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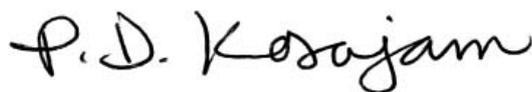
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## Forward

I am pleased the Volume Two of the Journal of The International Association of Buddhist Universities, IABU, has come out to increase the distribution of the results of scholarly research and strengthen the academic networking within the members of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, IABU.

I am grateful to all the contributors for their contribution. I am also thankful to all the members of the editorial committee, and in particular the Chief-Editor for their hard work. Thanks are also due to Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, MCU, my own university, especially the University Council and the Academic Council, for their support in granting the financial assistance to publish the IABU.

With the next IABU conference due to take place in just an over a year's time, the pace of academic activity and cooperation within the IABU members must increase. I believe this Volume Two of the IABU will help us realize that.



The Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn  
Chairman, IABU and Rector, MCU  
2009



## Preface

The Volume Two of the Journal of The International Association of Buddhist Universities, IABU, is now in your hand. I regret that it has come out a few months over due. The IABU is a new academic block that aims to reach out beyond scholastic community and this means that at times the resources are spread thin and wide. However, the IABU as a whole is determined that the JIABU comes out annually and is of the highest possible academic standard.

While the Volume One (2008) consists of articles from scholars all well-established in their fields, this Volume Two (2009) comprises of eight articles, two of which are from emerging scholars, Dion Peoples and Pram Sounsamut, both of whom are active in research and teaching. The inclusion of their good work here advances the goal of the IABU in encouraging the younger generation of scholars to realize their potential.

The other articles mainly focus on the topics popular to both researchers and practitioners in the world. They are, for example, Buddhist meditation in the West (Sarah Shaw); Buddhist Psychology (Padmasiri de Silva); science and Buddhism (Colin Butler) and the impact of globalization on different Buddhist schools (Asanga Tilakaratne). Justin McDaniel and Pram Sounsamut's articles also focus on important areas but within Thailand. Andreas Doctor's is the only article on Mahayana Buddhism in this volume and we hope more good research articles on Mahayana Buddhism will be included in the next volumes. Doctor's area of focus is also popular but little has been published in modern languages of such controversy on either revelation of treasured teaching or reincarnation.

Chief-Editor

2009



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# Changing Perceptions of Buddhist Meditation in the West<sup>1</sup>

Sarah Shaw<sup>2</sup>



Recently, a gap-year student from England wrote about her travelling experiences in *The Times*:

I found myself with no money, no friends and a large dose of homesickness, and ended up staying in a Buddhist monastery in Bangkok for six weeks. I lived with the monks, meditating for eight hours a day. And, to my surprise, this turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened to me.....in the monastery, with no other option but to sit and at least try to meditate, I slowly found that I could sit for longer and longer, sometimes more than an hour. And I began to feel clean

<sup>1</sup> This article is mainly based on the paper presented at international conference co-hosted by Mahamakut Buddhist University and the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Bangkok on the occasion of the ninety-sixth birthday of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, Sākala mahā saṅgha Parināyaka Saṅgharāja, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, in October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Sarah Shaw holds a PhD in English literature from Manchester University and studied Pali and Sanskrit under Prof. Richard Gombrich at Oxford and Samatha meditation under Nai Boonman and Lance Cousins. Author of *Buddhist Meditation: An anthology of texts from the Pali cannon* (Routledge: 2006) and *Introduction to Buddhist Meditation* (Routledge: 2008), she teaches Buddhism at the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Oxford, UK.

and refreshed afterwards, as if I had bathed in a cool sea. . . . Since I returned from Thailand I've been living and working in London. Life is fun and exciting (mostly) and always busy. But somehow, between the traffic and the parties and running for the bus, I've managed to keep meditating. I don't practise every day, but I try to find time because it boosts my self-esteem and when I have a problem, it helps me to deal with it.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that this girl's account is reported so easily and naturally in a mainstream British newspaper is a reflection of a changed attitude towards Buddhist meditation in Britain over the last twenty years. Indeed during the article the girl says her mother also meditates, making her also a representative of a rather new phenomenon, an English second-generation contact with the Buddhist tradition. For at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Buddhist ideas and practices are now considered acceptable and even actively desirable within many spheres of popular, public, religious and private life.

'Perceptions' at every level are difficult to quantify, but this paper explores some ways meditation – or in a broader sense, *bhāvanā* – is being talked about, described, researched, tested, investigated and, most importantly, practised in Britain. The twenty-first century brings conditions unfamiliar for both Thailand and the North Atlantic world, with shared problems that have prompted a new sense of global interconnectedness. Fortunately the subject of mutual influences is now so large that a general survey of Western encounters with Buddhism would be impossible in one article. So the emphasis in this paper is on Britain and the impact of Southern Buddhism: the survey will, however, draw in a wider sense upon the way Buddhist traditions have impinged upon various aspects of culture of the United Kingdom, with some reference to other Western countries where appropriate. After a brief survey of the historical background, various areas of 'perception' will be discussed: the popular, the psychological, the psychotherapeutic, the medical, the neuroscientific, the academic and the educational. The paper finishes with personal 'perceptions', comment from those who practise meditation in Theravādin traditions.

<sup>3</sup> Clara Tait, speaking to Harriet Addison, in 'Why I stopped partying for meditation', *The Times*, July 26, 2008, recorded on Times Online (2008): [http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/body\\_and\\_soul/article4397576.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/body_and_soul/article4397576.ece).



## The historical background

Over the last thirty years study of the history of Western encounters with Buddhism has extended and matured. So it will be helpful to review this research, before considering the relatively new phenomenon within Britain and the West of the practice of Buddhist meditation. Robert Bluck's study of contemporary Buddhism in Britain notes that two hundred years ago, although contact with what we would call now 'Buddhist regions' had been going on intermittently for centuries, most people in Western Europe had never heard the word 'Buddha': the term 'Budun' first enters an encyclopaedia in the early nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Nor was there any understanding of the idea of meditation as it is described in a Buddhist context.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as a number of scholars have observed, this century, for all its problems, saw the start of a global appreciation of the traditions and the emergence in Britain and the West of a love of Buddhism, its textual traditions, its languages, and history and even by the end of the nineteenth century, its practices.<sup>6</sup> Through the Victorian period, as translation work was undertaken, words associated with Buddhism started to seep into English dictionaries: karma in 1827, nirvana in 1836, eightfold path in 1845, bhikkhu in 1846, arahat in 1850 and sangha in 1858 (Bluck 2008: 5). The Buddha also started to be taken seriously in the 1850s as a historical figure, with a lifestory that could be assessed and reconstructed from the texts: as Charles Allen's work *The Buddha and the Sahibs* (2002) demonstrates, many amongst the British populace, despite the policies of their government, were also being beguiled by archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic discoveries in India and Sri Lanka relating to early Buddhism. The stories of various British civil and public servants, such as James Prinsep (1799–1840), T.W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) and R.C. Childers (1838–1876), who developed a passion for working with languages such as Pāli, the early Prakrits and Sanskrit, have now become legendary. Their work, as well as that of others visiting South and Southeast Asia, was instrumental

<sup>4</sup> For these and other dates of the emergence of Buddhist terms within British dictionaries, see Bluck 2008. His work gives an invaluable analytic overview to the way Buddhist practitioner groups are working in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

<sup>5</sup> On bhāvanā in Buddhism see Gethin (1998): 174ff.

<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, Harris (2009) and Allen (2002). The literature on this interchange is now extensive: see for varied comment and historical research Allen (2002), Batchelor (1994), Harvey (1990) 300ff, MacMahan (2008), Prebish and Baumann ed. (2002), Shaw (2006) 'Buddhist Meditation Practices in the West', in particular p. 10, n.11:

[http://www.vesakday.net/vesak49/article/pdf/Meditation\\_Practice\\_in\\_the\\_West.pdf](http://www.vesakday.net/vesak49/article/pdf/Meditation_Practice_in_the_West.pdf).

in bringing ancient texts to the global intellectual environment: they effected a rediscovery of Buddhism within its homeland, India, and, through the contagious enthusiasm of their scholarly and ethnographic discoveries, also ensured that Buddhist teachings, stories and inspiration were communicated at a popular level to those in the Western world. Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia*, (1879), the foundation of the Pali Text Society and continued contact with South and Southeast Asia helped to kindle a now often unrecognized passion amongst the intelligentsia for philosophical speculation about Eastern thought. As Elizabeth Harris has indicated in her work on colonialism in Sri Lanka, this was complex and far-reaching, with influences working in a number of ways between various parties (2009). Interest in Britain led to, for instance, popular articles on karma and rebirth in periodicals and short stories – often admittedly of a highly sensational kind – about reincarnation and Eastern religion.<sup>7</sup> These were read by newly-educated classes across the Western world able to take advantage of cheaper printing and distribution rates. This readership constituted an informed and curious public hungry for a new source of wisdom and ideas: the mystery of 'otherness' attributed to the East did include a genuine if bemused awe for its spiritual heritage.

Indeed when considering the difficult interchange between these loosely designated areas, a number of recent works have drawn attention to the great appeal of Eastern philosophy in the West: in Britain the possibility of reincarnation and spiritual development undertaken over many lives proved an attractive idea, as evinced by Edwin Arnold's son's novel, *Phra the Phoenician*, written in 1890, the work of Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), the esoteric Buddhism described and promulgated by A.P.Sinnett (1840–1921) and Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891) and the popularity of the Sacred Texts series and Pāli collections such as the *Jātaka* stories: these, because so new to the West, were appreciated and read by British intelligentsia with an enthusiasm which has perhaps never been matched since.<sup>8</sup> All of these areas of interest and research laid the foundation for the development of twentieth-century philological, cultural and

<sup>7</sup> See Patterson (1857) Neale (1860) and Sinnett (1883). See also Edwin Arnold's introduction to *Phra the Phoenician*, which appeared as 'An Informal Introduction', in 1898 in *The Windsor Magazine* IX: 58–60 and was used as a preface to the 1913 edition of the novel. For a general study of this fascinating period see Harris (2009).

<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, Cousins (1994).



straightforwardly experiential research into Buddhist meditative traditions.

By 1913, just before the outset of World War 1, major work had been undertaken in the translation, adaptation and interpretation of Southern Buddhist texts and a trickle of Westerners had even become Buddhist monks. These admittedly modest beginnings ensured that some of their work took root in ways that are flourishing now. Rhys Davids founded the Buddhist Society for the first time in 1907: although its career has been broken, this continues as a hub for Buddhist groups in Britain, and, with its central London location, acts as a focus and meeting place for Buddhist groups from throughout the United Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> In 1930 the Meditation Group was started under its auspices. The Western monk, Ven. Metteyya, (C.H.A. Bennett), was ordained as a bhikkhu in 1908, and he described his experiences in meditation, that included for instance, the recollection of past lives as a meditative training, to audiences in London and in articles in the early periodical the *Buddhist Review* (Metteyya 1915). An audience of about a thousand people of completely mixed ethnicity, with dozens of representatives of the saṅgha in Britain attended a celebration of his life and work in Brent in West London in 2008. The Pali Text society, founded in 1881, continues its work, presenting and publishing scholarly discussion of Pali Texts. I do not think any such organization exists anywhere else in the world, a curious byproduct of Britain's often unhappy, but occasionally fruitful contacts with Southeast and South Asia in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

So what can we say about the years 2009-2010 in the West? What development has occurred in the understanding of Buddhism in the twentieth century? The nineteenth century saw the groundwork undertaken in scholarship that allowed Buddhist texts to be appreciated and understood. But it has been the meditative tradition that has been the striking and transformatory feature of British and Western interest in the Buddhism in the twentieth century. This legacy, at the beginning of the twenty-first, has started to take root in all areas of society, and is being gradually explored and integrated within a culture increasingly

<sup>9</sup> For more details of the British Buddhist society, which gives its foundation as 1924, see (2009) <http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> For further history and detail of modern projects, see 'The Pali Text Society Homepage' (2010): <http://www.palitext.com/>.



looking to Buddhism for ways not only of interpreting events in the mind and body, for which it had no satisfactory language before, but also for practicing and behaving in response to them.

### **Meditation in the twentieth century onwards**

The roots of interest in Buddhist meditative practice can be traced to the nineteenth century, but two world wars left their scars on intellectual and spiritual explorations in the field. By the 1950s however, the situation was changing and, as Bluck notes, by this time most of the major Buddhist traditions had small but keen groups of practitioners: ‘The pattern of Buddhism in Britain between 1945 and 1965 is of gradually increasing complexity.’ (Bluck 2008: 10). With the popularization of Zen Buddhism by Beat poets and writers in the fifties, the move to Eastern philosophies amongst the young in the sixties and seventies, and the continued contact between the cultures concerned, a growing interest in the study of the mind and ways in which psychological and psychotherapeutic understanding could be enriched by Buddhism started to percolate through to the academic environment and popular culture. Membership of Buddhist groups grew dramatically, so that although the proportion of the populace who practiced Buddhism was still tiny, the presence of these scattered representatives of Buddhist practice in some way acted as a reassurance and a conduit for making Buddhism at least mildly acceptable and ‘normal’ within British culture.<sup>11</sup> Over a period of time articles on Buddhism, meditation and various ways of alleviating what we like to call ‘stress’ and ‘tension’, modern articulations for phenomena early Buddhists called ‘hindrances’, or perhaps simply ‘*dukkha*’, became absorbed into the mainstream culture, in magazine articles, television programmes and popular reading.<sup>12</sup> The idea of ‘meditation’ has been so deeply absorbed into popular culture as a byword for relaxation, that the usual way to describe activities perceived as being absorbing and restorative is that they are ‘like a meditation’.<sup>13</sup> And although of course not always Buddhist,

<sup>11</sup> A good general survey on the scope of Buddhist traditions now practiced in Western countries is given in Wallace, B.A. (2002) ‘The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West’: <http://www.alanwallace.org/The%20Spectrum%20of%20Buddhist%20Practice.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> At time of writing (2009–10) Buddhist monks are always shown in a clip that precedes the hourly news on BBC News 24 channel; although not explicitly here associated with peace and calm, that association is often made.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, an article on dance and meditation in *Dance Magazine*, by Nancy Alfaro November 2006 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1083/is\\_11\\_80/ai\\_n27032249/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1083/is_11_80/ai_n27032249/). Eileen Mulligan,



‘meditation’ has become linked in the popular mind with Buddhist practice.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a modern Westerner may only have an intuitive apprehension that Buddhism is associated with understanding and peace. There seems to be, however, an underlying level of respectful acknowledgement of what is perceived as a subtle resource of wisdom, offering a meditative heritage and psychological system that can bring great benefits. Buddhism was, for instance, voted the ‘most popular’ religious tradition at a conference of the International Coalition for the Advancement of Religions and Spirituality (ICARUS) in Geneva in July (2009), a reflection of what is now an underlying social perception of its character. ICARUS director Hans Groehlichen commented: ‘...with organized religion increasingly used as a tool to separate and inflame rather than bring together, we felt we had to take the unusual step of creating a “Best Religion in the World” award and making a bit of a stir, to inspire other religious leaders to see what is possible when you practice compassion’. Groehlichen said the award was voted on by an international roundtable of more than 200 religious leaders from every part of the spiritual spectrum. ‘It was interesting to note that once we supplied the criteria, many religious leaders voted for Buddhism rather than their own religion,’ said Groehlichen. ‘Buddhists actually make up a tiny minority of our membership, so it was fascinating but quite exciting that they won’ (July 15<sup>th</sup> 2009).<sup>14</sup>

### Psychology

One of the reasons such a shift has occurred over the last two decades is the promulgation of Buddhist practices and understanding by those working within the medical traditions and various psychological disciplines, who base their advocacy on evidence-based data and physiological and psychological research. Many articles in popular magazines advise that blood pressure is lowered by meditation,

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a personal success coach, recommends that her clients take regular exercise: ‘When you exercise, the conscious brain can go into a relaxed state, almost like meditation’, she says. ‘In this frame of mind the more creative half of the brain can start working.’ Reader’s Digest (2009) website: <http://www.rubbertreeplant.co.uk/bites/invent.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Moulin Tribune de Geneve: <http://blog.beliefnet.com/onecity/2009/07/freedom-from-religion-buddhism-wins-best-religion-in-the-world-award.html>



‘rather than medication’.<sup>15</sup> Although the category ‘meditation’, of course, also includes traditions such as TM, Buddhism features prominently and is inextricably associated in the popular mind with meditative practice.<sup>16</sup> The National Health Service website NICE lists 214 references to treatment of depression through meditation, many described as based on the Buddhist term ‘mindfulness’.<sup>17</sup> Activity described by this term has now been recognized by the British National Health service as a useful means of dealing with stress-management, short-term, trauma-related and recurrent depression and eating disorders such as anorexia. One study cited on the NHS website reports alleviation of mood problems amongst prisoners, treatment of stress related ailments and mild and serious depressive conditions.<sup>18</sup> Most doctors’ surgeries have notice-boards that suggest meditation is a good way of coping with various problems associated with the mind/body interface, such as stress, chronic fatigue and depression. Again, perhaps the word *bhāvanā* should be used as a term for much of the work conducted in these contexts.

Many of the most effective techniques, such as those involving ‘mindful’ cognitive behaviour therapy, are dependent as much on creating means whereby the patient interprets events in his mind as in his bodily awareness and the purification of the emotions we associate with the first two foundations of mindfulness. The method for this therapy is in part Western: it emphasises the way the mind narrates, describes and identifies various kinds of experience and personal history. It could be argued that in this regard it also follows a pattern of an eightfold path, which is concerned as much as how experience is described and the area of views, as a necessary accompaniment to meditative practice in its broader sense (*bhāvanā*). MBCT methods

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, ‘Lowering Blood pressure without Medication’, the ‘lifestyle magazine’ launched in 2007 Helium <http://www.helium.com/items/19227-lowering-blood-pressure-without-medication> 2002-2010. The magazine has 13 articles in its cache on the subject of ‘meditation’ dealing with various simple explanatory procedures and indications:

[http://m.www.helium.com/search/search?search\\_query=meditation&search\\_context=Unknown](http://m.www.helium.com/search/search?search_query=meditation&search_context=Unknown).

<sup>16</sup> As just one example of the modern interest in linking stress management, meditation and Buddhist forms of practice, see ‘School teaches boys to meditate and reduce stress’, article in The Times, January 12th 2009, recorded on TimesOnline website (2010):

[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article6984113.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article6984113.ece).

<sup>17</sup> See ‘The National Institute for Health and Clinical Guidance’ (2010): <http://www.nice.org.uk/>.

All the material I have discussed with reference to this organization may be found on this site.

<sup>18</sup> See the above website, with reference <http://www.evidence.nhs.uk/search.aspx?t=meditation>, for the many studies connected with this clinical work and research.



do not postulate quite the same positive or liberating elements, either in terminology or aims, nor are the meditation practices geared to the states we associate with Buddhist practice.<sup>19</sup> But where such therapy teaches the patient to wish him or herself well, to recount his own story differently to him or herself, with less negative connotations, and to look for a sense of path through ‘steps’, which ensure the inclusion of a gradual, progressively defined element, we can see a broader counterpart to the way the Buddha often responded to pre-existing systems and linked work on views to the advice to follow basic awareness techniques. Other exercises in the treatment of those with, for instance, anorexia, involve encouraging the patients to ‘think’ less when considering themselves, rather applying awareness to feeling as it arises at the five senses. It is difficult to match terminologies, but in Buddhist terms, it could perhaps be said that this is working on moving away from excessive worry (*kukkucca*), or more generally the fourth hindrance, where restlessness and worry are linked (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), accompanied by wrongly applied thought (*vitakka*). Meditative exercises then lead to a clearer apprehension of feeling, and the first and second foundation of mindfulness.<sup>20</sup>

There is a great deal of research still to be conducted here: the aims of psychotherapy are not necessarily the same as those of Buddhist practice, though one hopes they are not mutually exclusive.<sup>21</sup> There is no stated concept of an implicit health in the mind, or the positing of any inherent predisposition to skillfulness, though these can be inferred firstly by techniques that serve to lessen discursive and often negative ‘constructions’ in the mind and directing the attention more to the simple experience of feeling, and secondly by an emphasis on the ability of patients to come up with their own solutions to their own particular problems, both features of MBCT. Buddhist practitioners

<sup>19</sup> For discussion of *bhāvanā* see Gethin 1998:174ff, Harvey (1990) 244ff. See also Shaw 2006: 194-8.

<sup>20</sup> The *Dhammasaṅgani* classifies *kukkucca*, the other side of the coin to restlessness when it features as the fourth hindrance to meditation, as ‘The perception that something is lawful where it is not, the perception that something is not lawful where it is, the perception that something is a fault where it is not, the perception that something is not a fault where it is: all this sort of worry, worreting, agonising, regretting and scratching of the head: this is called worry (DhS 1160, trans. in Shaw 2006:47).’

<sup>21</sup> This point was reiterated by Dr Jenny Quek, a practising Buddhist psychotherapist who also delivered a paper at this conference. For the importance of joy in the Buddhist path, see Walpola Rahula’s comments: ‘... a true Buddhist is the happiest of beings. He has no fears or anxieties. He is always calm and serene, and cannot be upset or dismayed by changes or calamities, because he sees things as they are.’ (Rahula 1967 27ff). For his insightful analysis and translation of the factors of awakening, see Rahula 1967: 72, 74, 117 ff. For the inherent radiance of the mind as described in Pāli texts, see A I 10, translated and discussed in Shaw 2006: 31ff and S V 29 (Shaw 2006: 29).

who also work in the field of psychotherapy and psychology sometimes feel that the aspect of *sīla* (good behaviour or ethics) and *dāna* (appropriate generosity), essential in Buddhist practice for their promotion of a sense of well-being and health in the mind, are not incorporated into such therapeutic systems, where the link between happiness and such activities is not felt obvious.<sup>22</sup> Those teaching the techniques may have only very limited experience of the effects of following and actively pursuing a meditative practice over a period of years: the *bojjhaṅgas*, of mindfulness, investigation, strength, joy, tranquility, concentration and equanimity, central to this aspect of the tradition, are not employed. But such assumptions perhaps lie tacitly and in a hidden sense behind the success of any system, which, like the Buddhist, pays considerable attention to the way practitioners start to identify problems differently and consult frequently with teachers/guides; the courses are taught, practiced and undertaken throughout with close one-to-one supervision and group work. In the manner of the ‘good friends’ of Pāli texts, such contacts can help them help themselves to recovering health, good heart and equilibrium.<sup>23</sup> Therapy such as MBCT is successful: there is an unusually high fifty percent non-relapse in cases of depression. This illness usually manifests in repetitive cycles, and is treated when the patient is in remission, when there is a good chance that such techniques will prevent further lapses. The success rate is higher than options involving medication or other forms of Western treatment; it is also decidedly cheaper, a factor Professor Mark Williams has noted.<sup>24</sup> Work on this is ongoing at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, which trains practitioners in the field, runs clinical programmes for the depressed and those suffering from chronic fatigue, and is involved in a research programme investigating the psychological and neurological base for such illnesses, that explores the mechanisms of actions of mindfulness based treatments.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See also note above. I am also grateful to discussion with various practitioners working as therapists for this feedback.

<sup>23</sup> See S V 78 (trans. Shaw 2006: 28) and It 10–11 (Shaw 2006: 29–30). The subject of ‘friendship’ is discussed briefly in Shaw 28–31.

<sup>24</sup> This point was reiterated by him at the Buddhism and Science Colloquium, convened by Professor Denis Noble, Professor Vesna Wallace and Dr Alan Wallace at the Physiology Department of Oxford University, March 2010.

<sup>25</sup> A centre within the University of Oxford’s Psychiatry department affiliated to SoWide and the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. Founded in 2007, its purpose is ‘to realise the potential of mindfulness-based approaches in mental and physical health and to promote the well-being of people in their world of work, home and family life. Its aim is to be an international centre of excellence that



It is interesting that this means of bringing Buddhist meditative based techniques to the Western academic world has arisen from the strand of psychological and psychotherapeutic theory considered the most materialist, 'scientific' and traditionally linked with evidence-based physical research. So mention should be made of other strands of psychological and psychotherapeutic theory, at the other end of the spectrum, which are perhaps more often associated with those who are longstanding practising meditators and Buddhists. These, with a greater emphasis on privacy and intuition, are perhaps temperamentally less inclined towards scientifically based empirical research. Such formulations in Western psychology have traditionally been more predisposed to Buddhist perceptions of the nature of the mind and its wholesome roots; Jung himself acknowledged his debt in this regard.<sup>26</sup> Jung identifies the 'transcendent', that which is beyond the everyday, in the synthesis of apparently discordant or opposing qualities as part of a process of 'individuation'. The extent to which the formulation of such theories were influenced by Buddhism is beyond the scope of this study, and I would not dare attempt it, but we can perhaps see even in modern Western interpretation of events in the mind the imprint of Buddhist influences that have now been forgotten, that have nonetheless been absorbed into some perceptions of the mind, its relationship to the world and various responses to that.<sup>27</sup>

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can also meet local need, and to extend our understanding of the relevance of mindfulness through research, training and providing classes for NHS patients': (2010) 'Oxford Mindfulness Centre': [http://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=9](http://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=9).

<sup>26</sup> I am very grateful to Dr Charles King, Oxford University, a clinical psychologist and Buddhist practitioner, for some extensive discussion about this subject (September 2009). Any interpretations and consequent errors in communication of this material are my own.

<sup>27</sup> Curiously, Jungian theory has been so successful and pervasive that his name is sometimes invisible: just as one cannot see a geographical feature like a bridge when one is standing on it, so his theories seem to have fashioned underlying patterns in how Westerners view their own and other's psyches. Many people in Britain, whether interested in the mind at a professional or a popular level, would consider that they had an 'inner' drives or volitions that might be at odds with or difficult to integrate with outer behaviour, that certain impulses deriving from the 'unconscious' mind might need creative integration with 'conscious' ones, and that when such an integration was achieved, often through a sense of the 'transcendent', the person would become 'fulfilled' or 'individuated', perhaps a kind of *ekagattā* within Buddhist understanding. This has influenced the popular conception of the mind, even where the name of the principal proponent of such ideas, Jung, has been forgotten. For some comment on Jungian influence see, for instance, Ron Sharrin in an article on the subject, (2003) 'Jung and Buddhism': [http://www.deepstreams.org/journal/i002/i002\\_03\\_JungBuddhism.pdf](http://www.deepstreams.org/journal/i002/i002_03_JungBuddhism.pdf). and Heizig, J.W. (1999) in a paper presented at Kyoto to the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, 'Jung, Christianity and Buddhism': [http://www.thezensite.com/non\\_Zen/Jung\\_Christianity\\_and\\_Buddhism.pdf](http://www.thezensite.com/non_Zen/Jung_Christianity_and_Buddhism.pdf).

In a more general sense many modern psychotherapists have written their acknowledgement of Buddhist influence, and many are meditators. The now deceased Nina Coltart was a proponent of Buddhist theory. She writes: 'It is my contention that the practice of psychoanalysis in harness with the practice of Buddhism is not only harmonious, but mutually enlightening and potentiating. There does not seem to me to any area of absolutely radical disagreement or clash between the two.' The first two signs she says, are self evident to anyone approaching a therapeutic solution, the third she says can be, and indeed now is, often interpreted by the therapeutic community to refer to the absence of a permanent self in our dealings and day to day life. Coltart points out that to say to a patient that 'you are not quite exactly the same person as you were when you got up this morning', is immensely helpful and liberating, allowing new perceptions and identifications about self-fulfilment to come into play. (Coltart 1996: 127–9)

So Buddhist theory and practice are exerting some influence in clinical therapeutic contexts, in the pursuit of practical research on meditative methods, in reassessing the understanding of procedures for examining the relationship between consciousness and matter, in preventative medicine and in the popular understanding of meditation. Study of Buddhism is prompting a reappraisal of the terminology of physiological and psychological research. Study is ongoing on physiological effects of meditation in lowering blood pressure, improving memory and arousing something even scientists call happiness, which, when the product of meditative practice, seems, according to research conducted at Wisconsin University in the States to have a highly restorative effect on our neural pathways, sense of well-being and general health.<sup>28</sup> Such research is expensive and there are all sorts of features of Buddhist practice, narrative and attitudes to the mind, central to the success and perceived restorative properties of localized expressions of *bhāvanā* in Asian countries, which have not yet been subject to this sort of scrutiny. Chanting, and recollections, such as of the Triple Gem, *sīla*, and generosity, as well as *mettā* practice, have not yet been included in Western psychological frameworks. Perhaps

<sup>28</sup> For research conducted by Prof. Flanagan, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which received widespread publicity in British newspapers (22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> May 2003) and see 'The Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience' (2010): <http://psychz.psych.wisc.edu/>.



these trainings, involving the wish to arouse the aspect of peaceful wisdom and happiness in oneself, are implied. One hopes they will, where appropriate, also be integrated and acknowledged within Western psychological systems, along with the idea of a graduated path in meditation, that takes time and has distinct stages of development requiring careful, experienced guidance.

