to be attained and retained in the world of mutual dependence. (Rājavaramuni, 1990, p.52-3)

Chapter Two

Critique, Social Theory, and Economics: Towards a Buddhist Theory of Development

“The venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a well-known Siamese Buddhist monk, once remarked that the word ‘development’ in its Pali equivalent means ‘disorderliness’ or ‘confusion.’ He also said that, in Buddhism, ‘development’ refers to either progress or regress” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.35). It is perhaps fitting, then, that many of the myriad forces working against ‘development’ in the broadest sense have, in fact, actually stemmed from development projects (principally in the form of straightforward modernization). Economic dependence, social dislocation, and cultural transformation have been the hallmarks of the process in those nations from which Buddhist voices are emanating. From their perspective these are not surprising outcomes, but a function of the way development has been framed by national governments and bi- and multi-lateral aid agencies – indeed, there could have been no other possible outcome, given the values and intentions vested in (or overridden by) the process. Premasiri (1996) notes that “[t]he evaluative assumptions underlying the contemporary Western concept of development are being blindly adopted by other civilizations of the world without a sufficient critique of the very contradictions evidently involved in the practical implications of such a concept” (par.1). Part of the overall goal of Buddhist development theory has been just such a critique, in the spirit of Buddhist awareness-building and critical reflection. In mounting this critique, Buddhist theorists share in the task taken up by figures such as Mohandas K. Gandhi (in Asia), Raúl Prébisch (in Latin America), and Frantz Fanon (in Africa), whose writings on international intervention, in the form of colonialism and imperialism, are arguably applicable to development. Though it is true that “visions of a new and different social order often stem from dissatisfaction and disappointment with the status quo” (Swearer, 1996, p.196), it cannot be said that Buddhist theory-building and on-the-ground initiatives have been merely reactive. The analyses and solutions offered have been part of Buddhism’s ongoing effort to grapple with contemporary issues, to interpret traditional belief and practice in a way that guarantees Buddhism’s continued relevance (Swearer, 1996).

Buddhist Development – Broad Strokes and Foundations

Buddhist writing on development runs from negative theory (criticism) to positive (principally economic and social theory, the latter still in its infancy). Because reform or Socially Engaged Buddhism has thus far occupied itself with making explicit the applicability of doctrine to the modern condition, as

well as getting down to the actual work of community development, there is no *per se* Buddhist development theory. In fact, given the strong emphasis on context and flexibility, there is no one Buddhist model for development practice, either. Much theory-building in this area has been motivated by the Four Noble Truths, bolstered considerably by the observation that “[t]he further development has proceeded the more it has resulted in the rich becoming richer while the poor become poorer, *and the rich are still not happier*” (Sivaraksa, 1987, p.4, emphasis added). At its simplest, Buddhist development can be described as human intervention in, or the outcomes of human activity on, the causes and symptoms of material and immaterial suffering. It holds to foundational principles of autonomy, independence, dignity, and cultural integrity – without economic, social, environmental, or cultural harm.

As early as 1981 the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) had drafted a Buddhist-influenced critique of, and alternative to, the prevailing development model, presented in its *Mission Statement*:

Dominant Existing System	ACFOD Vision
1. Emphasis on economic growth and material needs	1. Human-centred development of persons and their potential
2. Serves dominant interests (industrialists, local and foreign vested interests, landlords, bureaucracy, military)	2. Serves peoples' interests (in particular the poor and disadvantaged)
3. Increasing dependence on foreign capital, aid, technology and power	3. National self-reliance
4. Export-oriented production	4. Production for use to meet basic needs
5. Inequality – control over resources by a few	5. Peoples' control over resources: equal access to goods
6. Depoliticization / domestication / condition people to preserve the status quo	6. Awareness build-up; conscientization/politicization of the people for change
7. Fragmentation of people	7. Organization of people and forging linkages/coalitions among peoples/groups
8. Urban bias	8. Elimination of the urban/rural contradiction
9. Neglect/discrimination/oppression of women	9. Integration of women
10. Dominant culture	10. Peoples' culture and traditions
11. Authorization/centralization/militarization	11. [Devolution to the local level]
12. Pollution and destruction of the environment/wasteful resource use	12. Harmony with the environment/conservation of resources

Dominant Existing System	ACFOD Vision
13. Suppression of minority rights and culture	13. Respect for minority rights and culture
14. Power (domination)	14. Counter-power (liberation)

The ACFOD material of the 1980s was noteworthy for, among other things, its rejection of both capitalist and communist/Marxist visions of development, faulting both for over-emphasizing economic growth as the yardstick of progress. This reflects one key difference between Buddhist and mainstream development. “In terms of human values,” writes Sivaraksa (1992), “countries that take refuge in materialism, no matter which ideological camp they belong to, scarcely differ” (p.41). Even Buddhadasa (1986), an influential, heterodox monk who proposed ‘*dhammic* socialism’ saw no meaningful difference between capitalism and Soviet socialism, describing both of their aims for curing the world’s ills as akin to “cleaning something that is dirty with dirty water” (p.31). This is, in general, in keeping with the Buddhist stance on materialism, which asserts that the full range of human potential is not expressed by material development, even if that development is found in the company of other liberal emphases (for example, ‘good governance,’ or the presence of *de jure* human rights). Buddhist writers have also lamented the dearth of viable cultural alternatives to mainstream development, given this similarity of materialist approaches. Speaking of the Thai and Japanese pride over their respective ‘distinctive’ development ideologies, Sivaraksa (1996) observes that “No doubt each country has maintained a certain unique identity and aspects of its cultural heritage, yet there seems to be no real challenge to the Western model of development in either country” (p.4). Unfortunately, Buddhist criticism, whether ideological or pragmatic, is invariably levelled at development policy and practice at the national and international level, rather than development theory (Western or otherwise). The few Buddhist writers that are actively addressing development have thus far been busy, as it were, investigating the effects of mainstream development activity on their communities and nations. Given the severity and scope of these impacts, it is perhaps understandable that these authors have yet to engage fully with development theorists. Some do, however, clearly differentiate between ‘modernization’ and ‘development,’ and point out the danger of conflating the two: “[t]he first can be achieved without any close harmonization of new techno-economic mechanisms with our overall system of values and ethics. The second cannot. [It must be] congruent with the way our people conceive and define the good life” (Ketudat, 1990, p.111). This sentiment, by Thai Theravada Buddhist Ketudat, is also

expressed by Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist Norbert-Hodge (1997), who writes that “*industrial* development affects not only our way of living, but our world view as well” (p.20, emphasis added). Sadly, the equation of human flourishing and industrial modernization has often been the way that development has found expression in the world.

Another key difference between Buddhist and mainstream development is the lack of an ends/means distinction – community participation, for example, is valuable in and of itself, as well as for its potential in servicing other goals. Similarly, work is long-term instead of ad-hoc, one-off project-based, and seldom operates within the bounds of stipulated ‘commencement’ and ‘conclusion’ dates. “Development,” writes Suksamran (1988), “is a continuing process which contributes to improvement in the quality of life of the people” (p.36). This, quite simply, is a practical expression of the Buddhist idea that “[t]here is no such thing as being, only becoming” (Ivarsson, 2001, p.36), and the idea of virtue as practiced or lived, rather than attained or demonstrated. Blindness to this principle leads to a dangerous false hope, in which development is seen as paving the way to perfection (which is itself illusory). Further to accusations of wavering on the instrumental/intrinsic value distinction, it is not uncommon to find assertions that development in practice has singularly “emphasized the end results of development in terms of production, consumption, and political power. Human beings have been seen as instruments to provide labour, to produce and consume, and to save and invest” (Suksamran, 1988, p.30). From the Buddhist perspective, ‘development’ is necessarily a personal engagement and therefore a personal journey, meaning that autonomy cannot be violated, even in the name of some common good. A diversity of approaches thus characterizes all Buddhist development work, which tends to be small-scale, community-based, inspired by indigenous knowledges, and thoroughly pragmatic. Direct personal involvement is favoured, as is a close and active relationship between donors and recipients (Gohlert, 1991). The clear emphasis is on long-term, interrelated, self-reliant, and cooperative development initiatives. At the rural level, some of the strategies employed in pursuit of these goals include community-funded resource banks (seed, livestock, equipment); donated labour, such as ‘friendship farming’ and ‘integrated family farming;’ local savings groups; cooperative construction and group ownership of public utilities (dams, wells, roads, reservoirs, rest homes, public halls, libraries, bridges, and schools); community forest management; community child-care centres; direct sales of community-produced goods; establishment of cooperatives; and the use of local, traditional, and appropriate technologies (Suksamran, 1988; Ekachai, 1994; Puntarigivat, 1998; Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995; Daniels, 1998).

Khemchalerm puts the motivation behind these kinds of initiatives plainly: “we have to be self-reliant in order to live freely” (as cited in Gohlert, 1991, p.185). Buddhism places local culture as one of the cornerstones of that self-reliance, stating unequivocally that material increase that comes at the price of local beliefs and traditions cannot be counted as a success. Development cannot disregard that which gives life meaning in the community affected by the project and remain ‘development’ in any meaningful sense of the word. These approaches “view local tradition and culture as an effective foundation for building a sense of identity and unity and for preserving a sense of personal dignity and integrity in the process of development” (Suksamran, 1988, p.41). Indeed, there is no compelling reason why traditional knowledges or local cultures should have to yield to any process that is intended to better their lives; at the very least they merit protection from the negative impacts of any work being carried out. Acknowledging that culture is far from static, though, Buddhist development prioritizes measures that enhance adaptability; macro-level socio-economic changes often come fast, hit hard, and run deep, and communities must weather them in order to survive as communal polities at all. Sivaraksa (1992) thus argues that the Buddhist approach to development “teaches us to look at the whole picture, balancing the prevailing psychological norms with a sort of counter-psychology, and balancing our culture, economy, and [...] policies with a counter-culture, a counter-economy, and counter-policies” (p.102).

Scale is also a principal consideration in Buddhist development thought. Small structures are better at putting a face on power, limiting entrenchment of political authority and control, and require less inflexible legislation to govern effectively. They also tend to inspire less of a feeling of ‘being a cog,’ reaffirming a sense of place and re-prioritizing human interaction. Buddhist development is thus characterized as following a principle of economic and political localization grounded in “human-scale structures” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.22). This principle, combined with the Buddhist appreciation of cultural, historical, and biological diversity, results in a tendency to ‘think small,’ rejecting both the scaling-up of initiatives and the translation of isolated successes into templates (Ekachai, 1994). This is a natural extension of the Buddhist attention to context, which itself flows from Buddhist ideas of causation. As Loy (1999b) points out, “[t]here is nothing absolute in any [Buddhist] doctrine: teachings are ‘true’ because they are appropriate – that is, liberative – for particular people at particular times and places. And for particular cultures” (p.133). It follows, then, that one-size-fits-all development solutions are incompatible with Buddhist ethics. Indeed, the deployment of any ‘instant formula’ would rob the Buddhist development process of its key step: communities analysing their own situations and finding consensus answers to the

problems they face. It is for this reason that Buddhism does not prescribe an ideal economic or political model; instead, it asserts that “economic and political systems are a question of method, and methods, according to Buddhism, should be attuned to time and place” (Payutto, 1994a, p.79). As Abbot Nan Sutasilo, a well-known Thai ‘development monk’ put it: “[e]ach locality has a difference history, social background, and set of beliefs. There are no ready-made answers [...]” (as cited in Ekachai, 1994, p.207).

In Buddhist development, concern for *place* is found alongside equal consideration of *time*. Ketudat (1990) uses the term ‘tempocentrism,’ the temporal equivalent of ethnocentrism, to describe how mainstream development “pay[s] too little attention to the future, or pay[s] attention but in the wrong way” (p.xxxi). In these models, in a sense the future does not count, either because of the potential for some new technology to come to the rescue (for example, in dealing with environmental destruction), or because thinking in policy circles is typically restricted to shorter-term forecasts, and limited, quantifiable issues. In a typically Buddhist analysis, Ketudat (1990) locates tempocentrism deep within complete “systems of attitudes and tendencies” (p.xxxii), which characterize a culture. It is thus not surprising that development planning should be affected by the same compartmentalized thinking and quandary ethics¹⁴ that constrains mainstream socio-economic reasoning, and which creates a focus on specific issues instead of issues-within-issues, historical processes, and long-term effects. Tempocentrism also serves to veil “possible or probable changes in the *context* of life as of a particular future point in time” (Ketudat, 1990, p.xxxiii, emphasis added), leaving citizens exposed to the effects of problems that they scarcely knew existed – and which could potentially have been ameliorated or avoided. Buddhist initiatives recognize that adaptation to change is psychologically demanding, and that this ‘burden of transition’ too seldom merits explicit attention in the planning (or follow-up) stages of development projects.

In addition to these foundational ideas, there are other significant themes and concepts that describe certain development initiatives and perspectives as uniquely Buddhist.

From the Individual to Society: *Dukkha*, *Paticcasamuppāda*, and *Anattā*

Buddhism does not fundamentally distinguish between of-the-world *dukkha* and transcendental *dukkha*; however, in discussing development, one may refer to both psychological and socio-political suffering (Puntarigivat, 1998). Because of the social nature of man and the symbiotic relationship

¹⁴ Quandary ethics describes the practice of looking at issues as made up of a set of specific moral dilemmas, creating a ‘piecemeal’ or ‘ad-hoc’ approach to moral reasoning wherein ethics is reduced to problem-solving.

between the individual and society, the ‘three poisons’ or ‘roots of suffering’ to which every individual is vulnerable¹⁵ may be either fostered or suppressed by the socio-cultural systems (Norbert-Hodge, 1997). In other words, *moha*, *dosa*, and *lobha* are the basis of not only existential suffering, but also social, political, and economic ills as well (Premasiri, 1999; Loy, 2003a). In various accounts, and because the Pali terms do not correspond perfectly to similar concepts expressed in English, the ‘poisons’ are given as covetousness, envy, or acquisitiveness (*lobha*, typically translated as ‘greed’); aggression, anger, or ill-will (*dosa*, typically translated as ‘malice’); and confusion, ignorance, or delusion (*moha*). From the Buddhist perspective, all of these ‘roots of suffering’ are today institutionalized, while continuing to arise as problems within and between individuals. Norbert-Hodge (1997) writes that “modern society is based on the assumption that we are separate from and able to control the [...] world. Thus the structures and institutions on which we depend are reifications of ignorance and greed – a denial of interdependence and impermanence” (p.20). To address *dukkha* entails a two-fold realization: one focus being within, on the causes of suffering, and one without, on its effects upon the world. And since *moha*, *dosa*, and *lobha* each depend upon the us-them distinction and the illusion of ego-permanence, work to diffuse them involves acknowledging – both personally and institutionally – the truth of *anattā* (no-self) and *paticcasamuppāda* (interdependent arising). Therefore, “If greed is understood not just in individual terms but also as a built-in mechanism of oppressive social structures, [...] to reduce or eliminate greed through personal self-restraint will not be enough; these social structures will have to be changed as well” (Puntarigvivat, 1998, par.1). In these kinds of assertions, which are common in Buddhist analyses, the objects identified and indemnified are violent or inequitable political and economic structure, as well as the dearth of information and awareness that perpetuates them. Loy (1999b), for example, puts it quite bluntly: “[i]n short, our global economy is institutionalized greed; our military-industrial complex is institutionalized aggression; our media and even our universities promote institutionalized ignorance of what is actually happening” (p.6). From the perspective of a philosophy that posits aggregate individual action as the font of change in the world, it seems obvious that “[t]he solution to this kind of suffering must come from broad-based, non-violent, grass-roots movements that challenge narrow self-interest and dehumanizing power” (Swearer, 1996, p.217). Such a movement cannot arise without acknowledgement of *paticcasamuppāda*, since “[o]nly by recognizing how we are all part of this system can we actively work together to disengage from these life-denying structures” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.23).

¹⁵ In that they are present, at least as potentialities, in every human being.

Sivaraksa (1988) writes that “[t]here is no doubt that peace and freedom are the supreme goals of Buddhism. Both of them are synonyms for *nibbāna*” (p.71). In Buddhism, the interpretation of ‘liberation’ is necessarily both social and personal – indeed, the definition of ‘freedom’ is threefold. Its first aspect consists of physical freedom from the insecurities presented by poverty, illness, and insufficient food (i.e. meeting the basic needs of shelter, food, medicine, and clothing), as well as freedom from strife or war. The second is social freedom, entailing freedom from oppression and exploitation, which is predicated on tolerance, solidarity, and benevolence. Its third aspect is freedom of the ‘inner life,’ or freedom from mental, emotional, and existential suffering, which is caused by greed, hatred, and delusion (Sivaraksa, 1988, 2000; Premasiri, 1999). This is a composite freedom impossible, or nearly so, in a fundamentally atomistic society, for it depends on the realization of fundamental interdependence. Echoing this sentiment, Phaisan (1999) writes that “[p]eace and harmony in society and personal happiness do not depend only on proper behaviour among individuals, but equally depend on how we relate to our own society” (p.88). External and internal freedom are part of the same path; if individual Buddhist practice aims for personal liberation, then Buddhist action in the world aims for social liberation. By way of contrast, in Western ideologies and the societies built upon them, freedom is typically defined as the ability to make choices, while the act of choosing is cognate with the affirmation of individual identity and personal self-worth. This self-worth is most often assessed non-relationally, as a consequence of the ontological priority of the person (itself a consequence of the Western fear that the group may oppress or subsume the individual). The problem seems to be that a mechanistic view of human nature has come to dominate the development equation – man is the product of external factors, and the focus must be on altering those factors in order to empower the individual. This is a rather anaemic view of human capacity, and one to which Buddhism does not subscribe.

Thus, although Buddhism is intensely personal, speaking most often of cultivating or refining the ‘provisionally real’ self, it acknowledges that personal change and structural change are necessarily interwoven, that human society and human consciousness do – and must – change together (Sivaraksa, 1983). The self may influence society, but society exerts effects that require the individual, in turn, to adapt and change. More than this, the two are fundamentally mutually constitutive:

[S]ociety is an aggregate of individuals, and if enough individuals change, then so will society as a whole. Society, however, is more than an aggregate of individuals. People create society, but social structures also create (socialize) people. The conditioning works

both ways, for social structures take on a life and agenda of their own that includes conditioning people to fit their own needs and meet the goals of the elites who dominate them. (Loy, 1999a, p.135)

Just as with the concept of *kamma*, man and society are involved in a *causal* relationship, wherein (roughly, of course) positive begets positive and negative begets negative – or as Sizemore and Swearer (1990b) note, “[i]t takes good individuals to create a good society, and a good society to create good individuals” (p.10). In this view societies take on, or represent the sum total of the virtues of their members, and one reaps the effects one’s virtue, in part, through the society in which one lives. Considering the doctrine of *patthasamuppāda*, Buddhist theory could come to no other conclusion (Sizemore & Swearer, 1990b). Because of this interdependence, and since there is a clear relationship between material development and individual transformation, it is not enough to merely foster change at *either* the individual *or* societal level. Further, “[f]rom the standpoint of Buddhist theory, people not only can effect change, they *must* take personal responsibility to act, since nothing else can effect change” (Marek, 1988, p.235, emphasis added). The Buddhist paradigm is thus bi-focal, attending to “the minute particulars of our actions,” as well as “the giant web of all life” (Sivaraksa, 1990b, p.176).

This dual focus brings with it a responsibility on the part of those who take action. In Buddhist socio-political philosophy, there is a right and wrong mindframe from which to initiate change. Concern with the ego-self, which strikes against the doctrine of *anattā* gives rise to the both the wrong mindframe for positive social action and the selfish inclination to take no action at all. The right cognitive ‘space’ is one of neutrality, mindfulness, and selflessness, in which decisions are made cooperatively, calmly, and critically (Sivaraksa, 1988). In other words, one cannot “fight blindly or selfishly to liberate others” (Sivaraksa, 1983, p.126). The ‘lender’ or ‘aid-giver’ is thus implicated in Buddhist development ethics, which has interesting implications for a host of related practices and phenomena, for example the Debt Crisis, which in Buddhism would be construed unethical or misguided lending as much as unethical or misguided borrowing. Similarly, the tendency to make dualist distinctions also gives rise to the wrong mindframe, since this creates hierarchies, oppressors, and opponents (Sivaraksa, 1983). As Sivaraksa (1992) writes, echoing the words of the Buddha himself, “[i]t is easy to hate our enemies [...]. But [we] must come to see that there is no other” (p.116). Between the ‘underdeveloped’ and the ‘developed,’ the ‘giver’ and ‘receiver,’ then, there is no metaphysical separation, and therefore no ethical distance:

There is a term from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, ‘interbeing,’ which conveys the spirit [...]. In the sutra it is a compound term which means ‘mutual’ and ‘to be.’ Interbeing is a new word in English, and I hope it will be accepted. We have talked about the many in the one, and the one containing the many. In one sheet of paper, we see everything else, the cloud, the forest, the logger. I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. That is the meaning of the word ‘interbeing.’ We inter-are. (Nhat Hanh, 1987, p.87)

Because the only truly controllable thing is the ego-self, Buddhist development posits individual effort as the nexus of all change; indeed, “[man] serves as the instrument of other forms of development” (Premasiri, 1996, par.6). Because self-transformation precedes group transformation, which in turn must occur prior to structural transformation, development philosophy holds up a kind of ‘temporary individualism,’ or unselfish individual behaviour, “premised on the far more important truth of the oneness of the social collective and natural environment” (Daniels, 1998, p.978). This constitutes an acknowledgement of the more widely appreciated truism that “[w]hile there are some things in life which no one can do for others, there are many things which everyone [sic] of us can do directly or indirectly for the benefit of others” (Sivaraksa, 1988, p.76). The individual on this path strives to accomplish all of the personally liberating goals of singular ‘practice’¹⁶ while also engaging in:

- (1) Sharing (*dāna*) what one has. *Dana* is not satisfied by giving away what one no longer needs, giving with any other end in mind (for example, earning thanks or renown), or giving what is not needed or is perhaps even physically or psychologically detrimental to the recipient. This practice acts to mediate materialism and competitiveness, and is meant to be enacted in lieu of strict dependence on buying/selling.
- (2) Practicing pleasant speech (*piyavaca*), which entails speaking politely, truthfully, and sincerely.
- (3) Undertaking constructive action (*atthacariya*). *Atthacariya* involves working for collective benefit, employing appropriate technologies. The ambition is full and voluntary participation, in the knowledge that “while there may be no immediate individual regard, the communal interest is served” (Suksamran, 1988, p.43).
- (4) Holding to equality (*samanattata*), which entails recognizing no classes, castes, or hierarchies that make for lesser and greater persons (Sivaraksa, 1983).

¹⁶ Buddhist practice involves the reduction of craving, avoidance of violence, self-contentment, freedom of mind, and cultivation of the non-material aspects of life (Phaisan, 1999).

Much of this imperative stems directly from the Buddha's teachings vis-à-vis social responsibility, which establish that "Buddhist practice, rightly understood, can and should go hand in hand with purposeful efforts to better society" (Foster, 1999, p.121). The principal ethical imperative is to address the abject material poverty of those with whom we share this world.

Buddhist Views of Poverty

From the Buddhist perspective, poverty is not merely a matter of monetary abundance and dearth, it is equally a matter of money chasing after the wrong ends, or after the right ends in the wrong way. Further, the social dimension and definition of poverty involves "[a] craving for wealth as haunted by fear of poverty; global poverty as necessary to monetarize and commodify the 'underdeveloped' world; and poverty as a necessary benchmark for the wealthy to appreciate their own achievement" (Loy, 2003a, p.196). Further, Loy (2003b) asserts that the urge to 'attack poverty' is the natural companion to the Western obsession with wealth creation. (It does seem an odd, egocentric variant of compassion to posit peoples engaged in a sufficiency economy as 'poor' because they lack what we have – meaning that, in their place, *we* would be miserable.) The Buddhist teaching on non-duality is here underscored, since simple dualisms create dependent opposition through mutual negation: 'rich' is not merely the inverse of 'poor,' it *requires* contrast with 'poor.' Worse, the conventional view of poverty is, in fact, an *incomplete* dualism. It affirms the existence of 'rich' and 'poor,' yet fails to extend that recognition to its natural end: an understanding that "there is no such thing as a 'poverty problem' that can be understood separately from a 'wealth problem'" (Loy, 2003b, p.10). On this view, the poor are thoroughly objectified, if not implicitly faulted, with no responsibility accruing to the wealthy to take any action to address inequality from their side of the equation.

The conflation of 'subsistence' and 'impoverished' is actually quite common, and typically terminate in a view of subsistence forms of livelihood as being in need of 'development' (Shiva, 1988). This perspective does not find purchase in Buddhist analyses, however, wherein material poverty is defined as lacking the physical requirements for a life free from hunger, illness, and exposure (Payutto, 1994a). These 'four basics' or 'four necessities' are those of the Buddhist renunciate (mendicant), defined as enough food to maintain physical wellness; clothing and shelter that protect one from the elements and retain a socially acceptable level of modesty; and medical care sufficient to both treat and prevent illness (Loy, 2003b). Loy (2003b) points out that anthropologists have a longstanding understanding, which was not

taken up quickly enough in development practice, that material wealth is not always (or even primarily) a useful self-measure of well-being. Buddhist theorists concur on this point, stressing the need to attend to local and cultural measures in evaluating need, value, and contentment. Because of the importance of a contextualized approach, they claim that investigations of ‘poverty’ require a level of empathetic neutrality and self-awareness that is rare in conventional analyses (Ekachai, 1994).