### Neuroscience

An area closely connected in the twenty-first century, but with primarily physiological implications, is the discipline of neuroscience, where Buddhism is offering new paradigms for the articulation of the relationship between consciousness and matter and of the ways in which neurological patterns are observed, identified and understood. The Oxford professor of Cardiovascular Physiology, Denis Noble, has espoused Buddhist doctrine in his attempts to articulate what he terms ‘musical’ patterns of relationships that appear to operate in the evolution of the human genome. The only sequences of events that can be interpreted as programmatic do not inhere in the body itself or even the genetic programme, but in the biological processes themselves: a sense of what we call ‘self’ arises more from the process involved in these patterns of features rather than ‘thingness’. Neuroscience, he argues, has been limited by Western concept of self as an entity in some way attached or not to a brain, traditionally considered the seat of consciousness. Noting that from a neurological point of view the operation of what we call ‘self’ conforms to changing, repetitive yet not static blueprints for which musical metaphors are far more appropriate, he remarks that many languages influenced by Buddhism place far less emphasis on the first-person singular pronoun, and concludes, ‘Viewing the self as a process rather than an object becomes more natural’ (Noble 2009: 141). Indeed, arguing that great skill in areas of artistry in spheres such as music involves the diminishment of a sense of the self, with a corresponding increase rather than lessening of mastery, he cites the famous Chan ox-herding simile to demonstrate the way the mind trained in any discipline learns to master selfish drives which lead to a lessening of ego and an increased selflessness. He concludes that a Cartesian model of the self, on which so much neuroscientific theory depends, is inappropriate. From an experiential point of view, ‘selflessness’ is a feature of great musicianship and other areas of life where



increased skill lessens rather than increases preoccupation with oneself. A sense of *anattā* may arise in all kinds of situations such as helping others, or practicing meditation. He argues that this renders Buddhist terminology more appropriate when considering the physiology of factors that contribute to the biological understanding of consciousness and matter. 'For 2500 years,' he writes, selflessness 'has been part of the aim of Buddhist meditation. There are many forms of Buddhism around the world, with a wide range of practices and beliefs, but the idea of 'selflessness', 'the disappearing self', and 'letting go' is common. Where this does not involve belief systems he argues, 'it contains no possibility of conflict with science' (Noble 2006: 139).

The aims of scientific research are not the same as those of Buddhist meditative theory and practice; clearly however traditions that have been shaped by meditative understanding can produce formulations helpful to those working within scientific contexts.<sup>29</sup>

### **The study of religion, the academic environment and the literary world**

In the twentieth century the subject known as 'Buddhist Studies' has become fully integrated as an academic world of religious studies, with a strong emphasis on its meditative traditions. Buddhist Studies are still thriving, despite cuts in all university courses in Britain. Just before the retirement of Professor Richard Gombrich, who has promoted Buddhist studies in Britain and abroad, the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies was established in Oxford and a new and first professor in the subject, Vesna Wallace. SOAS, Oxford, Bristol, Cardiff and Lancaster and York St. John Universities are amongst those offering courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level on Buddhism. Professor Peter Harvey designed and takes a successful online interactive course in Buddhist Studies at Sunderland University. Rupert Gethin is now the first professor of Buddhist Studies at Bristol University. The subject is also studied in theology departments, where Buddhism is researched in conjunction with other traditions. In these courses, meditative principle is taught, often, where the student is a theologian for instance, in conjunction with study of the prayer and contemplative traditions of other religions.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Lancaster (1997).



This academic interest has involved close analysis of terms and their implications in Western contexts. At the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, many translations of Pāli texts of this period describe *jhāna* with perhaps some bemusement as ‘mystic absorption’ or ‘trance’. Scholars in the early part of the twentieth century still clearly regarded the practice of Buddhist meditation, the concept of concentration and the development of mindfulness as arcane and alien: though interestingly, Rhys Davids, an early comparativist, does make real and useful attempts to explore the traditions, as his introductions to the *Dīghanikāya* (PTS: *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols.) attest. Work such as Cousins’ on *jhāna* (Cousins 1973) and on, for instance, comparative assessment of Buddhist meditation with St Theresa’s stages of prayer and its practice (Cousins 1989) have changed perceptions in religious studies of such states. Publications by Gombrich (Gombrich 1998 and 2009), Harvey (Harvey 1990), Gethin (Gethin 1992 and 1998) and Wynne (Wynne 2007) over the last two or three decades on various aspects of Southern Buddhist meditation have also deepened understanding of Buddhist meditation and its background for Westerners. Academic comparative work continues, as, for example in Gimello’s assessment of Christian and Buddhist contemplative methods undertaken at the University of Notre Dame.<sup>30</sup> Halvor Elfrig’s ‘Cultural Histories of Meditation’ Project, a major international venture devoted to comparative research, in particular on the nature of meditation objects, in a variety of traditions, includes reference to a number of different schools of Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> Such scholarship, and other research on Buddhist fields, is contributing to study amongst British theologians and those in other disciplines. One senior theologian at Oxford University told me, for instance, that he found the area of narrative and imagery a particularly useful means of studying Buddhism for his students, and cited *Selfless Persons* by Steven Collins (1982) as being his most helpful teaching aid and introduction to the subject.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Gimello, for instance, a leading academic at Notre Dame University, works on both Buddhist and Catholic theology (2009): <http://theology.nd.edu/people/all/Gimello.shtml>.

<sup>31</sup> For full details of this international venture, involving a number of books and articles which will be published over the next few years, see ‘Cultural Histories of Meditation’ project, University of Oslo (2010): [http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/halvor/Cultural\\_Histories\\_of\\_Meditation/participants.html](http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/halvor/Cultural_Histories_of_Meditation/participants.html).

The earliest literary depiction, to my knowledge, of a figure in seating meditation in the West is in Edwin Arnold's poem, but despite its enormous popularity the idea of meditation simply did not enter the Victorian consciousness as a personal possibility, in fiction or in speculation. It would be impossible to track the influence of Buddhism in works of fiction in this study, but the influence of the beat poets and Jack Kerouac has of course been central, as has the American love of Japanese literature and haiku.<sup>32</sup> In the literary world, however, Buddhism is still a marginal influence, though it is present. Dan Zigmund, in a book review in January 2005 of Anne Donovan's 2004 novel, *Buddha Da*, says 'We are witnessing an explosion of Buddhist fiction in the West': this has not impinged yet on popular British taste, but it is interesting to speculate when and if it will.'<sup>33</sup>

### Christianity

Christianity has its own meditative and contemplative traditions, but its system of gradual sustained and structured exercises, that can be consciously undertaken though careful and skilled preparatory work, had not been overtly stressed by the Christian churches, a situation that has changed in the last few decades. A number of committed Christians are practitioners of the various forms of Buddhist meditation now available. A significant figure is Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Monte Oliveto and Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation, who employs Buddhist meditative exercises in his guided retreats, while still retaining Christian allegiance.<sup>34</sup> While it is impossible to assess such features, this trend appears to be renewing interest amongst Christians in their own meditative exercises, such as those of Ignatius Loyola or St. Teresa of Avila, as evinced by a statement on Christian meditation (1989) made by the Catholic Church, which included this comment in its opening paragraph:

The interest which in recent years has been awakened also among some Christians by forms of meditation associated with some

<sup>32</sup> Buddhism in Britain has perhaps not got to the stage it has in America, as described in Whalen-Bridge and Storhoff eds. (2009).

<sup>33</sup> For reference to this and other modern works of fiction that discuss or describe Buddhist meditation, see his Shambala Sun book review (January 2005) at [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2639](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2639).

<sup>34</sup> For more information on his work, see: <http://www.christianmeditation11step.org/laurencefreeman.html>.



eastern religions and their particular methods of prayer is a significant sign of this need for spiritual recollection and a deep contact with the divine mystery.<sup>35</sup>

The Buddhism of early Buddhist texts arises in part from its originality in working alongside and integrating pre-existing traditions of spiritual practice and doctrine in its formulation.<sup>36</sup> Such a principle seems to be operating in the way Western traditions are coming to work with Buddhism or respond to the interest demonstrated by many Christians in Eastern meditative traditions. While it would be necessary to undertake full research into the field to verify this claim, it seems that the use of the word ‘meditation’, though of course ancient in Western culture, is now far more frequent in Christian discourse, in a sense that has come to be associated with the practices of Buddhism and other Eastern traditions.<sup>37</sup>

### Practice traditions

The practice traditions amongst Buddhists are not linked obviously to such trends, which do, however, create a favourable environment for those interested in Buddhist meditation. In Western culture, where scientific research is valued, studies validating meditative procedures can be an important factor for Westerners in arousing a willingness to explore Buddhist systems. As meditation is now a subject for open discussion, it is also possible that those from other backgrounds do not feel the sense of internal division in adopting methods different from those of their family.

Changing perceptions of meditation are working within the community at large and are unquantifiably instrumental in attracting people to Buddhist practice. The image of the Buddha and the *bhikkhusaṅgha* as representatives of the teaching are positive. Travel brochures, films and television programmes often include

<sup>35</sup> The German original version of the article (15. Oktober 1989) is on: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19891510\\_meditazione-cristiana\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19891510_meditazione-cristiana_ge.html). The translation quoted in this article is taken from ‘The Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of Christian Meditation; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’, anonymously translated from the German for Eternal Word Television Network (undated): <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfmed.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Gombrich (1998 and OCBS website (2010): <http://www.ocbs.org/> and 2009), and 2009), studies of the way the Buddha taught within a context of contemporary Indian thought and practice in which he reacted and sought creative adaptations of traditional notions and Wynne (2007).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, a book on Catholic meditation for young people, Zanzig and Kielbasa (2000).

a Buddha image, or a picture of some Buddhist monks, when they wish to communicate tranquil enjoyment and peace. Many British towns have Buddhist temples, and the sight of monks proceeding about their business has fostered an appreciation of the *saṅgha* as offering a less worldly way of life. In Britain, as one suspects elsewhere, small, perhaps only half-noticed details can be more effective in remaining in the mind and attracting interest than an overt advertising campaign or even scientific research. For instance, when asked to compose this argument, I compiled an informal survey and questioned a group (63) of experienced British *samatha* practitioners what had initially prompted their interest in meditation. Ten of these respondents cited memorable encounters with Buddhism at early stages of their life. One woman in her forties, that her first contact with a Buddhist meditation group, twenty years ago, had been through friends that she liked and wanted to spend time with, and she said that:

...an underlying reason was that when I was a child of seven I once saw a television programme showing some Thai monks on *pinḍapāta*. The memory had always stayed with me and when I saw the poster for meditation I thought I would give it a try. I have stayed with the *samatha* group ever since and have always just felt at home there.

Clearly advertising is helpful, but such personal contacts with Buddhism, like a monk, a peaceful shrine, or, as many querents responded, a discussion with a friend, can have a deep effect.

The number of practice groups in Britain have grown considerably over the last forty years. Some of these are attached to temples. For instance in Oxford, the Oxford Buddha Vihāra has close links with the university, where its abbot, Ajahn Khammai Dhammasāmi teaches, but also acts as a cultural and religious centre for the strong Burmese and Thai diaspora working in and around Oxford. Such immigrants, often working in highly trained professions such as medicine and law, or in successful commercial enterprises such as restaurants, have sometimes married Westerners, and have children who visit the temple who are the product of both cultures. Significantly, there is a number of Western Buddhists associated with the temple. At its establishment, such Westerners made a very distinct grouping, interested primarily in meditation and theory. Now such





distinctions have blurred. Those from many backgrounds attend daily chanting and meditation sessions and the weekly sutta study group. Monks at the temple host visits from schools and visit local schools too, where their teaching is received with freshness and investigative interest. These quotes are from twelve-year old boys at a local school in Oxford:

I am writing to thank you very much for your visit to our theology class. I among others, found it to be extremely interesting and it greatly deepened my fascination for Buddhism. One thing that I found particularly enjoyable was the meditation session we participated in. In my opinion this was extremely helpful for understanding the world around us and our relationship with it. I have never meditated before and having tried it in the talk if only for a short time, discovered sounds that I had never heard and a new state of mind, which extremely interesting and peaceful.

Another writes: 'I would like to thank you for your discussion and revealing meditation session. It was the first time in Theology class when we'd all been totally silent and peaceful. It is amazing what you can hear when you listen!'<sup>38</sup>

### **Perceptions of practitioners**

The history of Buddhism in recent years and the attraction of many of its meditation traditions are now well documented.<sup>39</sup> So this discussion concludes with 'perceptions' from within my own tradition. This was introduced to Britain by Boonman Poonyathiro who taught a Thai form of Samatha meditation in the sixties. In order to do this he disrobed, as at that time such ventures were not being actively promulgated. He started teaching in Cambridge and in London, and in 1973 the Samatha Trust was formed. Three meditators from that time remain, providing continuity in the Trust: the academic and Buddhist scholar, L.S. Cousins, a one-time academic and now psychotherapist, Dr Paul Dennison, who spent some time ordained as a monk in Thailand, and Christopher Gilchrist, a financier and broadcaster.

It is difficult to count practitioners, but around 1,000 meditators have been involved in various groups around the country over the last

<sup>38</sup>Quotes from letters addressed to Ven. Khammai Dhammasami, October 2009.

<sup>39</sup> See Bluck (2008) and works cited in this article, n. 4.

few years. Over a hundred attended extended meditation courses this year at the national centre, Greenstreete, Powys, in Wales. Boonman Poonyathiro, teaching *rūpa* and *arūpa* meditations, took some of these weeks. The group has had visits, talks and courses taken by members of the Thai Saṅgha, such as Ajahn Khammai Dhammasāmi, Phra Sriyansobhon (Tan Suvit), Ajahn Maha Laow and Ajahn Tan Sudhiro. The national centre has relics of the Buddha, kindly donated by the Thai government, and a Buddha figure, Phra Buddha Dhammacakra, sponsored by the King of Thailand and made and generously donated by supporters in Thailand. Phra Sriyansobhon has also donated three Buddha rūpas he made himself.

The meditation technique undertaken by the Samatha Association perhaps needs explanation, as the word ‘*samatha*’ is a matter of a slant to a breathing mindfulness practice that includes elements of *vipassanā* too. In line with the emphasis that can be seen in the Pāli canon, such as the *sutta* on breathing mindfulness (M III 78–88), and the recommendations of experienced teachers, such as Ven. Saddhatissa, who pointed out that Westerners need to develop *samatha* before insight, the method encourages close attention to ensuring that there is a basis of calm before moving formally on to *vipassanā*.<sup>40</sup> The practice is, however, a mixture of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, inclining towards calm, though both elements come into play at different times. British people incline to the serious and intellectual so meditations are needed to balance this. At the outset the good feeling and the happiness that can arise from the sensation of the breath are established, while observing the breath’s movement and changing nature, its occasional unsatisfactoriness and observation that it is not ‘owned’ or self. The practice is broadly the same for all, following, with some modifications, the stages recommended by Buddhaghosa of *gaṇanā*, *anubandhanā*, *phusanā* and *thapanā*. Sometimes these stages are linked to the practice of each of the four *brahmavihāras* respectively. The intention is to arouse the balance of *sati* and *samādhi*, so that when the meditator is ready the *nimitta* can be cultivated to lead to a deepening of concentration. Emphasis is placed on the masteries in meditation, through the practice’s various stages and through ways of adverting, entering, sustaining, leaving and recollecting the practice. This flexibility is encouraged from

<sup>40</sup> See Saddhatissa 1971: 81.





the beginning, so that practitioners prepare the mind for meditation and can leave it behind clearly and cleanly for daily business. After the practice, or sometimes before, there is practice the *brahmavihāras*, with a particular emphasis on *mettā*, and investigation of the three signs within the breath.

The subject of this paper has been other activities that could be included under ‘mental cultivation’ (*bhāvanā*) as well as sitting meditation. So it should also be noted that practices of mindfulness, wisdom and *mettā* are encouraged in daily life, as well as regular reports on meditation to teachers, a personal contact that is a hallmark of the group. Reports on meditation are considered very helpful for arousing confidence and fostering new experience or events within the practice. Another distinctive feature of the *Samatha* methods is collaborative group work: on chanting, theory and mindful work on physical surroundings, such as decorating and gardening. These activities are discussed and related together through study of *suttas* and *Abhidhamma* material. Groups work on particular texts together, sometimes chanting them in Pāli, and sometimes reading them in English. Attempts are made to relate new similes, theory or observations to experience and to communicate and discuss this with others. The components of the *Dhammasaṅgani* list of factors present in skilful consciousness for instance have aroused great debate and discussion: can *kusala-citta* be present when playing tennis? Does the *cetasika* of *mettā* arise when cooking? Does the food taste better when it does? When do animals experience skilful consciousness? There are often have late discussions on these subject, during, for instance, breaks on mindful work sessions, or even when trying to plaster walls, under mindful conditions. On the *Samatha* website a book edited by Mark Rowlands, *The Abhidhamma Papers*, represents work conducted of this kind by those in groups where discussion is more formal and based on practice and individual prepared contributions.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See ‘The Samatha Trust Meditation Homepage’ (2010): <http://www.samatha.org/> and <http://www.samatha.org/publications/index.html> Rowlands, M. ed. (1998 HTML edn) *The Abhidhamma Papers*.

This sort of debate means that both daily life and meditation are examined and explored through discussion and listening. Stories are popular amongst Western meditators. Amongst the favourite are those derived from the *Dhammapada* commentaries and *Jātakas*, narratives that are felt to enrich meditation; these are also liked for their flexible and *mettā* based exploration of theoretical principle. Several groups are now meeting for a publishing project, ‘Samatha Adventures’, which is intended to present material on dependent origination, breathing mindfulness practice and personal ‘journeys’ to a larger public. In 2009–10 there are now 80 teachers in the UK in this tradition; beginners’ weekends are held regularly.

On the basis of the questions asked to a group of experienced teachers at Greenstreete, the centre in Wales, three main influences, of roughly equal importance, emerged as important factors in encouraging people to the group. Many had come through friends to practice, many had read books on Buddhism, and many stated, in various ways, simply that they felt at intuitively at home with the practice. A number recorded that they felt the main factor operating in the twenty-first century as regards meditation was the growth of lay meditative practice in the West. At the same time, most valued greatly contact with the monastic orders. Teachers over the years, as well as those I have mentioned, have included Ajahn Chah (Thailand), Ven. B. Anandamaitreya (Sri Lanka), Ven Candawanna (Cambodia), Ven. H. Saddhatissa (Sri Lanka) and Ven U Nyanika (Burma). There have been many lay visitors from Thailand. Since the year 2000 seven members of the group have also taken temporary ordination in Thailand and Sri Lanka and others have learnt a great deal from their enthusiasm and the increased understanding and knowledge they have brought back. Groups have had many visits and teachings as well from the British Saṅgha, such as Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Viradhammo, as well as nuns, who are all very popular. In this regard it should be noted that nuns are particularly liked by the women meditators, who find them an inspiring example. Ajahn Candasirī, for instance, who has been living as a nun for thirty years now with the British Saṅgha, is well known. Whether or not the *bhikkhunī* line is formally reestablished, with such distinguished teachers the United Kingdom can be said to have four assemblies practising meditation, thus fulfilling a feature of the teaching of each Buddha described in the Buddhavaṃsa.



I have only scratched the surface of the British practice of meditation in my own group; there are many other Southern groups spread around the UK, most notably the British Forest Sangha, and thriving groups within other Buddhist traditions that would warrant their own story (see Bluck 2008). But practitioners I questioned admired the specificity of early Buddhism, the way the Buddha taught to individuals in canonical texts and the great variety of meditation objects, suited to practitioner's needs. Buddhaghosa's work in suggesting techniques and practical methods for dealing with everything from attachment to views, *dhamma* excitement and following the breath is particularly valued. One person commented that in the teaching on the *brahmavihāras* in the *Visuddhimagga*, careful distinctions are made between oneself and other beings, to avoid confusion and imposing one's views on others (see *Visuddhimagga* IX).<sup>42</sup> Some observed that they liked the way that *mettā*, as described in the *Mettā-sutta*, and the practice of compassion as a *brahmavihāra*, as well as sympathetic joy and equanimity, are often taught and practiced in Southern Buddhism. One teacher noted that the divine abidings are often not discussed in texts, but embodied in graduated individual meditation teaching, in canon, commentaries and practice, and in the diagnostic basis for the meditational advice. Such features are felt to be central to the development of the Samatha Trust approach to theory and practice, and vindicate Ajahn Khammai Dhammasami's comment on the divine-abidings, 'Once fully developed, they also tend to influence the way we think' (Dhammasāmi 1999: 9). For many practitioners, Southern Buddhism's capacity to encompass meditative training and intellectual challenge, along with kindly care and humour, make it attractive to Westerners.

The title of this paper has included the word 'perceptions' and has demonstrated that perceptions of Buddhist meditation are changing, on many levels, in a number of ways. Indeed, as the varied viewpoints in this paper indicate, it could even be said that various perceptions of Buddhist meditation are transforming even Westerners' understanding of perception and how to exercise it in meditation.

<sup>42</sup> See also Aronson (1980), Dhammasāmi (1999): 9–19, Gombrich (1998 and OCBS website (2010): <http://www.ocbs.org/> and 2009), Rahula (1967): 68ff and Shaw (2006): 163–172. As these works argue, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity animate and form an utterly essential part of the Southern Buddhist tradition, as manifest in its canonical and commentarial texts and its modern practices.

## **The Journal of I<sup>A</sup>BU**

To include such a variety of fields, the paper has included, necessarily, much scientific and third-person allusion but also much first-person, anecdotal or particular comment too. The Southern Buddhist tradition places great emphasis on the interchange between teachers, pupils and friends. A sense of this importance of personal contact has been a prominent feature within several areas covered in this paper: the story of the girl at the outset, encouraged by Buddhist monks, the methods of those employing Buddhist practices in the therapeutic traditions, where personal contact is considered vital, the comments from those practicing meditation, who value work in groups and personal contacts, and the letters from those learning about Buddhism first-hand in schools. Indeed it is the great warmth and effectiveness of individual contact and friendliness, eliciting personal change, whether recorded by evidence-based research or experiential investigation, which seems to be the overriding feature of the various ways Southern Buddhist meditation is becoming gradually integrated and accepted into British society. As the global community is appreciating Buddhism in general, those wishing to explore meditation as a graduated and carefully taught path have come to recognize that Southern Buddhism offers a rare, subtle kind of spiritual practice. Its method of taking each step of the ‘*ehipassiko*’ way carefully, and its stress on individual friendship, the group and continued advice, are perhaps its most notable and influential features.





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# Buddhist Education: The History and Background of the Saṅgīti-sutta

Dion Peoples<sup>1</sup>



The Saṅgīti-sutta from the Dīgha-nikāya was the subject of my PhD dissertation. What I would like to put forward in this article is the history of the discourse, to enable additional dialogues amongst other Buddhist scholars – certainly those senior who have superior knowledge and insight. I hope this will strengthen better and respectful engagements amongst us, certainly in the field of Buddhist education. I begin with Jainism’s perspective of Buddhists, and the Buddhist perspective of Jainism - as presented in Buddhist discourses. With this established, the historical perspective can be understood towards the creative-generation and motivation behind issuing the Saṅgīti-sutta and, therefore, we today know why we have it, and why we should use it in Buddhist education.

I believe that the Saṅgīti-sutta was issued as a defensive stance against allegations of mindlessness and uttered offensively to protect and establish themselves against doctrinal decay - so the 230

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guiding-principles contained in the discourse could be understood as required criteria inside the Buddha's system of learning – and quite possibly this may have officially established Buddhism, as a recognized sect, rather than just an assemblage of teachings by some random guru.

### **Nigantha Nāṭaputta (Mahāvira) in the Tipiṭaka**

In an attempt to be objective, and not present one-sided information, many Jain texts were examined to determine the manner in which Buddhists are depicted in their texts, and if any material exists pertaining to the death of their leader, it is because Buddhists discourses do discuss these events; Buddhists often don't know what is inside Jain literature. Consider the following material from Jain literature<sup>2</sup>:

“See! There are men who control themselves, (whilst others only) pretend to be houseless (i.e. monks, such as the *Bauddhas*, whose conduct differs not from that of householders).”<sup>3</sup>

Such external criticism shaped the Buddhist monastic regulations over the years; more:

“Through wrong instruction the (would-be) sages trouble themselves (for pleasures); thus they sink deeper and deeper in delusion, (and cannot get) to this, nor to the opposite shore.”<sup>4</sup>

Consider this criticism or Jain-opinion<sup>5</sup> from the Udumbarika-Sīhanāda-sutta of the Dīgha-nikāya:

<sup>2</sup> According to Hermann Jacobi in *Jaina Sutras, Part I, Sacred Books of the East Volume 22*, found at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/sbe2285.htm> “*The Kalpa Sutra - Lives of the Ginas*”, Mahāvira died after 72 years of life, in Papa in the writer's office of King Hastipala, single and alone, after giving a long lecture. Further, *Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation* by Helmuth von Glasenapp & Shridhar B. Shrotri (1999), states: Mahāvira had just preached for six days straight, in front of many people, but when the crowd was asleep, he could have taken his final rest, and when they awoke, they realized Mahāvira had died.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/sbe2204.htm> - accessed 2 October 2008.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe22/sbe2211.htm> - accessed 2 October 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Walshe, Maurice, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 386.

“...householder, do you know whom the ascetic Gotama talks to? Whom does he converse with? From whom does he get his lucidity of wisdom? The ascetic Gotama’s wisdom is destroyed by the solitary life, he is unused to assemblies, he is no good at conversation, he is right out of touch. Just as bison circling around keep to the fringes, so it is with the ascetic Gotama. In fact, householder, if the ascetic Gotama were to come to this assembly, we would baffle him with a single question, we would knock him over like an empty pot.”

The expression above seems to be an early representation of the ascetic Gotama before he was a well-known and established-respected teacher, perhaps, and to the Jains, Buddhists don’t appear to be very mindful. Being mindful is the often stressed-trait in the Theravāda tradition. Therefore, the literature of the Buddhist canon is quite diverse in various matters and mentions Nigantha Nāṭaputta, better known outside Buddhist literature as Mahāvira (Great Hero), several times entering into various doctrinal debates and confrontations with Buddhists.

Consider the doctrinal stance of the Buddhists towards the Jains: “...the doctrine of the foolish Niganthas will give delight to fools but not to the wise, and it will not withstand testing or being smoothened out.”<sup>6</sup> With these arguments established, an examination of the interactions that transpired between Buddhists and Jains should be undertaken, to highlight how the death of Mahāvira greatly inspired Buddhism and thus, eventually the Saṅgīti-sutta.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 489.

<sup>7</sup> Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyanissara Thera, *Saṅgīti: A Perspective, Prospect and their Impacts*: Researcher’s summary of the text: Venerable Nyanissara starts by defining the term Saṅgīti, then erroneously relocates the setting of the discourse, but claims it took place about 10 months before the death of the Buddha (and therefore about four months before Sāriputta dies); and that this setting should be about ten years after the death of Niganṭha Nāṭaputta, Mahāvira. He mentions Jain doctrine differs (thus Sāriputta wanted a uniform doctrine to replace any divisions); he states that half the disciples present belonged to Sāriputta and the other to Ānanda. Then Nyanissara states that Sāriputta taught the Dhamma-vinaya as known up to that time, and concludes with this: “It was the first Mahāsaṅgīti led by Sāriputta Thera while the Teacher was still alive. This *saṅgīti* has been overlooked by many scholars.” p. 7.

Whereas Walshe concludes his translation (p. 510) with: “...Well indeed have you proclaimed the want of chanting together for the monks!”, Nyanissara (p. 7.) translates: “...Well indeed have you Sāriputta, proclaimed the way of extracting the teachings to the Bhikkhus.” This is perhaps a radical departure from Walshe’s translation, but would indeed fit within the context of the existing matrix-system for the presentation of the discourse. Sāriputta, thus extracted the core



The Upāli-sutta<sup>8</sup> has Mahāvira staying in the same place as the Buddha, with a large assembly of followers. There is a discussion near the beginning of the discourse concerning aspects of the Jain doctrine. A skilled Jain disciple converses with the Buddha. The Buddha asks one of the Jain disciples a question concerning evil action. The Jain responds that Mahāvira teaches three types of rods for the performance and perpetration of evil action: the bodily rod, the verbal rod, and the mental rod. The Jain responds three times to the statement that the bodily rod is the most reprehensible for the performance and perpetration of evil action. The Buddha tells the Jain that he replaces the word *rod* for the word *action*. The Buddha responds to the Jain, that he teaches mental action is the most reprehensible concerning evil action. In fact, this manipulation of existing vocabulary is excessively illuminated throughout the great new text by Professor Richard Gombrich.<sup>9</sup>

Later in the sutta, the Jain layman Upāli hears of this teaching through the Jain disciple reporting the above conversation to Mahāvira. Upāli boasts that he can defeat the Buddha in a verbal debate, but the Jain doctrine is refuted and defeated. The agenda-inspired lay disciple then, after several similes given by the Buddha becomes satisfied after the first, but desired to hear the Buddha's ideas on other scenarios. The Buddha praises him for his investigation. Upāli, then departs and returns to Mahāvira. As the warning from the Jain disciple said that the Buddha is a skilled magician who can convert the disciples of other sectarians, near the end of the sutta, Upāli converts and invites Mahāvira and his remaining assembly to his (Upāli's) dwelling for alms and enters into a debate. Instead of Mahāvira being converted via debate by Upāli, he is encompassed by a great sadness at the elaborate verse of praise for the Buddha, as well as the loss of his disciple to the Buddha. Mahāvira vomits and spits up hot blood dying soon after.

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details, without explanation, and left the structure for later generations to elaborate on, to form their Abhidhamma texts, as history suggests. Sāriputta extracted all of the Dhamma-Vinaya of the Buddha known to him at that time, and presented it to both Sanghas. Everyone approved and the Buddha certified the discourse with his own approval.

<sup>8</sup> Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 477-492.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*.

The Pāsādika-sutta also has a description of what transpired after the passing of Mahāvira. The sutta says that after Mahāvira died in Pava, the sect split and the disciples of Mahāvira disputed various points of their doctrine, not seeing things the same way, seeing methods in certain orders, or out of order, etc. They were:

“...quarrelling and disputing, fighting and attacking each other with worldly warfare... Even the white-robed lay followers were disgusted, displeased and repelled when they saw their doctrine and discipline was so ill-proclaimed, so unedifyingly displayed, and so ineffectual in calming the passions, having been proclaimed by one not fully enlightened, and now with its support gone, without an arbiter.”<sup>10</sup>

This was reported to the Buddha by the novice Cunda. The Buddha, however, tells Cunda that he does not blame the pupils for the fighting, because the teacher was to be blamed, the doctrine was to blame, because the teacher was not fully enlightened. Thus perhaps, the Buddhists should then know their doctrine, so that the teacher could not be blamed for any negligence. This sutta mainly expresses that a disciple should practice the doctrine proclaimed by his teacher, according to certain proper conditions – again, basically: there is a correct teacher for a pupil to be under and the general doctrine (well-explained) for the going forth into the life of a bhikkhu.