Although poverty is often perniciously confining, the qualities that make a person free or without want in the Buddhist tradition are independent of wealth – hence the wealthy are not immune to dearth and constraint. They, too, experience *dukkha*, and on the Buddhist account may be accurately categorized as ‘underdeveloped’ in the psycho-social sense (Sivaraksa, 1983). In the *Anguttara Nikaya* the Buddha describes the ability to improve one’s physical/material existence and the ability to pursue a moral life as faculties of ‘vision,’ each vested in one metaphorical eye. There are degrees of ‘blindness’ that affect this vision, in which one ability may be present, but not the other. Those who enjoy material affluence are just as capable of *lack*, then, as those whose lives are more modest, or even relatively materially deprived.¹⁷ (The Buddha does, however, posit the ability to improve physical/material circumstances above actual deprivation as necessarily prior in the pursuit of other kinds of well-being.) Elsewhere in the Pali canon, one can find assertions that a poverty “even more miserable than that resulting from lack of material resources” comes from immoral conduct, lack of explicitly moral conduct, actions that are socially reprehensible, failure to develop one’s character, disinclination to give for the benefit of others, lack of faith, and lack of awareness of the Noble Fourfold Truth (Loy, 2003b, p.8). The inverse of these immoral and amoral engagements is, in fact, what is known as ‘noble wealth:’ a composite characteristic made up of confidence (*saddha*); ethical conduct, or *sīla*; a sense of aversion when contemplating wrongdoing, known as *hiri* or *ottappa*; learning, or *suta*; generosity, or *dāna*; and wisdom, or *paññā* (Premasiri, 1996). This presentation is not meant to make an emotional appeal to virtue, but instead describes the Buddhist understanding of physical and existential human needs as intertwined. Sivaraksa (1998) writes that,

Humans have a fundamental requisite of connection, to feel comforted and nurtured by the world around them. The four material requisites provide this on a physical level. On the spiritual and emotional level, we also require this comfort and nourishment. Life, society, and nature become three fundamental requisites for the individual to experience their [sic] interconnection with reality. (par.15)

¹⁷ See, for example, Loy (2003b), although my interpretation differs from his.

Here, 'life' refers to "the process of self-discovery and self-knowledge through solitude, meditation [...], and art and learning;" 'society' to "the way people connect together and reaffirm their cooperative nature through proper partnership, family, and community;" and 'nature' to "the way all beings connect, [...] practiced through a constant immersion where 'environment' no longer exists as an idea indicating the separation of man from nature" (Sivaraksa, 1998, par.15). These are needs as basic, and Buddhists would argue as common, as the 'basic needs' that support physical life. Freedom from material poverty is therefore a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a life worth living.

Buddhism obviously objects to any wholly material definition or analysis of poverty, recognizing that framing 'basic needs' as fundamental requirements for human well-being does not require commitment to materialistic development (Premasiri, 1996). Poverty defined as 'insufficient means with which to consume' says a great deal about the values and meanings hidden within conventional analyses of underdevelopment. Similarly, measurements of poverty according to consumption bring to the fore a materialist conundrum. When measurable assets are increased, additional wants tend to appear – indeed, growth of this type is key to market expansion and, more broadly, capitalism. Inculcating consumerism via development activity thus has the paradoxical effect of increasing the desire to consume. This observation leads to the Buddhist claim that, in practice, poverty can never be 'cured' by inculcating new wants, it can only be supplanted by a different kind of poverty. Loy (2003b) makes use of this irony when he points out that "there is a fundamental and inescapable poverty 'built into' a consumer society" (p.9). Similarly, Premasiri (1996) asserts that attention to the problem of underconsumption, without simultaneous attention to the problem of overconsumption, will only result in a situation in which "[a]ny attempt to overcome poverty in the [material sense] would turn out to be a self-defeating exercise" (par.4). Even if a rise in per-capita income was possible in every nation, and every human individual could be brought up to a middle-class Western level of consumption, "[a] world in which envy (*issa*) and miserliness (*macchhariya*) predominate [could not] be considered one in which poverty [had] been eliminated" (Loy, 1999b, p.8). Buddhist development theory and practice acknowledges that people are motivated to live *fully*, meeting a range of psycho-social as well as material needs, rather than merely *adequately*. Whether or not the individual acts on that urge, or has the opportunity to act on it, is the real issue in development.

Buddhist Economics: The Re-Embedding Process

At the root of material analyses of development and underdevelopment lie familiar approaches to economic reasoning. Economic models are culturally constructed, based on what the Pali canon refers to as *ditthi*, or ‘worldviews,’ and thus are “are ‘subjective’ mental formations *that inevitably condition events in ‘objective’ reality*” (Payutto, 1994a, p.55, emphasis added). The Western worldview, now dominant, “has convinced us to think in terms of money and has cornered us into believing that if we can just get the economics right, the rest of life’s pieces will comfortably fall into place” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.24). Mendis (1993) characterizes the Buddhist study of economics as, instead, “internalis[ing] the overall sustainability of economic, ecological, ethical, and spiritual aspects of human progress. For a Buddhist economist, economic behaviour is a part of the totality of human behaviour” (p.16). It is for this reason that, in Buddhist universities, economics is not a stand-alone discipline (never mind a ‘science,’) but an interdisciplinary field of study (Payutto, 1994a). Absent in it are purely monetary analyses, which are seen to address nothing but “the economist’s craving for statistical assessment” (Loy, 2003b, p.9). Teachings on economics are interwoven throughout even the most ancient Buddhist texts, suggesting that economics is part of a larger whole, and as such is inextricable from other spheres of life.

Buddhist economics is considerably more farsighted than its conventional counterpart. Instead of stopping at questions of supply and demand, it investigates the consequences of satisfying (or declining to satisfy) demand (Payutto, 1994a). At the macro level, “[g]ood economic decisions are those based on an awareness of the costs on the individual, social and environmental levels, not just in terms of production and consumption” (Payutto, 1994a, p.36). In assessing these decisions, theorists break down value into ‘true’ and ‘artificial’ – the former defined by an item’s ability to satisfy some aspect of well-being, determined rationally, the latter by its ability to satisfy the desire for sheer pleasure, and therefore determined irrationally. In fact, “[i]f we are to honestly discuss economics, we must admit that emotional factors – fear and desire and the irrationality they generate – have a very powerful influence on the marketplace” (Payutto, 1994a, p.xii). This rationality/irrationality distinction vis-à-vis economic choice also factors into Buddhist assessments of why conventional macroeconomics fails to account for human action. Payutto (1994a) explains that “theoretical [economic] models remain rational solutions to largely irrational problems, [while] rational decisions must be based on insight into the forces that make us irrational” (p.xii). In addressing individual and aggregate individual choice, then, Payutto (being a throughgoing Buddhist and a key economist in this tradition) examines intentions and values. The desire for objects that are pleasant or

enjoyable is called *tanha* in Pali, but its motivation is delusion, which clouds judgement of what is of true benefit and what is not (Payutto, 1994a). The desire for that which is wellness-fostering is called *chanda*, which arises from intelligent reflection. *Tanha* and *chanda* can be understood as distinct mental states based, respectively, on ignorance and wisdom – central concepts in Buddhist ethics. “[I]n real life situations, most people are motivated by varying degrees of both *tanha* and *chanda* [and] when it comes to judging the ethical value of economic behaviour, we must determine what kind of mental state is motivating it” (Payutto, 1994a, p.50). Buddhism thus links ‘freedom of choice’ to the power the individual has, through ethical reflection on personal motivation and economic relationships, to control his or her decision-making processes.

By way of contrast, Western/conventional economic theory, orbiting liberal capitalism, is fundamentally fatalistic. It examines ‘freedom of choice’ economically, as the ability to select from the widest possible array of commodities, and posits motivation as responding virtually perfectly to market dictates. The market itself is said to operate according to ‘natural laws,’ if unencumbered by state interference, and to curb unjust human inclinations through the action of an ‘invisible hand.’ In point of fact, the ‘laws’ of economics are based on social agreement (Payutto, 1994a). They are “the results of particular historical forces which can and should be challenged,” rather than natural forces that are beyond man’s ability to control (Loy, 1999b, p.6). An actual *imperative* to challenge these laws arises from the fact that, although socially constructed, they provide no guarantee of ethical outcomes. Theorists who still harken to free market ideology¹⁸ in discussing economic justice forget that its philosophical father, Adam Smith, wrote not one but two books that deserve consideration on this subject. *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), often read as a moral justification of greed, was preceded by *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which championed the virtue of empathy as a key determinant of just human action. Indeed, Smith’s over-cited ‘invisible hand’ has proven powerless to regulate economic behaviour according to social norms. Loy (2003b) speaks of practices like downsizing as “examples of how the market [...] ‘depletes moral capital’ and [...] relies upon the community to regenerate it, in much the same way it depends on the biosphere to regenerate natural capital.” He goes on to note, “[t]his is a good analogy, for the long-range consequences have been much the same” (p.12). In discussing the distortions of the market, Marx (1867) pointed out that economic progress served to throw dust on the true basis of exchange: human interaction, necessitated by a

¹⁸ In fact, there has never been such a thing as a completely ‘free’ market – even Polanyi (1944) called the idea a utopian dream. In fact, Polanyi accused Smith of profoundly misrepresenting human nature in characterizing the ‘invisible hand’ mechanism.

fundamental interdependence among and between individuals, communities, and the natural environment. When this happened, the ethical dimension of exchange was first lightened, then lifted, leaving the market as not necessarily an amoral sphere, but a pragmatic, ethically neutral (non-social) one. Weber (1914), too, wrote of the anti-social nature of “purely commercial relationships,” which have an “impersonal and economically rationalized (but for this very reason ethically irrational) character” (p.584). The obfuscation of the social element of exchange had wide-ranging effects; effects that have been amplified by the steady distancing of consumers from production and the resources it demands. As a result, and quite ironically, in an age of unparalleled privatization, natural resources (including so-called ‘human’ ones) now suffer a level of damage formerly only thought possible in open-access regimes.¹⁹ The root of the problem is the same in either case: a progressive ethical distancing, made possible by passive fatalism and fierce individualism set free, by the market, from social sanction.

In order to counter these effects at the macro level, Buddhist economics calls for self-sufficiency and localization to the greatest extent possible, along with ethical restrictions on corporate activity, movements of capital, and the diversification of economic activity. Neoliberal economic globalization is specifically targeted as a phenomenon that needs to be brought under social control. Despite the language of ‘harmonization’ and ‘integration,’ it is principally economies and politico-legal nationalistic aspirations that are brought together by globalization – and even so, not necessarily so that mutual benefit results. The fact is that globalization can serve either diversity or monoculture, and thus far its pace and direction have inclined strongly toward the latter (Shiva, 1993). Further, “[b]ecause it makes everyone dependent on the same resources, [neoliberal economic] globalization creates efficiency for corporations, but it also creates artificial scarcity for consumers, thus heightening competitive pressures” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.21). Although this is certainly a kind of interconnection, it is clearly not in the spirit of Buddhist ‘interdependence.’ Buddhist theorists thus favour the channelling of globalization so that what flows between borders is information, ideas, and cooperation, fuelling diversity and raising understanding (Lamberton, 2005). It calls for an accountability to place, rather than a borderless system of manufacturing and distribution coupled with heavily weighted (and therefore profoundly *unfree*) ‘free trade’ regimes. Free movements of capital are what confer significant advantage to multi- and transnational corporations; Buddhist economists contend that curtailing this ability would protect local industries that otherwise cannot compete, while making larger companies more accountable to local populations and environments. Profits

¹⁹ What Hardin (1968) famously (mis)labeled ‘the tragedy of the commons.’

may fall to more modest levels as a result, but shifts in the taxation and distribution of those profits could do much to preserve employment and offset economic shocks. 'Buy local' campaigns, which provide ethical justifications for supporting the local economy despite price increases, could also offer a supportive effect (Norbert-Hodge, 1997). All of these strategies are explored by, and deployed in, Buddhist macroeconomic development theory.

Other market-based issues also appear in Buddhist work on economics and development. Except insofar as it seeks to deepen itself through commodification, the market basically ignores human priorities that are without monetary potential (including relationships, community, spirituality, etc.). In response, Buddhist economics explicitly considers the implications of typically non-economic activities that take place in workplaces and the broader community. It prioritizes the sheltering these elements of culture, which the market mis-values, or which it suppresses or leaves behind because it cannot assign monetary value (Sivaraksa, 2000). In fact, this is one idea Buddhism has lifted almost wholesale from its own history, since societies used to limit or control the economy out of recognition of its potential for wide-ranging negative 'spillover' effects. They did not separate the economic and social, and posited social relationships as prior to economic ones.

If traditional economies, in the words of Polanyi (1944), were socially embedded, Buddhist theorists can be said to call for a 're-embedding' of the economy. They take a position which asserts that economic impacts are never wholly external (whereas mainstream economics posits both social and environmental effects as externalities), and which includes social sanction as an important limiter of human acquisitive self-interest (versus unrestrained acquisitive self-interest leading to optimal decision-making for the group as a whole). The Buddhist conception of an embedded economy is driven by Buddhist ethics, and includes several considerations that explicitly link the economic, social, political, and moral spheres. It is, in part, reactionary, recognizing that certain kinds of economic growth have come hand-in-hand with profound increases in material inequality and social dislocation. Payutto (1994a), in his criticism of this kind of economic growth being counted as 'development,' asserted that "the absence of poverty is a better gauge of a government's success than the presence of millionaires" (p.79). Development frameworks that overlook social and ecological factors are, essentially, declarations that such considerations do not have moral weight – this is, in light of the impacts that economic decisions have on the most vulnerable members of society, an ethically indefensible stance. Further, Daniels (1998) points out that conventional economic logic lacks "any mechanism for encouraging social behaviours or investment in social capital with substantial positive

spillover effects” (p.977). It is for this reason, in part, that Keyes (1983) describes Buddhism as unique in presenting a ‘moral economy’ without resorting to being anti-wealth or anti-consumption. As Payutto (1994a) explains, “Buddhism stresses that our relationship with wealth be guided by wisdom and a clear understanding of its true value and limitations” (p.78), while Sivaraksa (1992) writes that “[w]e cannot stop people from spending their money. We can only educated them to spend it wisely” (p.52).

In fact, the Buddha himself taught that ‘means’ goals can be economic (Marek, 1988), and various *suttas* describe areas where householders can maintain wealth without compromising Buddhist teachings:

- Acquisition: wealth must be acquired in a morally sound way.
- Safekeeping: wealth should only be saved and protected for beneficial ends.
- Use: wealth should only be put to support one’s self, family, and community.
- Mental attitude: wealth must not become an obsession. (Payutto, 1994a, p.78)

Economic reform inspired by this perspective thus targets *abuses of*, rather than *sheer* wealth and consumption (Sizemore & Swearer, 1990b). In Buddhist development economics, consumption and wealth are important, but they have instrumental rather than intrinsic value. In other words, profitable, non-violent economic activity can contribute to development goals by enhancing quality of life, specifically a life in which people are free to develop their potentials (Payutto, 1994a). Buddhist theory asserts that the hoarding or unethical acquisition of wealth cannot accomplish the same, even though conventional economics still posits wealth concentration as an engine of savings, investment, and growth, from which benefits will eventually (in some form) ‘trickle down’ (Payutto, 1994a). Adherence to this alternative conceptualization of wealth penetrates even as far as Buddhist leaders: the Thai king, in a speech about the then-pending International Monetary Fund bailout loan, famously said, “[b]eing a ‘tiger’²⁰ is not so important” (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2000, p.73).

Buddhist economics did not come into the public eye through the work of Buddhist theorists themselves – it took a respected voice in Western economics to present the Buddhist case. Schumacher’s (1973) five principles of Buddhist economics, laid out in his seminal work on the subject, include:

- (1) An economy of full employment as the central goal, wherein work is designed to “give man a chance to utilise and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by

²⁰ Here the King was referring to the remarkable economic success of the Four Asian Tigers (Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea) who pursued aggressive industrialization and modernization policies from the 1960s to the 1990s – often with serious social consequences (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1998).

joining with others in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed” (Schumacher, 1973, p.54). Economic, social, and psychological (individual) benefits are provided by work that takes place in a setting that promotes human dignity and freedom. Work is meant to be challenging, constructive, and to affirm (rather than subsume) the values and worth of the individual and society. Because of the critical role of work in overlapping spheres, there is no such thing as an acceptable level of unemployment or justifiable cost-cutting through reducing workers. No economic reasoning can outweigh this principle because economic reasoning is given no special, stand-alone status in Buddhist economics.

- (2) Consumption is targeted at optimal levels, meaning the highest levels of human satisfaction attainable at the lowest levels of material consumption. Maximization of production and consumption are therefore *not* goals, nor is the general neoclassical economic equation ‘material affluence + growth of desires for satisfaction = human happiness’ adhered to in any form (Buss, 1986). Through such equations, in fact, “economics, the science of human well-being and satisfaction, accepts, and indeed lauds, the kind of consumption that frustrates the realization of its own objectives” (Payutto, 1994a, p.42).
- (3) Simplicity is valued in both design and delivery of goods and services. Functionality, necessity, and durability are key characteristics of goods produced, since Buddhist economics stresses the difference between innovation and mere novelty. Production costs are reduced by local sourcing (eliminating transportation costs), consumption of essentials only (e.g. technology products and imported goods), and providing simple, minimal packaging for goods. The profit motive does not excuse waste in any form.²¹
- (4) Non-violence (*ahimsa*) takes the form of non-exploitation of humans, animals, and animate and inanimate elements of the ecosystem, all of which have clear moral status. “The promotion of economic activity involving injury to life in any form, or undermining the moral ideals of a society, however beneficial in economic terms, cannot be acceptable to one who values the Buddhist way of life” (Premasiri, 1999, p.4). This perspective includes pollution and stresses on habitats (in the

²¹ Restaurants, for example, give away excess to those who would benefit from such a donation, rather than promoting waste, even if this harms sales levels (Payutto, 1994a).

nexus between environment and economy), and the predatory elements of unregulated capitalism (in the nexus between economy and society). Far from economically empowering, capitalism has been, for many rural individuals, little more than a shock introduction to the cash economy, followed by personal debt and the erosion of community and traditional support systems. It is these kinds of effects that Buddhism seeks to ameliorate. In Buddhist communities, for example, pricing of goods is varied depending on customers' abilities to pay, rather than on 'what the market will bear,' since mutual benefit is the hallmark of Buddhist economic exchanges (Lamberton, 2005). This reflects what Cohen (1984) characterizes as the difference between "blood sucking capitalism," which permits blatant exploitation so long as *any* non-zero benefit accrues to the weaker party, and "good capitalism," which tempers itself with generosity and compassion (p.207).

- (5) Attitudes towards, and conservation of, natural resources are regulated, with renewable and non-renewable resources receiving different treatment regardless of their economic potential. Non-renewable resources are used only when necessity demands it, and then using strict care. Further, in Buddhist economics production is not simply the creation of a new material object, but the conversion of one substance to another, entailing the destruction of the former state in the process. "[I]n some cases the destruction is acceptable, in others it is not" (Payutto, 1994a, p.23).

One element which Schumacher overlooked, but which Eastern Buddhist economists stress, is:

- (6) Economic self-sufficiency as a goal at the level of the individual, household, community, and nation. Barter and/or sale of surplus is used to secure commodities that cannot be produced for oneself.

Payutto (1994a), in a typically Buddhist fashion, boils these separate elements down to one 'Middle Way' economic system with a dual guiding principle: the realization of true well-being, and not harming oneself or others. On his account, the defining characteristic of Buddhist economics is *mattannuta* (knowing moderation), which guides one to recognize the point at which well-being and material satisfaction coincide. Non-violence/non-harm of oneself or others, the other arm of his system, is the basic criterion of all human actions that qualify as 'good' according to Buddhist ethics. Both principles extend to human beings, society and the natural environment, addressing all three as a single 'community' (*sangha*). "Buddhist economics

must be in concord with the whole causal process,” writes Payutto (1994a), “and to do that it must have a proper relationship with all three of those areas” (p.70).

Interestingly, Buddhism espouses neither a socialist (or Marxist) nor a perfectly egalitarian division of wealth or goods. From a Buddhist rationalist perspective inequality is not itself problematic, except when advantage leads to feelings of entitlement, superiority, or pride; or when advantage is used to perpetuate itself at the expense of others (Green, 1990). Indeed, because individuals and groups disagree about the nature of entitlement and reward, “[t]he degree to which [...] inequalities can be considered to generate problems of social justice is not to be determined by universal moral principles but by reference to the principals adhered to by [local actors]” (Keyes, 1983, p.858). What is typically objected to on Buddhist ethical principles is “ruthless and destructive exploitation and income inequalities with dubious links to the value a person actually contributes to the social products” (Daniels, 1998, p.977).

From Materialism to Consumerism: Lack, Superstition, and Attachment

At its most essential, conventional economics (and subsequently mainstream development economics) is based on the idea that “[h]appiness is [...] inherently lacking and must be found somewhere else” (Payutto, 1994a, p.57). External objects, as commodities, are essential to the analysis, as is competition to secure more of them. Payutto (1994b) contrasts this characterization with that found in Buddhism, which distinguishes between *dependent happiness*, which requires external objects to fulfill personal satisfaction; and *independent happiness*, which arises without consumption. Consequently, in a Buddhist economy, “[w]e cooperate with others to solve problems, rather than competing with them to win happiness” (Payutto, 1994a, p.57). At a societal level, the economic individualism of liberal capitalism is often cited as the cause of the “social and economic costs of the widespread social pathologies (such as crime, suicide, abuse, alienation, conspicuous consumption, and profound ‘emptiness’ despite mass consumption) that tend to accompany development following this model” (Daniels, 1998, p.977). Digging deeper, Loy (1991) finds the root of the problem in what he terms *lack*. There is a small but vibrant collection of Buddhist literature on the idea of scarcity or lack, and its translation, through economic reasoning, from a fundamentally existential to a primarily material issue (Weisskopf, 1971). The resulting rationalization drives us to express economic issues stripped from their social, psychological, and ecological contexts, and fetishize, idolize, or otherwise superstitiously view consumption. Acquisitiveness, bolstered by the ideology of capitalism itself, causes fixation on objects as avenues of salvation, which ironically

become a locus of suffering. In Buddhist texts these objects are compared to embers or sparks carried on the wind – they “involve much anxiety but very little satisfaction” (Loy, 2003b, p.9). Buddhadasa (1986) writes about the confusion that this acquisitiveness engenders: “[i]n the first and most fundamental sense, we do not realize what we are doing: we want what we should not want, and we do not want what we should want. [...] We even desire things that will bring us trouble and anxiety” (p.139).

This confusion is a product of what Phaisan (1999) calls ‘malign superstition,’ differentiated from superstitions found within historico-cultural frameworks by the fact that no moral obligation attaches. In fact, Phaisan goes as far as to theorize that the shift to the cash economy involved, in an important step, replacing traditional superstitions with these new ones. “Consumerism has commodified superstition, making it easily accessible and diversified [...]. In short, consumerism increases both the demand for and the supply of superstition” (Phaisan, 1999, p.78). Similarly, Payutto (1994a) writes that consumerism and the advertising that sustains it makes us *peta*, or ‘hungry ghosts.’ The *peta* is a powerful image in Buddhist teachings, and a frightening figure in mythology. “The hungry ghost [...] is a phantom-like creature with withered limbs, a grossly bloated belly, and a long, narrow needle-like neck. They demand impossible satisfactions and search for gratification for old unfulfilled needs whose time has passed” (Think Sangha, 1998, p.i). Never satisfied, *peta* crave and seek and acquire *without gaining fulfilment*; even securing their hearts’ desires brings no satisfaction, leaving them eternally feeling that something is missing. The modern translation of *peta* is, fittingly, ‘consumer.’ Loy (1999b), another Buddhist theorist, speaks about consumerism as ‘idolatry,’ explaining that

Idolatry occurs whenever we try to ‘become real’ by completely identifying with something in the world as the source of our power. Psychological idolatry is akin to fetishism, and like fetishists idolators gain their security at the price of living in a more constricted world, with narrowed perception and fewer possibilities. [...] [T]he problem of life is how to ‘grow out of’ our idolatries by expanding our allegiances and preoccupations. (p.39)

These conceptualizations certainly bears some resemblance to the commodity fetishism of Marx (1867), not least in the use of religious language to characterize secular phenomena associated with capitalist consumption. They do, however, have a different root. For Buddhists, the sense of lack, inspired by the knowledge (indeed, fear) that we are not singular, permanent, and independent creatures, drives much action in the world. Lack also has a collective expression, derived from social and historical trajectories unique to each culture (Loy, 1999b). Objectification and consumption is one way – in fact the primary way – that

individuals operating under a mechanistic (read: objective and morally neutral) paradigm deal with their lack. Unfortunately, this objectification actually accomplishes the opposite of what was intended, alienating individual power or control via moral standards. All that remains in the wake of this alienation is the impersonal 'law of the market' (Loy, 1999b). Buddhism's answer is, of course, derived from Buddhist virtue ethics, namely awareness of *paticcasamuppāda* and *anattā*, fostered at the individual level. As Loy (1999b) explains, "[t]he self's sense of separation from the world motivates me to try to secure myself within it, but the only authentic solution is the essentially spiritual realization that I am not other than it" (p.6).

One outgrowth of such awareness is, in fact, a key tenet of Buddhist development: non-attachment and, by way of this 'development virtue,' reduced consumption. Non-attachment, in the mundane sense, describes an emotionally neutral or non-acquisitive position toward the material things individuals typically consume (whether to use up, wear down, or discard). Being the opposite of the impulse that drives conspicuous or ostentatious consumption, it steers toward reduced consumption overall, and communal or public ownership of key resources. Buddhism is thus an inversion of the basic growth-as-happiness (and development-as-growth) model, asserting that "when there are fewer desires there can be greater development" (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.44). Buddhadasa (1986), in fact, described Buddhist 'development' as demonstrating an ethics of sufficiency or moderation, leading to a "community of restraint" (p.29), while Lamberton (2005) refers to the Buddhist model not as 'development' but as 'sustainable self-sufficiency' or 'sustainable lifestyles.' Western economic principles active in development, by way of contrast, stress profit maximization and material accumulation; further, they do so, as Schumacher (1973) famously asserted, as if people did not matter. They emphasize 'gigantism,' particularly of technology, production/consumption, and wealth itself, all of which tend to overreach their original mandate to become controlling of those they were originally meant to serve. Sivaraksa (1992) writes that abundance flows not from this kind of massification or aggressive material acquisition, but from simplicity, the desire for rationally-determined comfort, and respect for "the community of life" (p.45). Simplicity, in turn, comes about through voluntary renunciation. "With renunciation as an active social value, it becomes clear to the rich what they actually need for a comfortable life. The rest is excess to be shared with others, especially those of lesser means among one's associations and community" (Watts & Loy, 1998, p.63). Taking this principle to the macro level, Sivaraksa (2000) summons Toynbee's 'Law of Progressive Simplification' (Toynbee, 1947), in which 'true growth' is defined as "the ability of a society to transfer increasing amounts

of energy and attention from the material side of life to the non-material side and thereby to advance its culture, capacity for compassion, and strength of democracy” (p.2).

Unfortunately, a strong component of contemporary Western self-identity is constructed via acquisition/consumption, and increasingly this is taking priority over other kinds of values, intentions, and systems of meaning. Prestige, in particular, seems tied to making certain kinds of purchases – witness branding in all its forms. Several writers have commented on the irony inherent in the fact that, in many developing regions, the first real ‘status symbol’ acquired is often a television set, which immediately serves to expose the household to new purchasing opportunities (Sivaraksa, 1992). Central to this irony is the hope wrapped up in consumerism and manipulated by marketing. Watts and Loy (1998) describe how “the false promise of consumerism distorts our own lives and the lives of those around us” (p.62). One particularly pernicious form this distortion takes is the conflation of needs and wants, so that the two become virtually (if not actually) identical in both thought and action. This has a profound effect on one’s notion of self and sense of place in the world. Further, the inability to separate necessity from desire renders self-sufficiency impossible, allows for considerable waste of both emotional and financial resources in chasing wants disguised as needs, and impedes the individual’s connection with the most basic necessities in the form of community and environment. The steady commodification of new spheres (including, most recently, knowledge, leisure, and genomic data) increases the scope and depth of these effects – and indeed, the significance of ratcheting up commodification and consumption is evidenced by the fact that these new markets have become major components of the world’s largest economies (Watts & Loy, 1998). Theoretically, from the conventional economic perspective, there is no upper limit to this expansion and the income it nets, given that the satisfaction of our desires is ostensibly possible through sufficient technological and economic investment. According to the major alternative perspectives, the satisfaction of our desires *may not be* possible given environmental limitations,²² though technology and economics still provide potential solutions.²³ From the Buddhist perspective, the very attempt to clear barriers to higher consumption is indicative of a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature and the relationship between man and the natural world. There are both environmental and psychological impediments to the satisfaction of material desires, neither of which are surmountable by technological innovation or economic ingenuity.

²² See proponents of ‘sustainable development.’

²³ For example, ‘green technology’ and market mechanisms such as the Kyoto protocol.

From a Buddhist standpoint, in fact, the proliferation of desires is the root of “unnecessary ill-being” (Loy, 2003b, p.9).

This analysis has implications for development, since economic development explicitly (and usually exclusively) articulates the attainment of material ends,²⁴ with individuals encouraged to orient activity toward those ends. Of course, marked discontent with capitalist accumulation is not unique to Buddhist theory. It is also seen in post-industrialism, post-modernism, the conservation movement, and green technology trends, all of which have found footing in development discourse – though not necessarily, or even to a significant extent, in development practice. Sivaraksa (1990b), in fact, describes development as an “ideology which preaches improvement of the quality of life through the acquisition of material objects” (p.170). This perspective is particularly problematic for Buddhists since, although all pleasure is fleeting in the ultimate sense, material pleasures are especially impermanent, unstable, and illusory. There is a creeping effect to materialism, too, in which everything may become ‘material’ to be portioned out and assigned value. Time thus becomes work-hours, a countdown to work hours, or productivity statistics; while space becomes either something to be filled or ‘planted,’ and emptied or ‘harvested’ – both materialist efficiencies imposed on what were previously socially or naturally defined units. Worse, from the Buddhist perspective, materialism is simultaneously alienating and numbing, as comfort insulates one from feeling, too intensely, the suffering of others. It is a vestigial biophysical imperative, which used to sensibly link necessary material accumulation with survival and physical security, gone mad (Daniels, 1998). It is also a spiralling and self-fulfilling phenomenon, since “[t]he unrestrained pursuit of material wealth and the immoderate urge for the gratification of the senses have only led to a complete obliteration of a reasonable distinction between mankind’s needs and wants,” while the conflation of needs and wants, in turn, feeds the pursuit of wealth and sensory gratification (Premasiri, 1996, par.5). This being said, non-consumption, like consumption, must be seen as a means to a positive end in order to stand as a viable pathway. Non-production can be a useful economic activity if the cost of the destruction outweighs the yield of production, but it remains that “[w]hat is important is to judge whether when we suspend materialist presuppositions [...] it has anything meaningful to offer” (Premasiri, 1996, par.11).

If the satisfaction of ego-bound desires is impossible, both psychologically and environmentally, the only promise of fulfilment lies in “a clear knowledge of the benefits and limitations of material possessions”

²⁴ Acknowledging efforts such as the securing of ‘improved water,’ development remains principally materialistic in both its means and its ends.

(Payutto, 1994a, p.68) and the promotion of relative contentment (Premasiri, 1996). The Buddha himself taught that the greatest wealth is contentment, thus Buddhism expressly encourages the cultivation of this psychological state (Premasiri, 1999). Affluence is permitted in this model, but must be countered with generosity, creating a kind of “qualified possession” paradigm (Green, 1990, p.222). Buddhist development, then, is about “transforming our relationship with the material” (Sivaraksa, 1998, par.14) involving “the acquisition and renunciation of wealth in a dialectical relationship” (Sizemore & Swearer, 1990b, p.1). As Ketudat (1990) rather plainly puts it, “I have no objection to development providing luxury for some, *after* it provides necessities for all” (p.112). Though much misunderstood by those who see Buddhism extolling a purely egalitarian distribution ethic, such a position is entirely appropriate to a ‘Middle Way’ philosophy. Further, it is possible or permissible because, as has been discussed, Buddhism has no *de facto* objection to the production of material wealth, but does strongly discourage egocentric use of wealth and the accompanying “servile dependence on consumer goods” (Premasiri, 1996, par.16). This basic acquisition-generosity dialectic of Buddhist economic ethics can be seen in the earliest texts, which describe how four kinds of material contentment can be found in possessing sufficient material resources, enjoying those resources, sharing those resources, and living in a state of freedom from debt. There is also a pragmatic, in addition to a socially ethical motivation presented in the *suttas*, since wealth that is shared cannot be stolen, destroyed, or otherwise appropriated. This is definitely not the ‘cornucopia’ image of Western satisfaction, but it does represent the ultimate ‘embedded economy.’ It also serves as one alternative model, worthy of serious consideration, in light of the fact that “[t]he natural resource implications, transaction costs, neglect of spillovers, and moral vacuity of unrestrained economic individualism based on self-interest and maximized material consumption suggest that it may be a dysfunctional basis for future economic systems” (Daniels, 1998, p.978).

At the macro level, Daniels (1998) cautions that production decline and reduced material consumption patterns may deal a blow to ‘economies of scale,’ with the net result that even greater pressure is applied to ecosystems per unit of consumption. Buddhist theorists, however, hold that reductions and declines will outpace, and thus offset, inefficiencies (Daniels, 1998). Further, they assert that consumption patterns *must* be found that do not out-pace development, no matter at what stage of that process a household, community, or nation entire, finds itself. What Buddhist theorists are discussing when they speak of shifting consumption patterns is, of course, not just personal transformation, but societal change on a significant scale. This reflects the underlying conceptualization of change as bi-focal, involving the

individual and society simultaneously. This individual, in Buddhist reasoning, is not the ‘rational utility maximizer’ of conventional economics, but neither is he or she a creature without economic motivations. The individual is a politically, economically, socially, *and morally* bounded being:

[People] do seek through rational calculation to maximize the well-being of themselves and their families, [but] they are constrained in doing so by the particular political economic conditions within which they live and also by the particular world of meaning in which their actions make sense. This world is a moral universe in which individual desires, to employ Buddhist language, are to be brought under control by moral reflection on whether one’s actions cause suffering to others. (Keyes, 1983, p.865)

Livelihoods, Social Welfare, and Human Well-Being

Buddhism regards access to ‘right livelihoods’ as fundamental; indeed, from the Buddhist perspective, “[d]epriving people of the means to an adequate livelihood is [...] a kind of killing” (Swearer, 1996, 217). Speaking of Schumacher’s work, Ophuls (2000) describes a Buddhist economy as one which “must be designed to provide all members of society with a sufficiency of material well-being through livelihoods that are inherently satisfying, that do not harm others materially or spiritually, that involve the individual in service to his community, and therefore contributes [sic] to the purification of character” (p.369). Western capitalist democracy, by way of contrast, makes little provision for the pursuit of full employment not because of some latent difficulty or external restraint, but because that was never its intended goal; full employment is not built into either the economic logic or the ethic of the system. Capitalism, as described by Weber (2002), is sympathetic to (and coincident with) the Protestant work ethic – which entails, at least at the philosophical level, separating ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ members of an actual or potential workforce, and rewarding the former with employment. Philanthropy, neoconservatives assert, can and should make up for any shortfall.

Unfortunately, at every step of Western development increased efficiency in production and distribution, and in the expansion or deepening of markets, has entailed a public/social cost, including: diminishing workers rights, spiralling pollution, and the progressive privatization of state services. Private charity is just not sufficient to simultaneously ameliorate the effects of neoliberal economic globalization and make up for the aforementioned ‘shortfall’ in employment-associated benefits. Further, from the Buddhist perspective, even social welfare systems undamaged by privatization and shrinking budgets cannot accomplish these tasks. Social welfare, according to Lancaster (1991), became an ethical priority in the

West because of the effects of rapid industrialization on a progressively urbanizing populace. It was the product of a certain political system operating in a particular cultural and historical location. Buddhism fails to embrace this ‘narrative of social welfare’ because such a narrative creates, as its basic tenet, a clear segregation between the deserving and undeserving, even within the ranks of the ‘poor’ (Lancaster, 1991). In doing so it strikes again the first observation of Buddhism – that suffering is universal. This realization is what allows support, in Buddhist social and political philosophy, to be mutual and extensive, rather than one-sided and unidirectional, flowing from ‘over-achieving’ to ‘under-achieving’ members of society. The latter scenario violates both self-reliance and dignity/autonomy, both core principles in Buddhism. Further, many social welfare policies and programmes overlook the motivations behind charitable action, not all of which are either *per se* ethical or even indisputably beneficial, to either the community in general or the segregated ‘other’ in particular. It is not inconceivable that social welfare is psychologically damaging by virtue of this deserving/undeserving dichotomy, which lends itself to patronizing behaviour (whether conscious or not). Buddhist texts, in fact, assert that not everyone should bestow ‘gifts’ because of the potential for negative fallout: for those who take on a ‘giver’ or ‘receiver’ role without awareness that both are essentially empty, and therefore no hierarchical relationship can be asserted; and for those who fail to realize that the gift, too, is empty, and thus confers no special status on those in a position to (strategically) part with it.²⁵

The Buddhist attitude toward livelihoods is an extension of its respect for individual autonomy and the dignity of persons, which produce a unique ambition in both the extent and substance of employment. Just as ‘right livelihood’ is not measured by the wealth it produces but by the well-being it generates, ‘livelihood’ in general is seen as both an economic and a social necessity, making zero percent unemployment and the availability of meaningful work specific goals. Work, in the Buddhist sense, is meant to address the desire for well-being, it is not merely human effort bartered for leisure time or material consumables. Similarly, Buddhism maintains that an awareness of human interdependence is critical, and is served in part by minimizing the distance (psychological and physical) between the work invested and the product(s) produced. The economics of wage labour, however, is based on a thoroughly artificial ‘law,’ where wages become the product of work for the individual, supplanting the actual outcome/product, and alienating the one from the other. (Marx (1867), of course, deals with this notion extensively). According to Buddhist theory, this produces a reluctant or perfunctory approach to work, positioning it as sheer labour

²⁵ See, for example, the *Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtras*.

rather than social and economic productivity (Payutto, 1994a). As Payutto (1994a) explains, “[w]hen *tanha* [the profit motive] is the motivating force, 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” (p.53). Both the estrangement/distancing of actual labourer from the fruits of labour, and the encouragement of an attitude toward work as a kind of servility, have broader social ramifications.

As a result, within individual Buddhist communities, a typical approach to development-as-economic-sufficiency bears similarities to the ‘livelihoods approach’ outlined by Grown and Sebstad (1989), and Chambers and Conway (1992). With these models it shares an emphasis on small-scale mobilization of community resources via diverse strategies (including, *inter alia*, borrowing, social networking, alteration of consumption patterns, and technological innovation). These strategies depart from the standard analyses of motivations and trajectories because, as Grown and Sebstad (1989) point out, they begin in *survival* and advance to *security* without necessarily progressing to *growth* – a distinction that mainstream economists tend to overlook. In Buddhist terms, growth beyond security is not necessarily advantageous. Chambers and Conway (1992), as well as Sen (1999), define livelihoods as made up of people, their capabilities (what the individual is capable of doing/realizing and being/becoming), and their assets (means of earning a living, whether through wage labour, self-provisioning, monetary, or non-cash holdings). Chambers and Conway (1992) add the prefix ‘sustainable’ to their livelihoods project, holding that this term is applicable in at least two ways: ‘social sustainability’ is the ability for communities to adapt to stresses and shocks while continuing to provide intergenerational equity, while ‘environmental sustainability’ is the ability of development efforts to maintain (or even enhance) the ecological assets necessary for livelihoods to endure. Essen (2003, 2005), a proponent of the Buddhist approach, holds that just as building sustainable livelihoods may occur post-deployment of complicated models, such as those developed by Chambers and Conway (1992), it may also occur in a more experimental way, being hashed out by communities on-the-ground. The latter pathway describes most Buddhist development praxis.

Participation, Community, and the Scale of Relationships

Participation has been oddly placed in development practice, most often either glossed over or heralded as the guarantor of equitable outcomes, without ever being seen as an end in itself.²⁶ Communities,

²⁶ Although the work of Robert Chambers has been described as valuing participation in itself, in practice this theoretical intention has not come through. Further, post-development critics question that very intention, finding Chambers’ work to present a reframing of (and not a shift from) the preceding development rhetoric (Chambers et al., 2005).

in this view, are made up of individuals whose agency is dormant, requiring outside intervention to awaken and guide – ironically, this is as true of academic champions of participatory methods as it is for non-academic actors and institutions. Several critics have raised the question of whether ‘participation’ actually constitutes a simple quasi-ethical shine over top of existing, entrenched agendas (Pottier, 1997). On the ground, ‘participatory’ projects have a mixed record of success, and have been particular targets of feminist theorists. Adding to the debate, Buddhism present a variety of its own unique theories regarding this net failure, as well as constructing its own approach to participation. If ‘participatory development’ in general represented a shift from models that introduced outsiders in leadership roles, to those in which the role of outsiders was deliberately limited (to facilitation, which is still a privileged position), Buddhist theorists view this trend as positive but incomplete. It is true that, in the practical sense, decisions must emanate from within the affected community in order to feed into positive development; in the metaphysical sense, though, there are no ‘outsiders’ at all, and to think otherwise is to fall into a dichotomy that cannot help but objectify the ‘target’ community and its members.

Under the contemporary capitalist expression of traits such as competition, acquisition, and individualism, the importance of relationships wanes dramatically. In the opinion of Watts and Loy (1998), this process links the individual (disconnected) to the community (dispersed), creating a nexus between delusion, despair, and disempowerment. The general observation in Buddhist countries has been that as communities break down, atomised by the state apparatus, people become increasingly dependent on bureaucratic structures for both personal safety and societal harmony, and “[t]hat in turn generates the modern distinction between public and private [...] thus promot[ing] the very individualism that it postulates” (Loy, 1999b, p.21). Scale has exacerbated this problem dramatically, since compassion and wisdom in exercising judgment are difficult, if not impossible, when scale begins to obscure real human-to-human interaction and the effects of individual choices – when “our arms have been so lengthened that we no longer see what our hands are doing” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.23). After a certain scale has been reached, there is nothing discernable left of the human cause-and-effect relationship. A purchase, for example, is neither beneficial nor detrimental, except in the personal, financial sense (more or less money in the bank, more or less pleasure secured). This is why Buddhism asserts that societies are not held together by laws but by a sense of connection; development, therefore, requires de-massifying of institutions and structures, and simplification and humanization of relationships. ‘Participation’ without these explicit considerations is a gamble, at best. The problem, however, goes deeper than participation in specific

development initiatives. It is one of ‘development’ in the most general sense of the word, particularly with the emphasis on self-reliance found in Buddhist development theory.

Centralization of political and economic power, and the bureaucratization that this shift necessitated, eroded the traditional semi-autonomy of communities, and with it the number and scale of affinities felt by individuals. Loy (1999b) attends to the status of trust in the wake of this political evolution, writing that

[i]n the Weberian ideal-type, bureaucratic role identification minimizes personal relations by maximizing functional relations. [...] [S]uch a bureaucracy ‘equalizes’ people by abstracting the right and obligations they have in common. [...] The objectivity of bureaucratic procedure engenders trust in the institution, which takes the form of law and respect for law. But this develops at the cost of personal trust. (p.20)

Bureaucracy, as the “instrumentalist and impersonal machinery of the state” is therefore found at the opposite end from mutualist community, measured along a continuum of personal trust (Loy, 1999b, p.23). Today, the norm is that “people relate to each other not just through interpersonal relationships, but also through institutions, organizations, and systems that are impersonal in nature” (Phaisan, 1999, p.94). Co-evolving with it, as bureaucratization has become more extensive, ‘circles of concern’ have shrunk from community-wide to extend now principally to only immediate family and friends, and most individuals today extend explicitly ‘moral’ behaviour only in this small group.²⁷ Morality is therefore not *absent*, but its application has shrunk dramatically, to be replaced with contracts and ‘manners.’ From the Buddhist perspective, centralization/consolidation of state power has seen communal and personal resources diminish, even as it engendered feelings of isolation and alienation. By way of contrast, “[i]n decentralized economies and political structures it is difficult to ignore the laws of impermanence and interdependence. Being personally accountable to the community means being constantly in tune with its changing social and environmental dynamics” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.23).

The negative effects of centralization and bureaucratization have been aggravated by development and modernization processes that inspire rural-to-urban migration and the thinning of family and community networks. Bureaucratic implementation of development initiatives, as a result, tends to involve complex rules and regulations that are often poorly understood or largely irrelevant to the local populace. As Phaisan (1999) notes, today “[s]ocial interaction based on common objectives or ideas is much less frequent than

²⁷ This assessment deliberately excludes mere etiquette from classification of ‘moral behaviour.’ Etiquette *is* practiced with strangers, but it is more automatic/unconscious than the type of behaviour being discussed here.

those based on existing personal bonds” (p.95). Compliance, therefore, typically requires concerted justification efforts, along with bargaining to secure cooperation or participation (Suksamran, 1988). The net effect, though termed ‘participation,’ is thus limited, cautious, and gauged for personal gain. Worse, in practice ‘development monks’ observe that mainstream development projects tend to inspire materialism and a singular focus on wage labour, “eroding the traditional spirit of mutual and reciprocal cooperation” (Suksamran, 1988, p.40). This observation resounds with certain Western social and political philosophers who have dealt with alienation and social erosion, for example Nagel (2002). Nagel would agree with Sivaraksa’s (1998) observation that “modern structure building has neglected the transformation of individuals within these structures [while] large structural bureaucracies inhibit the important communal factors for growth in personal connection and intimacy” (par.26). The answer, for Buddhist theorists, activists, and development workers alike, is the establishment of more human-scale structures and relationships, as well as attention to the ‘development’ of the individuals who make up the institutions through which governments govern.

In order to work toward this rather lofty goal, Buddhism prioritizes the role of elements that support moral responsibility in social relationships, including the fostering of virtues at the individual level. Sivaraksa (2000), for example, describes compassion as “the instrumentality of social organization,” asserting that it turns the mind toward the community as the locus of development (p.4). This is not, however, a claim that small-scale communities are the only settings in which meaningful relationships can be fostered. Tangible, immediate community differs from abstract, impersonal community (the latter consisting of unknown persons, organizations, and systems), but the two are hardly mutually exclusive, and neither demands exclusive loyalty. In fact, “[i]ndividualism and collectivism are not polar opposites but coexist and overlap at many different possible levels of aggregation” (Daniels, 1998, p.977). The shift that Buddhism seeks, then, does not entail a return to some quasi-utopian or mythic past, but instead the investigation of new and hybrid models of human association and development of appropriate technology (Sivaraksa, 1992). The past may well provide inspiration, particularly considering the power of exemplars in Buddhist thought, but no historical model could be brought forward wholesale. It is important to remember that, in terms of culture and Buddhism, the past is not a romantic mental escape, a time and place appealed to in a fearful reaction to impending threats. It is, instead, a “living past with the power to challenge and transform, [and] to inspire people” (Swearer, 1996, p.213). The elements that can successfully translate from past to present include collective ownership, management/protection and

consumption of resources (rather than individuation and privatization), social sanction to reduce the ‘free rider effect,’ a communal approach to problem-solving, and a shared commitment to common values (Ekachai, 1994). Consensus forms of governance are typically stressed in theories that include this model, since “[w]hatever the decision, the community is usually made more productive in doing what it wants as a community. Its community character and productive capabilities are strengthened together” (Daly & Cobb, 1989, p.165). Making this politically feasible involves, among other measures, seeking to make up for wildly lopsided power dynamics by increasing the net conventional and non-conventional resources held by communities (i.e. both material and non-material), and bolstering the bargaining power of marginalized populations with respect to rents, wages, and market prices. These are, in actuality, measures already embraced by Buddhist development workers and activists in the field.

Another measure to restore the kinds of bonds broken as communities evolved (or eroded) has been to expand the very concept of community. Daly and Cobb (1989) define ‘community’ as a group of individuals “bound up with one another, sharing, despite differences, a common identity” (p.165). This definition removes any geographical imperative, allowing relationships to form among more diverse groups and for urban collectives to count as ‘communities’ in the same sense as rural ones. Phaisan (1999) identifies this trend (to reduce the small/rural/large/urban binary) as thoroughly Buddhist, appealing to both *pattecasamuppāda* and *anattā*, by pointing out that,

relationships confined to one’s own small circles are conducive to a narrow mind, whereas expansive (horizontal) relationships contribute to a ‘civic mind.’ Expansive engagement helps broaden one’s realm of concern [...]. With this attitude, one’s own welfare and the public welfare are considered identical since one has developed a strong sense that one is part of society and society is part of oneself. (p.95)

Governance and Power: Weaving Indra’s Net

Buddhists maintain that at the core of many development problems is the fact that economics has outpaced the adaptive capacity of mainstream politics, while at the same time political institutions have actually been pruned back. The conflation of economic and political power, coupled with the progressive centralization of power, has produced structures which allow the existence of elites – divorced from the majority of people, and with the economic and political power to perpetuate their own privilege at the expense of that majority – in the context of fully democratic forms of governance. This irony, in particular, interests Buddhist thinkers, and influences the kinds of socio-political models that they produce. One such

model has surfaced repeatedly: Indra's Net, "a spider's web in which at each node appears a mirror which reflects all of the other mirrors and vice versa infinitely. In this way, each infinitesimal part encodes all of the whole within it" (Sivaraksa, 1998, par.19). Each node is both independent and interdependent, so that the nature of the nodes, the action and interaction of the nodes, and the nature and functioning of the whole are mutually constructive. Insofar as individuals and communities can be empowered (and this is itself a tremendous task), power should exist – and be balanced by existing – at every node, rather than massed at the centre and weakening as it moves outward. This model is not without its problems, of course. It carries with it an emphasis on communication and cooperation that necessitates significant community and individual capacity-building, as well as far more extensive examination of possible decision-making paradigms (Sivaraksa, 1998). Buddhist 'base communities' are a common inspiration for alternative forms of governance along these lines. Largely self-determining local polities in which consensus is widely employed, these communities offer a more participatory model of democratic governance. Accusations of 'retro-utopianism' are common because of the use of this particular 'exemplar,' and indeed some theorists do incline toward building community models based on past Buddhist societies. Most writers are well aware of the dangers inherent in an uncritical appeal to history, though, not to mention the fact that today's self-sufficiency simply cannot be built on that enjoyed by villages in the past, since the "intractable nature of structural problems" makes it impossible (Puntarigivat, 1998, par.10).

The past and traditional teaching are a source of considerable insight into Buddhist conceptualizations of 'right' governance and power. Myths about the founding of the first Buddhist state stand as examples of a social contract, in which, in an attempt to allay rampant violence and greed, mankind as a whole came together to *elect* a ruler. This ruler, called the 'Great Elect,' held a mandate of establishing justice and order, in return for which his kingship was financially supported by an equal tax.²⁸ This king upheld a principle of distributive justice, in which land was given away to those with need (Loy, 2003b). Further, the Great Elect had a responsibility to draw out a moral society through "his own exemplary conduct and by the establishment of law and order, justice, and prosperity so as to create equal opportunities" (Cohen, 1984, p.197). Today, inspired by this early model, "Buddhism maintains that it is the duty of the government [...] to see to the needs of those who are in want and to strive to banish poverty" (Payutto, 1994a, p.79). Thus, from the earliest Buddhist philosophical texts to current social theory, the state entire is a means to a higher goal, rather than an end in itself. Foster (1999) defends these early,

²⁸ See available translations of the *Digha-nikaya* in the *Pali Canon*, along with discussions of this text in Cohen (1984).

primarily mythological texts, as well as the diverse writings that followed in and beyond the Buddhist tradition, noting, “true, Locke, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Jefferson, Marx, and their brethren had no direct equivalent in the Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions, but Asian thinkers [...] developed their own highly sophisticated analyses of social causality” (p.121). A much higher premium on social harmony is one hallmark of that tradition – although, as Loy (1999) observes, “Chinese and Japanese emphasis on harmony looks attractive from an American culture of hyper-individualism, but it creates other problems, especially when there is need for major social change” (Loy, 1999a, p.134). Other writers, including Jones (1999), note that institutionalized Buddhism has often stood silent during astonishingly coercive, even brutal regimes. Reform or Socially Engaged Buddhism, however – the variety that is the driving force behind development theory and practice – seeks to counter precisely this complacency, leading Gohlert (1991) to conclude that “Buddhist alternative development presents intrinsically a political challenge; namely, how to counteract and ultimately replace conventional power” (p.151).