Additionally, along with the purpose of the monk-robles often chanted in the monasteries today, there are further details on how one should train. Then the sutta goes into various aspects of Buddhist philosophy: if one trains to higher levels of morality and with higher levels of Dhammas, then the ultimate results of Buddhist training become evident for the practitioner. This follows the model of gradual training adopted and adapted for the presentation of Dhammas throughout the Saṅgīti-sutta. Aspects or details inside this *Pāsādika-sutta* could form a skeleton-outline of an Abhidhamma text if further examined as I have done elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 427.





The Sāmagāma-sutta<sup>11</sup> discusses the death of Mahāvira, and again points to the schism that developed after his death. The verbal assault-daggers were being tossed by his pupils, and disgusted lay followers, etc., as mentioned above. The sutta is an exposition on how the Buddha's disciples are supposed to behave after his death to ensure the continuation of his teachings. Again, from the Sāmagāma-sutta, Mahāvira just died. Jains fight and split. This is reported to the Buddha, who is speaking to Ānanda, and states: disputing over livelihood or the Pātimokkha is trifling; but should any dispute arise in the sangha about the path or the way - such a dispute would be for the harm and unhappiness of many, for the loss, harm, and suffering of gods and humans. Therefore, in this discourse, Ānanda replies to the Buddha that no one argues about the dhamma, only over livelihood and the Pātimokkha. So the Buddha explains: six roots of disputes; four kinds of litigation; seven kinds of settlement of litigation; and the six *sāraṇīya-dhammas* – which lead to harmony amongst people who have to live near another.

Therefore, as we have seen, Jain literature seems to pass over the death of Nigantha Nātaputta, perhaps because he was just one of many leaders in a long line of religious ascetics. His role as a protagonist seems, then, rather weak, or as a normal man; in fact, he, perhaps is only the *Great Hero* from the perspective of what he offered the Buddhist tradition. What did the death of Mahāvira contribute to Buddhism? Precisely, as mentioned above, numerous discourses, at least fourteen, involve interaction with Jains and Buddhists as if they were ascetic/religious siblings, each dispute leads to the establishment of greater Buddhist ideologies. Buddhists, witnessing the social discomfort faced by leaderless Jain disciples, reacted by rehearsing doctrine to benefit future generations.

Benefit, here, should be illustrated to stress that a discourse mentions teachings to benefit from – and so some scholars have made the assumption that this is suggestive of a late-era discourse. Buddhists are very conscious of delaying or preventing any decay in the Buddha's tradition, so this discourse seems reactionary, to some extent. Of course, this may be solely from the perspective

<sup>11</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 853-860 (Sutta #104).



or hindsight of Buddhist monks fortunate enough to witness the behaviors of Jain disciples.

Buddhism sought, then, to eliminate any religious insecurity, perhaps placing emphasis on confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as a demonstration. It can be said that Buddhism was strengthened due to the mistakes in the Jain tradition or from philosophical-errors. Indeed, had it not been for the disassembling of the Jain tradition which acted as the catalyst for the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta, this profound discourse may not have occurred.

Now, the *Saṅgīti-sutta* is a very long sutta, but a portion recounts the death of Mahāvira and the sectarian split that arose from his death. Here, Venerable Sāriputta presents 230 aspects of Dhamma to some 500 Buddhist monks for reciting, in order to prevent any future-arising schism; this recitation was well-received, and no one argued against the pronouncements.<sup>12</sup> The Saṅgīti-sutta is a major step in the development of Buddhism – to protect the Dhamma from decay and propagate what has been established towards the future generation’s appreciation. Although the Buddha outlived his chief disciples and chief opponents, having the Jain sect co-existing in the same geographical region was highly beneficial to the Buddha’s doctrine. He or his major disciples could better or clearly debate and define Buddhist philosophy vis-à-vis the positions of antagonists; thus the discourse establishes itself in the Buddhist tradition and at the same time defends the created Buddhist tradition against potential doctrinal errors, a sign of its prominence and preeminence. 230 doctrinal positions were given and arranged numerically, perhaps for easier recollection within an oral-tradition.

### Important Perspective on Buddhist Councils

Charles Prebish writes an influential article pertaining to Buddhist councils.<sup>13</sup> He mentions the coming together of monks following the Buddha’s death as the first council because it was there that power was settled along with matters of discipline. However, Prebish is interested in the death of the Buddha, the background of

<sup>12</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 480.

<sup>13</sup> Charles S. Prebish, “A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, February 1974.



the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta, and Vinaya accounts of the incident – standard scholarship that fails to look into the background of other conceptual-gatherings, initially – as I accomplish here in this article. Now, a brief review of problematic points inside Prebish’s 36-year old article:

“Virtually all the researchers have concluded that the [1<sup>st</sup>] council was not a historical event.”<sup>14</sup> “...reliance on the Pāli texts was predominant, a flaw...”<sup>15</sup> Prebish cites La Vallée Poussin, a scholar writing on the episode of: “Subhadra, who believed himself freed from all rule by the disappearance of Buddha...”<sup>16</sup> – which is, to a minor extent, an echoing of the Jain dissention following Mahāvira’s demise.

Mahā Kassapa’s decision to initiate a council was not very different from the decision of Sāriputta to give the Saṅgīti-sutta, both were encouraged by someone. With the Chief Disciple dead, who could speak on social-regulations and Dhamma? Only Upāli, the Vinaya expert, and Ānanda with his great memory. Restated, Mahā Kassapa’s decision for a council was nothing novel, as the setting for the Saṅgīti-sutta occurred maybe several months before this episode of the Buddha’s demise. Perhaps the symbolism to gather 500 arahants was to duplicate the assembly of 500 disciples of Sāriputta, the number of attendees for the Saṅgīti-sutta. Further, Prebish writes, while citing another scholar, Andre Bareau:

“As to why Rājagṛha was chosen, the answer is clear enough: “it was only in the ancient capital of Magadha that the members of the council could find sufficient shelter and refuge.”<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, these scholars neglected to read the Saṅgīti-sutta, because the Mallas were not only present during the cremation of the Buddha, but supported the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta and the 500 monks in attendance there. As to the number 500, Prebish

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 244, citing Andre Bareau, *Les Premiers Conciles Bouddhiques* (1955).



is not clear and claims it is an artificial amount<sup>18</sup>, but again, this is merely an equal number to the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta. If that number is artificial, no one can be certain today, but it is indeed the ‘same’ number suggested for both episodes.

This initiated the curiosity and desire to undertake a deeper look into the Saṅgīti-sutta to study the processes that developed following the death of the Jain leader, as the earlier mentioned discourses suggest rather than thinking that the death of the Buddha triggered important events. It was indeed, the death of the Great Hero, a non-Buddhist, which served as the catalyst for Buddhists to gather and proclaim doctrine and discipline. Richard Gombrich writes extensively on the debt that Buddhists owe to the Jains, and the occasion for the discourse is yet another profound circumstance.

This gathering of monks listened to Venerable Sāriputta’s discourse, which was sealed by the Buddha’s approval. The setting was in the Ubbhataka Meeting Hall, which had never before been used, offered to the Buddha to be the first user, and therefore deserves more respect as an early emergency first council. The setting for the Dasuttara-sutta’s location, the Gaggara Lotus Pond in Campā, was without the Buddha present so this discourse cannot be advocated as prominent; other literature forgets this fact.

Rajagaha was the location of the council that took place after the death of the Buddha. Prebish inserts that Rajagaha was chosen because it had sufficient facilities to support the many monks but again, the Mallas supported 500 guests as well! The setting for Sāriputta’s Saṅgīti-sutta may be a form of a lesser council, perhaps because it wasn’t legitimized politically, sponsored or held under auspices of political-authority, rather it was held by ‘mere’ invitation of a tribal republic, to open or consecrate a building. This observation of ‘sanctioning’ manipulates true authority and undermines the original intentions of the Buddha to be freed from political matters.

The sangha has been forever altered by decisions held at Rajagaha; the resultant history of Buddhist Councils are written by others, elsewhere. The Saṅgīti-sutta is an extensive illustration

<sup>18</sup> Charles S. Prebish, “A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, p. 244.



of dhamma-concepts that were detailed and fully sponsored by the Buddha, as the most purified-authority. The other councils held later, were influenced by external agents, all during the beginning of the age of Buddhist schisms.

Below, Prebish tries to establish criteria, as formulated by Andre Bareau, for traditional recognition of Buddhist councils, and I apply the criteria to the discourse to see if the setting of the Saṅgīti-sutta could be determined to be council-like in nature (thus, subjecting the discourse to the criteria for the context of a council). My criteria and evaluation of the criteria is weaved into the conditions imposed by Prebish, and related to Bareau's seven conditions, listed first and in italics, along with my necessary response:

1. *The essential function of the council* was to recite together without disagreement so that the dhamma would last for a long time.
2. *Convocation<sup>19</sup> of the council* – in direct response to the death of the Jain leader, whose sect fell into schism. Because large groups of monastics dwelled together, the gathering was not because of the death, but the discourse given amongst a large order of bhikkhus, whereby a large collection of witnesses could listen to Sāriputta proclaim his discourse, which turned out to be the Buddhist dhamma to recite – and this material was uttered to protect against schisms so that all would hear, and this was thus approved – this group of 500 now possessed this knowledge. While this was not a purposeful convocation, it may be determined to be an incidental gathering of ordained people for an event that was significant to be modeled as how to perform ceremonial endeavors.
3. *The degree of universality of the council* was spoken by Sāriputta, supported by the Buddha before 500 monks (at this point there is no universality), but progressing: that the material is still traditionally maintained in the Tipiṭaka of different traditions should arguably merit some universality.

<sup>19</sup> [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com), “convocation”, in Easton’s 1897 Bible Dictionary: “A meeting of a religious character as distinguished from congregation, which was more general, dealing with political and legal matters...” Only the monks were in attendance and Sāriputta detailed discipline and doctrine to be recollected, and everyone agreed. Accessed: 01 November 2009.

4. *The ceremonial aspect of this council:* Let me be clear: this event was not a ceremony, and there shall never be the claim of such; but what is stated are detailed events inside the discourse descriptive enough to emulate for future endeavors and as the first incident, vinaya-regulations suggest that these may be copied for future ceremonies. Observe the following details: the Mallas prepared this building and invited the Buddha to use it first; the Mallas spread out 500 seats, put out water pots and oil lamps, perhaps out of courtesy; after everyone entered with freshly washed feet and settled, the Buddha gave a long discourse, not mentioned in the sutta for this occasion; the elderly Buddha lays down to stretch his aching back, and must let the Chief Disciple, Sāriputta to preside over the sanghas (the sanghas of Sāriputta and Ānanda), who thus gives an extensive, authoritative discourse to the 500 monks who are free from sloth and torpor. The sutta ends with monks rejoicing and proclaiming that Sāriputta's words were well spoken, and this was further confirmed by the Buddha. Apart from ceremonial aspects of preparing seats and feet washing, there were few other 'ritual' aspects contained in this sutta - the discourse mentions: the Buddha adjusted his robe and brought in his bowl, and after he washed his feet, he entered the meeting-hall and sat down against the central pillar, facing east. Then the monks after washing their feet, entered the hall and sat down along the western wall facing east. Then, afterwards, the Pava Mallas washed their feet, entered the hall, and sat down along the eastern wall facing west, with the Buddha in front of them.<sup>20</sup> When the Mallas departed for their evening sleep, they got up, saluted the Buddha, and went out ensuring the Buddha remained on their right side – fully illustrating a ceremonious and reverential occasion.

5. *The functions and authority of the members of the council:* The Buddha is the great teacher, Sāriputta is one of his chief disciples, the discourse was given in the community of the sleeping Mallas (who served no more significance for the discourse, apart

<sup>20</sup> Other discourses just do not venture into the in-depth details of these actions, and because these actions are specifically illuminated here, the modern researcher determines this was left for historical reasons: for future scholars to understand how to hold a group-meeting – another aspect to be remembered, apart from the 230 Dhamma-components. It would be useless to mention this unless this was the ceremonial-procedures or respectful actions of the era.



from just preparing the vicinity for use), and confirmed before 500 members of the order. The discourse met the approval of the Buddha and can thereby be certified as official doctrine. As far as the functionality of the members, the event was perhaps dictatorial in nature. The Buddha told Sāriputta to give the evening teaching, he had the freedom to say anything, but used this timely occasion to emphasize the doctrine for the creation of this now auspicious occasion, preserved in the Tipiṭaka. Buddhism could be perceived to be an official ‘school’ following this certification by the Buddha. Furthermore, Sāriputta dies before the Buddha and the Rajagaha council, so fellow disciples must have retained memory of this event, most likely Ānanda, because of the stock introductory phrase, “Thus I have heard”... and the insertion and maintenance of this sutta into the Tipiṭaka asserts its further authority. None of the officially recognized gatherings were attended by the Buddha – these later recognized-councils nearly lacked official authorities or immediate messengers of the Buddha – Venerable Ānanda attained to the criteria moments before the beginning of the first council, but could recall the Saṅgīti-sutta. Obviously, with the Buddha dead, the standard-recognized first council did not run as ‘approved’ by the Buddha.

6. *The judiciary power of the council:* The 500 monks agreed in silence, as witnesses to the doctrinal utterances, and were additionally subjected to the Pātimokkha as understood up to that period of time. If the Dhamma was not unanimously accepted, the monks would have spoken up, or the Buddha would have rebuked Sāriputta, as he did on other occasions or to anyone needing corrected; and there should be some legality behind verbal agreements – the acceptance of the discourse would mean submission to the intentions and any enforcements of the teaching.
7. *The relation between the king and the council:* this does not apply, as there appeared to be no direct ruler of the Mallas – all their verses across the Tipiṭaka are spoken as a collective voice (republic-democracy) – there might not be a king governing the council, but by consent/influence by majority. All the Mallas (lay people) were sleeping during the discourse; all of the monastics listening were in concurrence without disagreement.



In italics, above, we read Prebish and Bareau's seven stipulations, with my responses gained from engaging in this study. As my intention is to support the significance of the Saṅgīti-sutta, the criteria are only applied for it, not towards other discourses or existent-known councils. To be distinct, the difference between the Saṅgīti-sutta and other discourses is the intention of the delivery, based on a significant event, which led to other events (other discourses are not designed as such): the deliverance of the Saṅgīti-sutta as a gathering towards solidifying Buddhist doctrine. Further, other, later-Buddhist schools have taken this material, and preserved their account of the events: The Sarvāstivādins took their interpretation and resultant Abhidhamma material in one direction and even have the Buddha speaking lines that are attributed to Sāriputta in the Theravada tradition; while Theravada Buddhists maintained their opinions – discrepancies and arguments in a vibrant social-philosophical and psychological tradition – as I show in other areas of my unpublished-dissertation.

That concludes answering to Prebish and Bareau's seven stipulations for a council – thus it can be certain that this Saṅgīti-sutta's occurrence warrants redefinition as a first response to a critical situation, which can be interpreted to be an early-minor practice council – and minor (although similar) in terms of what would happen in the future: preparations or an exercise for meeting following the death of the Buddha; later gatherings, perhaps only improved upon this initial episode.<sup>21</sup> As discussed above, each of Prebish and Bareau's criteria have been answered – to the best ability of interpreting the Saṅgīti-sutta's dearth of available proofs and dearth in additional scholarship. Whether or not the criteria that Dr. Prebish supposes is idealistic or genuine - the material-criteria proposed exists or is resident in the sutta, as historical-evidence of the integrated aspects of what goes into a council. There is no reason to believe otherwise, that the Saṅgīti-sutta setting could not

<sup>21</sup> For instance, for the discourse, there were only 500 monks; but for the 1<sup>st</sup> Council, there were 500 Arahants; Sāriputta spoke the discourse alone, but the 1st Council was presided over by an elder-senior monk, with two different topic-experts issuing segments – discipline and discourses respectively. Additionally, the monk Revata was believed to be traveling nearby and came upon the council and was asked to adhere to the Dhamma dictated at the Council, but Revata declined and stated he would rather adhere to the Dhamma as mentioned by the Buddha. It is suggested that Revata was the younger brother of Sāriputta, and could have been privileged to hear and thus maintain his older-brother's discourse.



be determined, minimally, as a trial-run or a practical exercise for future Buddhist councils, and the preservation of Buddhist doctrine. The Saṅgīti-sutta was not another mere teaching; it was a planned, mentally-calculated response by one of the recognized greatest chief disciples – ten years in the making, perhaps his *magnum-opus* – and now a remnant of a form of Buddhist textbook for future educational endeavors!

A key element in future Buddhist councils was to collect, cleanse, and correct the doctrine from errors or heresy, and this was done by full consensus at the risk of a schism (whereas, Sāriputta looked externally against the Jains for his clarified-examples, and there was no internal bickering needing refereed by any political authority). Conditions later degenerated to the extent that the Sangha needed to have a neutral observing ruling authority to govern over the future disputes in later councils. As a result, these famed Buddhist Councils seem to be more internally disastrous than the calling for the Saṅgīti-sutta, which was delivered in a more pristine-era of Buddhist discipleship - an era of less infighting or sectarianism.

To whatever extent that someone wishes to accept what this section has tried to argue for, certainly: the importance to establish Buddhist doctrine was the goal of the Saṅgīti-sutta – and this can no longer be ignored. If the Prebish-Bureau manufactured criteria are applied, the Saṅgīti-sutta does not exactly fulfill all of the suggestive criteria presented by the scholars – if, even their criteria is legitimate criteria; but, this discourse, has been examined and is now determined to be: the most preeminent Theravāda Buddhist doctrinal discourse, because of its delivered intent – the establish Buddhist doctrine or material for Buddhist Education. Later Buddhists studied this material and elaborated on the components to manufacture their respective Abhidhamma-materials, as I have shown elsewhere in my unpublished dissertation.

### **Additional Considerations to Establish Preeminence**

Readers should not think that the Saṅgīti-sutta was examined in isolation - that no other discourses were examined. Other discourses mandated the same scrutiny, but since certain criteria were not met through the criteria established by Charles Prebish above, these other



discourses could not qualify, and below explain one example. From the deficiencies involved in this forthcoming example, the Saṅgīti-sutta draws more attention upon itself, as preeminent.

Perhaps someone might impose the comparison between the Saṅgīti- and Dasuttara- sutta's for similarities and discrepancies; because those are the formulas secured in the Tipiṭaka, intently, for chanting – this was done for the Dasuttara-sutta (found as an arranged appendix in the dissertation, for visual reference and proof of conducted research). Furthermore, an endeavor was undertaken to determine what unmentioned discourse the Buddha possibly gave to the Mallas immediately preceding Sāriputta's teaching. Only three<sup>22</sup> were found: the Pāsādika-sutta from the Dīgha-nikāya concerns itself with finding a good senior teacher with a well-proclaimed doctrine, with Ānanda in the audience; the Sāmagāma-sutta from the Majjhima-nikāya concerns itself with discipline after the death of the Buddha – again with Ānanda as audience; and a story concerning Cunda the silversmith, from the Anguttara-nikāya is concerned with a multitude of numerical dhammas. All of these three discourses occur after the death of Mahāvira and can be divided into numerical portions or expandable sets of Dhamma – but deeper exploration into these suttas fall outside the scope of this contribution. What is important, as mentioned earlier, was to collect all of the discourses related to the death of the Jain leader, to see why the Saṅgīti-sutta was given. Now, of interest to disseminate is the following, from the Pāsādika-sutta<sup>23</sup>:

A dispute about livelihood or about the Pātimokkha would be trifling, Ānanda. But should a dispute arise in the sangha about the path or the way, such a dispute would be for the harm and unhappiness of many, for the loss, harm and suffering of gods and humans.

<sup>22</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 427-439; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 853-860; F.L. Woodward, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, pp. 175-180.

<sup>23</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 854.



With these events, likely to precede the Saṅgīti-sutta by days, Sāriputta was able to calculate or contemplate what the Buddha had been saying following the demise of Mahāvira. The earlier mentioned discourses suggest the obvious need to follow a qualified teacher with a qualified doctrine; then we are told that disputes over discipline are trivial – although addressed through a discourse on how to prevent disputes. Sāriputta was given his chance to speak – after the Buddha urged him to deliver a religious discourse, but this seems more academic, in today’s perspective; thus the discourse becomes very timely, calculated, and appropriate to a decaying situation, potentially in the face of future conflict.

Moreover, the Saṅgīti-sutta was given by a chief disciple and approved by the Buddha, stimulated by the schism over doctrinal-differences that occurred in the Jain sect, following their leader’s death. Perhaps this is what Hajime Nakamura, suggests when he writes:

“With the lapse of time the fear appeared that the Order might decline and that the teaching of the Buddha might be brought for naught.”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Sāriputta offered this discourse as a summary and as an example of the Buddha’s doctrine to be maintained for the prosperity of Buddhism, in order to prevent Sangha schisms, and to reinforce what should be recalled. Again, as Sāriputta stated:

“Friends, this Dhamma has been well proclaimed by the Lord, the fully-enlightened One. *And so we should all recite it together without disagreement* (my emphasis), so that this holy life may be enduring and established for a long time, thus to be for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of devas and humans.”

<sup>24</sup> Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism*, p. 74.



In the above case, Sāriputta led his particular Sangha group (different major disciples had groups throughout ancient India), and this is perhaps a basis for the Jain confusion over his role in the Buddha's dispensation. Sāriputta then issued forth various dhammas, expounded by numeral-sets: ones-through-tens – to ensure everyone understands the approved doctrinal-sets. After this sutta was issued, the Buddha rose from resting his aching back, and proclaimed: “Good, Good, Sāriputta! Well indeed have you, proclaimed, the way of chanting together for the monks!”

To conclude this section on Buddhist councils, the gathered-assembly drew together and listened to what should be recollected and chanted, and all agreed; and I have endeavored to prove that the gathering effectively answers the seven imposed council-conditions by Prebish . If one is not convinced from the current endeavor – one would now find it difficult to argue against the Saṅgīti-sutta as being a very important, historic, Theravāda Buddhist discourse.

### Conclusion

In its entirety, this Saṅgīti-sutta is an impressive, lengthy work, covering all aspects of the Buddha's doctrine, dhamma-sets and social-regulations, as can be seen elsewhere in the unpublished dissertation. To recite this fully would take a considerable amount of time. However, if chanting or examining the Dhamma's within is conducted in one's own language, as during the days of the Buddha, the monks would gain comprehension or insight into all of the teachings – such was the inspiration for this dissertation. The best question to ask now is: Why do Buddhists not follow the advice in their sacred literature?<sup>25</sup> If the discourse was to be used for the education of Buddhist monastics, why has this practice been discontinued? Now, I must conclude answering only possible situations; the answer lays somewhere between the following circumstances:

<sup>25</sup> See, Daniel M. Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dhamma*, p. 19, citing Steven Collins: “Theravāda Buddhism did not arise around the Tipiṭaka, but rather produced it.”

Also see – Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words*, p. 7: “To understand the history and teachings of Buddhism in Southeast Asia one must start with how Buddhists teach Buddhists to be Buddhists, and it is only by understanding this method and the texts that reveal it that one can begin to do so.” This is through narratives, rituals, and grammatical texts:

- Nissaya: means “resource” – written for sermon preparations and guides to understand source texts.
- Nāmasadda: more literal word for word translations from short passages
- Vohara: idiomatic or common speech “oratory”... or mechanical techniques – lifting words skillfully



| <b>EVOLUTION OF RECOMMENDED BUDDHIST CHANTING/LEARNING</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Historical Recommendation:</b>  | <b>From Source or Authority:</b>   |
| Respectful exchange of greetings; then a discourse; finally keeping the Buddha on one's right side while departing   | Numerous occurrences in the Tipiṭaka, before the Saṅgīti-sutta   |
| <b>Saṅgīti-sutta</b>   | Sārīputta & Buddha; Buddhist Councils  |
| Specific extracts from: Vinaya, Anguttara-nikāya, Majjhima-nikāya and Sutta-nipāta   | Emperor Asoka's 3 <sup>rd</sup> Minor Rock Edict: "I desire that all monks and nuns may <b>constantly listen to and remember</b> ; likewise the laymen and laywomen. I have had this written that you may know <i>my intentions.</i> " |
| <b>IMPORTANT NOTE: Reverential Chanting develops sometime between Asoka's Reign and I-Tsing's Pilgrimage</b>   |  |
| Reading of a short sutta, praise of the Triple Gem, another sutta is read, prayers for merit   | I-Tsing, as witness during his pilgrimage to India, in the evening hours   |
| Recitation of several suttas   | Mahāvamsa of Sri Lanka   |
| "Tam Wat Phra"   | Ancient Teachers in Sri Lanka/Thailand   |
| "Tam Wat Chao" and "Tam Wat Yen"   | Phra Vajiranana<br>( <i>King Rama IV of Thailand</i> )   |
| "He ( <i>Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera</i> ) guided them in the correct way of practice, such as paying daily homage to the Buddha and performing morning and evening chanting, and they gladly followed his instructions." <sup>27</sup> |  |

Because, the Saṅgīti-sutta mentioned Mahāvira - the entire Tipiṭaka was examined to gain introspection into or determine the nature of this important historical religious-figure. Fourteen Theravāda Buddhist suttas assisted in learning more about the main non-Buddhist antagonist. It is often demonstrated that Buddha's doctrines are scrutinized against Jain doctrines, some of which

<sup>27</sup> Ācariya Mahā Boowa Nāṇasampanno (trn. Bhikkhu Sīlaratano), *Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera*, p. 91.



are mentioned here. The death of Mahāvira and the schism of his followers was an equally important historical factor for the presentation of the Saṅgīti-sutta. His death was the motivating catalyst for coming together to hold a gathering for hearing the exact teachings of the Buddha – to attempt to unify Buddhists and protect against doctrinal schisms – as would later occur throughout the centuries, in various nations. Prebish composed criteria for Buddhist councils – arguably the Saṅgīti-sutta is one of the earliest gatherings to gain an entire summarized-spectrum of Buddhist teachings. This auspicious gathering demonstrated the significance for detailing the extensive nature of doctrinal elements - conducted by one of the most preeminent Buddhist disciples. The chart, shown above, pertaining to historical chanting recommendations, demonstrates that political authority got involved in matters of Buddhism, and imposed its own will upon the Sangha. The Sangha, as it seems, has lost the authority to educate itself within its traditions, and willingly subjugated itself under political authority rather than remaining aloof from these influences, and continues to neglect its own traditional recommendations. Who chants the Saṅgīti-sutta, officially, today?



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# The Gods of Traffic: A Brief Look at the Hindu Intersection in Buddhist Bangkok

Justin McDaniel<sup>1</sup>



Any visitor to Thailand will undoubtedly pass dozens of shrines on street corners, at bus stations, and on monastic grounds to supposedly “non-Buddhist” deities. Besides the shrines to Thai royalty and national heroes, there are shrines to “Hindu” deities like Ganesha, Brahma, Śiva, Indra, and the uniquely Thai “Jatukham Ramathep.”<sup>2</sup> This is not a new phenomenon, there are shrines

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<sup>2</sup> Starting in 2004 and reaching its pinnacle in the summer of 2007, newspapers, television programs, film stars, and politicians in Thailand had regular commentaries on the popularity and economic impact of this new class of amulets from Nakhon Sri Thammarat in Southern Thailand called the Jatukham Ramathep. The flurry (what Thais came to call “khai” (fever)) of people who traveled to the South to purchase these amulets reached into the tens of thousands. When one group of these amulets went on sale two people were trampled to death as crowds rushed to the monastery cash in

and images dedicated to these deities found in the earliest Thai kingdoms.<sup>3</sup> Here I will briefly describe the shrines on one of the busiest intersections in Bangkok, Ploenchit, in the central commercial district of Siam Square. Here we will see that Hindu images are not a marginal feature of Thai religion, but visually and ritually central to Buddhist life in Thailand.

Perhaps the most popular shrine is that of the famous Than Thao Mahaphrom (referred to in English as the “Erawan Shrine,” shrine around a golden statue of a four-faced Brahma image cast in 1956 in front of what is now the Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel and across from the Central World Plaza Mall, National Police Headquarters,

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hand. There have been reports of people murdered to get their hands on rare Jatukham Ramathep. The amulet markets are full of inexpensive imitations and rare original runs of these amulets. There are t-shirts with images of the amulet on the front in every major mall and market in Thailand. I was given two of these amulets by scholar friends in November 2006 and June 2007. They are popular among the elite and the lower classes. There already have been Thai books written about their history. Thousands of people walked the street with these large round clay amulets hanging around their neck outside of their shirt. There are many reasons that this fever has hit Thailand -- economic speculation, peer pressure, and so on. One of the reasons the Jatukham Ramathep has become so popular is because it is considered the amulet made by a famous police major general from Southern Thailand who had killed over 65 “bandits” in his career and was never shot in the line of duty. Police Maj. Gen. Khunphantarak Rajadej (Khun Phan), who passed away in 2006 age of 104 is believed to have created the first Jatukham Ramathep amulet in 1987. The name is drawn from the Pali compound – *Catugamaramadeva* (Rama of the Four Towns). However, locally it is associated with a mythological Southern Thai prince who was have believed to have taken up arms against enemies if Buddhism. The name of the amulet may also come from the carved wooden doors of the monastery, Wat Mahathat in Nakhon Si Thammarat (Southern Thailand). Since there are four carved images of Hindu deities at Wat Mahathat, the amulet could have been named after these gods (not towns) who are loosely associated with the four protectors of Sri Lanka (Lakkhana, Rama, Sumana, and Khattugama). Relics were brought to Nakhon Si Thammarat from Sri Lanka in the twelfth century. The amulet’s name may come from a conflation of the names Khattugama and Ramadeva, traditional gods in Sri Lankan Buddhism and Hinduism. There are a number of different theories. Regardless of the origin of the amulet or the iconography of the image of the “Hindu” god on its face, it is important, partly, because it was made and promoted in the South by a police major general. This amulet is believed to have protected this most heralded police general, as well as the general public. The peace that he, Khun Phan, kept in the past, will return to the South.

<sup>3</sup> There have been a few studies of Hinduism in Thailand in general. For further reading see: S.N. Desai, *Hinduism in Thai Life*. Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 2005; Trilok Chandra Majupuria. *Erawan Shrine and Brahma worship in Thailand: With reference to India & Nepal*. Bangkok: Craftsman Press (1987); Penny van Esterik, “Interpreting a Cosmology: Guardian Spirits in Thai Buddhism,” *Anthropos Freiburg* 77.1-2 (1982): 1-15; Priyawat Kuanpoonpol, “Court Brahmins of Thailand and the celebration of the Brahmanic New Year,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 33.1 (1990): 21-51; Satya Vrat Shastri, “Brahmins in Thailand,” *Abhinandana-Bharati: Krishna Kanta Handiqui Felicitation Volume*. Calcutta: Gauhati, 1982; and, Satya Vrat Shastri, “Hindu Culture in Thailand,” *Amrtadhara: R.N. Dandekar Felicitation Volume*. Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1984.



and Gaysorn Plaza Mall.<sup>4</sup> This shrine to a Hindu god is so beloved by the people of Thailand that the foundation that administers it took in 1.5 million US dollars in 2004 alone from donations. A mentally disturbed man (or at least that is one of the rumors) was beaten to death by a crowd when he attacked the image with a sledgehammer in 2006. The former Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra was rumored to have prayed to the image and performed secret magical rituals to ensure his shaky political fortunes in 2006 right before he was forcibly removed from office by Sondhi Boonyarakalin. This shrine competes with prestige in the country with royally consecrated Buddha images and receives more visitors daily than nearly any other ritual site in the country. This is not a mere aberration or passing fancy. Unique rituals and liturgies, including the frequent performance of classical female dancers, Sanskritized-Thai chants, and the offering of yellow carnations and wooden elephants, have sprung up at the shrine.

This shrine connected to the Thai tradition of building “San Phra Phum” (Spirit Houses) on the grounds of homes and businesses to provide domiciles for land spirits who are displaced by human structures, has spawned the creation of dozens of copycat shrines throughout the country. Clearly, these ceremonies have not “worked” in most cases, because politicians like Taksin have lost power and Sondhi has been targeted for assassination (although the fact that he survived a daring assassination attempt might actually “prove,” for many, the power of his magic). The reasons they keep performing the rituals are numerous. They involve increasing their social prestige, their cultural capital, and out-performing each other all in front of television camera crews. However, the reason these performances are so effective (they attract and enthrall thousands of their respective supporters) is that they draw on common features of the Thai religious repertoire. Politicians need to perform these rituals, because they are expected to. It would be like a U.S. presidential candidate not having the “pancake breakfast” during the Iowa primaries, or a president not throwing out the first pitch

<sup>4</sup> Nathan McGovern’s MA thesis on this shrine is essential for understanding rituals associated with this site, “Brahmā Worship in Thailand” (2006: especially chapter six). Charles Keyes also produced (unpublished) a paper on the subject in 2006 “The Destruction of a Shrine to Brahma in Bangkok and the Fall of Taksin Shinawatra: the Occult and the Thai Coup in Thailand of September 2006.”.

for the annual Washington Nationals baseball team's home opener. It comes with the job.

The use of ritual to ensure political good fortune is not limited, of course, to Taksin. His political opponents, represented from 2007-present by the PAD (People's Alliance for Democracy) party led by Sondhi Limthongkul, have performed rituals to guarantee their political goals. After a series of bloody street battles between the PAD supporters and the government in Bangkok in the Fall of 2008, Sondhi led two rituals. The first was a circumambulation of the government house grounds dressed in white, sprinkling holy water, and chanting. He called this a "dhamma walk."<sup>5</sup> On the second occasion he stated that:

"For many years in the past, the powers of many sacred things including the spirit of the City Pillar, the Equestrian Statue of King Rama V, Phra Sayam Thewathirat, and the Emerald Buddha, have been suppressed by evil people using magic. 'Suppress' does not mean destroy, because sacred objects cannot be destroyed, as they have too much power. But 'suppress' means not allowing them to emit their power, by encircling them. This is true... Like at the statue of the Emerald Buddha... Behind it there is a stone. Evil-minded people had allied with some in the Royal Household Bureau to allow a Khmer adept to go behind the Emerald Buddha and take the stone away, because that stone is the important thing for emitting power... Tacks had been inserted at the six corners [of the state of King Rama V] so that the statue of the revered king could not emit its power. We drew out the tacks from all six places."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kultida Samabuddhi, "Sorcerer Sondhi wards off evil: Followers don white, clean, pray for victory," *Bangkok Post*, November 10, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Chang Noi, "PAD saves the nation from supernatural attack," *The Nation*, November 10, 2008. I thank Erick White for sending me this article. Chang Noi is a pseudonym for Christopher Baker. This pseudonym was made public on November 25, 2008 at a talk at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand.



A well-known historian and journalist noted that Sondhi openly accused Thaksin of being behind the destruction of the Erawan Brahma statue in March 2006. Sondhi said Thaksin “wished to thwart political forces rising up against him.”

Five of the most blatant attempts to cash-in on the popularity of the Erawan shrine are other shrines at this intersection like the one of the god Narayana (riding the mythical bird Garuda), the green goddess Lakshmi whose statue is on the fourth floor of the ultra-modern high-end Gaysorn Plaza shopping complex, the elephant headed god Ganesha, the triple god Trimurti, and the god (also green) Indra, all built within a 500 meter circumference. In front of the Intercontinental Hotel, the Central World Plaza Mall and Cinema Complex, the Amarin Plaza, and the Gaysorn Plaza respectively. .

Two of these shrines merit a further description. The first is a shrine to the Hindu deity, “Trimurti,” (a statue that represents three major deities in Hinduism: Brahma, Śiva, and Vishnu, apparently competing with the Erawan Shrine representing only Brahma across the street and the nearby shrine to the god Indra). It was established in front of the Zen Department Store in the Central World Plaza originally, but then moved because of construction 300 meters down the sidewalk and now sits next to the Ganesha image. The Trimurti platform and image measures over 25 feet high and is surrounded by a moats, as well as incense and flower holders, and donation boxes. The Narayana, Indra, Lakshmi, Erawan, and Ganesha shrines are particularly popular with those aspiring to become wealthy which would make them particularly appropriate since they each are in front of Thailand’s most expensive shopping malls and hotels. The Trimurti has a unique following, because it is popular with women especially on St. Valentine’s Day. St. Valentine’s Day, like Christmas, has become widely celebrated in Thailand despite its “Christian” origins. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008, I visited the shrine to make an offering and observed hundreds of young Thai women offering long-stemmed red roses (another imported tradition), red incense sticks, and red candles (the traditional three offerings to a Buddha image, colored red in honor of St. Valentine) to the shrine.



There was even a newly composed liturgy that the women read off of handouts as they knelt in front of the shrines holding their roses and hoping to find love. The liturgy consists of one short Pali benediction (sādhū sādhu sādhu ukāsa: “praise praise praise exaltation!”) and then a short Thai verse which only mentions the fact that the Trimurti is a great deity, but states nothing about his powers to help worshippers find love or companionship.<sup>7</sup> Despite the intention and the meaning of the chant having no relation, clearly this shrine drew a very specific group -- young women. One woman I spoke with said she was confident that despite not having a boyfriend, her offering would ensure she met the love of her life that very evening. Even though the Trimurti image is actually based on a statue from the sixteenth century in Ayutthaya, it has not been a particularly popular image in the history of Thai religions. Since a few urban legends claim that young women who knelt down to the shrine when it was cast in 2004 met the men of their dreams, it has become to be associated with luck in love. The Trimurti images in South Asia and in Ayutthaya were never associated with this specific type of blessing as far as I have been able to find.

Next to the Trimurti is the Ganesha shrine. Ganesha (Thai: Phra Phi Kanet) has long been a deity known throughout Southeast Asia, generally associated with the arts and learning. However, there has been a recent massive growth in the popularity of Ganesha images, shrines, amulets, and liturgies. Ganesha amulets and images are sold (“rented”) throughout the country especially at Wat Phra That Cho Hae in Phrae Province, Wat Trimit in Bangkok, and Wat Indrawihan. There are shrines at the Brahmanic training school (Thewasathan Bot Phrahm) in Bangkok, Phraratcha Wang Sanam Chan palace in Nakhon Pathom Province, murals of Ganesha at Wat Suthat in Bangkok, and an entire museum dedicated to Ganesha images and history in Chiang Mai. A very specific liturgy and ritual has been developed for Ganesha recently primarily thanks to the work of a Brahman ritualist named Thotsaphon Changphanitkun who is associated with Wat Umathewi (popularly known as “Wat Khaek”) a Hindu temple on Silom Road in downtown Bangkok. Every year (since 2004) he has held a massive festival in honor of

<sup>7</sup> “Ukāsa” is a strange spelling for Pali “ukkamsa.”



Ganesha and sells amulets, images, posters, plastic dolls, umbrellas, bumper stickers, and the like.<sup>8</sup> The appropriate times to worship Ganesha, Thotsaphon claims, are on the 9<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> on the month, between February and July, but never on Tuesdays. On those days, the worshipper should not eat meat and offer fruit of various sorts (especially bananas), milk, oyster sauce, and steamed rice sweets. While offering these gifts to an image of Ganesha, one should chant a Sanskritized Pali (with some vernacular Thai words as well) chant which begins with the word “Om,” but otherwise follows vocabulary and phrases common in Buddhist Pali chants in Thailand with the insertion of the name Ganesha in the middle of a chant that could easily be in honor of the Buddha. The chant is only three verses long and is a very simplistic series of honorifics. For example, the last verse reads in nearly Pali phrase using some vernacular Thai phonetic conventions: “tatiyampi phra phi ghanesavara sabbasiddhi bra siddhi me mahālābho bhavantu me” (for the third time, Oh venerable Ganesha, you are forever powerful, let you grant me success, great wealth and possessions). After chanting this one should light an oil lamp and a stick of incense, think of the wish you would like granted, concentrate deeply, and place the incense with your right hand along with a bottle of lamp oil, and other gifts at the feet of the shrine. Other chants to Ganesha have also been composed by Thotsaphon which have similar syntax and meaning. They are all very short and easy to read or memorize by visitors to various shrines. Ganesha has also gained notoriety because of celebrity endorsements and stories of the great success and wealth that followed their worship of Ganesha. These include the famous singer and actress, Aphaphon Nakhonsawan, as well as the action movie actors, Anucha Tosawat and Pokon Phonphisut.

Like Somdet To and Mae Nak, Ganesha, Trimurti, Jatukham Ramathep, and others have become important partially due to testimonials of famous and successful celebrities who have been saved, enriched, or have fallen in love because of being associated with them, performing their liturgies, holding their amulets, performing rituals in front of their shrines, and the like. The power of Somdet

<sup>8</sup> See for example a story about the 2007 festival on the front page of the newspaper *Thai Rath*: “Hae ruam wan goet Phra Phi Kanet,” *Thai Rath*, September, 17, 2550 [2007].



To (and in some cases, Mae Nak) is seemingly more authentic to some because they were actual historical figures who lived in Thailand. However, what does not seem important to most people is whether they are associated with Hinduism or Buddhism. In fact, the casting of Ganesha images and amulets is ritually supervised and performed by Buddhist monks at Buddhist monasteries like Wat Phikhunthong in Singburi Province, Wat Mahathat in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, as well as other monasteries in Phuket, Lad Phrao (Bangkok), and Chonburi. One of the largest casting and consecrations (*phithi pluk sek*) of Ganesha images in Thai history took place at Wat Pak Nam under the supervision of the popular Buddhist monk, Luang Pho Ke, on December 13, 2007.<sup>9</sup> The large shrine in front of the Central World Plaza and next to the Trimurti “love” shrine has begun to develop its own following and has its own liturgy.<sup>10</sup> This is not necessarily a sign of the decline of Buddhism or the rise in Hinduism in Thailand, it simply reflects a general lack of concern with religious boundaries and a valuing of abundance and security. Ganesha is said to protect those with money and help those without it get it.<sup>11</sup>

This is a good example of how Thai religious repertoires work and how cultural movements are created. Thai rituals and liturgies are never static. Over the twentieth century, many major scholars of ritual and liturgy like Freud, Staal, Levi-Strauss, and Douglas saw ritual as static, universally understandable, structural, and rule-based. However, in Thailand, rituals and liturgies are mutable. We must see how rituals and liturgies change overtime, and how this change makes them dynamic and perennially useful to both those in power and those in need of a touch of power. Thai rituals and liturgies are constantly changing. However, they can be legitimately grouped together because they share a common repertoire of tropes, meters,

<sup>9</sup> Information about these rituals and liturgies can be found on pamphlets at Wat Umathewi and the Thewasathan in Bangkok. Thotsaphon Changphanitkun wrote a short book as well *Phra Phi Kanet* (2550 [2007]). An amulet of Ganesha comes with every purchase of the book.

<sup>10</sup> The liturgy is distributed for free on flyers next to the shrine. There are three verses which all start with the Sanskrit “Om” and besides using the Sanskrit spelling of “Ganeṣa,” the chant is otherwise in simple Pali. All three are straightforward litanies of praises for Ganesha, referring to him as glorious in actions and thoughts, and a great god, worthy of being praised forever -- “mahādevo ahaṃ vandāmi sabbadā.”[sic].

<sup>11</sup> Peter Skilling has shown that Brahmins and Buddhist monks were tied together in ritual, inscriptions, and royal declarations from at the least the Sukhothai period -- “Kings, Sangha, Brahmins” (2007: 182-215).



rhythms, lexicon, implements, and especially aesthetic/physical performative contexts (i.e. the colors, altars, incense, flowers, etc. all look, feel, sound, and smell similarly). Most Buddhists in Bangkok do not see these supposedly “Hindu” images as foreign to Buddhism, but as simply part of being religious in Thailand.



# Searching for Love: Junction Between Thai Buddhism, Consumerism and Contemporary Thai Film

Pram Sounsamut<sup>1</sup>



When the Buddha taught his monks for the first time, he said:

... Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: ... sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering — in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging objects.

...  
Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainder less fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting, of the same craving. ... (Nanamoli Thera, 1981).

But, today Thai youth listen to things such as:

‘...Although I understand that I am still reckless. I fall in love with you, not scared of being hurt. The more I let my heart get deeper, the more I hurt my heart. How much it hurts...How hurt it is...how much it is in pain...I will love you. *It is just*

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*because of love, I will accept it and endure it for you, only you. How much it hurts...How hurt it is...how it is suffering...I can bear it. Even finally I will suffer all day and night. I will not change my mind....'* (Techatanawat, 2007)<sup>2</sup>

When we compare the word from the sutta with contemporary pop-song lyrics, we can see that the 'ideology of love' of Thai people, especially of the youth, is changing. The Buddha gives us the advice that 'love' is suffering, therefore 'love' ought to be ceased because '...the basic wish of any living being is to avoid suffering...'. (Goleman, 2004:77) Thai youth understand that 'love is suffering', they have learned this from school, but they are not encouraged or eager to relinquish it. Love becomes a 'must' for their life; love is a goal of their life. For them, to love someone and to have someone to love is the most important element of their life.

It is the aim of this paper to give the reader a broad picture of the changing ideology of love of Thai people. I will explain this by using two popular tragic romances, in the form of films, as examples. Before continuing, there are some limitations to this paper that I must explain. First, this paper is written on the assumption that the majority of Thai people are Buddhist, Theravādin. To be a good Buddhist, they have to follow Buddhist teachings and practice Dharma. The most important of the teachings of Buddhism is the four noble truths, which is the core teaching of Buddhism. Additionally, when we talk about love, or the ideology of love in this paper, I only refer to romantic love, or love as an attachment to someone.

The paper will begin with the discussion about the significance of death and funeral rites. Then, it will give a general idea of how tragic romance is related to 'ideology'. After that, I will discuss some difference between ideology of love in relation to consumerism. Later on, I will give an example of the ideology of love in Thai tragic romance films between 1997 and 2007. I sum up this paper by posting a recent problem of Buddhist Teaching in Thailand and some interesting issues that seem to offer solutions to this problem.

<sup>2</sup> The original lyrics: ... แม้รู้ดีแกใจยังเผลอ หลงรักเธอไม่กลัวซ้ำใจ ยิ่งปล่อยให้ลงลึกเท่าไร ก็ยิ่งซ้ำหัวใจเท่านั้น ซ้ำเท่าไร เจ็บซ้ำเท่าไร ปวดร้าวเพียงใด ก็จจะรักเธอ แคเพราะรัก ก็ยอม ก็ทนได้เพื่อเธอ เธอคนเดียวเท่านั้น ซ้ำเท่าไร เจ็บซ้ำเท่าไร ปวดร้าวเพียงใด จะยอมรับมัน (ทนได้ทั้งนั้น) หากสุดท้าย แม้ยังปวดร้าวทุกคืนวัน ก็ไม่ยอมเปลี่ยนใจ

### The Significance of Death

We are not certain about our life. Therefore, when we have a big change in our lives, we perform a ritual to ensure our future. The four rituals of life are birth, transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage and funeral. A funeral is the most uncertain transition of life. In other rituals, if something goes wrong, we have a chance to fix it. But, a funeral is totally different. We do not have a chance to re-perform a funeral. Technically, people can not die twice in one life.

We are all scared of death. We are not sure where we are going after we die. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, life after death is still a mystery. The more we understand what we call ‘science’, especially ‘biology’, the more we do not understand life after death. Nevertheless, religion and local beliefs (also primitive beliefs) always have an explanation of the place where one will be after passing away. ‘Myth’ tells us; where humans come from and where they go after dying. The funeral is often associated with those myths. Thus, a funeral, as a practice, is usually performed to reflect a particular person’s idea of ‘life after death.’”

In general, on each night of Thai Buddhist funerals, the host of the funeral will invite a monk to recite the *Abhidhamma*<sup>3</sup> On the last day of ceremony, the dead body will be cremated to show the impermanence of life. People will create a cremation site that mirrors the ‘Sumeru Mountain’. This is a symbol that the spirit of the dead will be transformed to heaven where Sumeru Mountain is its core.

If we look closely at the Thai Buddhist funeral, we will understand that Thai people believe in the cycle of life or rebirth. The *Abhidhamma* chanting teaches the dead and their relatives to give up the body and to understand that the body is impermanent. As a result, the dead can pass to another life wisely while the relatives are willing to do good deeds. Thus, funeral rite is not just a funeral; it is a ceremony that reflects the ideology of life of people, in our case Thai Buddhist people.

Death in a tragic romance does the same thing as a funeral. Whenever someone dies in a movie, the ideology of life will be reflected in the funeral scene and/or a few scenes later. The dialogue

<sup>3</sup> This *Abhidhamma* chanting is unique in Thai Buddhism. The venerable monks from the early times shorten it from *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*.



between the characters will be about life. What is life? What do we live for? What we are doing next? How to live after we have learned from the death? These are some question of life which usually arise and are answered in the movie after someone dies. That is to say, death in a tragic romance is used in one way to intensify the audience's emotion and let them get to the climax of the movie. In another way, it is used to give answers about life and the ideology of life.

### **Tragic Romance and Lessons from Death**

I use 'tragic romance' here to refer to a romance in which the climax of that romance presents a great lost or the death of the protagonist. It is not necessary for the leading role, either the actress and/or actor, to die, but it could be the death of someone in the romance that impacts the protagonist. The main character will learn something from that lost and will hopefully gain some insight into the meaning of life.

What do we learn from the tragic romance? There are two steps to answering this question. First has to do with the science of emotion; 'Love' is a 'higher cognitive emotion'. Even though love is universal but "Higher cognitive emotion (like love) ... are more capable of being influenced by conscious thoughts, and This in turn is probably what allows higher cognitive emotions to be more culturally variable than the basic emotions." (Evans, 2003:20) Thus, love is a cultivating process. That is why love is involved with 'ideology'. That is why different cultures and societies have different meanings of love; and, that is why different religions define love differently.

Second, negative emotion lives longer in the human mind. Keith Oatley, Dacher Keltner and Jennifer M. Jerkins' (2006:172) book *Understanding Emotion* divided emotion into two categories, which are positive emotions like happiness, excitement, gratitude, etc. and negative emotions like sadness, distress, anger, fear, etc. Among these two types of emotions, in relation to the cognitive process, negative emotions have a stronger affect on the mind. It lives longer in the memory and gives the subject more attention to the stimuli rather than positive emotions.



So, what does tragic romance, as another kind of literature, have to do with ‘ideology’? David Hawkes (2003:125) writes;

It seems that ‘art’ (which term remains suspiciously undefined) occupies an area midway between ‘science’ and ‘ideology’. It also seems as though art provides a conduit by which one may pass from ideology to ‘knowledge’ which is science. It does this by unmasking the contradictions within ideology, making them visible by imposing upon it a predetermined aesthetics form. This argument pursued by Althussers’ friend Pierre Macherey, in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966). ‘...Literature takes up a position in between truth and falsehood; its twists and distorts ‘the every day language which is the language of ideology’ (59), thus distancing the reader from this language, drawing attention to its ideological nature, and so making possible a later transition to a scientific ‘knowledge’ of ideology.

From Hawkes’ views, literature, or narrative in a new language, is another kind of ‘Ideological Apparatus’ because it given peoples an education. That is to say, literature is another kind of ‘education institution’. Greek tragedy has served this ‘Ideological Apparatus’ function. In a famous book of Aristotle, he gives a most quote meaning of tragedy;

Tragedy is a representation of an action that is serious, complete, and of some magnitude; in the language that is pleausably embellished, the different forms of embellishment occurring in separate parts; presented in the form of action, not narration; by means of pity and fear bringing about the catharsis of such emotion. ... (Murrey, 2004:64)

The word ‘catharsis’ has been translated in many ways but one of the most acceptable definitions is a ‘moral education’ (see Lear, 1992: 318-326). New ideology scholars and Greek masters agree that in someway narrative, in general, has an effect on human ideology. It is another kind of ideological apparatus. Louis Althusser (2001:105), who defines ideology as a “ ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” He gives a very strong statement that; “I believe that



the ideological state apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations ... is the educational ideological apparatus”.

Tragic romance answers or at least gives an idea regarding love. What is love? What is the goal of love? How to practice it with the one we love? After the audience absorbs the story, together with the idea presented, and if they agree with that message, it can become the audience’s ideology. Moreover, if such ideology is accepted by the masses and becomes the ideology of the majority, the producer will add or reproduce that ideology again and again. The more it is presented, the deeper it will dig down in the mind of the audience. Therefore, tragic romance is another mode of an ideological apparatus.

Before moving to another section, I would like to conclude my thesis in this section. A Tragic romance and narrative play an important role in cultivating and reestablishing the ideology of its audience. Tragic romance is a medium of teaching and giving a meaning of ‘love’, ideologically.

### **Romantic Love in Buddhism**

After the Buddha became enlightened, he taught his first group of monks ‘the four noble truths’. That is, to understand what is suffering, what is the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to cessation of suffering. Although, there are many other teachings, it is well accepted that the four noble truths are the supreme teaching.

The objective of the four noble truths, which is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists, is to ascend or acquire ‘*nibbāna*’<sup>4</sup>. The first thing mentioned in the four noble truths is ‘Birth is suffering’. To end the suffering is to not be born again. Therefore, the most well-known explanation or translation of ‘*nibbāna*’ is ‘not born again’. *Mahānagara Nibbāna* in the Buddhist cosmology is, thus, the highest level of heaven. The person who enters *Nibbāna* will not be reborn. Not being born again means not suffering again. According to the ideology of Buddhism, we are to believe that as long as we have ‘*karma*’, we will

<sup>4</sup> The idea of ‘*Nibbāna*’ is a very complicate idea and it has many argument of its. In this paper, my intention is only giving an idea about ‘*Nibbāna*’ of popular Thai Buddhism, or what common Thai people believe. It is not a complete definition of Thai Buddhism and the in depth meaning of ‘*Nibbāna*’ in Theravāda Buddhism.

be born again and again until we can get rid of *karma* which mean going to *nibbāna*. Teachings on the ‘life cycle’ or rebirth informs us that *nibbāna* is the best place to go and, in order to go to *nibbāna*, we have to understand the four noble truths and practice them, which will lead us to *nibbāna*. The Buddha suggested:

... The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is simply the noble eight fold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. ... (Ñānamolī Thera, 1981)

In the beginning of the paper, we learned that ‘association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering’. That is to say, love is suffering. Love here means ‘attachment’ and/or ‘clinging’ to someone or something. However, there are many kinds and levels of love in Buddhism. Here, in this paper we will focus only on romantic love.

Therefore, in the ideology of Buddhism, generally romantic love is suffering. According to the teachings, this kind of suffering is caused by the ‘craving for sensual desires’ or *Kāmatanāhā*. The Buddha said:

... The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being accompanied by enjoyment and lust, and enjoying this and that; in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being. ... (Ñānamolī Thera, 1981)

That is to say, if we want to stop suffering, we have to understand and prevent ourselves from the origin of suffering. The craving for sensual desire is cause by or starts from ‘romantic love’. Again, in the end for Buddhists, romantic love, no matter if it is successful or not, will cause suffering. Finally, if we do not want to be reborn, which is the ultimate goal of Buddhism, we have to have cessation of the cause of suffering.

Apart from the ideology ‘love is suffering’, another core belief in Buddhism that relates to romantic love is ‘*Pubbessannivāsa*’,





meaning ‘previous association’ or cohabitation in a previous life. Buddhist believes in the consequences of *karma*; that *karma* from our previous lives and this life will be reflected in this life. Therefore, if someone is married to someone in this life, it means that they have cohabitated as a couple in a previous life and/or they prayed or wished to meet again in this life.

‘*Pubbesannivāsa*’ explicitly appears in all major *jātakas*, or tales of the past lives of the Buddha. In *jātaka* narrative structure, before ending every *jātaka* there will be ‘*Prachumchādok*’, or *Samodhāna* which is the summary of the *jātaka*. The main purpose of this part is to inform the listener who is reborn as whom in the last life of Gautama Buddha. For example; in the very famous Vessantara Jātaka, Vessantara was reborn as Gautama Buddha, Maddī was reborn as Yasodarābimbā, Jūjaka Brahmin was reborn as Phra Devadata. That is to say, all of the persons who are involved with the Buddha have a previous association with him at least one time in a previous life before he becomes enlightened.

Additionally, the fantasy version of ‘the Life of Buddha’, *Pat\$hamsambodhi* on the *Abhisambodhiparivatta* episode 10, also refers to the important idea of previous lives. On the night the Buddha became enlightened, early in that night the book says:

When it was the beginning of the night, the Buddha, who had won over Māra, developed concentration until he gained eight meditative attainments. He spoke of the **recollection of former lives** with this higher knowledge. Then, with constant mindfulness, he recollected the events backward from his final throne ...<sup>5</sup>

After he recalled all his past lives, reaching hundred thousand *mahākālpā*<sup>6</sup>, he becomes enlightened. The bold indicates the idea of past lives which affects this life. The reason for enlightenment in this last life is a result of his prayer and good deeds from his past

<sup>5</sup> The original text: ครั้นล่วงเข้าราตรีปฐมยาม สมเด็จพระพิชิตมารพุทธังกรราชทรงเจริญพระสมาธิภาวนา ยังอัญญสมาบัติให้บังเกิดแล้ว ทรงพระปรารภเพื่อจะระลึกบุญเพนิวาसानุสสติญาณ ด้วยกำลังพระอภิญา และ ทรงพระอนุสรจินดาจับเดิมแต่ปัจฉิมบัลลังก์อาสน์ โดยปฏิโลมถอยหลังลงไป

<sup>6</sup> ‘Mahākālp’ is a simile of time, it can not be counted. One mahākālp is equal to the action which every one hundred years an angel, using a very light fabric, thin like a smoke from incense, wipes a mountain, which is both in height and width about 20 kilometres, until the mountain collapses and becomes flat, that is one Mahākālp long.

lives. That is to say, our previous lives are strongly associated and influence this life.

In conclusion, there are two ideas about romantic love in Thai Buddhism. Firstly, ‘romantic love is suffering’. To be attached to someone or something will finally cause suffering no matter how long it is, especially a romantic love which leads to sensual craving. While the supreme happiness is not suffering, it is an ideal that a Buddhist has to cease sensual craving. Secondly, ‘previous association’ or ‘cohabitation in a previous life’ affects this life. When we find someone we love or we association with someone in this life, it does not happen just because of this life. It is a consequence of a past life. We may do both bad and good deeds from a past life, thus we find each other again to pay for that deed in this life.

#### **Thai Films Before and After the Past Century**

The Thai film industry can be traced back to 1897 when films from India, Japan and Australia were first shown in Thai theaters. The first film that was produced by a Thai person was launched in 1927. (Tanawangnoi, 1997:13) Over the past century of the Thai film industry, there have been many turning points, with rising and falling periods in accordance with politics, economics and war. However, the Thai film industry began its second golden age in 1998. A new history of the Thai film industry began with the film ‘Bangkok Gangster’. Before that time, Thai films faced competition from Hollywood films. Normally, the production and screenplay of Thai films were not of much concern. The plot was very similar and the production was also poor. Some films were shot in only three days.

Thus, Thai film producers and directors had to change their style in order to compete with Hollywood productions. This big change can be witnessed by the better quality of screenplay, putting musical scores into the films, more shooting angles and putting more capital into the productions. That is to say, at that time Thai films became more of a piece of art rather than just a moving picture. After 1998, the increase of young directors who were educated in Western methods of producing films transformed the Thai film industry,



The coming of Hollywood films not only impacted the way films were produced, it also affected the message and the ideology within the films as well. As mentioned above, the films in this new age were concerned greatly with the message or moral.. The film has to say something to the audience. At least, it has to give some lesson for life to the audience. Thus, the film is not just another form of entertainment; it is a new institution of education and entertainment for presenting ideas to the people.

In the past Thai people judged a movie by the actors/performers, but nowadays they judge it by content and emotion. The audience looks more closely at the message of the story and tries to get ‘something’ from the film.