Buddhadasa (1986) discusses Buddhist definitions of politics and governance as both pragmatically and morally grounded. ‘Politics’ is defined as “a moral system for addressing the problems arising from the need for social cooperation. True politics is a struggle against misunderstanding, wrongview, craving [...] and the like” (p.79). Similarly, ‘governance’ means “solving the problems that arise in relationship to large aggregates of people” (Buddhadasa, 1986, p.80). This alleviates, to some extent, the feeling of powerlessness, of being subject to remote and disinterested power, that can cripple participation in (or challenges to) power and government, reformulating the community as an immediate and interested power in itself. Such a conceptualization speaks to, and counters, the feeling that “politics belongs to the wider world, the world of people who have power, from which ordinary people [are] detached” (Suksamran, 1976, p.119). Given these definitions and conceptualizations, alternative centres of power are not inconceivable. From the Buddhist perspective there is considerable power outside of coercive forms (i.e. strength of arms or economic might), to be found in: culture, including traditional symbols, institutions, and norms; values, particularly shared values across diverse philosophies; scale, meaning direct human relationships; and exemplars, both human and otherwise, which exercise a motivational power (Gohlert, 1991). Each of these powers plays a role in the Buddhist conception of psycho-social well-being, and each is tapped into in theorizing and initiating development. Meanwhile, it remains for Buddhist development initiatives, on the broader scale, to address massive inequities in political and economic power by, according to their own theory, “coax[ing] these structures in other directions” and “transcend[ing] our own selfish ‘national

interests” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.112). Loy (1999b) writes that “[n]ational interest’ allows us to rationalize acts of state that most of us would refuse to do as individuals” (p.37). Buddhist ethics, of course, does not permit this kind of distancing, in which scaled-up actions lose their moral character. For the Buddhist, every action is first individual, then social, meaning that the chain of ‘ownership’ is not broken by the movement from atomised to aggregate action. It follows, then, that “every problem is a mutual problem calling for collective responsibility” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.112).

Buddhism, Environment, and Development

Far broader now than just development issues, Dryzek (1997) claims that the ‘sustainable development’ paradigm is the principal form that ecological concern itself takes in the world today. The 1972 United Nations’ Conference on the Human Environment coined the term ‘sustainable development,’ defining it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p.49). The *Brundtland Report* (the *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*) established eight broad objectives for the paradigm:

- (1) Reviving growth;
- (2) Changing the quality of growth;
- (3) Meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water, and sanitation;
- (4) Ensuring a sustainable level of population
- (5) Conserving and enhancing the resource base
- (6) Reorienting technology and managing risk
- (7) Merging environment and economics in decision making; and
- (8) Reorienting international economic relations. (WCED, 1987, p.49)

This mainstream sustainability paradigm claims to attend to the economic, social, and ecological aspects of human development in a balanced fashion. In reality, though, both the practical/political literature and work on the ground have heavily prioritized the economic sphere (Rogers, 2000). As a result, where ecological imperatives have resulted in less favourable financial outcomes, ‘compromise’ has “allow[ed] negative social and/or environmental impacts to be *bought out* by positive economic outcomes” (Lamberton, 2005, p.55). These are hardly surprising results, given that a strong economic orientation is built into the sustainable development framework and the philosophy that undergirds it. In that framework, environmental concerns and basic needs are added as modifiers to a core thrust of economic growth. Sustainable development is thus *economic* development with the goal of minimal negative environmental

and/or social impacts; indeed, sustainability is critical for future economic and industrial *expansion*. Part of an effort to reconcile national economic increase with negative environmental consequences of the growth-oriented development model, the ‘sustainable development’ paradigm suffers a critical inconsistency by virtue of precisely this heritage. Further, global deliberations have produced little headway in operationalizing sustainability in a way that honours the hoped-for sociological-economical-environmental balance.²⁹ The underlying message of the *Brundtland Report* is a familiar one: sustainable economic growth is possible through the development and deployment of new technologies. This ‘mantra of modernization’ has survived almost four decades of attack from academics, development practitioners, and activists who assert that there are clear limits to growth, and that current global consumption patterns are wholly unsustainable (and worse, escalating) (Elkins, 2000).

The UN definition and model have also been criticized for ignoring the ways in which ecological concerns are culturally constructed, and as a result downplaying non-economic ways of valuing the environment and the resources it provides. Nazarea (1999) points out that many non-Western societies make decisions about natural resources using different criteria, including use-value (as opposed to exchange-value), beauty, and diversity. Informed by feminist scholarship, Rocheleau, Thomas-Slater, & Wangari (1996) assert that a ‘sustainability’ that actually has meaning at the micro level emphasizes *survival* rather than *growth*, and must include both rights and responsibilities, including the right to a healthy environment, and the responsibility to maintain or rehabilitate the local environments that make survival possible. They rightly point out that these considerations require a certain level of social organization in order to be possibilities rather than merely ideals, making explicit the link between development, environment, livelihoods, and governance. Ultimately, the concepts and principles set out by the UNCED are legible to governments (although Southern governments claim the paradigm shows a clear bias toward the priorities of Northern polities) without translating well for the actual users of local natural resources. Relatedly, UNCED and *Brundtland*-inspired literature has been taken to task for presenting a weak, if not actually fallacious link between smallholder or traditional agriculture and environmental degradation, for example in its blaming of swidden farming and the harvesting of non-timber forest products for widespread deforestation, particularly in Southeast Asia.³⁰ Overall, the ‘sustainable development’ paradigm has been

²⁹ See, for example, the documents arising from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the ‘Rio Earth Summit’), particularly *Agenda 21*, and the 2002 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the ‘Rio+10 Summit’).

³⁰ See, for example, the literature on Thai highland minorities. More generally, see Escobar (1995).

marred by unconstructive debate, intense politicization, and compromise of both goals and values, while vagueness and ambiguity in terms and concepts has allowed widespread co-opting of the basic principles of sustainability. Evidence of this can be found in the practice known as ‘greenwashing,’ wherein corporations and governments attempt to distract from environmentally damaging practices by highlighting, often at tremendous expense, token ecological initiatives (Beers & Caparello, 1991).

The Buddhist approach to environmental sustainability departs from the mainstream in several key respects. Sivaraksa (1990b) has criticised the implementation of ‘sustainable development’ as amounting to “conservation through international press releases” (p.174), pointing out that both environmental degradation and sustainability/conservation bear the marks of an egocentric, mechanistic world-view that constructs man and nature as separate (if not the actual mastery of the former over the latter). In such a setting – dominated by artificiality and command – “it’s easy to believe that we depend more on the technosphere than life” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.20). It is this faulty perspective that Buddhist approaches to environmentalism attempt to correct:

According to the Buddha’s teachings, there is nothing which exists beyond or separate from nature, either as a mystical power controlling events from without, or in any way related to or involved in the proceedings of nature. [...] The manner of speech, which describes human beings as separate from nature or as controlling nature, is simply a contrivance of language. (Payutto, 1994b, p.23)

Similarly, Buddhadasa asserts that nature “exists within itself, by itself, of itself, and as its own law” (as cited in Isager, 2000, p.26). Rather than which ecological imperatives must be fulfilled, in the Buddhist paradigm the question becomes ‘how can we inculcate environmental empathy and a sense of the indivisibility of man and nature, so that a naturally virtuous disposition vis-à-vis the environment emerges?’ Ivarsson (2001) discusses the man/nature dichotomy as being similar to the self/other dichotomy, which Buddhism methodically dissolves, creating a situation in which “man and the natural environment form a moral unity” (p.36). Exemplars and doctrine both play a strong role, here, since Buddhist texts are full of environmental metaphors and instructions. The entire life story of the Buddha centres on trees and forests, and he himself admonished his followers to respect trees as sources of food, shade, and shelter. In Buddhism, to plant trees is considered a meritorious deed (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995). Granted, such an attitude was doubtless easier to adopt when the natural world was immediate; today, increasing urbanization and built environments severely limit personal relationships with nature. Nevertheless, many

of the self-sufficiency (livelihood) strategies deployed in Buddhist projects emphasize local nature, even if that ‘nature’ has to be created. Acknowledging that the human and natural resources invested in every mouthful of food are not insignificant – and are, in fact, quite humbling – reconnecting with food as a product of the natural world is stressed, for example through urban agriculture initiatives (Norbert-Hodge, 1997). Buddhists also stress that environmental sustainability requires full employment, noting that traditional practices (which are typically ecologically sound, given historical reliance on natural areas) often give way when financial need becomes dire (Sivaraksa, 1992).

To be certain, Buddhism as religion has also been used as a *tool* toward environmental ends – witness forest monks’ tree ordination, in which particular forms of struggle are linked with Buddhism *per se*, and especially Buddhist symbols. Tree ordination actually serves two purposes: it saves the existent tree(s) and raises environmental consciousness, since the ceremonies are actually set up to be witnessed (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995). This tactic makes use of the widespread perception that “[g]iven the long history of intimate mutualism between Buddhism and forests, [ecological damage] can be understood as degrading to Buddhism as well as to [...] forests and their wildlife” (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995, p.35). Rural temples and *bhikkhu* have also aligned themselves strongly with traditional and Indigenous peoples, asserting that the world has much to learn from ideologies which have a more intimate relationship with nature. The hope is that such approaches may serve to balance mainstream command/control frameworks, and perhaps even inspire new technologies (Sivaraksa, 1992). Ideologically, such a relationship has the potential to widen mainstream respect for human life, typically expressed through rights and ethical norms of behaviour, to include *all* life. Buddhism thus sets out an environmental ethics that is at once local, sustainability-oriented, and accepting of ‘alternative’ valuation systems.

Reaching Out, Inviting In: The Role of *Kalyānamittatā*

The encounter with other systems of thought over the past several hundred years has produced heterodox Buddhism, which today tries to deal with the negative outcomes of certain tendencies in the culturally-situated and institutionalized Buddhisms of Asian countries (Loy, 1999a). Part of that quest involves learning from other communities that have grappled with, or are currently grappling with, the ill-effects of modernization, consumerist secularization, and neoliberal economic globalization. These are the organizational equivalent of the Buddha’s *kalyānamittatā* (‘good friends’), those actors with the skill, knowledge, or awareness to help the individual progress in his or her personal development. Now, as then,

kalyānamittatā need not be Buddhist. As Sivaraksa (1983) explains, “[a]ny view which helps one to be less selfish, to be more detached from worldly gain, and to be more friendly to others, would be on the noble path to Right View. [...] Buddhism does not claim that it alone has the exclusive right to reveal or maintain such a view” (p.125)

In particular, reform or Socially Engaged Buddhists today are actively reaching out to non-Buddhist faith-based groups and intentional communities, particularly those based on explicit ethical principles (for example, cooperatives, or even companies with relevant mandates and operating procedures). Study trips to visit these other communities, promoting the open sharing of knowledge, are common (Puntarigivat, 1998). The Asoke movement, for example, prioritizes “local knowledge based-change” that nevertheless finds inspiration in extremely diverse sources: Western ecological concepts, mainstream marketing techniques, and Japanese natural farming methods, among others (Essen, 2005, p.157). In this, Buddhist communities produce something completely unique by looking to shared commitments and a common learning process for inspiration, “select[ing] from a wide variety of ideas and techniques available to them from global, regional, local, and historical sources,” and acknowledging that fundamentalism and insulation do little for innovation (Essen, 2005, p.157). Although it would seem to be an oxymoron, there is also emphasis on a kind of ‘shared self-reliance,’ where mutual interests allow for either superficial or deep collaboration between Buddhist initiatives and other actors in a related field. Watts and Loy (1998) describe the essential openness of this method, relating that, “one of the strengths of the engaged Buddhist approach is basically its non-sectarian character. [...] Engaged Buddhism has been enriched by similar movements in other religions and other secular forms of human interaction” (p.65). Though not ‘good friends’ in the strictest sense, ideological opponents are also enjoined in meaningful dialogue since, as Sivaraksa (1992) points out, “we must all start relating to each other” (p.50).

‘Good friends’ can also be found in the fields of science and technology, with which Buddhism is compatible by virtue of:

- (1) An epistemology founded on insight and knowledge (rather than dogma and ritual) and a holistic understanding of the physical universe versus a ‘two truth’ criterion (i.e. one for science and one for religion);
- (2) While devotional, spiritual, and mystical, an importance ascribed to knowledge obtained through critical investigation, personal experience, and verification (strengthened by relatively high levels of individual autonomy) [...];
- (3) A high status attached to education and scholarly activity [...]; and
- (4) Adherence to a causal approach in the conception of a universe governed by deterministic causal relations. (Daniels, 1998, p.982)

This compatibility, when expressed through active cooperation, allows the development of technologies along Buddhist-ethical lines, negating the need for ad-hoc adjustments, measures that ameliorate the impact of inappropriate technology, or a gap (which often brings with it latent ethical ambiguities) between the intention of the developers and that of the users of technology. In particular, Buddhist practitioners seek out those companies and researchers involved in truly alternative technologies, especially ‘soft’ or ‘appropriate’ means that entail minimal harm to both natural and social environments.

In general, then, Buddhist development theorists and professionals look to exemplars, innovators, and copasetic communities to help them in developing working models and methods. Further, they actively seek out ideological opponents and even critics to help them in addressing the weaknesses of those models and methods. The work of Buddhist social theorists and ‘reformist’ writers also serves to engage the practice in an internal critique, to reflect on its own limitations. Sivaraksa (1998) sums it up simply, by pointing out that more voices at the table engenders a “biodiversity of thinking and experience” (par.27), from which Buddhist theorists, communities, and initiatives can only benefit.

Idealism, Practicality, and the Transmundane

In discussions of Buddhist development ethics, accusations of utopianism and idealism enter quickly, with the dismissal of the entire paradigm predicated on its supposed unworkability in practice. This claim deserves special note, as well as careful refutation.³¹ The argument is partly grounded in the apparently inextricable union of development and cultural, technological, and political/economic homogenization, producing a kind of fatalism in which “it becomes difficult if not impossible to contemplate a different future for the world other than progressive Westernization. For the more optimistic, this Westernization functions as a necessary law, imposed by the force of circumstances” (Sivaraksa, 1996, p.4). Buddhism, however, puts more stock in the mind of man, asserting personal efficacy over fatalism (Marek, 1988). It “sees the feasibility of improvement in the human condition through better ideas, and their corresponding actions and consequences at the individual level” (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995, p.35). In fact, what Buddhist ‘idealism’ attempts is the catalysis of a new understanding of nature and of the interrelationship of social, economic, and political problems *as moral issues*. In this, it stresses the role of individuals, aggregates of individuals, and society in effecting change – remembering that there is no purely intellectual Buddhist doctrine, since it must be practiced and found effective to be considered relevant or

³¹ Detailed examples of Buddhist development in practice are provided in the following chapter.

‘true.’ What this understanding highlights is the difference between ‘engineering’ and ‘transforming’ society. Its framing of dilemmas is anti-escapist and anti-fatalist, and therefore simultaneously optimistic and practical, idealistic and active. It characterizes problems as “the cumulative and synergistic consequence of the maladaptive ideas and actions of many individuals, not simply caused by the vague scapegoats of technology, science, government, business, and/or industry” (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995, p.35). Conversely, Buddhist theorists also refuse to defer questions of development on the basis of potential technological discoveries or possible voluntary, enlightened, external intervention:

Instead of appealing to national governments for solutions, we need to work for more decentralized political institutions with increasing local self-governance and more direct participation. Instead of hoping that [...] corporations and market mechanisms might be used to solve the problems they have created, we need to rein them in, perhaps by rewriting their corporate charters, the umbilical cords that could be used to subordinate them to greater social concerns. And since science is unable to set self-limits on what it tries to discover and how those discoveries are used, scientific ambitions, like corporate ones, must be firmly subordinated to more democratically-determined goals. (Loy, 1999b, p.40)

Buddhism thus starts from where things really are, seeing the world and its problems as plainly as possible (Sivaraksa, 1988). This is an active prerogative, asserting that it is in the ‘here’ and ‘now’ that all change is rooted. It acknowledges that while ‘how we were’ is gone and ‘how we may be’ is not yet here, that best possible future cannot be realized by inaction, whether based in hope deferred or sheer complacency. The development perspectives and methods outlined are clearly idealistic, but so too is the basis of ‘development’ itself, an important element of which is the ability to imagine and act upon an alternative future. Gohlert (1991) explains that “[w]hile it is obviously unrealistic to assume that the conventional system – the vast, interest-riddled international aid establishment – will simply fade into the background and disappear, a new political strategy, dealing in the coin of interests, *can succeed*” (p.190, emphasis added). Since dismay over the systemic nature of the issue is, in the end, what prevents people from attacking socio-economic and political problems at their root, to deny the role of idealism is to cut short the very possibility of positive change.

The argument against the ‘workability’ or validity of Buddhist approaches is also based on the idea that theories or models which acknowledge or incorporate the transcendent are fundamentally other-worldly, with little or no this-worldly application beyond providing inspiration to clearly demarcated faith communities. Such a claim denies first the essentially rational nature of Buddhism and its associated arguments, which carefully promote methods designed for uptake by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike,

and second the power and place of the transcendent in human psychology and society. Gohlert (1991) points out that “[i]n the past, man addressed his inherent vulnerability with transcendence and community” (p.171). Phaisan (1999) writes about the salience of this mechanism even today: “[t]he ultimate is not some remote ideal for the unworldly life; instead, it is relevant and necessary for people of this world. [...] Though [...] people may not attain the ultimate fully, a momentary experience of it is possible and will have a tremendous impact on their lives and their relationships” (p.87). From the Buddhist perspective, development takes place “at the intersection of *lokiya* (the mundane) and *lokuttara* (the transmundane)” (Swearer, 1996, p.199). The intention, it follows, is to weave together the ultimate and the immediate in visions of positive change. In assessing this claim it should not be overlooked that the transmundane has tremendous import even for those without religious inclinations. It can be found in the assertion that humans desire not mere survival, but survival with dignity; not life, but what Sen (1999) famously referred to as “our capability to lead the kind of [life] we have reason to value” (p.285). Just as other ethically-oriented development theorists do, Buddhist thinkers “den[y] the autonomy of politics and economics from religion and morality” (Cohen, 1984, p.202), and call for development to proceed “not only with reference to the political economic conditions that constrain their lives but also with reference to the social imperative of living within a moral community” (Keyes, 1983, p.851). One need not be Buddhist, therefore, to find that the assertion true development is “continuity between the inner and the outer world” has significant merit (Sivaraksa, 1990b, p.177). In answer to the pessimist outlook that insists that Buddhist development philosophy is *overly* idealistic and thus untenable, the philosophical answer is that there is always a gap between ideal and actual behaviour, but this is not an excuse for abandoning ethical motivations and moral values. The experiential answer is that Buddhist projects active on the ground attest to the feasibility of implementing Buddhist ethics in development. These initiatives provide evidence of the fact that “Buddhism provides [...] both the imperative and the tools to challenge the economic structures that are creating and perpetuating suffering the world over” (Norbert-Hodge, 1997, p.20).

Buddhist ‘idealist’ perspectives on development are also noteworthy for their emphasis on causation, interdependence, and personal responsibility, encouraging introspection and critical self-reflection. The ‘developed’ world is here fully implicated in development activity, as well as in North/South inequality more generally. Buddhist perspectives force us to address our values and intentions, how they have contributed to global inequality, and what, in light of this, our obligations should be. Some Buddhist theorists concur with developing world writers, activists, and development economists who claim that what

the global South needs is *less* Northern ‘development,’ not more (Shikwati, 2005). Loy (2003b), for example, writes that,

We should acknowledge that we are unable to determine what is the best course for other peoples to follow. If we are sensitive to what is happening in our own backyards, we will have enough trouble trying to determine what is best for our ‘developed’ societies, all of which have major problems. (p.13)

This amounts to seriously proposing an ethic of ‘leaving them alone,’ although it differs substantially from the more familiar (and admittedly libertarian) arguments for reduced foreign aid. For Buddhists, ‘leaving alone’ vis-à-vis intervention and structured aid is a compassionate philosophy, accompanied by the caveat that this does not mean doing *nothing*, nor would it apply in cases of extreme poverty. Loy (2003b) describes an obligation to build local capacity primarily through restoring what was lost or stolen through colonialism and neo-colonialism, including renewal of resources and efforts that support self-determination in managing those resources. The role for ‘developed’ nations engaging with ‘developing’ countries is to increase not bi- and multi-lateral aid or non-governmental organization (NGO) activity *per se*, but “the options available for developing [their] own economies in line with aspirations for a just and prosperous society” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p.26). Buddhist development theories also tend to embody Escobar’s (1995) call for the assertion of cultural rights (to identity), political rights (to autonomy), and the right to formulate and be guided by a local vision of the future.

Chapter Conclusion

Buddhism is not the first philosophy or ‘school’ to assert a clear relationship between individual, collective, and institutional change; to call for individual responsibility, action, and informed choice in influencing development both locally and globally; or the importance, to questions of justice, of intergenerational, intragenerational, and interspecies equity. It is the first, however, to prove capable of combining these imperatives in a single, internally consistent framework for development. From the Buddhist perspective, in life, we are surrounded by three dimensions: the individual, social, and ecological, meaning that man, society, and the environment form a *sangha*, or community (Matsunami, 1991). Between these three entities, independence and interdependence, individualism and collectivism, must be reconciled in order to bring balance to economies, technologies, and structures. This is the task assigned to, and taken up by, Buddhist development theory.

Chapter Three

In and Of the World: Buddhist Development in Practice

Case Studies from Thailand

Thailand is an exemplar of uneven development: a transitional country enjoying a medium level of human development, where both wealth and power decrease sharply as one moves away from the national capital of Bangkok (UNDP, 2003). The words “Buddhism” and “Buddhist” do not appear even once in the most recent Thai national Human Development Report, the focus of which is community empowerment in a nation that is 96% Buddhist (CIA, 2006). The Buddhist religion (*satsana*), imported from Ceylon, is one of the three ‘pillars’ of Thai society, represented in the country’s flag by two white bands that both separate and link a band of red (representing *chat*, or nation) and blue (representing *phra mahakaset*, or the monarch) (Darlington, 2000; Gohlert, 1991; Ishii, 1968). As Suksamran (1988) writes, “[t]hese three entities form a threefold moral bond” (p.27). Buddhism is a principal force in generating *ekalak thai* (Thai identity), while the crown – particularly the currently reigning King Bhumibol (Rama IX, 1946 - present) – is seen as representing the *dhammarājā* (righteous king), and providing a cohesive, stabilizing, moderating force (Jackson, 1997). It is hardly surprising, then, that the monarchy and *sangha* have both been consciously employed by the state to “symbolize, legitimize, and explain” national development plans (Suksamran, 1988, p.30). (Darlington, 2000).

Background and Context: Religion, Power, and Development in Thailand

Thai Politics and Society

Traditional power in Thailand is founded on formal authority (office) and access to, or control of, material resources. Historically, land, transmitted by benevolent gift from superior to inferior, was the basis of wealth and influence (Gohlert, 1991). Thai society is thus decidedly patrimonial and hierarchical, and authority (including that of the state) rests on a complex, ever-shifting web of patron-client relationships (Walter, 2007). Gohlert (1991) describes Thailand as a benevolent autocracy. This combination of rigid social stratification and ‘birthright’ has given rise, over time, to a bureaucratic political structure described as autocratic, arbitrary, personal, centralized, and erratic. Loyalty to the state, in modern context, is clearly fashioned on the older concept of allegiance to the monarchy, and is presented now, as it was then, as the best way to serve the common good (Demaine, 1986; Jackson, 1997). Strong, unwavering, unquestioned

leadership is considered beneficial for, or even critical to, the smooth functioning of political and social institutions. In this context, “political behaviour is oriented towards deference, inequality, submission to bureaucratic rules, [and] highly personalized and centralized decisionmaking” (Gohlert, 1991, p.77). Collective, local action is de-emphasized as the sense of responsibility for social change shifts to public institutions – yet not to improving these through the political process, which is viewed as “messy, chaotic and dirty” (Gohlert, 1991, p.50). Negative characteristics that run through society and state are cited as factionalism, lack of horizontal cooperation,³² disinclination (or inability) to collaborate in the long term, fatalism, a non-meritocratic work ethic, widespread corruption, excessive red tape, use of military force (or threat of force) in policing society, falsification of official data to inflate reputations, self-serving independence of government agencies, lack of discipline, and lack of trust in relationships (Demaine, 1986; Gohlert, 1991; Missingham, 1997). While the people themselves are often portrayed as generous, hospitable, easygoing, innovative, sensible, and hardy, there is also a pronounced concern with appearances, saving face, avoidance of conflict, and a pervasive class-based distrust and prejudice (associated with the rural-urban divide) (Gohlert, 1991). In 1999, Amaret Sila-On, Chairman of the national Financial Sector Restructuring Authority, commented that the four Thai ‘social evils’ were yet on the rise: “cronyism, corruption, collusion, and complacency” (as cited in Essen, 2005). Ironically, patrimonial systems are based on an underlying assumption of the morality of the state, and a supposedly reciprocal relationship between virtue and political power (Gohlert, 1991).

The Bowring Treaty (1855) between the British Crown and the Kingdom of Siam was the first link in a chain of events that brought the small, isolated nation into the global economy (Darlington, 2000; Sivaraksa, 1988). Rethinking restricted access to home markets, as well as Siam’s isolation from global markets, King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868) pursued an ‘open door’ policy with world powers, through which he managed to avoid outright colonization (Gohlert, 1991; Sivaraksa, 1988, p.42). He also initiated a programme of rapid modernization that brought about significant changes to education, science and technology, and the economy (Darlington, 2000; Ishii, 1968; Taylor, 1993a). King Mongkut’s son and heir, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) modernized the state bureaucracy, beginning in 1892, and thus transitioned Thailand from a “loosely ruled kingdom” (Ishii, 1968, p.865) into a nation-state marked by “extreme centralization of economic and politico-administrative power (Demaine, 1986, p.97). The nation

³² Some theorists assert that population density and ample resources, historically, created a social atmosphere in which cooperation was simply unnecessary (Gohlert, 1991).

has, however, never enjoyed long-term political stability. The 1932 bloodless *coup d'état*, in which the crown's undisputed political authority was supplanted by constitutional monarchy, was only the first in a series of eighteen *coups* over the past seventy-six years, in addition to ten major uprisings or rebellions.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the rise of a small middle class, made up largely of Western-educated, achievement-oriented technocrats, who held surprisingly apolitical values, adopted global Northern conceptualizations of progress, and expressed a surprising ambivalence about the form of government taken³³ (Darlington, 2000; Gohlert, 1991; Taylor, 1993a). These individuals, together with an equally apolitical modernizing proletariat, created a “compliant populace which [did] not stand in the way of economic growth, [allowing], among other things, a new ‘business-political elite’” to appear. The apex of this private/public power is found in authoritarian Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), who referred to himself as the ‘CEO Premier’ (Walter, 2007, p.340). Coincident with the rise of the middle class – and through several periods during which activism was a particularly dangerous undertaking – indigenous NGOs began to coalesce into a social opposition movement, and to partner with Socially Engaged *bhikkhu*. Cooperation between the two arose almost immediately, since monks were among the first participants at NGO-sponsored and NGO-hosted workshops on a variety of development-related and social justice topics (Gohlert, 1991). Not surprisingly, this NGO-*bhikkhu* nexus, part of the so-called ‘barefoot revolution,’ was seen by the state as a “potentially threatening mode of oppositional consciousness” (Darlington, 2000; Tannenbaum, 2000; Taylor, 1993b).

Buddhism and the State-*Sangha* Nexus

Buddhism has played a prominent role in social and political life in Thailand since the country was known, in the thirteenth century, as the Kingdom of Sukhothai (Walter, 2007). Traditionally, it “provided a coherent set of symbols and meanings for everyday life [and] formed the nucleus of community identity” (Taylor, 1993a). Today, Buddhism is seen as “a way of life, an identity, and the key to primordial Thainess” (Mulder, 1996, p.129). In Thailand, the process of modernization extended also to the *sangha* and popular religion, which was rationalized, centralized, and standardized in the early nineteenth century by King Nangklao (Rama III, 1824 - 1851), and subsequently employed to weaken local and regional political and religious elements (Darlington, 2000). In the later phase of the transition to modernity, Kings

³³ For example, in the 1998 by-election, only one in every six Bangkok residents (who are the most politically active in the country) went to the polls (Gohlert, 1991).

Mongkut and Chulalongkorn utilized Buddhism as a bulwark against the wholesale importation of Western culture and ideology (Taylor, 1993a).

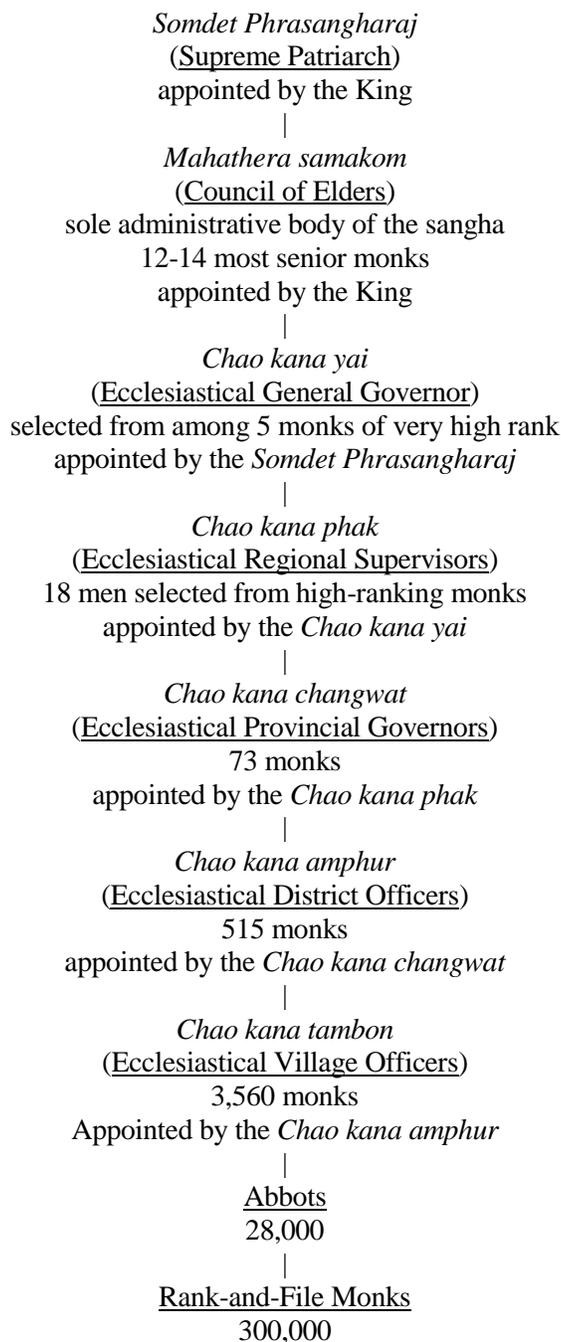
Buddhism has been a major part of everyday life in Thailand for centuries (Suksamran, 1988). After the family, the local *wat* was considered the most important local institution, and the calendar year was structured around the annual cycle of Buddhist rites and rituals (Ishii, 1968; Suksamran, 1988; Walter, 2007). Prior to the establishment of the government-run national education system, *wats* provided instruction in religious and secular subjects, and even today many government-run schools are attached to the local Buddhist temple (Suksamran, 1988). In both rural and urban communities, monks have long commanded considerable reverence and respect, being seen as “indispensable to the welfare of both society and individual members of society” (Suksamran, 1988, p.28). Historically, *bhikkhu* provided advice to community members and leaders, taught in the local school, and lent skills in carpentry and architecture to the construction or restoration of buildings (Walter, 2007). The laity has always had the responsibility to repay members of the *sangha* for their efforts by providing the ‘four necessities’ (clothing shelter, food, and medicine); in return, members of the *sangha* are obligated to perform services relevant to their religious function, and to do so whenever such services are requested (this is known as *dhammadana*, or the ‘gift of spiritual service’) (Suksamran, 1988).

The past several decades in Thailand have been marked by upheaval and change in the relationship between *sangha*, state, and laity. Every major aspect of Thai Buddhism has undergone some sort of radical shift, including “doctrinal interpretations, the *vinyana* rules of the monks, the roles of laymen, the establishment of Buddhist communities, and the incorporation of technology in the propagation of Buddhist messages” (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.396). Buddhism has overall become less relevant to modern Thai life because of the expansion of state services in education, health, and development (Darlington, 1998) – but it has also waned because the doctrinal educational, spiritual, and administrative roles of the *sangha*, “have lagged behind the secular world and the daily lives of urban people for almost three-quarters of a century (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.406). In the early 1990s the Council of Elders formally “came under attack for not responding adequately to changing social conditions and making clear certain normative rules,” (Taylor, 1993a, p.69) while the *sangha* as a whole was accused of being “inactive, non-committed, and uninformed” (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.405). While today “it is common even in the remotest temples to find air conditioners, refrigerators, TVs, and other modern conveniences that violate monastic vows of poverty,” (Essen, 2005, p.8) in the past decade the monkhood has also been shaken by financial and sex scandals

involving individual errant monks. This appearance of a disconnect between organized religion and morality has resulted in a “decentralization of religiosity and an exodus from institutional Buddhism,” in search of less feeble, corrupt, or esoteric forms (Jackson, 1997, p.76). In a break with tradition, *bhikkhu* are now subject to scrutiny and criticism from ordinary citizens, rather than the traditionally unquestioning reverence (Jackson, 1997).

Because religion is “an integral component of the ideology and practice of power in Thailand” (Jackson, 1997, p. 93), the *sangha* has been, variously, the tool of the military, bureaucracy, industrialists, and the commercial sector (Sivaraksa, 1988). It has been seen as a major instrument of nation-building since at least the reign of King Mongkut. Because of regulations prohibiting economic activity, the physical existence of the *sangha* is entirely dependent on these outside actors (Ishii, 1968; Tiyanich, 1997). Government funds (which often originate in the private sector) provide for its economic survival, while royal patronage imparts legitimacy (Walter, 2007). The government oversees virtually every aspect of a *bhikkhu*'s life, including issuing identity papers, assessing candidacy for titles, distributing honoraria, and disrobing errant monks (Gohlert, 1991; Ishii, 1968). The King is the *de facto* head of the *sangha*, since he appoints all of the major actors within the organization. Buddhism in Thailand has thus long been associated with, and effectively controlled by, the Thai state, which has enacted legislation and drafted regulations governing its function for more than a century. In 1902, King Chulalongkorn signed into law the first of the *Sangha Acts*, which established an organizational form similar to that of the national government, in effect creating the modern ‘Buddhist Church’ (Sivaraksa, 1973; Jackson, 1997). Subsequent revisions (in 1941 and 1962) changed the structure of the organization further, again tracking with shifts in the organization of the state (moving from absolute monarchy to popular democracy to military dictatorship) (Darlington, 2000; Jackson, 1997). Because of this paralleling, and since the 1962 legislation was enacted in the wake of the military’s overthrow of parliamentary governance, the most recent *Sangha Act*, in essence, stripped every aspect of democratic organization and function from the organization:

Hierarchical Organization of the *Sangha* Administration³⁴



Calls to reform the *sangha* structure once more, making it more democratic, have gone unheeded since the 1970s (Jackson, 1997).

³⁴ Adapted from Ishii, 1968 and Suksamran, 1988.

Even with this high level of state control, Buddhism in Thailand is anything but homogeneous. Divergences in scriptural or practical elements can be found along ethnic, sectarian, and regional lines (Taylor, 1993a). Further, within these groupings there are diverse popular, orthodox, and elitist interpretations of *dhamma* and *vinyana*. There is no unity of Thai Buddhism, although that myth is frequently endorsed by the government and the *sangha* alike (Satha-Anand, 1990). There are two recognized Theravada Buddhist orders in Thailand: the Mahanikai, which is a numerically larger sect made up of “unhegemonized indigenous traditions” influenced by animism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Hinduism; and Thammayutnikai, which, despite constituting less than three percent of Buddhist practitioners, has greater prestige, centuries-long royal favour, and control of the majority of powerful *sangha* positions (Sivaraksa, 1973; Taylor, 1993a, p.78).

Two of the earliest non-infrastructure state-led development initiatives in Thailand were, in fact, staffed by members of the *sangha*: the 1965 Dhammathud (Dhammic Ambassador) and 1965 Dhamma Caric (Dhammic Hilltribe) Programmes (Gohlert, 1991). It was understood at the time that the monks involved were to work with the Department of Public Welfare and the army to educate and spread Buddhism to underdeveloped communities (limiting the spread of missionary-driven Christianity), and to act as liaisons between the central government and local populations, bringing them under state control (Gohlert, 1991; Tannenbaum, 2000; Taylor, 1993a). The underlying idea was that bonds would be created between the government/*sangha*, Thai society, and marginalized groups, so that the latter would be less inclined to pose a security threat (Darlington, 2000; Gohlert, 1991). By the early 1970s, there were Sangha Education and Development Centres in every Northern and Northeastern province in Thailand, offering technical and leadership training that promoted *sangha* and state objectives (Gohlert, 1991). The *sangha* itself had no part in the planning of these programmes (Darlington, 2000).

Not all *bhikkhu* agreed with the government’s role for the *sangha* in development, nor did they unanimously endorse the conservative, nationalistic character of the order (Taylor, 1993a). Perspectives have varied, and continue to vary, on the proper role of the monk in society, the place (if any) of activism, and the ‘right’ structure and function of institutionalized Buddhism in Thailand (Walter, 2007). Unlike monks in Burma and Sri Lanka, Thai activist *bhikkhu* have never coalesced into a bounded group, nor have they ever wielded any significant political power or influence independent of the state (Taylor, 1993a). Government control of the *sangha* has meant that the institution cannot, itself, become a focal point for political power or social activism (Jackson, 1997). Nevertheless, today, in the tradition of the *thudong*

(wandering, typically forest-dwelling monks), one finds both ‘other worldly’ monks who are “emblematic of the primordial detached Buddhist saint” and ‘inner worldly’ activist *bhikkhu*, involved in community development that hinges on ecology,³⁵ participation, and local knowledge (Taylor, 1993a, p.82). Taylor (1993a) writes that the latter has “a sizeable following of urban intellectuals, middle-class ‘greenies,’ and a small liberal elite” (p.82). Despite the fact that conservative elements in the government and *sangha* have always (and somewhat hypocritically) asserted that secular and spiritual roles are immiscible, and that monks are not properly a part of the secular, political world, activist *bhikkhu* have proven not only amenable to, but enthusiastic and thoughtful participants in, economic development, environmental, and social justice initiatives (Darlington, 1998; Gohlert, 1991; Suksamran, 1988). The state often backs up its own objections by appealing to laws against sedition and civil disobedience, but it was not until the 1990s that it dared imprison a *bhikkhu* for his politics. After that, the traditional, revered image of the Theravada mendicant no longer provided a shield from persecution, violence, and even extra-judicial execution (Walter, 2007). During the Thai Rak Thai regime of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), for example, several *phra nak anurak* (ecology monks) were killed under suspicious circumstances, and agents of the government implicated by the media (Walter, 2007).

The National Development Project and its Discontents

National socio-economic development in Thailand has, for the past sixty years, been based on the conventional Western model, in response to Western advice. Policy has tended to incorporate the shifting opinion of aid organizations, in particular those of the World Bank (Missingham, 1997). A uni-dimensional development framework, based on capital-heavy industrialization, natural resource extraction, and agricultural intensification³⁶ was initiated in the late 1950s by Prime Minister Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963) (Darlington, 2000; Demaine, 1986; Gohlert, 1991; Phongpaichit & Baker, 1998; Sangsehanat, 2004a). The aim was a strong export-oriented industrial economy, as a means to the more general goal of increased production and consumption, which the state associated with increased political power (Darlington, 2000; Demaine, 1986). Overall, “[t]he prime stimulus to change economically, as with other development goals, has not been a response to the felt needs of the population at large, but rather, a response to the felt needs of the political bureaucratic commercial complex” (Suksamran, 1988, p.30).

³⁵ The Thai word for nature (*thammachat*) actually contains the word *dhamma* (noting that in Thai, ‘d’ and ‘t’ often appear interchangeably) (Essen, 2005).

³⁶ This entailed replacing subsistence with cash crop farming and corporate agro-business (Sangsehanat, 2004a).

The year 1967 saw the inception of an ongoing series of five-year Economic and Social Development Plans (ESDP), the first four of which were entirely concerned with pro-growth economic changes (Suksamran, 1988). These early policy documents must be regarded as a success in at least one sense: Thailand has a near-unparalleled record of attracting bilateral aid³⁷ (Gohlert, 1991). The first ESDP was launched with the start of the United Nations' 'First Development Decade,' and was formulated using input from the World Bank (Demaine, 1986). Thailand was advised to funnel capital into power generation, irrigation, telecommunications, and transportation, and to provide sizeable tax incentives, in order to create the conditions for private enterprise to fuel development and foster political stability (Demaine, 1986; Gohlert, 1991). Thanks to King Mongkut's 'open door policy,' international corporations (active in commerce, industry, and finance) had been operating in Thailand for more than a century by the time formal 'development' got underway, and the nation easily merited a great deal of foreign direct investment (Gohlert, 1991). In mid-twentieth-century Thailand, in the wake of World Bank-inspired 'laissez-faire' policies, these foreign businesses found welcoming conditions: "cheap labor, a docile work force, no strikes, and generally favourable labor practices, along with readily available natural resources (Essen, 2005; Gohlert, 1991, p.22).

Given the social and political climate in Thailand, "development is top-down; in truth, it could be no other way (Hewson, 1993, as cited in Missingham, 1997, p.151). National structural changes began at, and continue to emanate today, from the centre – the capital, Bangkok. Even projects initiated locally, in fields as diverse as health care, agro-forestry, and education, are usually eventually taken over by a government agency (Gohlert, 1991). An urban, commercial, financial, industrial bias has successfully controlled political decision-making for decades, with the rural periphery "distinctly subordinate [to] and at [its] disposal" (Gohlert, 1991). Provincial economies have remained stagnant, and even withered, since development projects began in earnest, with those in the rural North and Northeast faring the worst (Essen, 2005). Infrastructure development, along with changes to tax laws, has served mainly to bring rural communities under state control (both ideologically and politically) and to funnel wealth back to the metropole (Demaine, 1986; Missingham, 1997). Further, 'development' has been blatantly co-opted by national security campaigns targeting separatist and communist threats,³⁸ while simultaneously being used

³⁷ Though America has been Thailand's primary donor, large amounts of assistance have been contributed by Japan, West Germany, Denmark, Canada and Australia. Often, these nations have addressed their own security and economic concerns through sending aid to Thailand (Gohlert, 1991).

³⁸ Ironically, the Thai Communist Party emphasized social justice and equality, and with this ideology managed to recruit some 10,000 supporters from the mid-1960s (Demaine, 1986).

to dissolve less perilous local discontent and dissent, in the areas bordering Laos, Vietnam, China, and Burma (Gohlert, 1991; Suksamran, 1988; Tannenbaum, 2000). Naturally, this led to an overwhelming emphasis on infrastructure projects in regions that could prove either actual or potential insurgent activity, with little concern shown for other, less volatile communities (Gohlert, 1991).

After the 1997 financial crisis, Thailand was the recipient of a 17.2 billion dollar bailout loan from the IMF – a move that inspired mass protests from those who would prefer to see the nation self-reliant, and who saw the crisis as a call to re-evaluate the development process itself (Essen, 2003; Sangsehanat, 2004). Loan conditionality meant that structural adjustment measures were imposed across every sector. Although liberalization and deregulation brought about the hoped-for macro-level gains (realized largely after 1986), they simultaneously greatly exacerbated both rural-urban and intra-regional income inequality (Essen, 2005). In terms of the formerly lauded private sector engine of development, in which multinational corporations were expected to accomplish technology transfer and human resource development: the former never got underway at all, while the latter did not extend beyond taking advantage of Thailand's cheap labour supply (Gohlert, 1991). Prior to the 1997 'bubble,' economic growth in the nation had been phenomenal, but had brought with it serious and lasting disruptions in and ecological and socio-economic spheres (Darlington, 2000; Essen, 2003). Environmental devastation (particularly deforestation, water contamination, and pollution) was more pronounced in Thailand than anywhere else in Asia (Darlington, 2000; Essen, 2003, 2005). The state had engaged in commercial logging on a massive scale,³⁹ in its efforts at "civilizing the wild forest" through bringing more land under cash crop cultivation and monoculture tree planting,⁴⁰ and only ceased when deforestation and erosion-induced flooding took the lives of hundreds of people in 1989 (Darlington, 2000, par.12). By the late 1970s, extreme income inequality and grossly uneven standards of living had become undeniable; the numbers of people living in poverty had grown frighteningly quickly over the previous decade, and major swaths of the population had seen no benefits whatsoever from development (Demaine, 1986; Gohlert, 1991). Rural-urban migration in search of factory and service sector work kicked in as villagers' quality of life deteriorated (Darlington, 2000). The small farmer, who "in Asia, as perhaps nowhere else, [...] has for centuries been the backbone of civilization," became mired in debt (Gohlert, 1991, p.42), while rural institutions, networks of support, and material cultural traditions eroded rapidly (Phongphit, 1988).

³⁹ Between 1913 and 1998, Thailand went from 75% forest cover to less than 25% (Darlington, 1998).

⁴⁰ The state invested heavily in eucalyptus, which is valuable as a source of wood chips and paper pulp (Taylor, 1993b; Tiyanich, 1997).

Thailand has, according to one thesis, achieved modernization without development, with the reasons for this failure rooted in the character of the state (Jacobs, 1971). The various Economic and Social Development Plans often read well, but at no time has the government been in a position to actually implement all of the policies and projects they outline (Demaine, 1986). The state apparatus is highly inefficient, with few working horizontal relationships found between its ministries and departments, which simultaneously show a high degree of portfolio and institutional overlap (Demaine, 1986). A 1980 World Bank assessment found, for example, no less than ten agencies responsible for road construction, six for water supply in rural areas, and six overseeing land development and settlement. Further, that same report found no evidence that the development plans issued by the government either dictated or motivated action on the part of the various line agencies. The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), housed in the Office of the Prime Minister, is all but powerless to bring any other arm of the government to bear on development issues (Missingham, 1997). Further, up until the fifth ESDP (launched in 1982) there was no attention paid to how aggregate economic benefits would ‘trickle down’ to the poor (Demaine, 1986; Gohlert, 1991). Even after decentralization and popular participation made it into policy documents, resistance from elites and the bureaucracy was pronounced, making effective implementation exceedingly difficult. As Hall (1986) has argued, in Thailand, “state-directed participation is a contradiction in terms” (as cited in Missingham, 1997, p.160). In the Thai context, participation is defined – in practice, if not in theory, policy, and rhetoric – as successful mobilization of people for some specific, state-determined end (Missingham, 1997). Even as late as 1991, government was partnering with NGOs so that their ‘input’ could appear in state planning or evaluation documentation destined for bi- and multilateral aid agencies (Gohlert, 1991). In the field, cajoling of ‘participants’ is not uncommon, while officials are both seen as, and see themselves as, “infinitely superior to the ‘uneducated,’ and therefore ‘ignorant,’ villagers” (Demaine, 1986, p.110). Overall, “various interest groups in business and politics [still] view ‘development’ as the promotion of their own particularistic interests” (Demaine, 1986, p.111). As a result, the Thai development record is “marked by governmental neglect, political expediency, and mostly ineffectiveness” (Gohlert, 1991, p.20).

The following three case studies demonstrate Buddhist alternatives to the approaches the government has taken in pursuit of socio-economic development in Thailand. They are remarkable not merely for the fact that they illustrate an internally consistent, ethics-based set of concepts and tools, but also because they demonstrate how these have been successfully deployed in the context of a largely self-serving

and paranoid state, a conservative and complacent *sangha*, and a predominantly ambivalent and ward-like populace.

Berm's Story: A Farmer-Leader, Integrated Agriculture, and Rural Development⁴¹

Early Life and Influences

Berm is a farmer and community leader from Huay Saay village, Sanamchai District, in the relatively remote northwestern Thai province of Nan. His family were subsistence farmers who planted upland rice, lacking paddy land to cultivate, as well as harvesting non-timber forest products to meet household consumption needs. Anxious to improve their standard of living, they became among the first farmers in their district to respond to the Thai government's call for agriculturalists to clear new land, plant crops for export, and take up Green Revolution technology. Raising feed corn and beans on deforested slopes worked as a strategy until after Berm's parents retired, when the land dried out and hardened. Having left school at eleven to work on the family farm, by twenty-two Berm was heavily in debt from the expensive chemical herbicides and fertilizers that had proved, simultaneously, increasingly necessary and decreasingly effective on his inherited patch of marginal land.

In 1988 Berm migrated to Bangkok in pursuit of unskilled wage labour in construction and retail. For two years he lived very much as his peers did, enjoying the excitement of one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in Southeast Asia. At the time, Thailand was in the midst of an economic boom that saw urban wages, even for unskilled labourers, far outpace the income one could expect from small-scale farming. That boom brought with it a sharp upswing in commodity consumption, particularly in the middle classes – where Berm was now comfortably situated. His eldest brother, Jamrat, who had been ordained at twelve and was now the abbot of the village *wat*, wrote and visited Berm, trying to persuade him to return. Jamrat had become a follower of Phra Khru Phithak, a *phra nak anurak* (ecology monk), and wished to experiment with integrated agriculture on their family's land. Berm refused to help. In Bangkok his skin had become paler (a characteristic Thais associate with physical beauty), labour was far less exhausting, and he had cultivated a reputation and lifestyle he enjoyed. Everything was *sanuk* – simply enjoyable, with no greater meaning or longer-term horizon. As he himself explains, “I was having too much fun. I was lost in the lights of the city” (p.40). Over the next two years, though, Berm began to study the *dhamma* at Wat

⁴¹ All of the material in this section is taken from Delcore (2004). Direct quotations are sourced individually.

Chonprathaan in Bangkok, a reform *wat*, attended by Socially Engaged Thai Buddhists, where many development-related issues are discussed. He spent time reading books about the *phra nak phatthanaa* (development monks) and ordinary people who initiated development projects, and began to think about creating something meaningful through *phatthanaa baan* (developing one's home village). Buddhist teachings and his own reflections had left him certain that he would not be able to live in Bangkok indefinitely (since as he aged his prospects, as an uneducated, lower-middle class man were likely to dim considerably) or for much longer happily (as the city's various entertainments had lost their initial novelty for him). As Berm puts it, "I had gone everywhere and seen everything already, and I saw that it was nothing special" (p.40).