There have been many Thai romances film and tragic romances during the past ten years. However in this paper, I will review only the message about ‘love’ in Thai tragic romance films by using two films as an example: ‘Dear Dakanda’ and ‘*The Letter*’.

These two films have one thing in common; both films use a letter as a medium to communicate between the main protagonists. One line from ‘Dear Dakanda’ comes from a letter that the actor writes to his former friend. He says: ‘the best part of writing a letter is not thinking whether or not they will read the letter, but it is the moment that we think of writing them’.<sup>7</sup>

The climax of these two stories is the scene when the protagonist is reading (or viewing) a letter and realizes that there is another person thinking of her and loving her. The advantage of using a letter in the film is that the audience does not have to interpret the mind, the symbol or the acting to understand the character’s thought. The audience just has to listen to the words in the letter and they will understand the feelings and thoughts of the character. Additionally, it makes the movie more romantic, especially in the digital age when people very rarely write love letters.

<sup>7</sup> The original text: ส่วนที่ดีที่สุดของการเขียนจดหมายไม่ได้อยู่ที่ตอนมานั่งนึกว่าเขาจะอ่านจดหมายของเราหรือไม่ แต่เป็นตอนที่เราคิดจะเขียนถึงเขาเสียมากกว่า.



### Ideology of Love in Thai Films

In comparing the ideology of love in Thai Buddhism with the ideology of love in contemporary Thai films, some differences between them are apparent. First, as mentioned earlier, although love is suffering, it is considered a must for life to search for and to have romantic love. Second, people lack belief in previous association. The following are examples extracted from the two films mentioned above.

#### Love is a must of life

Beginning with ‘*Dear Dakanda*’, this film presents ‘love is a hope for life’. Love makes life go on and makes your life worth living. You are alive because of love. Even if love makes you hurt, you still have to find a new one to love. At the end of the last letter, Mu writes to Dakanda:

...Dakanda, now I have already taken off my cast, even though it is not really quite healed. But yesterday I packed my backpack and I am ready to journey again. Where will I go? It may be some place where the time is not turning backward. and A new day for me will begin. This is the last letter for you. Tomorrow, when the sun rises, I may stand on the roof of some boat and think of nothing. Nui prohibits me from getting on the roof again. But, that’s it! How often can we fall off the roof of a boat? ... Even if I fall again, I am already used to the pain.<sup>8</sup>

The letter consists of many similes. First, the film uses the act of packing a bag and going on a journey, along with ‘the place where time does not turn backward’, to refer to leaving and forgetting the past and beginning a new life. Then the ‘sunrise; is a symbol of a new life and for new hope to begin. Finally, standing on the roof of the boat, and risk falling off again, means he is willing to start loving and have a relationship again. This time he is not afraid of being hurt by love. From the letter we can clearly see the message of the film. Mu leaves Chiang Mai because he is heartbroken. He journeys to

<sup>8</sup> The original text: ดากานดาตอนฉันถอดฝืดออกแล้วนะ ถึงจะยังไม่ค่อยหายดีเท่าไร แต่เมื่อวานฉันก็เก็บของลงเป้แล้วพร้อมที่จะออกเดินทางอีกครั้ง จะไปไหนนะเธอ คงเป็นสักที่ที่เวลาเลิกเดินถอยหลัง แล้ววันใหม่ของฉันจะเริ่มต้นจดหมายถึงแกฉบับนี้เป็นฉบับสุดท้ายแล้ว พรุ่งนี้พอพระอาทิตย์ขึ้น ฉันก็คงยืนอยู่ชมแดดฟ้าเรือสักลำ แล้วไม่เขียนอะไรอีกนี่ยุ่เคยห้ามฉันเด็ดขาดไม่ให้ขึ้นไปบนนั้น แต่ก็นะดากานดา จะมีกี่ครั้งกันเชื่อว่าที่คนเราจะตกจากแดดฟ้าเรือ และถึงจะตกลงมาอีกฉันก็เจ็บจนชินแล้วแหละ



Pa-ngan to cure himself. At sometime he finds a new lover and decides to start a new love without being afraid of getting hurt again. From the letter, Mu, who has been suffering from the unsuccessful love in Chiang Mai, is ready to start a new love, even if in the end it may cause him hurt again; he is not scared of that.

This also describes how love is a must for humans. You can not live alone without romantic love. You will be worth nothing if you do not have someone to love. Love becomes an indication of success for one's life as a human being. Before Dakanda accepts Koh as her boyfriend, she says to Mu:

Dakanda: I am in my 4<sup>th</sup> year now. I have yet to have a boyfriend. If I pass to the 5<sup>th</sup> year and still have no boyfriend, I must go on sale like Fhuyern said.

Mu: So what! It is not necessary. Since I was born, I have never had a girlfriend. I still live, not die.

Dakanda: A person like you! If you open yourself and let other people truly know you, I guarantee someone will be interested in you for sure.<sup>9</sup>

From the dialogue, we can see that love becomes a factor for measuring the value of a person. Your value will drop if you reach a certain age and you can not find a boy/girlfriend. If we look at Mu's answer, we will find the very same ideology, even though he says that having a lover is not important. It is because he does not want Dakanda to be Koh's girlfriend, although he does not say this specifically. In the last scene of the movie, when his proposal has been refused by Dakanda, he walks soullessly to the train station and goes back to Bangkok. His journey in this story also begins with his inner confusion of being useless and unvalued because of that refusal from Dakanda. Finally at Pa-ngan, he thinks he is useful again because he find Nui, who gives him love.

<sup>9</sup> The text: ดากานดา: ฉันก็อยู่ปี ๔ แล้วนะโว้ย ยังไม่มีแฟนเลย แล้วถ้าเกิดขึ้นปี ๕ แล้วยังไม่มีแฟนอีกนะโว้ย ต้องโดนลดราคาเหมือนที่ไอ้ฟูเหียนว่าเลยอะ  
หมู: แล้วไงวะ มันไม่เห็นจำเป็นเลย ตั้งแต่เกิดมาฉันก็ยังไม่มีแฟน ก็อยู่ได้ไม่ตาย  
ดากานดา: อย่างแกนะ ถ้าแกได้เปิดตัวเองนะโว้ย ให้คนอื่นเขาได้รู้จักแกจริงๆ นะ รับรองเขาต้องชอบตัวแกแน่ๆ



The film was inspired by one of the most important message from *La Petit Prince*. In that book, the little prince meets a fox who teaches him how to be ‘tamed’. That is to say, how to love and react to the ones you love. The fox teaches the little prince that you can not become someone if you do not make a relationship with someone:

“People” says the fox “have guns and they hunt. It’s quite troublesome. And they also raise chickens. That the only interesting thing about them. Are you looking for chicken?”

“No,” said the little prince, “I’m looking for friends. What does tamed mean?”

“It’s something that’s been too often neglected. It means, ‘to create ties’?”

“To create ties’?”

“That’s right,” the fox said. “For me you’re only a little boy just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you have no need of me, either. For you, I’m only a fox like hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tamed me, we will need each other. You will be the only boy in the world for me. I’ll be the only fox in the world for you...” (Saint-Exupéry, 2000:59)

The book encourages its reader to be ‘tamed’ with someone or something spiritually. In the beginning, the fox mentions the man with the gun who raises chickens. The fox likes him because he raises chickens which are food for the fox. The fox is not ‘tied’ with him. Therefore, even if he provides the fox with food, he is still not his friend. This is a satire. Everyone knows the meaning of ‘friend’, but does not understand what a ‘friend’ is. For the fox, a friend is more than knowing each other, but that we have a ‘tie’ with that person also. That is to say, ‘attachment’ or ‘love’. We cannot be ‘someone’ or we cannot be recognized, if we have not been tamed or loved.



Thus, the film has denominated love as a ‘must’ for life. It is a thing that makes your live worthy. Additionally, no matter how often you suffer from love, you still have to find a new one to love. Finally one day you will find love and your life will be complete.

‘*The Letter*’ also presents the same message. It begins with the ideology that love is to make the one you love happy. That is to say, love is to give. Even though this is a cliché for tragic romances, it is interesting that ‘to give’ in this film means to take care of each other, both mentally and physically. During the period before Ton and Dew get married, Ton helps Dew recover from her serious mental situation. After Kate dies, Ton brings Dew to see his tree <sup>10</sup> and says:

I don’t know why on spur of moment I want to find new relatives in addition to my old tree. When I see it spread out, I feel good. It reminds me that there are always new things in life, no matter what happens. I want you to start a new life too. Promise me, Dew! You will never cry again.<sup>11</sup>

Again, when Dew refuses to go to correct her work at Bangkok, she feels desperate. On the one side is her work and another side is the one she loves. Ton tells her to go to work in Bangkok:

Dew, you have to live further. Take it as my plea. I want Dew to have happiness. I don’t want to see you suffer. Do you know? Every night I do not dare close my eyes because I am afraid I won’t wake up and be able to see you again. I am not sure, when I will die. If I could settle it, it would be great. Then, I will not be tortured like this. But as I cannot choose, I want everyday remaining to see Dew full of life; being the same Dew, whom I have loved. I promise that I will not die before you come back.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This tree his parent planted on the day he was born. Since his parent died when he was a child, he treats this tree as a relative; it is the only relative left for him.

<sup>11</sup> The original text: ผมไม่รู้เป็นอย่างไร อยู่ๆ ผมก็อยากหาญาติเพิ่มให้กับต้นไม้ต้นเก่าของผม เวลาที่ผมเห็นมันแตกหน่อ งอกงามที่ไรเห็นแล้วมันสบายใจดี เหมือนมันทำให้ผมรู้สึกว่ามีอะไรบางอย่าง ชีวิตก็จะมีสิ่งใหม่เกิดขึ้นเสมอ ผมอยากให้คุณ เริ่มต้นชีวิตใหม่เหมือนกัน สัญญากับผมนะดี คุณจะไม่ร้องไห้อีก

<sup>12</sup> The original text: ดิวยังต้องมีชีวิตต่อไปนะ ถือว่าผมขอรับรองแล้วกัน ผมอยากให้คุณมีความสุข ผมไม่อยากเห็นคุณนั่ง อมทุกข์อยู่อย่างนี้ ดิวรู้ไหม ทุกวันนี้ผมไม่กล้าแม้กระทั่งจะหลับตาด้วยซ้ำ เพราะผมกลัวว่าจะไม่ได้ตื่นขึ้นมาเจอตัวอีก ผมเอง ก็ไม่รู้ตัวหรอกนะว่าจะตายวันไหน ถ้ากำหนดได้คงจะดีนะ จะได้ไม่ทรมานแบบนี้ แต่เมื่อมันเลือกไม่ได้ ผมก็อยากให้คุณวันที่ เหลืออยู่ ผมจะได้เห็นตัวที่มีชีวิตชีวา เป็นตัวคนเดิมที่ผมรัก ผมสัญญาว่าผมจะไม่ยอมตายจนกว่าตัวจะกลับมา.



Apart from taking care of her psychologically, all the time that Dew stays in Chiang Mai Ton takes care of her doing everything he can. He does laundry, cooks food, cleans the house and nurses Dew when she is sick. On the other end, when Ton suffers from a disease, Dew takes care of him and nurses him all the time. Even though she is a city girl who has never ironed or done any housework, she does it all. It is the simple matter of taking care of each other. It is not just physical action, but it has a value in feeling and heart. Foods may not be delicious like in the finest restaurant, cloths may not be clean like sending them to a professional cleaner or hot rice soup may not help as much for a cold as an injection, but these things are the fuel for life because they come from the heart. The recipient can feel the warmth of the giver.

Many couples in the busy world of Bangkok, or other major metropolitan cities, barely look after each other. It seems as if they just stay together in one house, which causes the problem of a large number of divorces and unhappy family lives. People may blame economic factors or the rush of city life, but, most importantly it is that they do not 'see' each other anymore. They forget to take care of each other. They forget to give love to each other. This movie draws a picture of what it means to be 'born for each other'. They both give their hearts to each other. Although at the end of the story Ton dies, his unconditional love for Dew still remains in Dew's heart. Dew also continues her life with love from Ton and lives with her past memories.

Unlike '*Dear Dakanda*', '*The Letter*' does not tell us to search for new love, but it tells us 'to use love as a fuel for life'. Even though it seems different, it is the same message: life without romantic love is lifeless. We must have romantic love in our lives. Dew does not seek a new love because she remembers Ton's love which is enough for her to live. Moreover, Ton and Dew make a promise to see each other again. Therefore, she continues her life with some hope in the future that she will find him and love him again.



### The idea of Pubbesannivāsa

In *Dear Dakanda*, the film presents the ideology ‘You have to find love, love will not find you.’ That is to say, the film quite (or not) believes in *Pubbesannivāsa* or previous association. In the last part of the film<sup>13</sup>, the events reflect this ideology:

[Nui scatters Jiew’s ashes on the beach where Mu, Nui and Jiew used to play together]

Mu: From now on, Jiew will not wander anymore.

Nui: Mu, do you believe in rebirth and the process of becoming? As someone say; we will go to heaven, to hell or go to some star.

Mu: I don’t know.

Nui: Nonetheless, I try to believe. It would be sad if we only had this one life. Mu, do you remember the Little Prince?

Mu: I can remember.

Nui: Jiew made me think of the Little Prince. Mu, will you think Jiew is going to live on a star as such?

Nui: Mu, do you believe in a ‘soul mate’ from a previous life.

Mu: The same as in a song?

Nui: That say, the one we loved from a previous life is searching for us in this life in order that we can see each other and love each other again. I do not believe it. Unless it is real, one life is enough for one guy.

Nui: I have given a chance to every guy who has loved me. Mu, know what! There is no one who has really loved me.

<sup>13</sup> The film transposes the situation between Pa-ngan and Chiang Mai. However, I will quote only from the event that happen in Pa-ngan



Nui: Mu!

Nui: Can you love me?<sup>14</sup>

We can see two things from the above. First, it is more evidence for the ideology ‘Love is a must for life’. Nui says: ‘I have given a chance to everyone who has loved me’. This means she has had more than one boyfriend before she met Mu. Surely, she has gotten hurt from those guys. However, she is still searching for love and hopes that one day she will find true romantic love.

Another matter is the idea of ‘previous association’. It is clear from Nui’s dialogue that she is hesitating to believe in previous association. She may face many failures. She begins hopelessly. Finally, she denies believing in previous association. Furthermore, if the ultimate goal of all Buddhist, as the Buddha suggested, is going to ‘*Nibbāna*’ or *nirvarna*, Nui also denies this idea and hopes to be reborn as she says: ‘It would be sad, if we only had this one life.’ She does not see that life is suffering. She loves to have life and wants to be reborn.

However, ‘*The Letter*’ is totally different. In the trailer to the film, the promotion team selected the following speech to advertise the film:

<sup>14</sup> The original text: (นุ้ยไปรยอ้งคารของจีวิตนหาดทรายที่หมูกับจีวิตเคยไปวิ่งเล่นด้วยกัน)

หมู: ต่อไปนี้จีวิตคงไม่ต้องเร่ร่อนอีกแล้วนะ

นุ้ย: หมูเชื่อเรื่องชาติภพหรือไม่ ที่เขาบอกว่าตายแล้วไปสวรรค์ ไปนรก ไปอยู่บนดวงดาวนะ

หมู: ไม่รู้เหมือนกัน

นุ้ย: แต่เราพยายามจะเชื่อนะ มันคงเศร้าถ้าเวลาของเรามีแค่ชาตินี้

(นุ้ยสะอื้น) หมูจำเจ้าชายน้อยได้ไหม

หมู: จำได้

นุ้ย: จีวิตทำให้คิดถึงเจ้าชายน้อยนะ... หมูว่า จีวิตจะไปอยู่บนดวงดาวเหมือนกันไหม .....

นุ้ย: หมูว่าเรื่องคู่แท้แต่ในชาติก่อนมีจริงไหม

หมู: เหมือนในเพลงอะเธอ

นุ้ย: ที่เขาบอกว่าคู่รักของเราในชาติก่อนตามหาเราในชาตินี้ เพื่อที่จะได้พบกันแล้วก็รักกัน

แต่เราไม่เชื่อหรอกนะ แต่ถ้ามันจะจริง ชาติเดียวก็พอแล้วสำหรับผู้ชายคนนึง .....

นุ้ย: เราให้อีกาสทุกคนที่รักเรา แต่หนูรู้อะไรไหมยังไม่เคยมีใครรักเราจริงสักคน .....

นุ้ย: หมู ..... นุ้ย: เธอจะรักเราได้ไหม





‘If two people are born for each other, even though they come from different places, no matter how far it is, they will meet. The belief of *pubbesannivāsa*’ (previous association) is real.’<sup>15</sup>

It is the speech that Ton’s boss gives at Ton and Dew’s wedding. We can see the idea of previous association has a strongly influence on this film. Additionally, on Valentine’s night, Ton comes to visit Dew before Ton goes back to Chiang Mai and he asks:

Ton: Will we meet again?

Dew: I don’t know! It up to destiny.<sup>16</sup>

Later, after the wedding, Ton says to Dew; ‘Thank you Dew that you were born for me (ขอบคุณนะดิ้ว ที่คุณเกิดมาเพื่อผม)’. Again, one day after Dew comes back from Bangkok, Ton brings warm water and soaks Dew’s feet to make her feel relaxed. Dew touches Ton’s head and says; ‘where have you been Ton? Why have we just met? (คุณไปอยู่ไหนมาต้น ทำไมเราเพิ่งมาเจอกัน)’.

In the most tragic scene in the film, Dew plays the last letter that come in the form of a video tape. Ton says to Dew:

‘I never thought that I was handsome or special. Since the first day I met Dew, I told myself all the time that I will do everything to make Dew the happiest woman. I will not make you cry again. I have one thing to beg of you. Do not forget me. One day in the future, perhaps it may be very long, we will see each other again. We must see each other again. I promise. I love you.’<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The original text: คนสองคนเนี่ยนะ ถ้าเกิดมาเพื่อนกันและกันแล้วละก็ ถึงจะมาจากต่างที่ต่างทาง ห่างกันแคไหนก็ มาเจอกันจนได้ เรื่องของบุพเพสันนิวาสนี่มันมีจริงๆ นะ

<sup>16</sup> The original text: ต้น: แล้วเราจะได้เจอกันอีกไหม ดิว: ไม่รู้สิ แล้วแต่โชคชะตา

<sup>17</sup> The original text: ผมไม่เคยคิดว่าตัวเองเป็นคนหล่อเหลาหรือดีพิเศษอะไรเลย ตั้งแต่วันแรกที่ผมได้ เจอดิว ผมก็ บอกกับตัวเองว่าผมจะทำทุกอย่างให้คุณ ผมจะทำให้ดิ้วเป็นผู้หญิงที่มีความสุขที่สุด ผมจะไม่ทำให้ดิ้วต้องเสียน้ำตาอีก มีอย่างหนึ่งที่ผมอยากจะทำให้คุณ อ่าสิมผมนะ วันหนึ่งข้างหน้า มันอาจจะนานมาก แต่ไม่ว่ามันจะนานแค่ไหน เราต้อง ได้กลับมาพบกันอีก เราได้กลับมาพบกันอีกผมสัญญา ดิวผมรักคุณ



From the above, you can see the influence of the idea of previous association. I think there are two reasons why they present the ideology of previous association in this film. First, the screenplay writer and director, themselves, believe in the idea of *pubbesannivāsa*. Therefore, such an ideology is present in their work. Most of all, the film is dedicated to the dear friend of the producer, the director and all of the movie team who began the project. Unfortunately, she died of cancer before the film started producing. All of the crew believed that making the film was sign of gratitude and they will meet her again in their next life.

Second, which I think is the more important reason, is that at this time the idea of *pubbesannivāsa* is quite an old concept. Most of the members of the new generation have quit believing in the idea of previous association. In a brief survey, I gave a questionnaire to 314 freshmen students of the faculty of education in the first semester of the 2006 academic year. One of the questions I asked was ‘Do you believe that your lover from the past life is searching for you in this life. On a scale of 1 to 10, over 60 percent rated this question below 5 and surprisingly the students who rated it over 8 were less than 10 percent. This indicates that teenagers today hardly believe in *pubbesannivāsa*. This may be another reason why the film’s promoter decided to use ‘If you still believe in love’ in the tagline. Love for this movie is the love that is conducted or led by some divine power.

One consequence of the advance in science and technology is that people believe less in divine power. They believe in themselves. Thus, they are searching for love. They think they can choose their love. Nevertheless, this film tries to say that ‘love will find you’. Sometimes we have to wait for someone to be born for us. If we are born for each other, someday and sometime we will find each other. If, on that day, Dew did not stop to buy a cactus and forget her wallet; if that day Ton stayed at the office, they would not meet each other. So, it is destiny that makes them find each other. While, Kate, who tries to find love on her own, has to pay with her life. I can say that this film want to promote its audience to believe in *pubbesannivāsa* again.



### **Consumerism versus Buddhism**

These two films use death as the beginning of questioning life. In 'Dear Dakanda', Nui explains how she thought about life when Jiew died. She also dares to ask for Mu's love because she sees the uncertainty of life. While in 'The Letter', the death of Ton teaches Dew to continue her life with love from him, even though he has passed away. Consequently, they both present the ideology that love is the most important part of life. We cannot live happily without love. Therefore, we have to search for love, especially 'true love'. Once we find true love, love will make our lives worthy and, therefore, it is worth living for.

When I compare consumerism with Buddhism, I see consumerism as an ideology. I use consumerism here not as an economic term as it is normally used. Consumerism as an ideology is the way in which people 'consume for pleasure'. They do not consume because they truly 'NEED' to; they consume because they 'WANT' to. Consuming makes them feel happier. While I am writing this paper (January, 2009), I am watching the Oprah Winfrey show Oprah has invited Suze Orman to her show. Before the show started, Suze asked 215 people at the show how much they owed on their credit cards. 215 people in studio had over \$US 2,295,000 total in debt for their credit cards only. Suze suggest: The issue of being in debt with credit cards is because: the more you are in debt the more you have will using them. The debt is not a matter of consuming for need, but it is involved with emotion of wanting; because, when you spend more you feel good.

Most of all, consuming for pleasure is a 'capitalistic' way to reach self-actualization, that is to say, to be proud of yourself. People want to be 'someone'. They want to be recognized by others. They want the others to be interested in them. Therefore, a life of consumerism is a life for other people rather than for oneself.

This is quite complicated; formerly I said consumerism is for self-actualization, why later do I say that it is for others rather than oneself? Normally, the idea of self-actualization refers to the idea that you pay respect to yourself. It is a result of achieve something that you wish for from your own ability. It happens when



you fulfill your ultimate goal of life. I would say self-actualization is an ‘independent’ process. The teaching in Buddhism is a very good example of this. In the teaching of the four noble truths, the Buddha says that Buddhist need to ‘understand’ suffering as it is. You have to think and understand it by yourself. When you understand suffering, you use the noble eight fold path to cope with it; then, you can get rid of suffering by yourself. Finally, you can respect yourself and understand your life again.

Unlike consumerism, self-actualization in consumerism is a ‘dependent’ process. You need help! It may be from both things and people. When you are sad, you need someone to help you, to share your emotion or to have sympathy with you. That is why love is a must and you have to find love. By consuming love or going to a nightclub or getting drunk, you get rid of sadness, although is not because you understand it but you are just ‘ignoring’ it. You do not cease the suffering, you just suppress it. It is not permanently gone. If we still believe in Freud, the suppressed suffering will emerge someday.

In ‘*The Letter*’, Dew is able to continue her life, not because she understands that Ton died, but she lives with the hope that someday she will find him again. She still lives because she depends on Ton’s love. As in one letter, which arrives after he has died, he writes:

“...Do you feel better right now? I want Dew to be the same Dew as soon as possible. When I look back from above, I want to see the lively Dew as before, not the sad Dew who is still crying right now. There is no need to worry about me! I have not left you. Look around yourself. Can you feel that I am still around you, hugging you like before? I will not let you be lonely in a lonesome town like this. ...”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, she feels like he has not yet died and she can continue her life. This means her self-actualization is not from her understanding about life, but it come from Ton’s love which never leaves her. Again,

<sup>18</sup> The original text: ตอนนี้ตัวคอยยังขั้วขึ้นหรือยัง ผมอยากให้ตัวกลับไปเป็นตัวคนเดิมให้เร็วที่สุด เพราะเวลาที่ผมมอง กลับลงมา ผมจะเห็นตัวที่มีชีวิตชีวาคนเก่า ไม่ใช่ตัวที่เอาแต่นั่งร้องไห้อย่างนี้ ไม่ต้องห่วงผมนะจ๊ะ ผมไม่ได้จากคุณไปไหนหรอก ตัวลองมองดูรอบๆ ตัวของตัวให้ดี รู้สึกหรือเปล่าว่าผมยังวนเวียนอยู่ข้างๆ ตัวเสมอ คอยกอดตัวเหมือนวันเก่าๆ ผมไม่มีวันทิ้งคุณไว้คนเดียวในเมืองเหงๆ แบบนี้หรอก



she uses love as the fuel of life; that is to say, she consumes love for pleasure, but she does not really understand love. This is also the same explanation of the last letter Mu wrote to Dakanda.

Today, in this new age, many Thai people, both teens and those of middle age, are addicted to life. Youth are fetish life. They want to have romantic love. 'Love' and 'Life' are not for understanding anymore. They are living only for pleasure. As people seek love as a goal of life, love then becomes a product for buying. Thai male teenagers dress in Korean style, not for clothing, but to attract females who are crazy for Korean stars. Even if the weather in Bangkok is 35 degree Celsius, they wear a sweater like it is 15 degree in Korea. Teenagers enroll in Korean language courses, not for their future career, but just because they want to know what their pop-idols say. At the extreme end, they learn it so that if someday they meet their idol, they can talk with them. This is a result of (crazy and addict to) 'love'.

Love also becomes the strategy for selling things. From deodorant to life insurance plans, they all use 'love' to advertise their products. Love has nothing to do deodorant, but they say the smell will attract women and they will fall in love with you. Life insurance plans question, what will you do if you die? Who will look after your family? Thus, you have to buy a life insurance plan in order to be sure that the ones you love will not suffer or have a hard time to live. Even in seasoning sauce advertisements they say, let's use this sauce and it will cause our family to be happier.

As people consume love for pleasure, love becomes a root of 'popular culture'. The world of consumerism, thus, encourages people to search for love. Life is not suffering anymore as long as you have love. You may ask, what is the problem with love? Love is good; I can not deny that. However, happiness from love is an attachment or a clinging to an object that is not permanent. According to Buddhist ideology, love which is led by sensual craving ought to be ceased. Even if you experience happiness today, one day, when you "lost your loved one", you will suffer; or one day, when 'you do not get what you want', you will suffer.



The difference between Consumerism and Buddhism is that the former tells you to love and love and love more, while the later wants you to ‘cease’ attachment. Nevertheless, in this battle of ideology, it seems that consumerism will win finally and definitely.

### The challenge to Buddhism

What is the challenge to Thai Buddhism? Why do people in the ‘land of Buddhism’ seem to not understand how the Buddha became enlightened? Or as I said at the beginning of this paper, they do understand what the Buddha has been taught, but they ignore it. I think the problem is not in the teachings. The teachings are not out of date. The four noble truths still are noble truths. It is the way of teaching that is the problem. Although education is one the most important institutions in creating and sustaining ideology, there are many problems in the teaching of Buddhism in Thailand today.

First, there is the use of difficult Pāli words in teaching Buddhism. Normally, when a monk or a school teacher teaches Buddhism, they will start with Pāli words and then explain them in Thai language, which sometimes needs to explain again in normal Thai language, like *tripitāka* has *tāikā* and *atāhākathā*. These make the Dharma hard to understand, especially for young students. Once they do not understand, they do not care. They just keep the Pāli word in their short term memory for examination, but not for their life. That is why many young Thai Buddhists can answer what the four noble truths are, but they do not understand them. When they reach the stage of realize those difficult word truly meaning (when they are getting old and really understand ‘life is suffering’), their ideology has already changed and it is hard to bring it back.

In these past few years, these problems seem to have been much thought about. Therefore, many of the new generation of Thai monks try to speak the *Dhamma* in language that can be understood by the youth. It is working! *Dhamma* books, in this less serious style, have become best sellers. The monks are also invited on TV programs and to give lectures in many schools and collages.

The second problem is the unreachable teachings. All Buddhist teachings are practicable in theory. Thai Theravada Buddhism focuses on ‘wisdom’, which needs a lot of practice and a deep understanding





of the ideas. However, in the world of capitalism and consumerism, where people struggle for life, it is hard to be contentment (*Santosa* or *Santuttho*). People have to get involve with the others. People have to work for a living and for their children. People have to find their own food. So, it is hard to practice and reach '*nibbāna*', which may cause people to give up and ignore the *Dhamma*. Additionally, we cannot deny that living your life with pleasure is preferable and easier than living it with wisdom. The challenge is how we can adapt or choose the appropriate teachings and practices for them?

It is quite interesting that in the past few years, especially last year, 2008, the Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, became very popular in Thailand. The number of people who queue to learn his teaching grows rapidly. I have interviewed some of the people who enter the Plum Village program and I also have followed a few of the TV programs which scoop Plum Village activities. I found that the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh are easy to practice in everyday life. Most of all, the language he uses is very easy to understand. His general teaching about basic meditation and love may seem too basic in comparison with the canonical teaching in Thai Theravada Buddhism, but it is the teaching that people in a rush age can practice. Hopefully, some day ahead they will love to learn more and practice more.

However, the way in which this Vietnamese monk teaches is not really that new in Thailand. Some Thai meditation schools, such as Sathira-dhammasathan, have also taught in this style for a decade, but it has not been supported.

Therefore, this is a time for all Buddhist experts in Thailand to wake up and do something to make Buddhist teaching, especially of Theravada school, an 'ideology of life' for Thai people, before the ideologies of consumerism will take its place and totally conquer the next generation.