Experimentation with Integrated Agriculture and Simple Living

In 1992 Berm moved back to Huay Saay. Through locally active NGOs he went on study tours to visit successful farms employing integrated agriculture. At the age of twenty-four, he was encouraged not just by the successes of the farms, but by the fact that they were run by elderly men. Back in the village, Berm exhausted himself clearing the weeds and trees from the land he had inherited, and began to experiment with various crops and animals. He bought seeds and cultivars, and asked friends and neighbours for samples of plants from their own gardens. As he himself explains, "whenever I left the farm for some reason, I felt I had to come back with something to plant. I would always come back with a tree or a plant of some kind. People laughed at me because whenever I visited someone's house, I didn't go straight into the house, but instead went to their garden to see what plants they had, and I'd ask for something" (p.41). At the same time, Berm began to read books about *kaset baep thammachaat* (natural agriculture) and used these, in combination with his own understanding of the *dhamma*, to forge a different lifestyle. In direct opposition to the way he had lived in Bangkok, he aimed for *mak noi*, or being content with little. With Huay Saay in the midst of a remittances-fuelled building boom, and well-appointed concrete homes springing up everywhere, he set himself up in a small, wood-plank, grass-thatched house without either electricity or running water. He dressed in simple, functional clothing. He became the leader of a *wat*-based youth group that had been created, in part, to curb use of *ya ba* (methamphetamine), addiction to which was fast becoming a national concern in Thailand. He gave up alcohol in order to set a better example to the youth group members, and in order to live without contradiction. Berm also took on a

part-time job with the Nonformal Education Department of the government, teaching local adults basic school subjects.

Within a year, Berm's integrated farm could boast a mango orchard, dry rice fields, and several vegetable plots, plus geese and pigs. Further, it employed a form of integrated agriculture that was unique, based on Berm's own understandings, and which had been declared a virtual impossibility to practice. Diverse crops and livestock were set together in a single ecological unit, in which no chemical herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, or feed additives were necessary. Fruit trees were planted among vegetable plots so that they required no irrigation of their own. Beneficial insects were encouraged, while marigolds were interspersed with vegetables to keep pests down, while the highest part of the land left forested in order to preserve the watershed. Animal manure from the farm's own livestock provided all of the necessary fertilizer. Though a small surplus was taken to the local market, the emphasis was on subsistence production in order to avoid market pressures and fluctuations – a philosophy called *kin khon lua khaay* (eat first and sell the remainder) that is widely espoused by Thai NGOs involved in rural development. Not surprisingly, development being a national priority in Thailand, Berm's farm began to attract the attention of state officials, social activists, and the media.

Forays into Activism, Politics, and Rural Development

Thai rural development NGOs have long held an informal mandate to encourage the maturation of farmer-leaders capable of effective and widespread advocacy. Between 1993 and 1997, Berm took up offers to undertake this kind of work, mostly from friends who were employed locally by such NGOs. He worked briefly as an intermediary between farmers and NGOs before becoming the leader of the Sanamchai District Sustainable Agriculture Group (itself part of an NGO network). He also lent his voice to efforts to network rural farmers from across Thailand, so that they could share ideas and experiences. In 1995 Berm's farm became the recipient of state support, by earning the patronage of the King's Pilot Project for Integrated Agriculture and the installation of a fish pond from the district agriculture office. In the same year he also received a royal award for being a 'model' integrated farmer, attending a ceremony in the Dusit Palace in Bangkok. At regional and national discussions and forums in advance of the government's Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan, intended to secure input from across economic sectors and social strata, Berm was one of the individuals officially representing the province of Nan. In 1996, he became an official advisor to the Provincial Agricultural Office, as well as speaking at governmental and

non-governmental meetings on integrated agriculture across Sanamchai, earning the respect of most farmers interested in the techniques of integrated agriculture. In 1997 he won one of two seats allotted for Huay Saay on the sub-district government council, and used this elected position to advocate for initiatives in sustainable development. Throughout, Berm kept working on the farm, adding, among other things, laying hens to the livestock complement, and tending them with no small amount of concern. Twice a day he personally collected the eggs, only passing off the task if his duties took him out of town. Yet when people were brought to the village to visit the farm, it was often thought to be his brother Jamrat's enterprise, so modest and unassuming was Berm.

When asked about his definition of 'development,' Berm responded, "[s]uppose the roof on that chicken coop down there is falling apart, and we go fix it. That's development. There are many aspects to development. You can have development of the mind and spirit, also." (p.44). Delcore (2004), writing of this episode, explains,

[Berm] argued that development, and integrated agriculture in particular, was more than just one's livelihood. Integrated agriculture involved both economic value (secure livelihood, low expenses) and an awareness of environmental concerns. Further, development to Berm was highly personal, linked to his own transformation from a high-living migrant in Bangkok to a responsible and respected member of his home community. To some extent, then, Berm saw his own life story as subsumed by the idea of development, which provided an idiom for self-understanding. Thus, Berm defined development not just in terms of selected material and spiritual elements, but as an entire way of life as well. (p.45)

Phra Pongsak's Story: An Activist Monk, Forest Conservation, and Community Development⁴²

Early Life and Influences

Phra Pongsak Techadhammo is the abbot of Wat Pha-laad in the northwestern city of Chiang Mai, in the province of the same name. Born in 1932 to farmers in the north-central province of Nakhon Sawan, but orphaned at a young age, he spent his post-primary school years working in his uncle's paddy and trading rice (buying from local farmers and selling to rice mills). Ordained at twenty, he cultivated his meditative practice by going on *tudong* (pilgrimage) throughout the forests of Thailand's northern Chiang Mai province. Continuing his studies in Bangkok, he became disappointed in the open materialism and individualism of many members of the *sangha*. After considering disrobing, Phra Pongsak instead began

⁴² All of the material in this section is taken from Payulpitack (1991). Direct quotations are sourced individually.

reading the work of, and then sought out in person, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a forest-dwelling monk who was becoming famous for his critical, intellectual re-interpretation of the Pali canon; for his rejection of later developments in organized Buddhism that he saw as antithetical to the Buddha's teachings; and for being the first monk to either teach the *dhamma* in ordinary language or to try to make it relevant to laypeople's lives. In 1959 he joined the group of monks at Buddhadasa's Wat Suan Mokh, a forest monastic centre with a temple of nothing but standing trees, in the southern province of Surat Thani. He studied there for five years.

In 1971, looking for a way to bring Buddhadasa's teachings to the north, Phra Pongsak took up residence at the abandoned forest *wat* of Pha-laad, on Doi Suthep, the mountain that flanks the city of Chiang Mai. He established the surrounding 100 acres of forest as a religious sanctuary, in which no trees could be felled nor any animals killed. After the collapse of the dictatorship in 1973, Chiang Mai University became a gathering point for students interested in the nation's mounting socio-economic problems and working in nascent rural development initiatives. Many of these students sought out Phra Pongsak, looking for a way to invest development activity with *dhammic* sensibilities. In response, he began to organize seminars at Wat Pha-laad and retreats at an abandoned, centuries-old *wat* near a cave in nearby Mae Soy, in the district of Chomthong. A small meditation centre was constructed in the latter location, which became known locally as Tam Tu-Phu ('Cave of the Old Man'), and immediately began attracting both broad sponsorship and a wide range of academic visitors from several different universities. With the student massacre at Thammasat University in 1976, all of this activity came to a sudden and violent halt. A right-wing, military-backed regime took over the Thai government, forcing thousands of students, writers, and activists underground. Wat Pha-laad was declared a communist base and Phra Pongsak a communist sympathizer.

Environmental Devastation at Mae Soy

It was not until the next change of government, in 1983, that Phra Pongsak felt able to continue his work. Returning to his meditation retreat, he found the forest in Mae Soy severely degraded. Commercial logging had gutted the lowlands; illegal logging had razed the ridges; slash-and-burn agriculture had denuded the highest plains; and lowland subsistence farmers, falling upon hard times, had resorted to illegally cutting their way up the slopes to make charcoal and sell timber. Cyclic labour migration, in which men travelled to the cities to work for ten to fifteen days a month, no longer yielded reliable wages. Streams

ran near-dry most of the year, resulting in almost half of paddy land being unavailable for cultivation, even with short growing season glutinous rice, while vegetable crops withered in their beds. As one villager put it: “[a] few years ago, my work was to mobilize villagers to repair the weirs because of strong currents. The water level was enough to cover an elephant’s back. Now the streams are fast drying up and we have to dig the stream bed. Little forest is little water also. In all my life, I have never experienced this much hardship. Things are turning upside down” (p.232). Because of water shortages, harvested rice lasted only five to eight months of the year. Home cultivation could no longer be augmented with the gathering of wild vegetables, fruits, and herbs from the forest, either, because of the accelerating deforestation. Water conflicts were on the rise. What stream water there was produced sores on livestock that swam in it, and diarrhoea and dizziness in people who drank it. Crime and loss of land holdings became more common as farmer debt mounted, and the local people felt helpless waiting for governmental or nongovernmental assistance to find its way to Mae Soy.

When Phra Pongsak considered the problems affecting life in the nearby village of Wang Nam Yad, he could trace most to poor water quality and quantity in the local streams used for consumption and cultivation. Environmental damage was thus the root cause, and one that the fifty-one year-old abbot saw as itself stemming from a lack of morality and understanding in those who were participating in deforesting and polluting activities (which were technically against the law). He realized immediately that the law could not teach someone the value of the forest or instil a sense of gratitude and affinity, but neither could the *dhamma* protect the forest from those who deliberately chose, or were hopelessly driven, to do wrong. Only a combination of authorities, secular and spiritual, could accomplish the necessary conservation work, meaning that villagers, monks, and government officials would have to cooperate. He asked to meet with the villagers, in order to persuade them that they had to take action while they still could – that to wait for aid was not a wise course. He taught “the knowledge and understanding of the true value and meaning of things to life, and gratitude towards things of such benevolence” (p.225). In his own words, Phra Pongsak asserts that “to have a sense of gratitude to nature [...] is to gain an understanding of the essence of Buddhist morality” (p.226). For him, *sila* is more than obeying precepts – it is the active maintenance of balance, within and without. In one particular sermon, he explained that,

The forest does not simply mean valuable resources, goods, or money. [...] The value of the forest is inestimable. [...] Every tree and its leaves are useful to the world. [...] For us (rural people), forest [is] our first home. The one we live in that we cherish so dearly and

are possessive about is in fact only our second home. Without the first we cannot have the second. [...] Forests are also our second parents. Our human parents give us life but the forest sustains us. [...] From it we get the ‘four necessities’ of life – food, shelter, clothing, and medicine (p.227-8)

On being told that by starting small they could effect small changes to which others (including the authorities) would respond, the villagers took hope. As one woman observed, “Ajarn’s⁴³ teaching is simple and direct. For villagers, it brings promise” (p.238).

When Phra Pongsak and a group of villagers went to survey the watershed, it was found to be ninety percent degraded; worse, it had been degraded by a rural development project. The Hmong, an indigenous group, had been relocated into the margins of the watershed under the Thai Norwegian Highland Development Project (TNHDP), part of a sustained effort to curb drug production and trafficking upcountry. The Hmong, who traditionally intercropped opium, were given new land and encouraged to grow cash crops (in this case, cabbages). The TNHDP had cut a road right through primary forest into the relocation area. The cabbage fields were established within and adjacent to the forest area at the headwaters of the six streams that fed the valley, about eleven kilometres above the villages on the valley floor, affecting villages in three different *tambons* (sub-districts). Approximately 42,000 lowland farmers’ livelihoods were being impacted. Because the produce prices were guaranteed and all supplies were provided by the project, the Hmong planted as extensively as possible, cultivated three times a year on the same land, and made use of the maximum recommended amount of chemical inputs. They irrigated by tapping into the catchments, diverting water away from the valley. Because the soil on the steep slopes wore out quickly, more forest had to be periodically cleared. When the project began, in 1975, it had involved only five families (about thirty persons) in a small settlement called Ban Pa-Kluay; ten years later, there were over a hundred families (about 430 persons) living and farming in the watershed.

Formation of the Conservation Group

At a meeting in October 1985, Phra Pongsak discussed the importance of the forest with five hundred villagers, the *tambon* council, and the abbots of the five area *wats*. A variety of strategies for preserving the forest were discussed and, in the end, the signatures of all attendees appeared on a petition to register the entire area as a Buddhist Park. A further decision was made to fence in, actively protect, and regenerate the forest at the headwaters of the three streams, and to suggest that the government relocate the

⁴³ ‘Ajarn’ is a title for an advanced instructor, such as a university professor or a highly knowledgeable teacher of the dhamma.

Hmong again, this time down into the valley proper. In response to the petition and plan, the *sangha* deputy chief in Chiang Mai ordered the *bhikkhu* and abbots to refrain from joining the burgeoning movement, and prohibited their attendance at any future meetings. He also ordered Phra Pongsak to leave Tam Tu-Phu, as it was illegal to live in the reserve forest, and also to cease all conservation work, as it was both against the law and inappropriate for a *bhikkhu*. It was pointed out that anyone who participated in erecting the fence would be engaging in illegal activity, since no construction could take place inside a government forest. Despite the existence of a federal law stating that no human settlements were permitted inside intact upper watershed forests, it was announced that the Hmong settlement would not be relocated, owing to the sensitivity, complication, and expense of such an initiative. The district headmen and abbots were specifically threatened with arrest by the deputy district officer, who immediately began an investigation into Phra Pongsak's activities at the meditation centre. Tam Tu-Phu had begun to function as a discussion centre for villagers who wished to learn more about the *dhamma* and the forest, and to dialogue about conservation. Those activities continued. The lack of obedience there to the *sangha* deputy chief and the deputy district officer was rooted in the belief that "everyone had two levels of duty: duty as a member of society; and as a human being" (p.235).

Prior to the arrival of Phra Pongsak, the villagers had thought it was illegal to openly question, either through discussion or protest, any government policy. After his arrival, and in the wake of his ecological instruction and teachings and linking Buddhist values, individual motivation, and social action, the villagers exhibited considerable cooperation, creativity, and perseverance in their efforts. They put together a photo essay on the deforestation, which was sent to the governor of Chiang Mai and shown at temple festivals in the villages of neighbouring *tambons*, drawing an additional 1,500 affected villagers into the movement. Phra Pongsak's prediction had been realized: "once the villagers are aware their well-being is one with the well-being of the forest and feel gratitude to it, no one needs to tell them about conservation. They will protect the forest themselves" (p.231). The words of one of the village farmers attest to the accuracy of the prediction: "[w]e will fight to end the deforestation before it's the end of us, we see very clearly that destruction of the forest means destruction of our lives, so with or without government officials cooperation we will solve this problem" (p.241). Cutting timber and making charcoal stopped, despite continuing economic hardship, while water conservation was taught and practiced. On February 25th Phra Pongsak and five hundred villagers erected a ten kilometre barbed wire fence demarcating the remaining seventy square kilometres of watershed forest, containing a gate in order to allow the Hmong continuing

access to irrigation water. Everyone who participated was charged with encroachment and troublemaking – but the work continued. The following month the villagers formed the Khum Anurak Pha Lae Thon-nam Lam-taan Tambon Mae Soy (Watershed and Forest Conservation Group of Mae Soy Sub-District). Using voluntary labour, fire breaks were cleared inside the fenced-off forest, nine kilometre pipes were laid down both sides of the valley, and fire patrols were created. The trees inside the perimeter were labelled with large, official-looking numbers. Groups were organized to maintain the fence and warn off intruders. Most importantly, restoration of the watershed was debated, and then organized. As the head of the Conservation Group commented, “[l]ittle hope, but some is enough for the people of Mae Soy to try. There is no scientific work to provide any model for reforestation, but the locals know a great deal about plants that made up the vanished forests” (p.237). Seeds and cuttings were gathered from the forest, germinated in a new nursery; and two thousand holes were bored into the denuded watershed, filled with loam and manure, and planted with original tree species (pine, chestnut, teak, and various hardwoods).

Villagers from the other three affected *tambons* soon joined the Conservation Group, whose numbers quickly swelled to 7,000 individuals. They discussed the situation collectively, and decided that environmental measures were insufficient – the Hmong village would have to be relocated. Together the group members set aside and prepared land and irrigation on the valley floor, and then approached the Hmong *phuyaiban* (headman) personally. When he refused to consider the offer, claiming that it was “too hot” in the valley (p.239), the Conservation Group petitioned the district and provincial government in March of 1987, and then appealed to the Prime Minister, Royal Forestry Department, and Third Army in May of the same year. Personal testimony and photographs of the destruction were used to help make the case. To charges that they were discriminating against a minority group and threatening an endangered culture, the villagers pointed out that the Hmong, prior to being targeted by the TNHDP, had not had television antennas on every roof, their own power station, or late-model pick-up trucks for one-third of households, nor had they farmed using chemical inputs or fetched consumer durables home when selling their produce for a fixed price. They doubted that a move further down the valley would entail ethnocide – but it did mean the livelihoods of 42,000 Thai farmers might be spared. Phra Pongsak argued that,

to solve a problem you need wisdom coupled with compassion, whether you [are an] officer, peasant, or monk. If you employ only compassion you [will] fail. We tend to forget that once nature is destroyed, no amount of money will do any good. [...] [I]f the forests are further destroyed all parties, including the [Hmong] will be affected (p.242)

Further, if the goal was eradication of opium production (which had continued even after the Hmong were relocated into the watershed area), that goal would be obtained as a consequence of relocation into the valley, since opium only grows at high altitudes.

The Dhammanaat Foundation and Community Development

That same year, coincident with the conservation efforts, Phra Pongsak founded the Dhammanaat Foundation at Wat Pha-laad in Chiang Mai. Intended to relieve the circumstances that led to the villagers' destruction of the forest, the Foundation used public and private donations (raised through meditation retreats at Tma Tu-Phu) to establish a rice bank,⁴⁴ an emergency fund for crop production, and a cooperative shop in each of the five affected villages. Traditional irrigation systems were set up to bring dry farmland under cultivation in the summer months. Surveyors and engineers were hired to plan sites reservoirs and feeder canals, while 600 acres of scrubland on the valley floor were assessed for distribution to the 408 landless families of Tambon Mae Soy. All activities of the Foundation were the result of cooperative efforts between Phra Pongsak and the villagers of Mae Soy, who had already begun to realize their cooperative, active potential to improve their own lives through participating in the conservation and reforestation campaign. Asked about his specific plans, Phra Pongsak replied, "I have [not] the faintest idea or plan of *how* to do it. But when I saw the suffering in the village [...] I knew *what* I had to do" (p.243, emphasis added). The meditation centre in the valley, meanwhile, began to attract high-level guests, including groups from the United Nations Environment Programme, the Ford Foundation, and the German Embassy in Bangkok.

In August the director general of the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) took action on the villagers' appeal, and a formal partnership between the government, villagers, and monks began. The RFD officially released the scrubland the Foundation had assessed, with the 408 landless families in Mae Soy gaining title. The partnership was structured in order to handle the considerable work necessary for those families to become self-sufficient: the RFD would provide equipment, the Foundation the 3,000,000 baht in funding (approximately USD \$150,000), and the Conservation Group the labour. Nine kilometres of dirt roads and bridges were built to open up the area, and four reservoirs were constructed, with the capacity to distribute

⁴⁴ Community-based rice banks address seasonal shortages in rice meant for household consumption. They operate through sharing between those households that have more than needed (in the form of deposits) and those that have less (in the form of loans, approved by the community). Rice borrowed is repaid at the end of the next harvest. Rice banks also protect against exploitation by merchants and 'loan sharks,' who can levy loan rates as high as two hundred percent on the grain farmers need in times of shortage. By running the rice bank, farmers and villagers learn valuable management and administrative skills.

one million cubic metres of water through a four-channel irrigation network. The RFD also announced the government's decision to relocate the Hmong settlement. One particularly hopeful outcome of this partnership has been the 'birth,' from a combination of land reform and ethical, collaborative planning, of entirely new villages in the valley. Meanwhile, in the five pre-existing villages, work on the conservation project was found to inspire "change in various aspects of the community's life, particularly in [the] role of cooperative arrangements in the socio-economic and political spheres" (p.243). As one well-known Thai activist pointed out, "[r]ousing the villagers from their hopelessness to act on their fate [was] the means to social reform" (p.246). By 1989 the entire district of Chomthong – eight *tambons* in all – was involved in the Conservation Group, which underwent a name change to the Association of Conservation and Protection of the Watershed Forest of Chomthong District, and soon boasted 97,000 individual members. Shortly thereafter, the Association announced its intention to scale-up, aiming at the protection of 500 kilometres of the Inthanon Mountain Range, which contains Thailand's highest peaks.

The Influence of Phra Pongsak's Work

Phra Pongsak has been consulted by a variety of environmental groups and people's movements, hailing from all across Thailand, fighting against deforestation, mining concessions, and dam building. The Mae Soy forest has become a destination for school class trips, in order for children to learn both the environmental and *dhammic* aspects of conservation. Student and faculty groups from sixteen Thai universities have visited Tam Tu-Phu, both for meditation retreats and for talks on Buddhism and ecology. *Bhikkhu* from Maha-Chulalongkorn Buddhist University have attended seminars on 'The Monk's Role in Forest Conservation,' including discussion of the application of Buddhist ethics to environmental and social problems, and the rightful place of the *bhikkhu* and his duty, alongside legal measures and official channels. As Phra Pongsak has pointed out, "[i]f the government want[s] to preserve forests, their attitude toward forests and the potential of local residents must be changed first" (p.242). Apparently, that message has gotten through, since by the end of the decade the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) sent a proposal to the Sangha Council outlining how, in future, the Royal Forestry Department and the DRA would be working together on conservation initiatives. At about the same time, seventy *phra nak anurak* (ecology monks) created the Khum Phra Anurak Pur Cheevit Lae Karn-Patana (Monks' Association for the Conservation of Life and Development) at Tam Tu-Phu, with Phra Pongsak as its elected leader. They have called for *wats* all over the country to set aside funds for forest conservation in their home communities, and

to pursue work that uses Buddhist principles to balance ecology and development. Government departments, international nongovernmental organizations, and dignitaries and activists from across the world have visited and consulted with Phra Pongsak, including: the World Wildlife Fund; the International Consultancy on Religion, Education, and Culture; the Thai Ministry of Agriculture; the National Institute of Development and Administration; the Third Army; foresters from various ASEAN countries; and delegates of international religious conventions from Asia, Europe, and Africa. They have visited to hear the message that rural development, conservation, and morality are inextricably bound up in one another. In 1990, Phra Pongsak became the first Buddhist monk to receive the United Nations Environment Programme's Global 500 Roll of Honour Award.

Phra Pongsak has been up for arrest for years, but the authorities, worried about triggering an uprising in the villages of Chomthong, have never acted on the warrants. And despite this risk, and although he has received actual death threats throughout his activities in Mae Soy, he has never considered giving up: "I am not afraid to work like this because – well, if you have opened your heart to the suffering of the villagers, you would do just the same. I have seen the problem with such clarity that I have no choice but to follow the course that I am taking" (p.203).

The Santi Asoke Story: Intentional Community, Meritism, and Self-Development

The Movement, its Founder, and His Influences

Samana Bodhirak is the founder of the Santi Asoke Buddhist Reform Movement, which emerged in 1970s Thailand as "an experiment in an alternative way of life" (Essen, 2003, p.6). Born Mongkol Rakpong in 1934 in Srisaket province, and raised in a poorer merchant family, he worked from the age of ten to support and educate his five brothers and sisters (Heikkil-Horn, 1996). After high school, Mongkol attended Poh Chang Art College in Bangkok, in the wake of which he forged a successful career as a television producer and composer with the Thai Television Company, changing his name to Rak Rakpongse (Heikkil-Horn, 1996; Payulpitack, 1991; Satha-Anand, 1990). In 1970, at the apex of his career, and having earned considerable money and fame, he suddenly renounced all of his possessions and was ordained in the Thammayutnikai tradition at Wat Asokaram, just outside of the Thai capital (Payulpitack, 1991; Satha-Anand, 1990). In his own words, he felt his life was "like water, flowing away" (as cited in Essen, 2005). At Asokaram, Mongkol/Rak took the name Bodhirak, shaved his head, and adopted the lifestyle of a monk.

In an early break with tradition, however, he eschewed chanting and Pali language lessons in favour of learning through open debate on the *dhamma* (Payulpitack, 1991). Further, in what he saw as an extension of that debate, he became an outspoken critic of institutionalized Buddhism, openly condemning the *sangha* for its inability to meaningfully engage with the laity, its moral lethargy, and its lack of response to emerging development crises. As he commented at the time, “[a] religious institution should help the society in solving its problems; otherwise, the existence of the religious institution becomes meaningless” (as cited in Heikkil-Horn, 1996, p.97). Bodhirak quickly gained followers, both laypersons and monks. He had himself re-ordained in the Mahanikai sect/tradition and started a monastic centre just outside of Bangkok, called Daen Asoke, which accepted both Thammayutnikai and Mahanikai followers – a move toward syncretism that had been expressly forbidden at Wat Asokram (Heikkil-Horn, 1996; Payulpitack, 1991). Almost immediately, orders came down to dismantle Daen Asoke; orders which Bodhirak ignored (Satha-Anand, 1990), claiming that he was not attempting to cause controversy but merely to merge the positive aspects of Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism (Heikkil-Horn, 1996).

In 1975, dissatisfied with both the Thammayutnikai and Mahanikai orders, Bodhirak publicly announced the nullification of his group’s association with the Thai Council of Elders, as well as his intention to continue operating outside of state religious authority (Heikkil-Horn, 1996; Satha-Anand, 1990; Sivaraksa, 1988). This same year marks the official birth of the Santi Asoke Movement proper (Satha-Anand, 1990). Despite his break with the institutionalized *sangha*, Bodhirak refused to formally disrobe, merely changing the traditional orange garb for a brownish-red version. His retention of the robes of a monk, as well as his claiming the ‘right’ to ordain monks, has been the basis of periodic state legal action against Bodhirak, since it expressly contravenes the *Sangha Act* of 1962. (Payulpitack, 1991; Sangsehanat, 2004a; Satha-Anand, 1990). For his part, Bodhirak personally upholds the simple lifestyle that he espouses, further dissociating himself from the mainstream *sangha*, in which a monk as prominent as he would live both privately and luxuriously. Dividing his time between two different Asoke communities, he eats and travels with other Asoke *bhikkhu*, lives in a 2½ by 1½ metre *kuti* (hut), and rises to preach at 4:00 am every day (Heikkil-Horn, 1996).

Asoke Communities and their Members

The first Santi Asoke *chum-chon* (community) was established in 1976, in Bangkok (Payulpitack, 1991). It was immediately perceived as a living example of a reinterpreted Buddhism, in which moral

emphasis was placed on the community, and not just the individual adherent and righteous Buddhist sovereign, which have stood as the pillars of Thai Buddhism for centuries (Satha-Anand, 1990). Asoke *chum-chon*, as well as the basic development model they employ, are based on Bodhirak's own action-oriented, world-engaging interpretations of Theravadan Buddhist philosophy (Sangsehanat, 2004a). Asoke encourages simultaneous spiritual and social activity, aiming for individual and group development by combining a focused *dharmma-vinyana* with community self-sufficiency and work for the benefit of the 'outside' world. Their conceptualization of the development process is tripartite and layered: the individual is the basis of community change, and the community is the basis of wider socio-economic change. As of 2004 the movement had eight intentional communities, approximately seven to eight hundred resident members, hundreds of boarding school students, and about ten thousand non-resident members who interact with the movement through its four lay organizations and via participation in local and national festivals and activities (Sangsehanat, 2004a).

Each Asoke *chum-chon* operates on a four-element foundation, known as the 'axis:' the *wat*, with its *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhuni* (Buddhist nuns), novices, and *khon wat*; the *baan* or village, with its five-precept laypersons; the *rongrien* (school), known as the Samma Sikkha School, with its boarding and local students; and the *yatithaam* ('Brothers in Dhamma'), or non-resident supporters of the Santi Asoke movement. Their influences, both practical and philosophical, are quite diverse, representing a sizeable swath of *kalyānamittatā*,

Asoke people select from a wide array of ideas and techniques available to them from global, regional, local, and historical sources, such as modern information technology, natural farming methods from Japan, Western environmental concepts, and existing Thai cultural practices. In the imaginative combination of these elements, something entirely new is fashioned. (Essen, 2003, p.16)

What is important here is the act of selection – choosing carefully, from among the dizzying array of alternatives that globalization (*lokanuwat*) delivers to the eye and imagination, the attitudes and technologies to 'let in' to the community and movement.

A typical community's facilities (besides the *wat*, *baan*, and *rongrien*) include areas for mushroom cultivation, cloth weaving and dyeing, recycling centres, numerous organic vegetable and herb patches, fruit orchards, rice fields, a museum, a rice mill, a convenience store, a library, and both outlying and internal forested areas (Essen, 2003, 2005). Everything, down to the roads and water system(s), are usually

constructed by community members (Payulpitack, 1991). Technology is not eschewed, but is consciously selected to be ‘soft,’ and to benefit as wide a group as possible – water, for example, is kept fresh and chilled in traditional earthenware jars (Essen, 2005; Sangsehanat, 2004b). Permanent residents, including *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*, exchange their labour for a variety of non-wage forms of compensation, including: spiritual guidance, free education, a family-supportive atmosphere, and no-cost provision of the so-called ‘four necessities’ of material life (food, shelter, clothing, and medicine) (Essen, 2003). Further, labour is chosen by the individual, ideally in recognition of his or her skills and preferences, from within the available set of necessary works. Asoke members volunteer for any work the *chum-chon* can accomplish itself. That work is organized into more than thirty ‘activity bases,’ few to none of which require specialized knowledge or skills, and all of which benefit from cooperative activity. Planning and evaluation systems are established to account for the ‘real costs’ of production – including natural resources, physical and social capital, artificial (technological) resources, and human resources – while output waste is measured as a real cost (Sangsehanat, 2004a). At the macro level, there exists an “egalitarian interrelationship” among the various Asoke communities, between which resources, products, knowledge/skills, and members flow with the aim of increasing each community’s autonomy (Sangsehanat, 2004a). The individual communities are linked horizontally and, arching over these connections, are subject to the nation-wide Asoke operational policies (Essen, 2005). This being said, the *chum-chon* are not managed from above, but from within (Essen, 2003). Monthly meetings between Bodhirak and the various community leaders keep information flowing (Essenm 2005).

Autonomy at the community level is supported by autonomy at the individual level, and Asoke members enjoy considerable freedom. Freedom of movement, including the freedom to come and go or leave the community altogether, is absolute; as is the freedom to participate in governing the *chum-chon*; and to select one’s own work, including changing it at any time (Essen, 2003). This autonomy-within-community draws a diverse group of individuals to the Santi Asoke movement – they are single, married, widowed, and divorced; aged eighteen to eighty-four; from Chinese, Thai, Isan, Lanna; and Lao families; with rural, town, and metropolitan backgrounds; minimally educated and holding advanced degrees; with and without children; and in possession of varied skills reflecting a wide array of occupational backgrounds (Essen, 2003). Governance of such a diverse group is accomplished through weekly community meetings, at which “differing views are hashed out, conflicts are mediated, new ideas are proposed, goals are set, and progress is evaluated” (p.13).

Fundamental Principles: Meritism and “the Ideas behind the Image”

The Asoke view represents a radical departure from the lay Thai Theravadan approach to religious practice, the Buddhist *dhamma-vinyana*. Indeed, the most immediately evident physical differences between an Asoke community and its mainstream equivalent include the fact that Asoke *wats* contain no chapel, pavilion, or Buddha images (nor do they allow offerings or praying to such images), and in them one will find neither Pali chanting nor the performance of traditional rites, including the making of amulets and sprinkling of holy water (Essen, 2003; Payulpitack, 1991; Satha-Anand, 1990). Bodhirak asserts that “dhamma cannot be moulded out of brick, stone, clay or cement into charms, lockets, amulets or other adornments,” and claims that his wish in breaking with tradition is to see people “worship the ideas *behind* the image” (Heikkil-Horn, 1996, p.95, emphasis added). The reason and insight of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is a considerable inspiration in this regard (though his influence has recently been denied), in particular the passages from his *Handbook for Mankind* (1956) that deal with the *vinyana*:

If a man could eliminate suffering by making offerings, paying homage, and praying there would be no one subject to suffering left in the world. [...] But since people are still subject to suffering while in the very act of making obeisance, paying homage, and performing rites, this is clearly not the way to gain liberation. (p.3)

Asoke is also distinctive for its ordination of *bhikkhuni*, since there is no such practice in mainstream, state-sanctioned Buddhism. Owing to a long-manipulated loophole, in which it is claimed that the Theravadan *bhikkhuni* lineage died out a millennium ago in Ceylon, Thai Buddhist females can only attain the official status of *mae chii*, or devout laywoman (Essen, 2005; Suksamran, 1988).⁴⁵ Within the androcentric religious hierarchy, these women are subservient to monks, receive little respect from the laity, no regard for their concerns from the *sangha*, and tend to have low-level caretaker jobs at the *wats* they serve (Essen, 2005; Walter, 2007). Ordination of women, on the part of Asoke authorities, thus constitutes a deliberate attempt to revive the Buddhist community of the Buddha’s own time, which brought together monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen (Satha-Anand, 1990; Sivaraksa, 1992). In general, in fact, Asoke women have available to them a greater array of high-status roles (including village heads and government liaisons); this has a beneficial effect not only for these women leaders, but also for the other female members of the *chumchon*. For example, Buddhist laywomen often express greater comfort discussing certain spiritual matters with *bhikkhuni* (within Asoke) or *mae chii* (in ‘outside’ society) than with *bhikkhu* (Essen, 2005).

⁴⁵ Female novices can only be ordained in the presence of at least five elder *bhikkhuni* (Essen, 2005).

The ordained members of Santi Asoke adhere to codes of conduct that are considerably more austere (and, Bodhirak would argue, authentic) than those followed by members of the institutionalized *sangha*. *Bhukkhu* in the Asoke tradition use neither shoes nor umbrellas, for example, while their mainstream counterparts typically sport matching footwear and parasols, handed out by each monastery to its novices (Payulpitack, 1991). The Asoke prescriptions and proscriptions for its *bhikkhi* and *bhikkhuni* can be read – and often are – as a “direct critique of Thai monks in general” (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.403). The principles of the Santi Asoke Movement have implications for its lay members, too. Being born into the tradition, most Thais practice Buddhism without much conscious thought of its moral or spiritual ideals (Payulpitack, 1991). In the mainstream Thai approach to lay practice, the focus is on relative amounts of personal *bun* (merit), *baab* (demerit), and *wibāggām* (the consequences of past ill deeds), which can be manipulated through *thombun* (making merit) (Essen, 2003, 2005; Suksamran, 1988). Aspects of the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* (Noble Eightfold Path), including *paññā* (wisdom) *sīla* (ethical conduct) and *samādhi* (mental discipline, typically meditation), are considered, by ordinary Thais, to be available only to *bhikkhu*, leaving merit-making as the only way to express the state of being ‘a good Buddhist’ (Essen, 2003; Payulpitack, 1991). Ironically, *thombun* in Thai Buddhism serves not the Buddha’s idea of *selflessness*, but *selfishness*, since it constitutes a straightforward attempt to manipulate *kamma* by amassing ‘good deeds’ (Sangsehanat, 2004a). In addition to *thombun*, laymen sometimes recruit monks to perform rituals that serve to “appease fear or enhance prestige” (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.403), yet merit-making remains the most common lay practice. *Thombun* typically involves almost exclusively *sangha*-supportive activities, such as financing temple construction or repair, making daily donations of food to the local monastery, having a son become a *bhukkhu* (or becoming one oneself), and observing each religious holiday (Essen, 2003). As part of its sustained critique of both mainstream Western development thought and mainstream Thai Theravadan Buddhist practice – and in particular the selfishness (*hen kaeh dthua*), acquisitiveness, competitiveness (*kad yaeng kan*), and exploitation found in both – Santi Asoke characterizes its ideology as ‘meritism’ (*bun niyom*, literally, ‘to prefer merit’), a play on the Thai for ‘capitalism’ (*thun niyom*, literally, ‘to prefer capital’) (Sangsehanat, 2004a). *Bun*, here, is not individual merit but social merit, and the duty to make merit focuses not on the *sangha* as recipient, as is the norm in Thai Theravadan Buddhism, but society itself (Sangsehanat, 2004a). Asoke *bun* has two prongs: self-reliance and selflessness, which are seen as mutually dependent, since “residents sacrifice time and energy for the good of the community, and community-wide self-dependence allows individuals to help ‘outside’ Thai society” (Essen, 2003, p.8).

Following Buddhadasa, then, Asoke presents world-involved forms of Buddhist practice as on a par with world-renouncing forms (Sangsehanat, 2004a), which have traditionally been the domain of members of the *sangha* alone, and thus unavailable to the ‘ordinary’ Buddhist. The Santi Asoke Movement thus “refuses the distinction between mundane and supramundane” (Sangsehanat, 2004a) – indeed, Bodhirak himself asserts that “to be a Buddhist is to be one who acts in the world for the benefit of the world” (Payulpitack, 1991, p.65).

The Tripartite Model of Development: Individual, Community, and Society

Development of the Individual

From Bodhirak’s perspective, “[p]eople solve problems at the wrong points when they try to change society without changing the individual” (Heikkil-Horn, 1996, p.93). At the individual level, Asoke asserts that development has both a spiritual and material component: the spirit is cared for by adherence to the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*, while the body is cared for by engaging in work that provides the ‘four necessities.’ Following the Noble Eightfold Path, for Asoke residents, involves living according to a varying number of Buddhist precepts. Laypeople follow the *pañcasīla*, the Five Precepts that form the core of ‘right action’ (*sammā-kammanta*), made up of refraining from destroying any form of life (including eating meat), stealing or cheating, deception, ingesting intoxicants, and engaging in unwholesome sexual activity (Essen, 2003; Sangsehanat, 2004a). *Abayamook* (‘the six vices’) are also avoided, specifically alcohol, narcotics, gambling, nighttime entertainment, laziness, and ‘sexual playing.’ Members of Asoke *chum-chon* also utilize no cosmetics, perfume or jewellery, drink nothing but water, eat only one meal per day (and do so prior to noon), use no electricity at home, never sleep through the day, and forego fashionable clothing and interior décor (Essen, 2003; Payulpitack, 1991). Personal possessions are redundant, since cooking, eating, and entertaining are communal activities, meaning that resources are held in common rather than individually. All members wear traditional indigo-dyed Thai peasant shirts and slacks or *phathung* (wrap skirts), sport short haircuts, and go barefoot (Payulpitack, 1991). In addition to the five practiced by everyone, *khon wat* (‘temple people’) follow a further three precepts, while *bhikkhuni* observe ten total, and *bhikkhu* honour the full 227 precepts of the *sangha* code (Essen, 2003; Payulpitack, 1991). Adherence to Buddhist precepts is seen, particularly by lay members, as simultaneously practical (saving time, money, and effort) and as serving a greater purpose (such as cultivating non-attachment and mindfulness, and setting a positive example for others). Morality is thus shared, rather than dictated, and

lived, rather than achieved. Moral conduct is ‘evaluated’ at informal weekly meetings in which all community members, young and old, participate. The various precepts are there discussed in detail, and members who want to share a transgression or receive advice, in the spirit of both self-reflection and of learning from others’ mistakes, do so in an atmosphere of levity and support.

Work is the second component of individual development attended to in Asoke communities. Here, as with its concept of merit, the movement departs from mainstream Buddhist practice, this time by regarding everyday activities as a legitimate form of meditation (Payulpitack, 1991). The mental discipline (*samādhi*) usually aimed for only by monks, and pursued only via sitting meditation, is here extended to lay practitioners through what is called ‘open eye meditation.’ Residents believe that the peace and insight gained through meditating in isolation is lost as soon as the individual re-enters the world; further, it is fundamentally escapist practice (Sangsehanat, 2004a). Instead, Asoke members cultivate a constant meditation through *gnan*, or the ordinary activities of life, making the process the goal of religious activity, and shifting the attitude one normally takes toward labour at the same time (Sangsehanat, 2004a). This is another principle borrowed directly from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, who wrote that “dhamma sweeps the heart while the broom sweeps the ground” (as cited in Essen, 2003, p.12). The overall aim of ‘open eye meditation’ is to cultivate mindfulness, a state of “general awareness, a calm mind, concentration on tasks and interactions, and control of feelings such as anger, jealousy, aversion, and pleasure” (Essen, 2003, p.12).

Mindfulness goes hand-in-hand with non-attachment in the development of the individual; both are cultivated by, as the Asoke slogan goes, “working harder, consuming [little], and sharing the rest of what one has with society” (Heikkil-Horn, 1996, p.93). As the administrator of Srisa Asoke, one particular Asoke *chum-chon*, explains,

We have a principle philosophy that we must eat little, use little, and work hard. The leftovers support society. This is sacrificing to society – the part that is left over. We do not accumulate. [...] Therefore, we stipulate that we will come to be poor people in the view of people in the other world. [...] We will be people who do not have property. But we will be people who are hard working and industrious, who have knowledge, efficiency, [and] capability. (as cited in Essen, 2003, p.10)

Consuming little, especially as an expression of temperance, involves cultivating the principle of *mak noi*, or being content with little. The point sought is one between neediness (or nihilism) and indulgence (or hedonism), and differs from person to person (Essen, 2003; Taylor, 1993a). *Mak noi* combines with the concept of *sandood*, being satisfied with what one has, since, as one of Srisa Asoke’s training organizers

notes, “if (what you have is) enough, you are richer, suddenly richer” (Essen, 2003, p.11). With these concepts can be found a uniquely Asoke definition of *kilesa*, or moral defilement, in which the tendency toward extravagance blurs *want* and *need* into the same experience (Sangsehanat, 2004a), confusing the individual and making self-development impossible. The ‘cure’ for this ambiguity is a combination of pursuing efficiency of consumption while stripping of pleasure from acts of consuming, resulting in an “economics of enoughness” (Sangsehanat, 2004a).

Development of the Community

Nonattachment, which supports individual development, also contributes to community development by helping to conserve resources and reduce waste, while freeing members’ time and energy. It thereby increases the group’s capacity for self-dependence (Essen, 2003). Meditation, in the form of work, also contributes to community development in two different ways. Through treating work as meditation, “as [members] increase their concentration and awareness of thoughts, speech, and actions, the quality of their work and social interactions improves” (Essen, 2003, p.12). *Gnan* also supports the community directly through provision of the ‘four necessities’ – through the food grown; cloth woven, dyed, and clothing sewn; medicinal plants harvested, prepared, and administered; and buildings constructed. This distribution system, known as *satarana pokee*, allots goods according to need rather than ability (Sangsehanat, 2004a), while by providing members with the ‘four necessities,’ Asoke philosophy asserts that the community as a whole is spared the variety of ills that stem from worrying about sufficient shelter, medicine, food, and clothing (including hoarding, delusion, anxiety, greed, want, crime, and conflict) (Sangsehanat, 2004b).

An important component of any Asoke community is the Samma Sikkha School, which provides instruction in both moral/*dhammic* and practical subjects, with all adults in the community undertaking some form of teaching. Culture, ideology, and the working methods of the Santi Asoke Movement are also part of the curriculum. When school is in session, older students look after the younger ones, under the guidance of adults and teachers – a revival of traditional village support systems, in which real and fictive kin relations bound together the community entire. Every child refers to every other as either *phîi* (elder sibling) or *nong* (younger sibling), and the adults as *naa* or *aa* (younger maternal or paternal uncle or aunt,⁴⁶ relative to one’s parent’s age) or *lung* or *paa* (older uncle or aunt, relative to one’s parent’s age). Etiquette

⁴⁶ Traditionally, the words *phuu yin* are added to denote a female, and *phuu chay* for a male.

is observed and respect conveyed by offering the traditional *wai* greeting (hands pressed together at the chest, chin, or nose). The educational environment, despite drawing on some traditional elements, is unique in its deliberate attempt to teach children “to have self-confidence in order to criticize and to propose their perspective to adults” (Sangsehanat, 2004a). This ideology directly contravenes the Thai emphasis on respect for authority and a classroom atmosphere in which no questions at all – even to alleviate confusion – are permitted.

Development of Thai Society

The third tier of the Santi Asoke development model sees the community helping Thai society as a whole. Here the core value is *anattā*, or ‘no-self.’ In order to cultivate this value, the Asoke philosophy inverts the traditional Thai Buddhist process of merit-making: instead of accepting offerings to the temple, goods flow outward from the temple to the wider society, where they benefit *bhikkhu*, laypersons, and the natural environment. As Essen (2003) writes, describing the Asoke approach, “[t]he act of giving is training in selflessness” (p.14). While financial donations do help support the work of the Asoke *chum-chon* and movement, they are only accepted from regular supporters (Payulpitack, 1991). As one Asoke community member explains, describing her first exposure to the *chum-chon* and its *wat*,

We went to donate money to them, but they would not take our money. We were surprised! What?! Other places ask for money first. Here they said, ‘if you do not come seven times and do not read seven books, if you do not have understanding about what we do here, we will not take [your] donations. At least, you will know when you donate what [we] are going to do with the money. If you don’t know what [we’re] going to do with your money, why [would] you donate?’ (as cited in Essen, 2005)

The national purse (the central fund of the Santi Asoke Movement, replenished through national-level donations and sales of Asoke media) distributes funds to individual communities for approved projects, while additional funding comes from NGO support and government grants (Essen, 2005).

The activities of the community-within-society are varied, but united by the Asoke philosophy. In order to promote the first precept, Santi Asoke runs affordable vegetarian restaurants and, once a year on the King’s birthday, gives away significant quantities of vegetarian food (Essen, 2003; Heikkil-Horn, 1996). In 2000, to celebrate the King’s 73rd birthday, Santi Asoke gave away free food in seventy-three locations throughout the country (Essen, 2005). Individual *chum-chon* also operate Goodwill Stores (*Ran Naamjai*, or ‘flowing heart’ shop), stocking everything from household goods to seeds, and so-called Noble Markets,

which make available community produce and products at low (typically non-profit) prices, and occasionally below the actual cost of production or purchase. The custom at Asoke is to have no more than a fifteen percent mark-up on any item (Essen, 2005). Their organic herbal medicines (*ya samoonphrai*) and personal care products are eagerly sought out by rural and urban Thais alike (Heikkil-Horn, 1996). At and through the markets, the provision of organic, useful, and durable goods serves to convey the ideology of meritism, as well as making low cost foods, medicines, and clothing available to the public (Essen, 2003). Each product bears two numerical values on the label: one showing the cost to produce the item, and another the asking price (Sangsehanat, 2004b). The underlying logic is thus not profit but *dana* (giving), and getting more than you give is not admired, but actually constitutes a form of demerit (Sangsehanat, 2004a). When profitable, the markets and stores generate ‘non-exploitative income,’ which funds community works and activities; when they operate at a loss, the stores and markets make up part of the Asoke sacrifice for Thai society (Essen, 2005).

Members of Thai society also benefit from Asoke community initiatives by being able to send their children to the Samma Sikkha elementary and secondary boarding schools. In the late 1990s, these schools boasted 200 students spread across eight Asoke communities (Essen, 2003). Visitors also come to Asoke *chum-chon* for free seminars and workshops, lasting from a few hours to a few days, on Buddhist morality and ‘right occupation.’ In particular, the focus at these sessions is on training in natural agriculture, preparing chemical-free fertilizers, and waste management – these activities feed into one another, promote self-reliance, do not pollute, and together make up what the Santi Asoke Movement refers to as “the Three Professions to Save the Nation’ (Essen, 2003, 2005). Sometimes an Asoke community will see upwards of a thousand visitors a month, meaning that the tours and trainings consume vast amounts of community time, energy, material resources, yet are undertaken with no expectation of payment, and no guarantee of success (Essen, 2005). Relatedly, Asoke produces materials documenting their ideology and methods, including books, journals, brochures, newspapers, audio and video media, websites, community radio broadcasts, articles, and interviews (Sangsehanat, 2004a).

Since Bodhirak asserts that politics and religion are indivisible, the Santi Asoke Movement has additionally sought to benefit the Thai nation by openly engaging in politics, both fronting candidates and having members working as ‘watchdogs’ on the staff of the governor of Bangkok (Payulpitack, 1991). As Chamlong Srimuang, a Santi Asoke *khon wat* who served as governor of Bangkok, asserted: “the greatest enemy we have [...] is rotten politics” (as cited in Essen, 2005). In these monitoring and evaluation

positions Asoke members have monitored and reported on vote buying, bribery, and misappropriation of funds (Essen, 2003). Chamlong himself was considered a symbol of personal discipline, integrity, and sincerity – known in the media as “Mr. Clean” – who tried to ‘clean up’ the city on social, environmental, and political fronts simultaneously (Essen, 2005; Taylor, 1993a). Perhaps most notably, he won the governorship by a landslide in 1985, earning double the votes for the next closest candidate in the first ever elections for that post (Payulpitack, 1991; Satha-Anand, 1990). Some credit his election to the fact that he had carefully “curtailed activities deemed frivolous by Buddhist standards” (Essen, 2005, p.12). A national political party (the Palangtham Party) was set up to reflect the ideals of the Santi Asoke Movement, and had an explicit mandate of merging morality and politics (Payulpitack, 1991). These kinds of political activities were robust in the late 1980s, but were truncated by many members of the movement, including its founder, being charged with various violations of the *Sangha Act* (including ‘impersonating monks’) (Essen, 2003; Heikkil-Horn, 1996). More recently, Chamlong Srimuang acted as a human resources advisor to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and further political activity is actively planned by Santi Asoke members (Sangsehanat, 2004a). It must be remembered, though, that these forays into politics are undertaken by individual Asoke members, rather than by the movement as a whole, and are in no way guided by Bodhirak himself (Essen, 2005).

Criticism and Defence of the Asoke Approach

The success of the *chum-chon* is undeniable. Being self-reliant, the Asoke villages were among the few communities in Thailand to be spared the devastating fallout of the 1997 economic crisis (Sangsehanat, 2004a). The Thai government has, over the past thirty years, come to view the Asoke communities as individual models of alternative socio-economic development; further, it has taken advantage of various Asoke offerings in forging its own development initiatives. As one example: rising farmer debt to the national Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) brought about the initiation of the federal *krong karn pak cham ra ni* (‘Stop the Debt’) programme. Through this programme, over a three-year period the BAAC sent 300,000 farmer debtors to Asoke *chum-chon* to study *kaseet baep thammachaat* (natural agriculture), *dthua rao ben thii pheung* (self-sufficiency) measures, and sustainable development, using *bun niyom* principles (Sangsehanat, 2004a). At the same time, the Samma Sikkha Schools became model institutions under the Ministry of Education’s assessment

of Buddhist education, and have been officially lauded as alternatives not only to Thai but also to Western schools, providing an alternative on two different fronts (Sangsehanat, 2004a).

And yet reactions to Santi Asoke have been mixed, with passionate critics and defenders emerging periodically ever since the movement was founded. Sombat Chantarawongsa, a leading Thai political philosopher, has famously called the Asoke *chum-chon* a “Buddhist utopia” (as cited in Sangsehanat, 2004a). Their fleshing out of important values – freedom, fraternity, peace, efficiency, and integrity – are seen as an important achievement in a country accustomed to ‘lip service’ paid to morality (Essen, 2005). Many Buddhist scholars, on the other hand, have criticized the movement for being subjective, superficial, and non-scriptural (Essen, 2005; Payulpitack, 1991). Bodhirak’s counter to these criticisms is that his insights are experiential – harkening, in a way, back to the Buddha’s own approach (Payulpitack, 1991). Santi Asoke remains the only sect to have “openly rebelled” against the *sangha* and criticized its elders and teachings (Sivaraksa, 1988, p.35). The movement as a whole has been pronounced ‘illegal’ by the Office of the National Legislative Council, and there have been contradictory, official attempts to both defrock Bodhirak, for “defying and distorting Buddhist principles,” and merge Santi Asoke into the *sangha* hierarchy (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.405). The outcome of the decade-long legal battle over the status of Asoke and its religious practitioners ended strangely: individuals may practice their faith through or within Asoke wats, by virtue of the freedom of religion guaranteed in the Thai constitution, but they may not call that faith Buddhism. The brown robes of Asoke *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* have had to be exchanged for the white robes that denote merely devout laypersons (Essen, 2005). Jackson (1997) points out the final irony in this endeavour: “in the 1990s, it is largely politically irrelevant whether [Bodhirak] bows to the *sangha* authorities” (p.78), while pursuit of Bodhirak only generated sympathy in the mind of the public (Jackson, 1997). In Thailand, “many saw [it] as a conflict between a corrupt *sangha* seeking to uphold its entrenched power and an ethically strict Buddhist renunciate aiming to purify and revitalize a moribund religious order” (Jackson, 1997, p.78).