In this paper, I have tried to draw a picture of what has happened with the ideology of love in contemporary Thai mass media by using Thai tragic romance in the form of film as an example. I come up with the thesis that Thai romance, presented in the form of tragic narratives, plays a significant role in both sustaining and cultivating





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the ideology of love in Thai society. In popular Thai tragic romances, from 1997 to 2007, the ideology of love, largely assembled through mass media, is a synthesis of Buddhist belief and consumerism. I also post a question to all Thai Buddhist scholars, and those who are interested in Thai Buddhism: In what way can we reinstate and retain Buddhism in the ideology of Thai people? This question is a challenge. I have only reviewed some of problems and some of hopes. However, the future of Thai Buddhism is in the hands all Thai Buddhist.





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# Without and Within: Science and the Middle Path

Colin D Butler<sup>1</sup>



## Background

I have no formal training in ethics, philosophy or Buddhism, nor is he from a country with a substantial Buddhist tradition. I was first exposed to Buddhist teachings almost 40 years ago, then trained in medicine and public health, environmental science and what has recently been termed “sustainability science”.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, since that first encounter with Buddhist teachings in January, 1971, my life course has been substantially motivated and influenced by my understanding and experience of the dhamma, especially of metta and bodhicitta, the wish that all beings can be free from fear and pain, as far as possible. These are my qualifications for writing an essay that links Buddhism, science and the environmental crisis. I am delighted to have this opportunity.

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<sup>2</sup> Kates RW, Clark WC, Corell Jr, R, Hall M, Jaeger CC, Lowe I, et al., 2001, “Sustainability science” *Science*, 292:641-2.



In 2009, at the United Nations Day of Vesak meeting in Bangkok, I spoke about Buddhism and the environmental crisis.<sup>3</sup> At the end of my talk, which was held at one of Thailand's most famous universities, I asked if anyone in the audience of about 60 people had a science degree. Not a single person raised their hand. In retrospect, I wish I had asked how many of my international audience had any kind of university degree – but I am sure at least some did. Perhaps someone in that audience might one day read this essay. This experience at Vesak reinforced a growing perception that there is limited understanding of modern science among serious scholars and practitioners of Buddhism.

### **Buddhism and science**

Of course, in some countries where Buddhism is widely practiced (most notably Japan, but increasingly in nations such as China, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand), there is a growing public understanding of the scientific method. India, the land of the Buddha, has an ancient and distinguished history of mathematics and science.<sup>4</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, one of the few Buddhists to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, has long had an interest and a close involvement with neuroscientists. In fact, the Dalai Lama has participated sufficiently closely to offend some of the neuroscientific community, who have claimed this involvement to be unscientific.<sup>5</sup>

Buddhism and science share more in common than some experts in either field may first appreciate. Indeed, I would argue, all forms of religion have more in common with science than prominent contemporary critics of religion seem to understand.<sup>6</sup> Both Buddhism and science are concerned, in part, with understanding the nature of phenomena. Both are concerned with causes, and the causes of causes. Both can provide a profound level of understanding, and yet both also reach a point at which mystery is inevitable.

<sup>3</sup> Butler CD., 2009, "The Global Environmental Crisis and Sustainability of Civilization: Time for the Buddhist World to Awaken" Dhammasami K, Dhammhaso P, Wutthikaro P, Peoples D, eds., *Buddhist Approach to Environmental Crisis*. Bangkok, Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press; p. 216-25.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph GG., 1987, "Foundations of Eurocentrism in mathematics", *Race and Class*,;28:13-28.

<sup>5</sup> Bhattacharjee Y., 2005, "Neuroscientists welcome Dalai Lama with mostly open arms" *Science*, 310:1104.

<sup>6</sup> Dawkins R., 2006, *The God Delusion*. London: Bantam Books; Grayling AC.; \_ , 2008, "Children of God?" *The Guardian*, 28 November.





This mystery may in part occur because no single “cause” exists for any phenomena. Indeed, it can be argued that no phenomenon exists of itself, but is dependent on context and observer. Instead it can be argued that nothing exists other than a pattern in reality which is observable and distinguishable from another pattern, or from an amorphous background by senses and consciousness. At one level, it is clear that no absolute reality exists but is instead dependent upon the observer. An ant crawling across the surface of field will perceive (perhaps more by touch than sight) thousands of sharp green blades, each of which is many times its height. A sheep, walking on that same terrain will see a diverse green carpet, containing both attractive and less tasty forms of food. The ant may be effectively invisible to the sheep. A human being, seeing the same scene from a satellite with a powerful magnifying camera might spot a hundred white specks, each of which represents a single sheep. All these perceptions are valid, and they all have causes. Yet no single perception can be considered absolutely right – they are all shaped by the context, the sensory perception, the experience, and the intellect of the observer.

On the other hand, to dispute the existence of *any* absolute reality on the basis that all experience is subjective and relative is itself very doubtful. It also leads to chaos, both physical and moral. After all, it is very likely that the perception and interpretation of grass by each ant has much more in common with other ants than with the perception of a flock of sheep. Furthermore, even though the life experience and the mind of every person on the planet is different, it is equally clear that each of the almost 6,900 million people alive today not only was born on Earth but also requires food, oxygen, water and so on. Without invoking any claim of absolute reality, it is clear that phenomena such as those involved in the transition of a plant from a seed to a flower and back to a seed can be better understood using the scientific method. Finally, views which deny absolute reality risk disintegration into a moral abyss, in which for example, murder or extreme selfishness is considered equivalent to service and compassion. No society could exist for long in such a world. It therefore follows that some attitudes and actions are more beneficial than others, while some are more harmful.

### Reductionism, emergence, and systems thinking

The separation of phenomena into smaller and smaller constituents is frequently called reductionism, from the root word “reduce”. Its origins in the West are credited to Greek philosophers such as Hippocrates (c460-377 BC), who Rambihar describes as “changing the world-view from one of divine intervention and supernatural causes, to a new Greek science”.<sup>7</sup> This scientific view was later developed by great European scientists such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727). There is no doubt that reductionism has considerable explanatory power, but it also has limits. Reductionism ultimately led to concepts such as a “clockwork universe” which postulated that everything that exists is like giant machine, whose unfolding could be determined and predicted if only we had a sufficiently powerful calculator and sufficiently precise measurements. Such a worldview provides little room for uncertainty, for religious experience, or for any form of cause and effect transmitted by a mysterious law of kamma.

However, reductionism is itself now widely discredited, at least as being the sole or dominant explanation of reality. After all, no amount of insight into the components of an organism can bring it to life. Indeed the finer the division of the organism (for example to organs, cells, cellular components, molecules and even smaller), the less the chance of understanding the actual occurrence of life. After all, life does not depend on any single component of a living organism, but is better understood as a phenomenon that arises (or *emerges*) from the interaction of sufficient constituent elements of life. Many other phenomena (including consciousness) are also better considered as processes.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the behaviour of a crowd at the end of a performance involves more than the thoughts of the individuals in it at the moment the music or voice fades away. For example, the decision by that crowd to applaud or to provide a standing ovation is influenced by the behaviour of other individuals in that crowd. If a critical number of people stand up to applaud, then most, or even all of the crowd will also stand, through a process of observation and social networking.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Rambihar, V. S., 2000., Science, evidence, and the use of the word scientific. *The Lancet* 355: 1730.

<sup>8</sup> Noble, D., 2010, *Systems biology and the concept of no-self (anātman)*, paper presented at the Colloquium Buddhism and Science. Oxford, UK, 4/5 March 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Miller JH, Page SE., 2004, “The standing ovation problem” *Complexity*;9(5):8-16.



Once an investigator starts to understand and to analyse the world as containing many linked processes, then views such as atheism or “proof” in the non-existence of spiritual rules such as those espoused by leading atheist philosophers such as Dawkins and Grayling dissolve into internally consistent theories, which on close examination have no certainty. This does not mean that religious views are correct, but it does open the possibility. It also opens the possibility that religions, including Buddhism, may provide extremely rich and insightful windows into reality, as well as ethical systems of great value. However, critics of religion do make valid points when they attack absolutist attachments and interpretations of dogma, be they Buddhist or other forms. For example, some fundamentalist forms of religion claim to have the entire truth, and that other versions are therefore wrong. It is logically impossible that both versions can be correct, and it is far more likely that both are untrue. Indeed exposure to such extreme, rigid versions of religion may have catalysed the vehement anti-religious views of Richard Dawkins.<sup>10</sup>

### **Meditation, concentration, insight and uncertainty**

Irrespective of the absolute certainty of religious insights into nature, there is no doubt that Buddhism and other religions reward their practitioners with deep insights and beneficial states of mind through meditation and prayer.<sup>11</sup> The deepest insights of science require similar intense and sustained concentration, but with different goals. No matter how diligent the mental effort, neither science nor Buddhism can explain everything. Buddhism uses concepts and words with great explanatory power but, for most practitioners, some of these aspects require faith or critical consideration. In this category belong teachings about rebirth and the karmic causes of events due to actions in earlier lives. For beginners (and certainly myself!) recall of past lives is very vague or non-existent. The reality of past lives may be either denied (by a reductionist), recalled (by an accomplished meditator) or accepted, as a credulous beginner might. But a fourth possibility exists: that it be considered possible but unproven. Similarly, many scientific explanations at their heart depend on the acceptance of esoteric and subtle facts which are

<sup>10</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*; \_ *Children of God?*

<sup>11</sup> Miller G., 2009, *A quest for compassion*. *Science*. 324:458-9.



either beyond the understanding of most people or are explicitly understood to be unproven, hypothesised theories.

For example, scientists' theories about fundamental (subatomic) particles and the origin of the universe are unlikely ever to be fully confirmed. In 1973, Western philosopher Fritjof Capra published a classic book called *The Tao of Physics*, which explored many parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism.<sup>12</sup> Though not conventionally religious, Albert Einstein had a deep appreciation of and sympathy with views many call mystical.

Using an early telescope, the great Italian astronomer, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) observed the movement of four of the moons of Jupiter.<sup>13</sup> Galileo later challenged the official view that the sun rotates around the earth. This conception of the solar system is today widely accepted, even though very few of us have observed the moons of Jupiter. Galileo's name and memory are still honoured, including by naming space expeditions.

Scientific understanding of the solar system rests on a vast amount of other evidence, beyond that observed by Galileo. The evidence of rotation of the moons of Jupiter and the means to observe it are widely documented. This observation can be reproduced by anyone with sufficient training and equipment. The evidence is also established and traced through the scientific literature. These points illustrate two important aspects of the scientific method: reproducibility and the integrity of the scientific peer review process. Somewhat similarly, at least in some schools of Buddhism, teachings are transmitted from master to student through generations of an accredited lineage. Some distinguished Buddhist teachers are also remembered for generations. In each case the reasons for this transmitted respect are the quality of the teaching and the clarity of the insight.

<sup>12</sup> Capra F., 1973, *The Tao of Physics. An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*. London: Fontana.

<sup>13</sup> Rosenstock L, Lee LJ., 2002, "Attacks on Science: the risks to evidence-based policy" *American Journal of Public Health*. 92:14-8; Anonymous, *Galileo and the Telescope*. [cited; available at <http://outreach.atnf.csiro.au/education/senior/astrophysics/galileo.html>].



Much of science is less well accepted than the rotation of earth around the sun. Galileo was also disbelieved for some time by an institution which had considerably more power than did science: the Christian church based in Rome and its leader, the Pope.<sup>14</sup> The scientific process may be considered a large family of competing theories and hypotheses which are gradually evolving towards a more complete understanding of the physical and psychological universe. Nevertheless, it is extremely unlikely that science can explain everything. In the same way, complex software is unlikely to be completely error-free, and the toss of a coin is random. As has been stated, “The fact that the future is like the past makes science possible  $\frac{3}{4}$  the fact that the future is different to the past makes science necessary”.<sup>15</sup>

The universe contains both predictable and unpredictable elements. This lack of absolute certainty appears to be a necessary part of the way things are, and is a fundamental component of quantum theory. One consequence is the opening of a pathway for human choice. Kamma may determine human destiny and humans may determine their kamma, but the finer details of its- unfolding are impossible to know in advance. Similarly, if we live in a temperate zone, such as the United Kingdom or Korea, we can confidently predict that July will be warmer than January. However, we can never predict with total accuracy the maximum temperature on any day in July, even on the day before.

This lack of absolute proof of many aspects of science does not invalidate science itself. In the same way great respect for Buddhism does not, in my view, require faith in all aspects of its teaching. Many Buddhist principles can be tested and understood from personal experience, such as the generally beneficial effects which thoughts of loving-kindness bestow.

<sup>14</sup> Rosenstock L, Lee LJ., 2002, “ Attacks on Science: the risks to evidence-based policy” *American Journal of Public Health.* 92:14-8.

<sup>15</sup> Levin S., 1999, *Fragile Dominion: Complexity and the Commons*: MacMillan.

What perhaps most distinguishes science from Buddhism is that the scope of the former is mainly concerned with the material and psychological universe, while the latter concentrates on moral laws and includes consideration of past or future lives. However, much of science studies the past, and increasingly, the future. Science is beginning to make serious attempts to examine the near future in ways that extend well beyond the prediction of comets, eclipses and other astronomical events.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the human capacity to forecast such events derives from ancient forms of science and mathematics.<sup>17</sup> Science is also improving its understanding of the evolution of both fairness, and injustice.<sup>18</sup>

Science also considers the physical rules connecting past, present and future phenomena. The scientific method involves the generations of hypotheses  $\frac{3}{4}$  concepts and theories about events, processes and phenomena  $\frac{3}{4}$  which are refined by repeatable, verifiable evidence. The process of discarding theories shown to be incorrect can be very drawn out, taking decades or longer. Some practitioners may approach Buddhism in this way, too; that is, by discarding beliefs shown to be wrong. Here, my scholarly knowledge of Buddhism falters and I am not able to say how widespread a similar analysis applies. However, I clearly recall my own most revered Buddhist teacher stressing that I and other students should “check up”  $\frac{3}{4}$  investigate  $\frac{3}{4}$  before accepting any basic principle of Buddhism. Perhaps that teacher, Lama Yeshe, was unusual, or perhaps the things that later attracted me to science also made me receptive to his message.

Scientists who are critical of religion, such as Richard Dawkins,<sup>19</sup> frequently assert that religion relies on followers’ uncritical assimilation of dogma. Perhaps this occurs in Buddhism, but my sense is that such uncritical acceptance is not essential. Science is similar to Buddhism in that both understand that reality has different forms. Physicists and chemists conceive of matter as

<sup>16</sup> Butler CD., 2005, “Peering into the fog: ecologic change, human affairs and the future” *EcoHealth*. 2005;2:17-21.

<sup>17</sup> Freeth T., 2009, “Decoding an ancient computer” *Scientific American*;301:76-83.

<sup>18</sup> Henrich, J., J. Ensminger, et al., 2010, “Markets, religion, community size, and the evolution of fairness and punishment” *Science* 327: 1480-1484; Hoff K., 2010, “Fairness in Modern Society” *Science*, 327:1467-8.

<sup>19</sup> Dawkins R., 2006, *The God Delusion* ; \_ Children of God? *The Guardian*.



being composed of smaller particles or chemical compounds, but also understand that the appearance of events is determined by our senses and instruments. Some parts of science teach that “reality” as perceived by our senses is a construct, a way in which the brain interprets the world, rather than being but not the world itself. Similarly, doctors know that each human is a system of organs and physiological processes, but at the same time an individual being.

### Science, daily life and ethics

Any reader who thinks science has no value to a good Buddhist might reflect upon the fact that you can read this page because you have acquired secular knowledge. The world needs both secular and spiritual knowledge to thrive. Even if you are a monk, some secular knowledge, including of science, can surely help you to be more valuable to sentient beings. If, like me, you think Buddhism can help you practice metta or bodhicitta, then you might reflect that science too  $\frac{3}{4}$  at its best  $\frac{3}{4}$  can also help practice and loving kindness. If you have ever had an antibiotic or flown 1,000 kilometres in a couple of hours to show your love for a sick friend or relation, then you have benefited from science.

But science also needs ethics. There is a long history of science being used for purposes such as developing weapons, improving forms of torture and practicing eugenics. Dictatorships are especially good at corrupting science, as occurred under the Nazis<sup>18</sup> and in Communist Russia.<sup>19</sup> Support for the misguided and deliberately exaggerated theories of the Russian agricultural scientist Trofim Lysenko contributed to crop failures and famine in Russia. Pseudo-science is not restricted to dictatorships; the denial of the causes and effectiveness of treatments for AIDS led to many unnecessary deaths in South Africa.<sup>20</sup>

During the Cold War, many behavioural scientists (mainly psychologists, social scientists and anthropologists) co-operated in heightening concerns about the vague enemy of shadowy, alleged communists and subversives.<sup>21</sup> The Nazi regimes rejected the findings

<sup>20</sup> Geffen N., 2005, “Echoes of Lysenko: state-sponsored pseudo-science in South Africa” *Social Dynamics*;31:183-210; Makgoba MW., 2000, HIV/AIDS: The peril of pseudoscience. *Science*; 288:1171.

<sup>21</sup> Holsti O., 2006, The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex (by Ron Robin) (book review). *Political Communication*;23(1):123-4.

of Jewish scientists, including Albert Einstein. Ethical and prosperous societies need science, -science informed by equitable and ethical practices.

### Climate change and science

Finally, Buddhists can learn about science and the global environmental crisis, of which ecological damage is but a part. How do we know that scientific understanding of this crisis is valid? Some of us may sit in comfortable offices. We are well fed every day. Yet for many others at the front line of the environmental crisis, the problems are stark and immense. It might be tempting suppress thoughts about such people and animals, but if we do, then might we not create the cause for others to one day be indifferent to us?

Similarly, if we start to imagine the life of a slum dweller in a low-lying, flood-prone area or the insecurity of a debt-burdened farmer hoping for rain, then this becomes more real and more pressing. Many interlinked forms of evidence inform us of environmental crises in the large and growing literature on this subject.

Recently the science of climate change has attracted sustained and virulent criticism.<sup>22</sup> This follows the theft of private emails from the UK's University of East Anglia<sup>23</sup> and the discovery of minor errors in the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.<sup>24</sup> Sceptics of climate change claim that they have identified numerous errors in climate change science. Outsiders might think that this debate is like a breakaway religious sect. However, there is a crucial difference. With very few exceptions, the critics of science are not trained scientists. The few that are make speeches and write papers, but they do not publish on climate change in the scientific literature. Some critics of climate science also claim that their failure to do this illustrates a form of "groupthink," a collective taboo maintained by scientific editors and peer reviewers. It is true that some pervasive beliefs in science have taken decades to overturn, such as the view of continental drift. First postulated in 1858, this theory was dismissed

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton C., 2010, *Requiem for a Species. Why we Resist the Truth About Climate Change*. Allen & Unwin.

<sup>23</sup> Macilwain C., 2010, Calling science to account. *Nature*, 463:875.

<sup>24</sup> Editorial., 2010, Climate of fear. *Nature*, 464:141.



until the development of plate tectonic theory in the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> There are many similar examples from health and medicine.

However, the science of climate change dates from the mid-nineteenth century, and was ridiculed for many years. It is far more likely that these attacks on climate science are motivated by powerful vested interests, such as industries that profit from the sale of fossil fuels and from the many think tanks supported by these industries<sup>26</sup> than by a genuine new understanding of science.

### Conclusion

Buddhists concerned with the well-being of other people and species will be rewarded by investing time in the study of science. Scientists deserve respect, not worship. The message of science can also be distorted and denied, including to serve the interests of powerful minorities not acting in the public good. A recent example concerns the exaggeration of anti-ageing remedies.<sup>27</sup> Science has made progress in this field, but progress is far less mature than claimed by those who seek to profit from this limited understanding and oversell the benefits. Thus, for both science and Buddhist teachings it remains crucial to exercise discrimination, wisdom and other forms of critical thought.

<sup>25</sup> Tobias PV., 1996, "Premature discoveries in Science with especial reference to" Australopithecus" and Homo Habilis., *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*;140(1):49-64.

<sup>26</sup> Michaels D., 2008., *Doubt is their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health*: Oxford University Press..

<sup>27</sup> Olshansky SJ., 2010, "Exposing the longevity business" *Nature*, 464:491-2.

# Emerging New Trends in Buddhism and Their Doctrinal and Organizational Implications

Asanga Tilakaratne<sup>1</sup>



## Introduction

That all constructed phenomena are subject to change is one of the fundamental insights of the teaching of the Buddha. Usually this concept is understood in the context of meditation, as characterizing the phenomenal existence. It is, however, interesting to see how change takes place within the Buddhist tradition itself. The teaching of the Buddha has undergone changes in the hands of its various interpreters. One sees this phenomenon taking place from the first council that took place three months after the parinirvāna of the Buddha. Although in his self-perception a commentator would not interpret his own work of interpretation as conscious effort at changing of what is being interpreted/commented upon, what has really happened in the actual process is change, no doubt. Since the interpreters usually think that their interpretations represent the original teaching correctly, there is, on the part of interpreters and

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their followers, reluctance to accept the fact that the doctrine itself has undergone change in the process. This is somewhat different with regard to Buddhism as an organization. The organizational aspect of Buddhism, the Sasana, comprising the four groups of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis and upāsakas and upāsikās, has undergone change, and the tradition cannot deny this quite obvious fact.

Throughout its long history of twenty five centuries, the Buddhist tradition as a religious organization has undergone considerable change. This aspect of Buddhism has been studied by many scholars, and the present paper does not propose to deal with this vast subject. The purpose of this discussion is modest in the sense that it proposes to study some new developments in Buddhism. What follows is not a comprehensive account of all the new developments in Buddhism that have taken place over the past few decades. But it will try to capture some of the main trends of world Buddhism today. This includes brief discussions on what I would like to call ‘trans-yānic Buddhism’ and socially engaged Buddhism. Under the latter I will briefly examine what is called ‘eco-Buddhism’ or Buddhist environmentalism.

### **Trans-yanic Buddhism**

Today globalization (disappearance of distance and time due to rapid improvements in transport and communication) has enhanced physical proximity and communication among different schools of Buddhist monks in an unprecedented manner. Sharing of physical space and experiencing different modes of life and practice have enhanced mutual understanding among the members of the Sangha. Modern education has done its part by providing opportunities for the monks belonging to many traditions to learn about one another’s traditions. In particular, there is ever growing tendency among the non-Theravada monks to come to Theravada countries and study what is believed to be the original teaching of the Master. In a similar manner, monks from Theravada tradition go to countries such as China, Korea and Japan and learn different schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The study of Buddhism for the Buddhists has never been a dispassionate and pure academic exercise devoid of any religious significance. The end result can be mutual enrichment. It is customary today to hear a Mahāyāna or a Vajrayāna teacher referring to Pali



canon and a Theravada teacher narrating a Zen Buddhist story or quoting from Mahayana or Vajrayāna texts. Theravada Vipassana meditation is being practiced by a large number of Buddhists cutting across traditional methodologies of meditation.

The very concept of 'yāna' or vehicle is a later development in the history of Buddhism. The Mahayanists who seem to have coined the term 'mahāyāna' to describe themselves have used the term 'hinayāna' to refer to whom they considered to be of lower capacities and inclinations. Clearly 'hinayāna' is not a term the non-Mahayanists would have used to describe themselves. Neutral terms such as bodhisatvayāna and sāvākayāna were representative of the actual soteriological positions behind the so-called Mahayana and Hinayāna respectively. Vajrayāna (tantrayāna or mantrayāna) was the latest development in the process. Theravada which originated from the original Sangha after the parinirvāna of the Buddha seems to have had its existence away from this yāna struggle although technically it too could have called hinayāna. Despite the doctrinal differences there has been lot of interaction among these groups. The world-wide history of Buddhism bears evidence to how members of different Buddhist schools developed friendly and fruitful interactions through centuries. This is nowhere more evident than in the illustrious Buddhist monk-travelers from ancient China to South Asia, namely, Fa Hsian, Xuan Zang and many others who followed their lead. The Buddhist world is indebted to these Chinese monks who risked their lives for the preservation of the vast Buddhist literary heritage. In the subsequent centuries, however, this trend seems to have gradually waned. With the demise of the so-called Hinayāna traditions in India, relocation of Vajrayāna in the Tibetan area, and overall destruction of Buddhism from its place of birth, after the first millennium and half, interactions among yānas seem to have ceased. Nevertheless, within the yānas there were frequent interactions across boundaries. For instance, the East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan had interactions among themselves basically unhindered until modernity. The same is true for South Asian and the South-east Asian Theravada, and Vajrayāna which was East and South Asian. Particularly within the former there were frequent interactions, and give and take from the time Theravada was introduced to South East Asia from



Sri Lanka till modernity. But the three main traditions themselves do not seem to have had interactions after the celebrated Chinese pilgrims mentioned above. This state of isolation continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Buddhists, like many others in the world, started moving beyond their traditional habitats.

Close physical proximity of various groups of people, who were otherwise isolated, has become a reality today as a result of globalization. One of the key characteristics of the global existence of Buddhism today is close interaction not only among different schools of Buddhism but also among different religious traditions. This close physical proximity has caused religions to review their traditional isolationist policies and come up with new ways of inter-action. Dialogue or inter-religious dialogue is a concept that has been developed quite recently in the Western religion in its effort to communicate with other religious traditions. Although Buddhism has not developed any such specific concept, friendliness and cooperation toward other religions has been there from its very inception. Usually the reaction of one particular religion to other religions has been one of intolerance and hostility. The only purpose of studying another religion was to find fault with it. Different religions have varying degrees of intolerance toward other religions. As Arnold Toynbee has said, “Three Judaic religions have a record of intolerance, hatred, malice, uncharitableness and persecution that is black by comparison with Buddhism’s record.”<sup>2</sup> Buddhism, throughout its history, has been a quite tolerant religion and it has never engaged in hostilities against other religions although occasionally the Buddhists have been unfriendly to their own dissent groups<sup>3</sup>. It is interesting to note that religions have always treated their internal ‘heretics’ more harshly than they would treat total outsiders. In pre-modern Sri Lanka Theravada tradition, for instance, there was much openness for Hindu philosophical traditions and literature and other Brahmanic systems such as medicine (āyurveda) and astrology (nakshatra) whereas it was almost totally closed for Mahayana and Vajrayāna traditions. It is only from the middle of the last century that Mahayana texts were allowed in the traditional

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Noel Seth S.J. in “Buddhism and Communalism”, *Religion and Society*, Vol. XXXV, No/4, December 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Noel Seth S.J. discusses similar instances in Buddhist history in 1988. pp. 44-66.



monastic education curriculum. The same in varying degrees holds true for the other religions in the world.

Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, is relatively a new phenomenon. What is even more new is intra-religious dialogue which has been growing for the last several decades. This is true not only for Buddhism but also for many other leading religions. Long gone are the days when the monks belonging to the three main sects in Sri Lanka would not even sit together to take part in a *dāna*<sup>4</sup>. Not only among the different sects within the same tradition but also among different Buddhist traditions inter-action and cooperation is quite a common phenomenon today. This trend is developing to such an extent that it is true to say that a form of world Buddhism or a kind of trans-yānic Buddhism is being evolved.

#### **Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907): Father of Trans-yānic Buddhism?**

The emergence of this new form of Buddhism did not, however happen all at once. Till the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the three main traditions of Buddhism existed as disparate schools confined to their traditional habitats although each tradition had close connections with its own brethren across countries. This isolated situation started changing with certain developments that were taking place in the Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka and around the world. One event with far-reaching affects was the arrival of Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) in Sri Lanka in 1880 with Madam Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), who together had founded Theosophical Society in the United States in 1875. They came to Sri Lanka inspired by reading a report of the famous Panadura debate which took place in 1876 between Buddhists and Christians. Although this was the immediate cause, the two pioneers of theosophy were already looking up to Hinduism and Buddhism as the source of ‘ancient Asian wisdom tradition.’ Upon arrival of Sri Lanka Olcott and Blavatsky embraced Buddhism and started working with local

<sup>4</sup> In Sri Lanka, this term is taken to specifically means a meal offered to monks.





Buddhist leaders, both monastic<sup>5</sup> and lay, in areas such as education of children and organization of adults.

In addition to starting schools for Buddhist children, a major project of Olcott was to prepare a Buddhist catechism, obviously following the Christian model, to be used in schools and also to serve as the source for correct knowledge of Buddhism for the adults whom Olcott felt to be wanting in their knowledge of their own religion. In this project he worked closely with Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thera who was the foremost of all erudite monks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), and to whom he dedicated this work which was an immediate commercial success. The compilation went into several dozens of reprints and editions and was translated into many languages.