Bodhirak himself has been called the *Saatsada Mahaaphay* – the ‘Highly Dangerous Prophet’ (Sangsehanat, 2004a). The fact that he has declared himself a *bodhisatta* (a being on its way to becoming a *buddha*) has unnerved both *sangha* members and laypersons, since orthodox teachings prohibit monks from discussing their own level of spiritual achievement (Sangsehanat, 2004a). Thais have also been unnerved at the Asoke view of activism, since their work around and in government “far exceeds the acceptable relationship between religion and politics in Thailand” (Essen, 2005, p.18). Playing on this

societal discomfort, Suchinda Kraprayoon, leader of the 1991 *coup d'état* and Prime Minister for a brief period in 1992, accused Bodhirak of “politically undermining the stability of the nation” by dispatching Asoke members to pro-democracy demonstrations (as cited in Taylor, 1993a, p.76). More generally, Satha-Anand (1990) interprets widespread support for Asoke’s antiestablishment stance, but lack of commitment to living in the communities themselves, as evidence of the “ambivalence of the Thai urban middle class” to the movement (p.407). Many, it would appear, find the lifestyle admirable in principle, but too demanding in practice. Members of the Santi Asoke Movement are unperturbed by this, however. As one supporter explains, “[e]veryone is looking for a *tang auk*, a solution [...]. Asoke is one solution. It is not right for everyone (as cited in Essen, 2005)

Chapter Conclusion

Patthanā (development) emerged as a term only after 1957. From 1932 to 1957 the term of choice was *watthanā* (modernization). Prior to 1932 the word *būrana* had been used to describe “improvement of public works,” including construction of irrigation, transportation, and drainage systems, using *corvée* labour (Demaine, 1986). This term actually translates as ‘to reconstruct, rehabilitate, restore, or repair,’ in the sense of perpetuating the self-reliance that rural areas had always enjoyed, rather than bringing about ‘progress’ in the evolutionary sense (Demaine, 1986). This is a seemingly subtle shift in the conceptualization of ‘development’ that has had far-reaching implications, since changes to national policy have followed suit. Because of the work of individuals and communities like those described in the preceding case studies, Jackson (1997) describes that Buddhism in Thailand as having shifted from a ‘religion of justification’ for the wealthy and powerful to a ‘religion of opposition’ for those who desired socially just economic change. Comparisons are often made between the work of activist rural *bhikkhu* and that of Catholic liberation theologians – the main differences being that the Buddhist monks are typically less educated and worldly, are less formally organized, and definitely lack official sanction (Handley, 1991). Some authors point to philosophical differences, as well; Swidler (1990), for example compares the basic tenets of Buddhism to those of Western and Eastern monotheistic religions by stating that the former uses the language “from within” and “from below” while the latter uses the language “from without” and “from above” (Swidler, 1990, p.172).

Ideological and practical independence concerns activist monks less and less as Buddhism in Thailand sloughs off its bonds to state and *sangha*. As one Socially Engaged *bhikkhu* put it: “[I]ook around,

there are lots of things that need to be done. In fact, the amount of work is overwhelming. [...] We don't have to wait for anybody's order. We [...] take orders directly from the Buddha" (Tiyavanich, 1997, p.275). It is this attitude that inspires Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa to refer to the 'development' work of rural monks and Buddhist laypersons as *sekiathamma* (appropriate doctrine) (as cited in Handley, 1991). These activities, taken as a whole, constitute "attempts to make Buddhism meaningful to modern life, both as critique and affirmation" (Satha-Anand, 1990, p.405). While each case is unique, "a response to a particular configuration of social needs," (Essen, 2005, p.19) they share key attributes in common, including a revisionist interpretation of Pali doctrine; opposition to the negative elements of capitalism; use of a mixture of relevant 'outsider' and traditional knowledges (*phu mii panya chao baan*); meaningful integration of cultural elements and indigenous concepts; lack of concern for the national agenda *per se*; affinity with the natural environment; and the Buddhist development values of self-reliance, localization, equanimity, and participation. These initiatives are based on flexibility rather than precedent, and stand as endogenously inspired, implemented, and maintained (Essen, 2005; Gohlert, 1991). The inspiration for action is everyday experience, someone or an entire group having been touched *personally* by the problems of spiritual or material 'underdevelopment.' This differentiates the Socially Engaged Buddhist active in local development from the typical development worker, who is "separated from [villagers] by identity, status, and outlook' (Gohlert, 1991). There are also deeper divergences from 'mainstream' development projects, since Buddhist activism seeks to "redefine the underlying concepts of development and progress," while encouraging (or challenging) those involved to rethink their place in the political, social, spiritual, and natural world (Darlington, 2000, par.45). Each seemingly isolated case of Buddhist development is thus actually part of "a larger discussion about the nature of Thainess, modernity, and progress (Tannenbaum, 2000, p.117).

Discussion and Conclusion

Whether to Pave the World or Wear Shoes

Objectivity, Neutrality, and (In)consistency: The Challenge of the Prevailing Paradigm(s)

Many of the ‘harder’ or ‘purer’ scientific and social scientific methods and frameworks utilized in development are oriented toward a neutrality or objectivity that renders them blind to ethical considerations beyond the merely procedural or quandary-based. In the process, explicitly ethical approaches are devalued, whether subtly or overtly. This is especially true of development characterized as ‘religious’ or ‘faith-based,’ which is almost invariably labelled irrational, biased, inscrutable, and doomed to yield to the progressive secularism of the modern age. In practice, however, this pursuit of value-unencumbered and non-subjective theories and practices fails, for two interrelated reasons. First, values are invariably carried within or under analyses – and thus *cannot* be avoided – and second, we are actually sufficiently accustomed to our own moral subtext that, though quite active and influential, it has become invisible to us:

In our world, we are faced with ethical values that belong to meta-narratives, systems of thought or social structures that have created a special narrative in which ethical and moral issues have been arranged to give priority to certain values. The meta-narratives most often expressed in the contemporary Western world are those of [...] Marxism, modernization, and scientific progress. (Lancaster, 1991, p.348)

Pseudo-scientific claims of objective neutrality also warp explicit consideration of ethics by trying to exclude them as ‘subjective’ elements beyond the current undertaking. This constitutes willing ignorance of the fact that ethics may be subjective, but they are undeniably connected to an objective (and shared) reality. Seen in this light, many scientific and social scientific analyses are stripped of considerable authority and, as a result, much of their power to convince simply by virtue of that authority.

The disjuncture described here has given rise to problems in the application of development theory, by various individuals and institutions working in the field. Professed commitments to development have proven inconsistent with the self-interested actions of nations, corporations, and other actors in (and peripheral to) the industry, meaning that normative renderings of theory and practice have been easily co-opted for unquestionably non-normative ends. The result is that “history has now brought us all to a point where we have to choose between, on the whole, confirming the values of the dominant [paradigm] or, on the whole, seeking to disconfirm them and transform them” (Jones, 1992, p.13). There has long been a

suspicion of conventional approaches to ameliorating inequality and dearth, stemming from the sense that there is something odd about proposing solutions that deploy the very same ideological framework that created the problems under consideration – it may be consistent, and show a certain symmetry, but it is decidedly short on other virtues. As Watts and Loy (1998) assert,

Four hundred years into the scientific, rational experiment, this method of discourse has effectively come to dominate how we envision and address the way we live in our world. Though such ‘social engineering’ has its merits, it lacks a complete view, such as one that takes into account the very basis of material development, which is human happiness. (p.61)

This assertion brings the inquiry at hand full circle, back to the definition of development.

Ethics as Praxis: The Answer from Buddhism

Conceived of as “a process of socio-economic change which ought to happen” (Dower, 1998, p.154), ‘development’ is congruent with the Buddhist idea that there is no being, only becoming, and the Buddhist conceptualization of virtue as practiced or lived, rather than attained or demonstrated. Buddhism places the ethical individual at the centre of a flourishing *sangha* (community) of self, society, and nature, asserting that ‘true development’ is “continuity between the inner and outer world” (Sivaraksa, 1990b, p.177). Appeals to development in the Buddhist sense acknowledge that personal liberation and social liberation, personal suffering and social suffering, are deeply entwined with one another and, as a result, call for intervention in the causes and symptoms of both material and immaterial *dukkha* (suffering) (Sivaraksa, 1988, p.177). In creating Buddhist development alternatives, one important ambition is the catalysis of a new understanding of social, political, and economic problems, and of the relationship between them as *moral issues*.

A key corollary of these various propositions is that human consciousness and human societies must change in tandem for that change to have either meaning or persistence. Because it frames personal growth and socio-economic growth as linked processes, and broader change as the result of aggregate individual action, Buddhism asserts that each person has a responsibility for the justness and compassion of the socio-economic order. Phrased differently: every individual has an obligation to act to secure intergenerational, intragenerational, and interspecies equity and empathy. A reminder of this acute sense of causation can be found in a particular mantra, spoken by the Buddha himself, which concludes with the phrase “I am the

owner of my deeds; whatever deed I do, whether good or bad, I shall become heir to it” (as cited in Sivaraksa, 1988, p.73). Knowledge that contributes to Buddhist development theory and practice is drawn from the life and teachings of the Buddha; the insights of exemplars and *kalyānamittatā* (‘good friends,’ including critics); and the firsthand experiences of the individual practitioner. These merge to form a robust *dhamma-vinyana* (doctrine-practice), which serves as the foundation of Buddhist ethical action in the world. From the realization of the universality of suffering (*dukkha*), the reality of impermanence, the fact of *anattā* (no-self) and the truth of *patīccasamuppāda* (interdependent arising) emanate compassion, generosity, and a mindframe that makes both exploitative action and complacent inaction impossible (Sivaraksa, 1988). These insights into the nature of reality and human existence produce the remarkably nuanced set of discourses and practices that fall under the rubric of ‘Buddhist development.’ Thinkers in this tradition “offer solutions based on seemingly simple concepts, which are however, most complex in their application” (Gohlert, 1991, p.151).

Naturally, not all elements of Buddhist development are unique, and it is not the first ‘school’ to oppose neoliberal economics or seek to offset the negative elements of capitalism. Some of its key characteristics can be found, for instance, in the work of NGOs and writers active in ‘alternative,’ ‘participatory,’ or ‘sustainable’ development. It is important to remember, though, that the principles found in Buddhist development do not arise through negation (a point on which Chambers and Conway (1992), for example, are not entirely defensible), nor are they vulnerable to the accusations of inconsistency that are fairly levelled at environmentally or culturally-inflected variants of conventional development models (like those outlined in the *Brundtland Report*). Of course, as the Thai case studies demonstrate, there is no *necessary* connection between Buddhism and positive, holistic, or even particularly successful socio-economic development initiatives. Indeed, representatives of institutionalized Buddhism in that nation cannot even be said to be supportive of such efforts. In seeking to explain this disparity, Sivaraksa differentiates between what he terms ‘Small “b”’ and ‘Capital “B”’ Buddhism. The latter is “acculturated [...], conventional, ritualistic Buddhism” (Swearer, 1996, p.215). The former is essentialist, in that it adheres to the taproot of the life and words of the Buddha, and does away with the non-essential elements of institutionalized religion. The most successful Buddhist development initiatives are, it would seem, mounted by individuals or groups that are best characterized as heterodox (more commonly known as ‘Socially Engaged Buddhists’). Heterodoxy, however, is an evolving position, and changes in the interpretation or practice of Buddhism reflect changes in the surrounding culture, community, and nation.

This opens up the possibility that, in Buddhist contexts, “traditional symbols and meaning systems [may] provide a cognitive and instrumental framework for restructuring society” (Taylor, 1993a, p.68).

Buddhist development is not so much a model or theory as it is the direct application of the ethics of the *dhamma-vinyana* to the problems of ‘underdevelopment,’ as perceived and articulated by those whose lives are most immediately affected by it. Each practitioner, realizing that no one approach can answer all questions, is engaged in an attempt to “teach and live out a local alternative” (Walter, 2007, p. 341). There is thus no single movement, but what Darlington (2000) calls a “collective implication.” That implication is, as opposed to merely the strengthening of *socio-economic units*, the creation and nurture of *moral communities*, with attendant social, political, and economic imperatives. In pursuit of this ambition, the methods employed are highly varied, but the concepts, explanatory models, and goals are common, involving:

Localization, since efforts are locally situated and use local natural and human resources, while initiatives are endogenously inspired, implemented, and maintained;

Solidarity and Fraternity/Sorority, which need to be (and have not thus far been) endorsed to the same extent as freedom and equality, leaving societies with legalized norms but without the spirit that gives them meaningful expression;

Scaling of institutions, wherever possible, at the human/personal level, which allows for direct relationships across multiple spheres of action and reduces the likelihood of entrenchment of political authority and control;

Alternative Conceptualizations of Power, including motivational and cooperative loci, which counter conventional expressions of power as coercive and unidirectional;

Conscientization, enhancing awareness of political, social, and economic issues, and empowering communities to analyse the problems they face themselves;

Voluntary Simplicity (mattannuta), or pursuit of the highest levels of human satisfaction attainable at the lowest levels of material consumption;

Collectivism and Consensus in decision-making, in which dialogue weaves together historical experience, local knowledge, indigenous values, and cultural traditions;

Inspiration and Example, which see new initiatives branching off of, or inspired by, existing ones, so that one vigorous ‘seed’ project gives rise to a range of related initiatives;

Partnership, undertaken with related groups and agencies with whom the community being ‘developed’ must or should act;

Economic Self-reliance, enhanced through both raising incomes and reducing the debt and ‘frivolous’ expenditures of individuals and groups;

Autonomy, through decentralization and demassification of government, including reducing the role for the state to one of cooperation with local actors;

Livelihoods, including considerations of quality of life and personal fulfilment, which take precedence over macroeconomic growth and national-level concerns;

Balance, in particular of material and spiritual values, which entails the deconstruction of the binaries that drive social disharmony (especially rural/urban, rich/poor, worthy/unworthy, and public/private);

Courage in exerting an influence on processes and systems that are almost universally perceived of as unsteerable, such as globalization and capitalism;

Voluntarism and *Participation* as not only desirable, but properly pivotal, which inculcates a disinclination to proceed without these in place;

Criticality and *Selectivity* in the evaluation, adoption, or hybridization of ‘alien’ methods, approaches, and understandings, and in the assessment of ‘value’ (with particular attention to the difference between necessity and desire) more generally;

Process-orientation, so that development is perceived as continuous rather than an activity that discretely begins and ends, and problems are conceptualized as part of issues-within-issues and historical process;

Empathetic Understanding, so that acts of ‘charity’ or ‘aid’ do not objectify the recipient, violating his or her dignity, or ‘puff up’ the donor, serving stratification and self-interest;

Flexibility and *Particularity*, which are cultivated in order to move beyond an emphasis on precedent, procedure, and ‘one size fits all’ modes of development planning, while helping persons and communities adapt;

Compromise and *Tolerance* in dealing with disparate individuals and ideologies;

Justice, or the pursuit of substantive rights, particularly those of vulnerable and marginalized groups;

Equity in access to resources and in meeting basic needs;

Culture as a vital reservoir, requiring articulation, protection, and transmission (sometimes articulated as a ‘right’ to local cultural autonomy);

Transparency and *Accountability* in all forms of governance and leadership;

Environmentalism, or living in harmony with nature, including the adoption of ‘soft’ technologies and sustainable methods in every conceivable aspect of life, and the differential classification of renewable and non-renewable natural resources; and

Ethics, asserted throughout the conceptualization, planning, and implementation phases of all ‘development’ initiatives.

Given these commitments, the search is on for particular examples of appropriate economic models, sympathetic political systems, and suitable technologies. That search is an ongoing one, which regularly yields new elements of Buddhist development theory, practice, and praxis.

Acknowledging that there is no one Buddhist voice or view, the work contained herein has established that the *dharmavinyana* gives rise, with a surprising immediacy and fluidity, to a particularly robust, virtue-based ethics of development. It has done so through analysing the theory and practice of Buddhist development at various levels of abstraction: from fundamental tenets, to the general goals and models that describe those tenets, to the specific strategies that flesh out the goals and models. In this case, ethics stands not only as the basis of, but also the link between, theory and practice. Buddhist development has been revealed as a truly alternative vision, in that it is highly internally consistent, rational, and explicitly ethical in form and function. In pursuit of its main goal, this work has accomplished two others: it has established that it is possible to deliberately ground theoretical and actual socio-economic change in clear normative principles, and it has demonstrated that faith-based advocacy for desirable socio-economic change is logical, effective, and worthy of inclusion in normative views of human flourishing. Jackson (1997) writes that, in heterodox Buddhism, ethics is seen as “the practical expression of the principle of reason [...]. For reason to be effective in progressively transforming the world there must be a congruence between theory and practice, and only morality [...] is believed capable of transforming the social, political and economic domains” (p. 81). This idea is explicit in the work of the various thinkers contributing to an emerging Buddhist theory of development (whether through critique, social theory, or economics), and implicit in the actions of the many Buddhist development practitioners who advocate for desirable socio-economic change. In comparing and contrasting the works of these individuals and groups with those of their more mainstream counterparts, a Tibetan Buddhist analogy provides a fitting closing thought: “[t]he world is full of thorns and sharp stones (and now broken glass as well). What should we do about this? We can try to pave over the entire Earth, or we can wear shoes” (as cited in Loy, 2003b, p.9).

Appendix A: Glossary of Thai and Pali Words

aa	Thai	uncle or aunt, specifically one's father's younger brother or sister
ajarn	Thai	teacher
abayamook	Thai	the six vices: alcohol, narcotics, gambling, nighttime entertainment, laziness, and sexual playing
ahimsa	Pali	non-violence
akusala	Pali	unwholesome actions
ananasukha	Pali	the happiness of freedom from debt
anattā	Pali	no-self
anavajjasukha	Pali	the happiness of being blameless in one's economic endeavours
anicca	Pali	impermanence, the continuous flux that characterizes existence
arahant	Pali	exemplar, one who has personally addressed the roots of suffering in a substantial way
ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo	Pali	the Noble Eightfold Path; typically given as simply <i>magga</i> (literally, 'path'); the way toward the cessation of suffering
atthacariya	Pali	constructive action
atthisukha	Pali	the happiness of rightfully acquired ownership
baab	Thai	demerit (the opposite of <i>bun</i>)
baan	Thai	house, home, village
bhikkhu	Pali	mendicant, Buddhist monk, member of the Buddhist Order
bhikkhu-sangha	Pali	the community of monks, the monkhood
bhikkhuni	Pali	Buddhist nun
bhogasukha	Pali	the happiness that stems from enjoying what one has
bodhisatta	Pali	an enlightened being, an individual on his or her way to becoming a buddha
brahma vihāras	Pali	the Four Noble Abodes (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity)
bun	Thai	merit
bun niyom	Thai	meritism (literally, 'to prefer merit')
būrana	Pali	to reconstruct, rehabilitate, restore, or repair
catanā	Pali	disposition, character
cattāri ariyasaccāni	Pali	the Four Noble Truths
chanda	Pali	the desire for that which causes wellness (the opposite of <i>tanha</i>)
chat	Thai	country
chum-chon	Thai	community

dāna	Pali	charity, giving, generosity (one of the six perfections)
dhamma	Pali	duty, laws of nature, the Buddha's teachings, the doctrine of Buddhism (the counterpart to the <i>vinyana</i> , or practice/discipline)
dhamma-vinyana	Pali	the Buddha's own name for Buddhism, made up of <i>dhamma</i> (doctrine) and <i>vinaya</i> (discipline)
dhammadana	Pali	Obligation of a monk to perform religious services for the laity (literally, 'gift of spiritual service')
ditthi	Pali	worldviews
dosa	Pali	aggression, anger, ill-will, malice
dthua rao ben thii pheung	Thai	self-dependence
dukkha	Pali	suffering, unsatisfactoriness, the inability to live well
ekalak thai	Thai	Thai identity
gnan	Thai	work, life-related activities
hen kaeh dthua	Thai	selfishness
hiri	Pali	aversion or apprehension when contemplating wrongdoing (see also <i>ottappa</i>)
Isan	Thai	northeastern region of Thailand
issa	Pali	envy
kad yaeng kan	Thai	to be competitive with one another
kalyānamittatā	Pali	association with good people (literally, 'good friends')
kamma	Pali	destiny, volitional action, the moral principle within the law of cause and effect
karuna	Pali	compassion
kaseet baep thammachaat	Thai	natural agriculture
khon wat	Thai	temple person
kilesa	Pali	moral defilement
kin khon lua khaay	Thai	subsistence agricultural production, in which one sells only a small portion at market
kusala	Pali	skilful means
kuti	Thai	monk's sleeping hut
Lanna	Thai	northwestern region of Thailand
lobha	Pali	greed, passion, covetousness, or unskilled desire
lokauwat	Thai	globalization
lokiya	Pali	mundane, worldly
lokuttara	Pali	supramundane, transcendental
lokuttara paññā	Pali	thoroughly knowing the truth, higher wisdom
lung	Thai	uncle, specifically the elder brother of either parent

maan	Thai	devil
macchariya	Pali	miserliness
mae chii	Thai	devout laywoman
magga	Pali	the short form of <i>ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo</i>
Mahanikai	Thai	The numerically larger of the two recognized Theravada Buddhist orders in Thailand, made up of various indigenous traditions
mak noi	Thai	to be content with little
mattannuta	Pali	moderation
moha	Pali	delusion, confusion, ignorance
naa	Thai	uncle or aunt, specifically one's mother's younger brother or sister
naam jai	Thai	good will (literally, a 'flowing heart')
nibbāna	Pali	enlightenment, salvation
nong	Thai	younger sibling(s)
ottappa	Pali	aversion or apprehension when contemplating wrongdoing (see also <i>hiri</i>)
paa	Thai	aunt, specifically the elder sister of either parent
Pali	Pali	the vernacular language of northern India in the Buddha's time, the original language of Buddhist texts
pañcaśīla	Pali	the Five Precepts (avoiding the destruction of any form of life, stealing or cheating, deception, ingesting intoxicants, and engaging in unwholesome sexual activity)
paññā	Pali	wisdom
parāmitā	Pali	the Ten Perfections (generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truth, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity)
paticcasamuppāda	Pali	the doctrine of interdependent arising, dependent origination
patthanā	Pali	development, developing
peta	Pali	hungry ghost, consumer
phathung	Thai	traditional wrap skirt
phra	Thai	monk, also a title for a monk
phra mahakaset	Thai	king (one of the three pillars of the Thai nation)
phra nak anurak	Thai	ecology monk
phra nak phatthanaa	Thai	development monk
phīi	Thai	older sibling(s)
phu mii panya chao baan	Thai	village wisdom, local knowledge
phuyaiban	Thai	village headman

piyavaca	Pali	practicing pleasant speech (speaking politely, truthfully, and sincerely)
phu mii panya chao baan	Thai	local/traditional knowledge
rongrien	Thai	school
saddha	Pali	confidence
sammā-ajīva	Pali	right livelihood (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-diṭṭhi	Pali	right understanding (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-kammanta	Pali	right action (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-samādhi	Pali	right concentration (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-saṅkappa	Pali	right intention (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-sati	Pali	right mindfulness (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-vācā	Pali	right speech (part of the <i>magga</i>)
sammā-vāyāma	Pali	right effort (part of the <i>magga</i>)
samādhi	Pali	mental discipline, concentration attained through meditation
samanattata	Pali	equanimity, equality
samsāra	Pali	the cycle of rebirth, the world of appearances
sandood	Thai	to be satisfied with what one has
sangha	Pali	community (often used to refer to the <i>bhikkhu-sangha</i>)
sangaha vatthu	Pali	the Four Grounds of Social Harmony (generosity, kind speech, service, and equal treatment)
santi	Pali	peace
sanuk	Thai	enjoyment
satarana pokee	Thai	Asoke's social distribution system
satsana	Thai	Religion (specifically Buddhism, one of the three pillars of the Thai nation)
savaka-sangha	Pali	the wider community, society
sekiathamma	Pali	appropriate doctrine
sīla	Pali	ethical conduct
suta	Pali	learning
suttas	Pali	Buddhist texts
tambon	Thai	sub-district
tang auk	Thai	solution, way out
tanha	Pali	a craving for objects (sometimes used to refer to the profit motive)
thammachat	Thai	nature, natural
Thammayutnikai	Pali	The numerically smaller, but more powerful, of the two recognized Theravada Buddhist orders in Thailand

thep	Thai	angel
thombun	Thai	to make merit
thun niyom	Thai	capitalism
tudong	Thai	a meditational pilgrimage, typically carried out alone in the forest
upādanā	Pali	attachment
vinyana	Pali	the practice or discipline of Buddhism (counterpart to the <i>dhamma</i> , or doctrine)
wai	Thai	A gesture (consisting of one's hands pressed together at the level of one's chest, chin, or nose) of greeting, prayer, apology, thanks, or respect
wat	Thai	Buddhist temple
watthanā	Pali	development as progress or advancement
wibāggām	Thai	the consequences of past ill deeds
ya ba	Thai	methamphetamine (literally, 'crazy medicine')
ya samoonphrai	Thai	herbal medicine
yatithaam	Thai	'relatives in dharma,' how the members of the Asoke movement refer to one another
yonisomanisikāra	Pali	systematic attention or reflection

Appendix B: References

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