What interests us in this context is not the catechism which was confined to the Theravada Buddhism but what Olcott added at the conclusion of it as ‘fundamental Buddhist beliefs’ (see appendix). Olcott concluded this list with the remark that it was ‘drafted as a common platform upon which all Buddhists can agree.’ Guided by theosophist outlook, Olcott’s main purpose was to present Buddhism as a scientific and rational system which did not have a place for superstition. The catechism was the result of this motivation. But, one could question as to why did Olcott want to develop what he believed to be the core of Buddhism acceptable to all three traditions of Buddhism? According to Elizabeth J. Harris, the answer is the following:

The theosophists who came to Sri Lanka saw Buddhism as that part of the East’s wisdom best suited to aid their search for the spiritual truth at the heart of all religion. Whether

<sup>5</sup> The role of the Buddhist monks not only in this particular aspect but also in what is called ‘Buddhist modernism’ remains to be determined. The commonly accepted belief is that the monks played only a supporting role in the works initiated by Olcott and Dharmapala. Nevertheless, records left by Olcott himself reveals how crucial was the role played by Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala among other monks. Although catechism appears to be the idea of Olcott, it was so crucial for him to get the approval of Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala for his project. Olcott admiringly records how the erudite monk went word by word of the whole document with utmost care (Ananda Guruge 1986 p.cxxxix ff). The fourteen points of the core of the teaching of the Buddha too were given approval by Sumangala. Given the vast Dhamma knowledge he had, it is probable that these points were a joint work by both Olcott and Sumangala. But unfortunately, as our current knowledge stands, we are not in a position to draw a definitive conclusion on this matter. (See Blackburn (2001) and Harris (2006) on the monks’ role in ushering modernism prior to the arrival of Olcott.)

they read this in esoteric terms or not, they usually opted to downplay the esoteric when in Sri Lanka in their zeal to encourage a ‘pure’, rational, exoteric Buddhism, rooted in right action, loving compassion, cosmic law. Olcott came closer than other theosophists, with the exception of Frank Lee Woodward of the twentieth century, to making Buddhism his primary love, *even seeking to create a movement that would unify Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism* (emphasis added). (Harris 2006: p.146)

In the fourteen articles Olcott presents as the fundamental Buddhist beliefs, are included the basic Buddhist teachings such as the four noble truths, karma, causation, morality and nirvana. The Buddhist non-theism, and its rational and tolerant character are emphasized at the very beginning. Olcott formulated these articles, got the initial approval of the leading members of the Sri Lanka Sangha, and got the approval the representatives of the Mahayana Sangha having presented these articles to them at the international Buddhist conference held Adhyar, Madras in 1891. At the end of the 1891 edition of the catechism Olcott describes how he got the approval of the Vajrayāna tradition for the document:

The following text of the fourteen items of belief which have been accepted as fundamental principles in both the Southern and Northern sections of Buddhism, by authoritative committees to whom they were submitted by me personally, have so much historical importance that they are added to the present edition of THE BUDDHIST CATECHISM as an Appendix. It has very recently been reported to me by H. E. Prince Ouchtomsky, the learned Russian Orientalist, that having had the document translated to them, the Chief Lamas of the great Mongolian Buddhist monasteries declared to him that they accept every one of the propositions as drafted, with the one exception that the date of the Buddha is by them believed to have been some thousands of years earlier than the one given by me. This surprising fact had not hitherto come to my knowledge. Can it be that the Mongolian Sangha confuse the real epoch of Sākya Muni with that of his alleged next predecessor? Be this as it may, it is a most encouraging



fact that the whole Buddhistic world may now be said to have united to the extent at least of these Fourteen Propositions.

The effort by Olcott remains the first ever in this direction, and, as his above words reveal, in addition to formulating the document Olcott actively campaigned for it to be accepted by the Buddhists all over the world.

Anagarika Dharmapala, Olcott's protégé in Sri Lanka, seems to have inherited this holistic view from his mentor. In 1889 Olcott and Dharmapala went to Japan and this trip, as one writer describes, "was taken up in the spirit of a dawning unity among Theravadins, Mahayanists, and Vajrayanists."<sup>6</sup> In these travels the two leaders encouraged participation of all the Buddhists in the activities they organized. For instance, when Dharmapala established Mahabodhi Society (1891) with the aim of restoring the Buddhist sacred places in India he had in his board representatives from Sri Lanka, Tibet, Thailand, China, Chittagong, Myanmar and USA. For the place of the Buddha's awakening, Buddha-gaya, Dharmapala had a grand-vision including an international university of the caliber of ancient Nalanda. As Dharmapala's own words reveal his vision included all the Buddhist traditions:

At this hallowed spot, full of imperishable associations, it is proposed to re-establish a monastery for the residence of bhikkhus representing the Buddhist countries of Tibet, Ceylon, China, Japan, Cambodia, Burmah, Chittagong, Nepal, Korea and Arkan. We hope to found, also a college at Buddha-gaya for training young men of unblemished character, of whatsoever race or country for the Buddhist order (Sangha), on the lines of the ancient Buddhist university at Nalanda, where were taught the Mahayana and also works belonging to the eighteen sects. (quoted by Ananda W.P. Guruge in Mahinda Deegalle (ed): 2008 p.54)

Although Dharmapala later fell out with Olcott and other theosophists such as Leadbeater and Annie Besant, this holistic vision persisted in him. For both Olcott and Dharmapala there was another avenue through which this broad outlook naturally came. For Olcott

<sup>6</sup> Christopher S. Queen in Queen and King (1996) p.23.



it is the globalizing background from which he came. Traveling from the United States to India and Sri Lanka passing various countries and meeting with various people, Olcott had experience needed for a holistic approach to Buddhism. Dharmapala himself came from a family with urban culture, and with his early Christian education and entrepreneurship inherited from family, he was quick to grasp this outlook of Olcott. Olcott's arrival in Sri Lanka having read a report of Panadura Debate in an American news paper can be described as a result of globalization (contraction of space and time due to rapid advances of transport and means of communication). The holistic view toward Buddhism ushered by Olcott and accepted by Dharmapala may well be described as resulting from emerging forces of globalization. Although what was initiated by Olcott and followed by Dharmapala does not seem to have reached its desired conclusion in their life times, the former's formulation of what was widely accepted as the fundamental Buddhist beliefs can be taken as the first-ever effort at formulating a 'manifesto' for intra-Buddhist dialogue and cooperation

#### Developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Dharmapala's influence was far-reaching. The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) initiated by the late Professor Gunapala Malalasekera in 1950 was a direct outcome of this broad outlook. Malalasekera came under Dharmapala's influence when he was quite a young man. Being the first Professor of Buddhist Civilization at University of Ceylon Malalasekera understandably had a good understanding of the historical evolution of Buddhism. It was his expressed opinion that there were more reasons for Buddhists to get together than to remain separated. The initial resolution for the establishment of WFB was presented to the 1947 meeting of All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC), and it said that an organization representing all the Buddhists of the world needs to be established "for the purpose of bringing together Buddhists of the world, of exchanging news and views about the condition of Buddhism, of different countries and of discussing ways and means whereby the Buddhists could make their contribution to peace and happiness." It is with this understanding and conviction that he convened the Buddhists from all the traditions of Buddhism and established what is known today as World Fellowship of Buddhists. After establishment



of WFB Malalasekera embarked on a world tour covering countries in South, South East and East Asia meeting Buddhists belonging to all traditions. Malalasekera's own account of this tour amply reveals the magnitude of goodwill and respect he commanded everywhere he went<sup>7</sup>. One of the things he achieved in this tour was to get all the Buddhists to accept the six-coloured flag, initiated by Olcott as a part of his holistic vision, as the common Buddhist symbol. In concluding the records of his travel in the Buddhist world Malalasekera says:

I had asked for unity, for the recognition of the basic agreements which exist, as I passionately believe, amongst all who call themselves the followers of the Sakyamuni Gautama. I sensed that there was this recognition by all, orthodox Theravada or not, and felt happy that my mission was not in vain. In symbolic fellowship I asked, on a mandate of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, that the six-coloured Buddhist Flag as used in Lanka be accepted by Buddhists everywhere. Wherever I went I saw that the response to the call was marvelous. On the day of Vesak, as is known in Theravada lands, or Buddha day (as asked for by the World Fellowship of Buddhists) in others, I saw the Flag continuously from Lanka to Viet Nam, the utmost confines of this my mission. (p.71)

Another result of Malalasekera's broad vision was the Encyclopedia of Buddhism project which was conceived and planned by him. The proposed encyclopedia was not confined to Theravada but was to cover Buddhism in its totality. Malalasekera serves as its first editor-in-chief. Today WFB is an organization serving as the gathering point for Buddhists of all traditions all over the world.

**World Buddhist Sangha Council (WBSC):** WFB has remained predominantly a lay Buddhist organization. It took nearly two decades for a similar organization for the Sangha to develop. The World Buddhist Sangha Council (WBSC), started in 1966 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with the participation of monks from all Buddhist traditions, is an organization for the Buddhist monks exclusively. The Council membership represents all the Buddhist

<sup>7</sup> Read his *The Buddhist Flag in South Asia* by Malalasekera (publication date not mentioned, but could be in 1952).

traditions, sharing responsibilities among members across traditions. The Council has four objectives, namely,

- (i) developing the organizations and exchanges of Sangha worldwide;
- (ii) helping Sangha carry out dharmaduta activities throughout the world;
- (iii) enhancing harmony and relationship among different Buddhist traditions and
- (iv) propagating Buddha's teaching of compassion to promote world peace.

These objectives testify amply to a unified vision of the Dhamma, which was to serve as the foundation for the unity of the world-wide Sangha, not identifying with any sectarian particularities. It is also interesting to note that the council accepts the six-coloured flag (referred to above) as its official flag. After four decades from its inauguration, today WBSC is a world-wide organization in its true sense where Buddhist monks from all traditions get together on one flat-form and work under one identity, namely, the sons of the Sakyamuni Buddha (*samana sakyaputtiya*). This is definitely a long way from the situation that existed at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when, at times, members of different sects belonging to the same tradition refused even to acknowledge the existence of the other sects.

**Daughters of the Buddha: Sakyadhita:** A similar and even more interesting development has been taking place among the Buddhist women all over the world. Like their male counterparts the Buddhist nuns along with Buddhist female followers have initiated a world-wide Buddhist women's organization called Sakyadhita (Daughters of the Sakyamuni Buddha): International Network of Buddhist Women. The Organization was founded at Buddhagaya in 1987 by a group of female Buddhist practitioners, including Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American national with Asian Studies academic background and nun in the Tibetan tradition, Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen, a nun in Tibetan tradition, Ayya Khema, a nun in Theravada tradition and Dr. Chatsuman Kabilsingh, a university professor in Thailand and later Bhikkhuni Dhammanandi, a Theravada Buddhist nun. The Organization comprises nuns and female followers from all traditions including the recently ordained nuns from Sri Lanka<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> See for more information: *Women's Buddhism and Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision*,



The very reintroduction of bhikkhuni upasampadā (full admission to Buddhist nuns) to Sri Lanka is an example for the emerging trans-yānic Buddhism. The Bhikkhuni-sasana in the Theravada tradition had become extinct for the last ten centuries<sup>9</sup>. The traditional position is that reintroduction within Theravada is out of the question since there is no bhikkhuni-sangha within the Theravada lineage to grant upasampadā to them. Consequently, it is claimed that until and unless a Buddha appears again none can initiate the Bhikkhuni order. This meant that there is no room for Bhikkhuni-sasana to be revived within Theravada. The stalwarts in the tradition do not wish to identify the legitimacy of the Mahayana bhikkhunis, and the Vajrayāna tradition does not have a full-fledged bhikkhuni order. Consequently they do not see any possibility of cross-breeding either. The recent reintroduction of Bhikkhuni order to Sri Lanka was made possible when the prospective candidates first received higher ordination (upasampadā) from Korean Mahayana Bhikkhuni tradition and subsequently received the same from (a group of) the Sri Lanka Sangha as the traditional Vinaya requires (the bhikkhunis to have upasampadā from both the monks and nuns). Strictly speaking, the present bhikkhuni organization in Sri Lanka, which was a joint effort by both Mahayana bhiksunis and Theravada bhikkhus, is both Mahayanic and Theravadin<sup>10</sup>. Although the traditional monks<sup>11</sup> and lay people of Theravada do not accept the validity of this new upasampadā there cannot be any doubt that the age-old boundaries across traditions are being blurred and that what is emerging clearly transcends the age-old categories.

**‘American Buddhism’:** The practitioners of what is sometimes referred to as “American Buddhism” derive inspiration from various Buddhist traditions simultaneously, and seem to have

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*Renewal*, 2000, Ed., Ellison Banks Findly, Wisdom Publications, Boston, pp.97-101.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, after India, it seems to have existed only in Sri Lanka where it disappeared after the collapse of Anuradhapura around 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. It does not seem that Bhikkhuni order was ever introduced to the Southeast Asian region from Sri Lanka.

<sup>10</sup> Ven. Hewanpola Ratanasara (1920-2000), a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk who lived in Los Angeles ordained and gave full admission to a group of women following exactly a similar methodology. *Women's Buddhism and Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, p.154.

<sup>11</sup> In fact the hierarchy of the three chapters of the Sri Lanka Sangha does not recognize this joint upasampada as valid. Consequently the Sri Lanka state too does not accept the existence of bhikkhunis with full admission. The ordinary people, however, do not seem to worry about this theoretical issue.

evolved a type of eclectic Buddhism going beyond traditional categories<sup>12</sup>.

The American Buddhism is a result of both globalization and some geo-political and social problems the world has been experiencing for the last 4-5 decades. The arrival in the USA of East Asian Vietnamese Buddhists in large numbers took place as a result of the Vietnam war that ended by 70's. The kind of Buddhism they brought was mainly Mahayana although a sizable number of these Buddhists were Theravada followers who were 'converted' by the Venerable Narada Maha Thera of Wajiraramaya, Colombo. Vajrayāna Buddhists from Tibet arrived in the West in large numbers as a result of political problems between China and Tibet. Cambodian Buddhists started arriving in the West in the 80's after disastrous political experimentations by Pol Pot regime. What they represented was Theravada Buddhism. In addition to these groups there were Buddhists from the Mahayana countries for more than one hundred years in the USA and the Theravada Buddhists from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar for the last several decades. The evolution of this manifold Buddhism is a long story to be told in great detail and I do not attempt it here. What is to be noted however is the on-going process of the evolution of a new form of Buddhism drawing inspiration from all the traditions. As we noted earlier already some scholars have dubbed this as "American Buddhism". Richard Hughes Seager tries to portray this phenomenon in the following words:

The American Buddhist community as a whole encompasses an extremely wide spectrum of opinions about the nature of Buddhism. Within it, traditionalist and innovative impulses co-exist, sometimes comfortably, sometimes not. Tolerance is generally valued highly and the idea that all expressions of the dharma are in essence one is widely accepted<sup>13</sup>.

A good example of this newly evolving Buddhism comes from the Sangha (monks and nuns) in this part of the world. The Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California founded in 1980, initially to mediate disputes between monks and laity, grew

<sup>12</sup> See Seager (1999) for a comprehensive discussion.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 232.



up to be an organization bringing monks and laity from all Buddhist traditions that exist in that region. Inter-Buddhist celebration of Vesak organized by the Council is very significant for it marks the unanimity reached by all Buddhist traditions to adopt the full-moon day of the month of May, as accepted by the Theravada tradition, as the birth day of the Buddha. This shows how different Buddhist traditions developing consensus in matters of importance and creating new traditions in their new habitats.

In addition to this example of organizational significance, there is another important aspect with doctrinal significance that has developed within the context of North America in particular and the West in general. It is the practice of meditation we referred to at the beginning of this discussion. The insight (vipassana) meditation was introduced to the USA in the 1960's by the monks of Theravada school. This early meditation remained basically traditional and the teachers were usually monks from south and southeast Asian countries. This traditional form started undergoing change with lay meditation teachers such as Sharon Salsberg (born 1952), Joseph Goldstein (born 1944) and Jack Kornfield (born 1945). Salsberg and Goldstein studied meditation under the well known Myanmar-Indian meditation teacher Goenka (born 1924) whereas Kornfield was ordained twice under Ajahn Chah (1917-1992) in Thailand. They together started Insight Meditation Society in 1974 in Barr, Massachusetts, and have been teaching meditation at their centre and elsewhere. What is unique in their practice of meditation is that it has not been confined to the traditional Theravada. They have evolved a practice deriving inspiration from all the three Buddhist traditions and even from some non-Buddhist systems. This is very different from how the traditional meditation teachers from Theravada would feature their practice. Although they may have their own unique approaches to meditation and follow some of their own methods, they basically remain within the tradition. The newly evolved practice is not strictly Theravada in that sense. It is eclectic and trans-yanic in its character. Apart from this American reconstruction of meditation, some of the world renowned teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh are well known for their innovative methods that cut across traditions.



As we know, the traditional division of Mahāyāna and Hinayāna is based on a value judgment in which the former takes the latter to be of low dispositions whereas the latter is convinced that the former is misguided. After two millennia of the controversy today, however, the traditional division does not mean exactly the same. All traditions seem to come to a consensus as to what the core Buddhism is. Traditions have displayed openness to learn from others. The Buddhists are free to follow whatever the goal they aspire to, namely, the goal of full enlightenment, that of individual enlightenment or the goal of enlightenment as an arahant. As we saw in the discussion so far, the dialogue within the Buddhists themselves has been less theoretically oriented and more practical. This however does not preclude the need to have a theoretically refined position regarding the dialogue within. What seems significant is that the substantial practical experience gained so far can shape the nature of the theory and avoid the danger of theory being empty.

### **Socially Engaged Buddhism**

Buddhism went to the Western world roughly about one and half centuries back and was perceived as matching well with rational understanding of the universe advocated by the Enlightenment movement in Europe. More recently its philosophy was interpreted by philosophers like K.N. Jayatilleke as embodying an advanced form of empiricism. Continuing this line of thinking, today Buddhism is identified as a religious and intellectual force that provides an alternative mode of thinking and behaviour for those millions of people who feel that they need a change.

What is known as ‘socially engaged Buddhism’ refers to a way of thinking and behaviour characterized by active engagement by Buddhists in social and political problems that affect the society at large. Writing in 1985 on socially engaged Buddhism, Fred Eppsteiner, having described a risky effort by a group of concerned Buddhists to evacuate about 200 civilians trapped in a combat zone in Vietnam (in the mid 1960s’), says:



The term ‘engaged Buddhism’ refers to this kind of 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. In times of war or intense hostility they will place themselves between factions, literally or figuratively...<sup>14</sup>

Social engagement is not something new in Buddhism. In traditional Buddhist societies Buddhists have always been living a community life looking after the needs of one another. The new-ness in socially engaged Buddhism is that it is the response of the West, where Buddhism was introduced recently, to the initial misrepresentation of Buddhism as an anti-social teaching. The difference would be that whereas in the traditional societies Buddhists looked after their own societal needs the modern Buddhists would involve in large social political issues, the effects of which go far beyond the places where they originated. This is basically a result of globalization forces. Furthermore, social activism of the Buddhists can be regarded as both responding to the pressing needs of the world today and searching for new meanings of religious life itself.

**Eco-Buddhism (Green Buddhism):** Eco-Buddhism or green Buddhism is Buddhist theory and practice toward nature. As theory it presupposes and is based on the Buddhist perception of reality as a dependently arisen phenomenon. As practice, eco-Buddhism represents a set of attitudes and a way of behaviour. It is activism or praxis what makes eco-Buddhism a kind of engaged Buddhism<sup>15</sup>. As one advocate of this way of thinking puts it, “contrary to the popular view of Buddhism as a ‘refuge’ from the world, to become a Buddhist today is definitely political act. More specifically it is a geopolitical act<sup>16</sup>.”

The Buddhist ecologists identify two approaches to ecology: one is what is described as ‘appropriate management’ or stewardship of nature and its resources by man. This is understood to be

<sup>14</sup> *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 1985, ed. Fred Eppsteiner, Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, p.xii.

<sup>15</sup> A representative collection of papers is found in *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, 1990, edited by Allan Hunt Badiner.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Timmerman in “It is Dark Outside: Western Buddhism from the Enlightenment to the Global Crisis” in *Buddhism and Ecology*, 1994, ed. Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, Indian Edition,



a human-centred environmentalism based on individualism and supporting exploitation of natural resources by human beings. In this perspective, the opponents claim, individual greed is justified and the result is “a planet of ten billion points of infinite greed”. The other approach is characterized by protection of nature and environment from encroachment by human beings. This has been described as ‘eco-centric environmentalism’, and many find it preferable to the former. Writers such as Ken Jones (1993) criticize even this second type of approach which is relatively good. He describes views held under this category as “many varieties of deeper greenery” which are still based on subtle forms of individualism. He compares such approaches to the parable of elephant and blind men and proposes to jettison modern hyper individualism in favour of return to community.

What this sketch reveals is that there is an intensive discussion and debate on the issues of engaged Buddhism including many aspects of Buddhist environmentalism. The problem of individualism which Ken Jones touches is at the heart of the whole issue. The place of the human being in the whole process of interacting with nature has to be assessed correctly with the right balance. I say something about it in the next concluding section. But it is only a suggestion which needs to be argued for.

### **Doctrinal and Organizational Implications**

As we saw in the above discussion, the trans-yānic Buddhism cuts across the traditional three yānas. The practice throughout the history has been that the contacts among the traditions have been kept to the minimum although we cannot say that there were no contacts at all or that they were actively hostile to one another. As Noel Seth’s paper referred to above reveals, there have been hostilities within schools of, for instance, Japan and Korea. Sri Lanka history, however, records several instances of conflict between the Mahāvihāra and those who held different views (vaitulya-vāda). But one finds hardly any evidence of three Buddhist traditions fighting with one another. What we witness with the dawn of modernity is something different. It is a conscious effort to assimilate and incorporate ideas and practices of one another which were naturally isolated in the past owing to practical difficulties of interaction.



A question one may raise is whether there is any doctrinal or theoretical difficulty for this kind of interaction among divergent groups. Both in the early Dhamma and the Vinaya one finds frequent references to the unity of the Sangha (sangha-sāmaggi). The discourses such as Cula-gosinga and Mahā-gosinga of the Majjhima-nikāya heap praises on the disciples of the Buddha who interacted with each other like 'milk and water' (khirodakibhuta). Devadatta, on the contrary, is disparaged for splitting the sangha (sangha-bheda), which is described as one of the most serious unwholesome deeds resulting in the birth in the hell immediately after death (anantariya-kamma). But it is not included in the category of 'defeat' (pārājika), the most serious of all monastic offences. It is included in the next category, sanghadisesa, which can be remedied by proper behaviour unlike the first category which are not remedied. There are two sanghādisesa rules (rules 10 and 11) applicable to one who commits the split of the Sangha and to those who support such an act. In both cases those who were found guilty may remedy their offences by proper behaviour.

In the subsequent history of the Sasana we find that there were many instances when the groups of sangha splitting from the mother group and start acting as separate groups. Symbolic to the independent activism is performance of the Pātimokkha recital (bi-weekly recital of the code of Vinaya rules) as a separate group. It is not quite clear whether or not such breakaway groups were considered to have committed the offence of sangha-bheda. As the early Buddhist history shows, there were breakaway groups from the breakaway groups themselves, making the situation more complicated. Even in the more recent history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka this tendency of breaking away from mother groups was quite commonplace. In the Amarapura fraternity, which started in the early eighteenth century, for instance, still there are more than twenty subgroups operating as independent groups. But these groups are not considered as guilty of splitting the Sangha although every act of forming a new group of the Sangha runs the risk of sangha-bheda.

While the Vinaya does not approve of sangha-bheda it does provide for the Sangha, which is split, to come together. The recital of the Pātimokkha as one group is considered as symbolic of



the unity of the Sangha. There is a special provision for the recital when the Sangha which was split before reunites as one group. This recital is called 'unity recital' (sāmaggī-uposatha). A recent example of such performance is when all the branches of the Amarapura fraternity of Sri Lanka got together in 1969 and performed uposatha together to mark the newly forged unity<sup>17</sup>. This shows that the ideal situation is to have a single unitary body of the Sangha. If a group breaks away that does not necessarily mean that the breakaway group is invariably guilty for there is a possibility that the very breakaway group is the one that upholds the right position. Both the Dhamma and the Vinaya supports unity, and encourage divergent groups to unite. Strictly speaking when divergent groups come together there is no divergence any more and the uposatha is performed within the united Sangha.

The situation with the three Buddhist traditions today is different. When the three traditions come together they do come as unique groups maintaining their identity. But tend to work together upholding commonalities at a higher level. For example, in the case of sakyā-dhitā or 'the daughters of the Buddha' what unites all different Buddhists groups is their identity as the female followers of the Buddha. When the first group of nuns from Sri Lanka received higher admission (upasampadā) from a group of Korean nuns and when the same group was given higher admission by the Sri Lanka Theravada Sangha, as the Theravada Vinaya requires, this becomes tantamount to accepting the validity of the Mahayana practice by the Theravada. The situation here is different from two divergent groups coming together forming one group. This is a clear case of two different Buddhist traditions accepting the validity of each other while maintaining their own identities. The resultant bhikkhuni tradition functioning currently in Sri Lanka<sup>18</sup> is neither fully Theravada nor fully Mahayana; it is both Theravada and Mahayana. (Currently the Sri Lanka Theravada hierarchy and the Sri Lanka state do not accept the validity of this newly formed Bhikkhuni Sangha. However, if they go as a new non-Theravada group with a new identity, this question does not arise.) The Vinaya observed by the Mahāyāna nuns

<sup>17</sup> The branches of the Amarapura fraternity were united formally in 1956 under the name, All Lanka Amarapura sangha Council. In 1974 the organization was brought under a new constitution and renamed, 'Sri Lanka Amarapura Sangha Council ( Sri Lanka Amarapura sangha Sabha).

<sup>18</sup> Thailand has only a very few bhikkhunis with higher admission.



is not the same as that followed by the Theravada nuns. On the other hand, however, the differences are only with regard to minor rules, and not the major ones. From the point of view of the Dhamma we can argue that the Mahayana while upholding the Buddhahood as the ultimate goal and the path of the Bodhisatva as the method, does not reject the arahant ideal or the sāvaka-yāna. This shows that there is really not any serious difficulty either from the Vinaya or from the Dhamma in the joint operations among the three traditions. The presence of some East Asian sects with married clergy, however, seems to pose a problem, for sex involves violating one of the central requirements of the monastic life not only in the traditional Theravada, but also in Mahayana and Vajrayāna. This more recent development which arose first in Japan and introduced to Korea almost by force at the turn of the last century may be ignored for the present discussion. In any case, in the Buddhist tradition in which where there is no centre with power accumulated, a question of excommunication does not arise. Therefore it seems that there is no real doctrinal or 'legal' difficulty for a trans-yānic Buddhism to evolve.

Engaged Buddhism represents the contemporary Buddhist approaches to social issues and problems. Although social consciousness is not absent in Buddhism what we witness today is Buddhists sharing the global awareness of the need for addressing social ills. The challenge is to apply the Buddhist principles and insights to contemporary situations which are more complex and more diverse than those of the pre-modern world. In spite of complexity and diversity of situations, since human being has remained human being from time immemorial, the teachings of the Buddha which are first and foremost meant for human beings, may be applied to these situations with success.

Of the two approaches to nature and environment outlined above, one may reject the first without much debate as not representing the true Buddhist position. The second with its many varieties may be acceptable to many. The matter, however, is not that simple or clear-cut. It is clear that the greedy behaviour of one set people endangers their own lives as well as the lives of many others who are really innocent. Such behaviour is unhealthy for oneself for one



is overwhelmed by one's own avarice. At the same time it is ethically wrong for it is harmful to others. The real challenge, however, is to forge an ethic which takes into account our own individualism, namely, the fact that we are a group of beings motivated by self-satisfaction. In the process of self-satisfaction human beings invariably use natural resources to achieve their goals. No one will say that this is wrong. It is hard to imagine how one can argue that the existence of nature takes precedence over the existence of human beings, or that human beings need to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of preservation of nature. But the destruction of nature is surely going to be self-destructive for human beings. What this means is that human beings and nature are inter-dependent, and neither takes precedence over the other. If we understand the entire universe including its many varieties of beings as an inter-dependent whole the question of one having precedence over another will not arise. Neither would there arise the need for self-sacrifice for the sake of nature. In other words, the Buddhist care for nature and ecology is not unconditional altruism. It has to be based on compassion and wisdom, the two pillars of Buddhist social action.

### Conclusion

Emerging new trends in Buddhism seem to pose many problems and challenges to students and practitioners of Buddhism alike. New situations force us to look for new solutions. As far as Buddhism is concerned, the new solutions needed may not be really new. What is needed is creativity and innovation in order to adapt the ancient teachings to contemporary situations. There is an extensive discussion on these issues, particularly on engaged Buddhism and Buddhist environmentalism, in the West. Nothing comparable is seen in the traditional Buddhist societies. What is important, on the part of those who are in the traditional Buddhist societies serious about the applicability of the teaching of the Buddha to current social problems, is to have continuous discussion on these issues, rather than letting things happen on their own.



## **Appendix**

### **FUNDAMENTAL BUDDHISTIC BELIEFS (formulated by Henry Steel Olcott)**

I Buddhists are taught to show the same tolerance, forbearance, and brotherly love to all men, without distinction; and an unswerving kindness towards the members of the animal kingdom.

II The universe was evolved, not created; and its functions according to law, not according to the caprice of any God.

III The truths upon which Buddhism is founded are natural. They have, we believe, been taught in successive kalpas, or world-periods, by certain illuminated beings called BUDDHAS, the name BUDDHA meaning “Enlightened”.

IV The fourth Teacher in the present kalpa was Sākya Muni, or Gautama Buddha, who was born in a Royal family in India about 2,500 years ago. He is an historical personage and his name was Siddhārtha Gautama.

V Sākya Muni taught that ignorance produces desire, unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth, and rebirth, the cause of sorrow. To get rid of sorrow, therefore, it is necessary to escape rebirth; to escape rebirth, it is necessary to extinguish desire; and to extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance.

VI Ignorance fosters the belief that rebirth is a necessary thing. When ignorance is destroyed the worthlessness of every such rebirth, considered as an end in itself, is perceived, as well as the paramount need of adopting a course of life by which the necessity for such repeated rebirths can be abolished. Ignorance also begets the illusive and illogical idea that there is only one existence for man, and the other illusion that this one life is followed by states of unchangeable pleasure or torment.

VII The dispersion of all this ignorance can be attained by the persevering practice of an all-embracing altruism in conduct, development of intelligence, wisdom in thought, and destruction of desire for the lower personal pleasures.



VIII The desire to live being the cause of rebirth, when that is extinguished rebirths cease and the perfected individual attains by meditation that highest state of peace called *Nirvāna*.

IX Sākyā Muni taught that ignorance can be dispelled and sorrow removed by the knowledge of the four Noble Truths, *viz.*:

1. The miseries of existence;
2. The cause productive of misery, which is the desire ever renewed of satisfying oneself without being able ever to secure that end;
3. The destruction of that desire, or the estranging of oneself from it;
4. The means of obtaining this destruction of desire. The means which he pointed out is called the Noble Eightfold Path, *viz.*: Right Belief; Right Thought; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Means of Livelihood; Right Exertion; Right Remembrance; Right Meditation.

X Right Meditation leads to spiritual enlightenment, or the development of that Buddha-like faculty which is latent in every man.

XI The essence of Buddhism, as summed up by the Tathāgathā (Buddha) himself, as:

To cease from all sin, To get virtue, To purify the heart.

XII The universe is subject to a natural causation known as “Karma”. The merits and demerits of a being in past existences determine his condition in the present one. Each man, therefore, has prepared the causes of the effects which he now experiences.

XIII The obstacles to the attainment of good karma may be removed by the observance of the following precepts, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism, *viz.*: (1) Kill not; (2) Steal not; (3) Indulge in no forbidden sexual pleasure; (4) Lie not; (5) Take no intoxication or stupefying drug or liquor. Five other precepts which need not be here enumerated should be



observed by those who would attain, more quickly than the average layman, the release from misery and rebirth.

XIV Buddhism discourages superstitious credulity. Gautama Buddha taught it to be the duty of a parent to have his child educated in science and literature. He also taught that no one should believe what is spoken by any sage, written in any book, or affirmed by tradition, unless it accord with reason.

Drafted as a common platform upon which all Buddhists can agree.

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# Anger Management: A Buddhist Perspective

Padmasiri de Silva<sup>1</sup>



How could we forget those ancient myths that stand at the beginning of all races-- the myths about the dragons that are at the last moment transformed into a princess. Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are only princesses waiting for us to act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises before you larger than you've ever seen, if an anxiety like light and

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shadows moves over your hands and everything that you do. You must realize that something has happened to you; that life has not forgotten you; it holds you in your hands and not let you fall. Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any miseries or depression? For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you.

Rainer Maria Rilke, (1984)

Most people live, whether physically, intellectually or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness. We all have reservoirs of life to draw upon, of which we do not dream.

William James (1962, 51).

### **Nature of Anger and Pathways of Management: Introduction**

A recent analysis of anger management observes:

All of us get angry- although some people might not believe this. Anger is an emotion that can occur when there is a threat to our self-esteem, our bodies, our property, our ways of seeing the world, or our desires. People differ in what makes them angry. Some people will perceive an event as threatening, while others see no threat in the same event. Our responses to anger differ greatly. Some people are able to experience angry feeling and use them as a way of solving problems rationally and effectively. Others turn their anger inward and engage in self-destructive behavior. Other people strike out when they feel angry. And some refuse to acknowledge their anger—or they confuse with other emotions such as vulnerability or fear.

(Lehmann, 2006)

There may be multi-faceted reasons for getting angry but anger is suffering (*dukkha*) and as a state of mind, anger can affect our health and well-being. Recent discoveries in medicine and health indicate that anger, hostility, anxiety, repression and denial



can affect the strength of the immune system and the robustness of our cardiovascular system, where as calm, optimism, joy and loving kindness are beneficial to our well-being. At the ethical level, anger is a *kilesa* (defilement) and is a road block on the path to liberation and it emerges as *vyapada* (ill-will), one of the five hindrances. At the social level, anger generates conflicts and when this state deteriorates, there is confrontation and violence. Anger according to the *suttas* lie dormant-“the sleeping passions” (*patigha anusaya*) and this may emerge at the level of our thoughts or physical activity. Even a baby boy lying in the cot is attached to the body and has a proclivity to generate anger by sounds and physical expression.

We tend to ignore the simple fact that the origin of violence is in anger. The Buddha showed how anger can be very counter-productive, and he said getting angry with another person is like lighting a fire which burns within oneself and it harms oneself more than the other person. Repentance and guilt, as well as humiliation and punishment may follow what one does in an angry frame of mind. Anger also may be rooted in bias and prejudice and thus an inability to look at an issue with openness and impartiality. Though there may be a point in anger at an injustice (moral anger/righteous indignation), such anger rests on the fence between the wholesome and the unwholesome and at any time deteriorate into violence---history has proved this point in struggles against injustice. While moral silence at injustice, moral deafness at injustice (lack of sensitivity) are unwholesome, the response to injustice needs to take a positive and mature path

If anger is suffering, it is necessary to understand the causes of anger and the unhealthy and healthy ways of managing anger.

As I have mentioned in an earlier study, in the sermons of the Buddha, there are number of ways of dealing with negative emotions: Taking precautions through *restraint*; *abandoning* them once they have emerged, not leaving room for them to emerge in the future, develop positive emotions and stabilize the positive emotions once they have emerged; *remedying* them *by antidotes like loving kindness and forgiveness*; *transforming anger to endurance and understanding their true nature through insight* (de Silva, 2005).



Transformation of negative emotions like anger into positive insights and positive personality qualities is what Carl Jung called ‘emotional alchemy’, converting brass into gold. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition this process is described through the metaphor of the peacock, though she eats poison, it is transformed into a spectacle of varied colourful feathers.. In Buddhism, though we consider anger as a defilement (*kilesa*) at the level of the *sila*, at the level of insight meditation, anger is considered as just phenomena or *dhamma* that ‘emerge, stay for a while and pass away’. At this level it is neither good nor bad, neither yours nor mine, it is an impersonal process. At the meditative level whether it is *samatha* or *vipassana*, anger emerges as *vyapada*. It can emerge in a subtle way, when one reacts to the fact that “today the meditation is not working well”. One should shift gears into the impersonal mood (without personalizing), develop patience and persistence, generate energy but just let the process develop with its own momentum. Even in the emergence of boredom in meditation, there is a subtle form of anger. Anger in such contexts is a form of ‘reactivity’. Refraining from identifying oneself with anger is referred to as de-centering in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (de Silva, 2008).

Thus we do not throw away the anger, jealousy and remorse but convert them into positives without being imprisoned in negativities. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has captured this transformation in a beautiful phrase: “No lotus without cow dung”!

A technique, I used in my clinical practice is based on the use of the “componential theory” of emotions, breaking an emotion like anger, fear and sadness into different facets and taking these aspects one by one: **the body, feelings, thoughts, desires and social contexts**. I also use the framework of the *satipatthana* in working on emotions. The initial obstructions come from those who refuse to acknowledge the presence of anger, those who repress **them**, find escape routes, react to them without knowing that this is occurring and use various types of ‘defence mechanisms’ ( a concept introduced by Sigmund Freud). Those who are subject to moral anger and describe it as ‘righteous indignation’ add another layer to the negativities of anger, as they have found a way of justifying anger. Freud would refer to this feature as ‘rationalisation’. Other relevant defence mechanism linked



to anger are repression, identification, reaction formation, projection (of responsibility on others), while sublimation may take a wholesome turn, converting the energy of anger to a positive turn: a boy who is angry at the extremely unexpected failure at an examination may take to music or sports, like channelling a river that floods for cultivation.

Acceptance and seeing their anger with clarity is the first step in a sound therapeutic approach. Self-deceptions, facades, rationalizations and worst of all denying responsibility are the initial targets of awareness on the road toward recovery. Such deceptions prevent one from seeing one's true nature, and this condition is described as a state of self-alienation and lack of authenticity or sincerity in one's being. The Buddha advised Rahula to consider his mind as a mirror, and that is the path to self-knowledge.

### **The Emotion Profile of Anger**

First let us look at the emotion profile of anger and then explore ways of managing anger. Simple anger is a reflex of reacting when something obstructs our plans; for example we kick the ground in a mood of frustration. Anger proper is based on a belief that there is an offence committed to oneself and the desire to set the offence right or retaliate. Indignation is the anger over a moral principle we cherish, like not keeping to a promise and violating the essential ingredient of a good friendship or on a more objective scale, seeing the injustice done to an innocent man, whose cheap labour is exploited. If you look at the range of angry feelings, there is a whole range from slight annoyance to rage; sulking is passive anger; exasperation is outliving one's patience. Revenge takes time for reflection and holding a grudge is long-standing resentment.

Hatred compared with anger is an enduring, and intense feeling. It is also a cumulative condition, and also may go underground till it comes out or becomes distorted into forms like sarcasm and cynicism. Anger may take a superiority stance, feelings like disgust and contempt towards the hated person. Hatred is more a disposition or an emotional attitude than a moving emotion. Anger also becomes blended with other emotions like fear and suspiciousness.



Envy and jealousy are blend emotions but depending for their existence on anger. Malicious envy is unjustified hatred directed towards some one's good fortune, and also to pray that this good fortune collapses, even if one does not get it. Admiration envy is different—it is the desire to emulate others. Jealousy is a blend emotion with the flavour of anger: fear of losing something one cherishes, like one's girl friend; shame, as one's self-image is being threatened by a third party; sadness, as we are loosing something closer to our heart; ambivalence-love and hatred towards your girl friend or beloved. Another subtle inroad of anger into an emotion is in boredom. It is because of this all pervading quality of anger, that some one compared anger to the quality of salt while cooking a curry, as almost all negative emotions have the flavour of anger or a more subtle form of aversion. Aversion (*dosa*) is found in boredom, pathological sadness/depression, and is a quiet partner in the pathologies of greed and of course in sadism and masochism.

There is a subtle form of anger which lies at the bottom of general depressive moods, strange enough among affluent people and this theme is the subject of a lively television drama by Alan de Bottom, *Status Anxiety*: it is a restlessness in the midst of plenty, and emerges specially in a society that overvalues external goods that generates envy and competition rather than compassion. He observes, "it is a strange melancholy often haunting inhabitants of democracies in the midst of abundance". (Botton, 2004, 52-53). Studies of the politics of emotion indicate that such emotions like envy coupled with pathological greed generate an epidemiology, that needs treatment observed the philosopher Ameli Rorty

One of the most powerful causes of immediate anger release is physical interference, and here the role of the body in anger is crucial but psychological insults of a denigrating nature may have a greater hold of the mind. We need some restraint at the level of verbal expression, as this is an immediate route for anger behaviour. Thoughts are more tangible and therapies like cognitive therapy focus on the thoughts. During recent times many therapeutic traditions in the west have integrated the contemplative approach to therapy focused on mindfulness. Mindfulness techniques may be focused on the body, specially breathing patterns, feelings, thoughts and desires.



Paul Ekman, world's foremost exponent of emotion studies says that it is harder to be attentive and mindful when one is angry, but if we have cultivated mindfulness, it is possible to step back, and then it is possible exercise a choice as to how you may respond; for instance you may try to understand why and excuse the person who provoked you due to some stress of the person (Ekman, 2003, 73)

Also, we can be aware of negative techniques like stonewalling: "More often shown by men than women, in whom the stonewaller won't respond to his partner's emotions". Not communicating and registering silence may turn out to be a form of anger.

One of the western traditions using mindfulness techniques defines their practice: "Consciously bringing awareness to you here-and-now experience with openness, interest and receptiveness" (Harris, 2006). The facets of mindfulness include:

Living in the present; engaging fully in what you are doing rather than getting lost in thoughts; allowing your feelings to be what they are, letting them come and go rather than trying to control them. When we observe our private experiences in this manner even painful feelings appear to be less threatening and such practice may transform our relationship with painful feelings and thoughts. This is a transformative education of the emotions. The following verse has been displayed in the office room/living room of some of my clients who came for counseling:

### **The Guest House**

This human being is a guesthouse  
Every morning is a new arrival  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are're a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweeps your house  
Empty of it's furniture  
Still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
For some new delight.



The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at the door laughing,  
And invite them in.  
Be grateful whoever comes, because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond

(Rumi)

There is a kind of clarity that is precise and the direct experience of what comes and goes in our minds, our feelings, thoughts and also to some extent our bodily experience. We have a habit of pushing out of awareness what we dislike and repressing them or finding escape routes. There is also a method Krishnamurti used called “choiceless awareness”, as described in the poem, “The Guest House”, where the mind is able to open itself, and instantly know and recognize what is arising, and incessantly discern its true nature, non-conceptually by the mind., observe the flow of mental images and sensations just as they arise, without engaging in criticism or praise.

Also compassion, forgiveness, acceptance and openness add a new sense of space to the mind. This process frees us from constantly judging others and oneself, with a whole range of categoricals, of what people ought and should do.

### **Buddhism & Anger Management: The Subtle Inroads of Aversion**

The Buddhist discourses have a whole range of anger words: some of these terms are ill will (*vyāpāda*) which is one of the hindrances, *kodha* (anger), annoyance (*upaghāta*), malice (*upanāha*) and fret (*paritāha*). But *dosa* is one of the roots of all unwholesome states along with *lobha* (greed) and delusion (*moha*), and *dosa* refers to all states of aversion. It may be observed that fear, judgment and boredom are also forms of aversion: although we generally don't think of them as such, fear and judgment are all forms of aversion. When we examine them, we see that they are based on our dislike of some aspects of experience. With the mind full of dislike, full of wanting to separate or withdraw from our experience, it is difficult to explore the present moment in a state of discovery. Just as we react to physical pain we react to unpleasant psychological feelings and emotions. Thus it appears that anger or reactivity colours almost all negative emotions. But one of the problems as Joseph



Goldstein points out is that often we are not aware as to what emotion is present and whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. In his book, *Insight Meditation* (Goldstein, 1993), he mentions a number of steps in the right direction: as the emotions that appear in the mind have no clear boundaries and no definite sense of beginnings and endings, it is necessary to take care to recognize each emotion as it arises and to learn to distinguish among subtle differences; secondly, as the negative emotions are unpleasant we do not acknowledge them, and clear recognition has to be followed by acceptance, as the emotions often do not emerge as a single emotion but in constellation, both of these skills are necessary. Thirdly, the most difficult thing to learn is to open ourselves to the whole range of feelings/emotions without identifying with them. Thus there is a point of paradox that a collection of negative emotions provide raw material for insight meditation. Important thing first is to take responsibility for what emerges in the mind and body, change perspectives and as you move into deep meditation to cut through the chains of identification. The change from accepting responsibility for one's emotions and then shift to a process of disengaging from mechanisms of identification is one of the deepest shifts in the practice of insight meditation. In concluding this most insightful description and analysis of the transition from emotional bondage to emotional liberation, Goldstein says that the practice of *vipassana* can be a wonderful experience, as this gives us the power to observe our own mind.

Ven.Nyanaponika discussing the value of bare attention says that, "The greater part of man-made suffering in the world comes not from deliberate wickedness as from ignorance, heedlessness, thoughtlessness, rashness and lack of self-control. Very often a single moment of mindfulness or wise reflection would have prevented a far-reaching sequence of misery or guilt" (Nyanaponika, 1975, 39). Exercising the inner breaks of self-control and slowing help us to free ourselves from our constant reactivity to unpleasant situations and experiences.

### **Meditation Techniques**

The term *samatha* refers to a state of mind which has been brought to a rest and is focused for instance on breathing and limited to that without allowing it to wander. It is a state of calm and clarity,



which prepares the ground for gaining insight (*vipassana*). The insight meditator uses his concentration as a tool to deal with the encountering of illusory constructs, which prevent him from seeing reality. With the practice of insight meditation you gradually move away from thoughts of “me” and “mine”, and see anger as an experience that emerge and cease. It is a process, which does not belong to you or me. This helps us to refrain from concealing anger, get obsessed with, rationalize it or for that matter even to escape. As venerable Nyanaponika points out, there is a twilight world of frustrated desires, suppressed resentments, vacillations, ambivalence—all drawing nourishment from subliminal tendencies described by the pali term *anusaya*: at the level of negative emotions *paṭigha* (aversion), *rāga* (lust) and *māna* (conceit) are important character traits out of seven *anusayas*. (Nyanaponika, 1986, 7). Techniques of insight at a deeper level make us see anger as ‘construction’.

During regular meditation sittings, if these disturbing thoughts and feelings intrude, the method of naming and identifying negative feelings and emotions is a useful technique. We can also make them objects of meditation. The *Satipatthāna* (Fourfold Mindfulness Practice) offers number of entry points to deal with anger: Body and breath; feelings; thoughts. Anger as a negative emotion first manifest via the body and breathing patterns, then as painful feelings, and then with the admixture of thoughts, desires, memory etc we see a full-blown emotion. It is fed by the subliminal proclivity of aversion (*patigha anusaya*).

### Body and Breathing in Anger

Breathing is controlled by the autonomic nervous system and so generally does not come within average consciousness, unless we develop awareness of the breath as a special exercise. The central nervous system functions when we receive and process messages and makes conscious choices. When we are stressed or experience sudden anger, breathing patterns change. Evolution has developed ways to manage ‘emergency reactions’ of flight (fear) and fight (anger), which may convey useful messages. But when the alarm bells ring, a celebrated boxer, and I think is supposed to have bitten his rival’s ear! Joseph Ledoux a neuroscientist working on such emergency reactions says that at that time the emotional brain hijacks the rational



brain. According to him in impulsive reactions, the part of the brain called the *amygdale* is active begin to respond before the *neocortex* processes the information and makes a finely tailored response.

The practice of regular mindfulness, observing the breath in quiet moments of meditation, helps the breathing patterns to get habituated into a rhythmical, quiet and steady flow, a pattern that is both healthy and wholesome. Thus instead of engaging in ‘damage control’ after developing a violent character, it is better to take preventive remedies by developing mindfulness as a routine activity in one’s daily agenda. *Ānāpānasati* when blended with compassion helps to reduce blood pressure, stress and tension, minimize the adrenal release, the dilation of the pupils, sweating, rapid respiration and in general irregular breathing patterns. Thus regular mindfulness practice is able to restore the even rhythms of our lives as a whole. As the breath stands at the threshold between voluntary and involuntary bodily functions, this practice helps us to be mindfulness of lot of our mechanical and automatic acts. The recent discoveries in *psychoneuro-immunolog*: that the body is a second brain has added a new dimension to mindfulness of the body meditation. (Work of Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*); Joseph Ledoux, *The Emotional Brain*).

### Feelings

As we are dealing with anger, I wish to direct attention to the role of feelings in emotional experience, for mindfulness of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) provides a basic key to unravel crucial emotional issues:

This therefore, is a crucial point in the conditioned origin of Suffering, because it is at this point that **Feeling may give rise to passionate emotion of varying types**, and it is, therefore, here that one may be able to break that fatuous concatenation. If in receiving a sense impression, one is able to pause and stop at the phase of Feeling, and make it, in its first stage of manifestation, the object of Bare Attention, feeling will not be able to originate Craving or other passions. (Nyanaponika, 1975, 69, Heart of Buddhist Meditation).

The germinal sate of what later develops into an emotion with great speed is found in pleasurable, painful or neutral feelings.

When experiencing a pleasurable feeling, the monk knows: “I experience a pleasurable feeling”, when experiencing a painful feeling, he knows “I experience a painful feeling”, and when experiencing a neutral feeling, he knows “I experience a neutral feeling”

Pleasurable feelings have a tendency to rouse subliminal lust, and painful feelings to rouse subliminal aversion. So, if you just notice a pleasurable or a painful feeling without attachment or aversion you prevent them from getting converted into lust, anger, fear etc. Three very important and interesting suttas shed further light on this issue: *Culavedalla-sutta*, *Bahuvedaniya-sutta* and the *Salāyatanavibhanga-sutta* (Middle Length Sayings, 44, 59, 137).

Pleasurable feeling is pleasant when it persists and painful when it changes; painful feeling is painful when it persists but pleasurable when it changes. *Bahuvedaniya sutta* analyses 108 types of feelings; *Salāyatana vibhanga* 36 kinds of feeling; six kinds of joy based on household life; six kinds of joy based on renunciation; six kinds of grief based on household life and six kinds of grief based on renunciation; six kinds of equanimity based on household life and six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation.

### Thoughts

“Herein a monk knows the mind with lust (*rāga*), as with lust; the mind without lust (*vitārāga*) as without lust; the mind with hate (*dosa*) as with hate; the mind without hate (*sadosa*) as without hate; the mind with delusion (*moha*) as with delusion, the mind without delusion (*samoha*) as without delusion, and ...the shrunken mind, distracted mind, undeveloped etc

### Contemplation of Mind Objects

When anger is present, he knows, anger is present. He knows how the arisen of non-arisen comes to be; he knows how the rejection of non-arisen anger comes to be, and he knows how the non-arising in the future of the rejected anger comes to be.





## Anger Management and EQ

Today, exponents of emotional intelligence (EQ) point out that the way we handle emotions need a special kind of intelligence. Daniel Goleman in his work, the best seller, *Emotional Intelligence* outlines the nature of the concept, and below is a Buddhist adaptation of his criteria.

1. The ability to access one's own emotions, discriminate different emotions, and understand their nature.
2. Empathise and understand the emotions of others.
- 3 The ability to distinguish between morally wholesome and unwholesome emotions in one self and others.
4. The ability to regulate one's emotions.
5. The ability to be motivated by healthy emotions.

In Buddhism emotional intelligence is supplemented by contemplative intelligence.

Though 'emotional intelligence' is now recommended for training professionals, as well as being incorporated in a school curriculum, twenty six centuries back, the Buddha has provided a comprehensive theory and practice for the education of emotions, in life, liberation and therapy. Anger management is only one area of his skills in managing emotions without repression, deception and disguise (*vancaka dhamma*), escape and avoidance.

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# Political Rivalry and Doctrinal Debates: A Modern Tibetan Response to the Controversy of Buddhist Revelation

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In the history of Buddhism political conflict has often been tied to doctrinal issues and discussions concerning the authenticity of scriptural sources. One such example can be found in Tibet during the so-called “renaissance period” from the 10th to the 14th century. During this time various schools would compete for the favors of the political establishment, often doing so by claiming superiority on doctrinal issues. This paper traces the history of one of the key discussions in this period, namely the controversies surrounding the treasure tradition (*gter lugs*) of the Ancient School (*rnying ma*), and outlines the main areas of content while also considering a modern response to this conflict offered by one of the greatest masters of 20th century Tibetan Buddhism, Mipham Namgyal (1846-1912).

The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism is home to a transmission of Buddhist teaching known as the “Treasure tradition” (*gter lugs*), a unique religious system that only recently has

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become the focus of attention in the West.<sup>2</sup> This tradition propagates the reverence of religious material known as “Treasure” (*gter ma*), blessed words and objects said to originate in the enlightened intent of buddhas and bodhisattvas. According to the Nyingma School, the Treasures are most often comprised of spiritual instructions concealed by enlightened beings for the purpose of discovery at a later predestined time when their message will invigorate the Buddhist teaching and deepen spiritual understanding. Central to this process is the figure of the Treasure revealer (*gter ston*)—the person who acts as a medium for the re-emergence of this inspired material into the human world. Accordingly, beginning in the eleventh century and continuing into the present, the Nyingma School identifies a large number of Treasure revealers and grants authoritative status to their discoveries.

It did not take long from the first major Treasure revelations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries before skeptics from rivaling Buddhist schools began questioning their authenticity.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of the Treasures coincided with the second wave of Indian Buddhist import to Tibet from the tenth to fourteenth centuries. At this time, as the texts and practices of the New Schools (*gsar ma*) and the older Nyingma tradition became increasingly measured against one another, tensions often ran high as the life-giving favors of the political and financial establishment were perceived to be intimately linked to publicly demonstrating the supremacy of one’s own religious tradition at the expense of others. The New Schools primarily sought to establish themselves by emphasizing the Indian origin of their texts—an origin the Nyingma School had difficulty proving, in part due to the long time span since its textual import from India in the eighth and ninth centuries. As a verifiable Indian origin became the central measure for authenticating Buddhist scripture in Tibet, the texts and practices of the Nyingma School were quickly disclaimed as Tibetan forgeries and interpolations. Even so, the approach to validation propagated by the New Schools was never rigorously applied internally and would occasionally be suspended with if seen to conflict with the inherited textual corpus

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the Treasure system see Doctor 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Although traditionally Sangye Lama (11<sup>th</sup> cent.) is said to have been the first Treasure revealer it is uncertain whether this attribution is factual or represents a later attempt to trace the tradition to more ancient roots.



of the New Schools themselves. Nevertheless, as this new-found standard of evaluation became increasingly normative in the Tibetan discourse on authenticity, the stage was quickly set for a polemical confrontation over the validity of the Treasures.

### Traditional Polemics

The lack of mention of the Treasures in outside sources until the thirteenth century tells us that in terms of adherents and political influence the Treasure tradition must have been a relatively minor movement at least until the time of Nyangral Nyima Özer (1124-1192) in the second half of the twelfth century. During the first half of the thirteenth century, however, with the appearance of polemical works denouncing Treasure revelation we may assume that the tradition had gained momentum through the revelations of Nyangral Nyima Özer and Guru Chöwang (1212-1270)—the two most prominent figures among the early Treasure revealers. The earliest known critique of Treasure revelation is by the scholar and polemicist Chak Lotsawa Chöje Pal (1197-1265), who advanced his criticism of the Treasures as part of a general complaint against practices and scriptures circulating in Tibet that he perceived to be spurious in nature.<sup>4</sup> Having argued at length against the general teachings of the Nyingma School he concludes this section of the text with a critique of the Treasures and Guru Chöwang, concerning whom he remarks:

At the time when Samye Monastery was being constructed Guru Padmasambhava arrived from India and vanquished false teachings. Then, having made a few auspicious connections by accepting students, he returned to India. Later, Pekar, a Gyalpo spirit, entered the body of a Nepalese known as Kakarudzin. He put on a meditation hat, placed feathers in it and put on a brocade cloak. He then went to Samye where he declared himself to be Padmasambhava and taught innumerable perverted teachings and thereafter these numerous wrong teachings spread. The many false teachings were then manipulated by the one known as Guru Chöwang who became possessed when a Radza spirit entered him after telling him that they were Treasure texts.

<sup>4</sup> Chak Lotsawa 1979: 2-18.2. See also Martin 2001: 111-116.



Subsequently, nāgas, demons, and Gyalgong spirits gathered around his false teachings which resulted in outbreaks of leprosy and psychotic fits. These were then taken as his signs of accomplishment. Such texts that appear from Treasures are not authentic.<sup>5</sup>

There were other thinkers of this period, such as Jigten Gönpo (1143-1217),<sup>6</sup> Sakya Pandita (1182-1251), and possibly even Butön (1290-1364),<sup>7</sup> who, like Chak Lotsawa, saw it fit to issue warnings against the Treasures. In a text attributed to the famed scholar Butön Rinchen Drub the author seems to agree with Chak Lotsawa's assessment of Guru Chöwang and comments: "Such false teachings, pretending to be the words of [Padmasambhava], were presented as Treasure revelations by Chöwang who was under the influence of demons. Thereby numerous incorrect teachings were put into writing leading many beings down the wrong path."<sup>8</sup>

The main objection of the early polemics seems to have been a concern that the Treasures were false Tibetan compositions devoid of spiritual continuity with Buddhist India. Although the condemnation of the Treasures was often categorical and determined, the early skeptical writings generally offer little historical, philosophical, or philological deduction to support the critique. This did not, however, prevent these writings from becoming standard models for subsequent condemnations of the Treasures by the New Schools. Thus, two centuries following the critiques of Sapan and the other early polemicists, the Treasure apologist Ratna Lingpa (1403-1478) sums up the skeptical arguments in the following manner:

There are some ghostly and sectarian people...who criticize the Treasures. They say that the Treasures are false and never were concealed. Even if the Treasures should happen to be genuine, they will say that they are earth teachings, stone teachings, and wooden teachings as they were concealed in earth, rocks, water, and so forth. Yet other people claim that

<sup>5</sup> Chak Lotsawa 1979: 13.2-14.2.

<sup>6</sup> On the critique of the Treasures by Jigten Gönpo, see Martin 2001: 157.

<sup>7</sup> A polemical work attributed to Butön is contained in Chak Lotsawa 1979: 25.3-36.3. Kapstein has argued against this attribution (2000: 253, no. 35).

<sup>8</sup> Chak Lotsawa 1979: 26.4-5.



if the Treasures had been concealed at the time of Urgyen Padma during the early spread of the teaching they would have turned to dust by now. Therefore, since they are still intact, it is claimed that we deceptively hide and discover them ourselves. Still others say that the Treasures are controversial, have little success, and only benefit others slightly while yet other people say that the oral transmission of the Treasures are broken as they do not have an oral lineage. They call them “teachings that burst forth” because it is claimed they have no spoken transmission or empowerment.<sup>9</sup>

Being a Treasure revealer himself, one should of course not uncritically accept Ratna Lingpa’s characterization of the skeptical positions as he would have no interest in making this critique appear any more sensible than necessary. Nevertheless, his description of the criticism does indicate that, until the fifteenth century, the critique of the Treasures had developed only slightly from its early formulations quoted above. Furthermore, this hermeneutical *status quo* appears to have continued into the following centuries as well, as the polemical literature increasingly ossified around previous positions. Thus, the arguments set forth by the Gelugpa scholar Sumpa Khenpo (1704-1788) in the eighteenth century remain by and large identical to the critique advanced during the early days. Although the Treasure revealers are no longer portrayed as possessed by demons, Sumpa Khenpo still suggests that the Treasures are best avoided as they are composed by charlatans wishing to deceive the public. Characteristic of the polemical literature, both skeptical and apologetic, Sumpa Khenpo states his position in no uncertain terms but offers no actual arguments in support of his view.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the assumptive nature of the skeptical critiques, the Nyingma School clearly felt a need to defend its revelations and, rather than stoically ignoring the criticism, it soon composed a series of vigorous and spirited rebuttals of the charges brought forth against the Treasures. Among the various apologetical writings of the Nyingma School, the most detailed works related to Treasure revelation are the two Treasure chronicles by Guru Chöwang

<sup>9</sup> Ratna Lingpa 1977: 219.4-220.4.

<sup>10</sup> Kapstein 2000: 131-132.

and Ratna Lingpa.<sup>11</sup> At first glance, the two chronicles resemble each other as both authors are concerned with demonstrating commonalities between the Treasures and the generally accepted Indian Mahāyāna canons, though Ratna Lingpa's Treasure chronicle is both longer and more detailed. The primary theme throughout this treatise is an attempt to situate the revelatory activity of the Treasures firmly within mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism. Like Chōwang, Ratna Lingpa claims that Treasures are not only religious texts and objects revealed in Tibet but include anything meaningful that previously has been concealed, in actuality as well as figuratively, from the perception of sentient beings. This may include, but is not restricted to, the Buddha's teaching. Ratna Lingpa defines a Treasure in the following words: "It is a Treasure because it is concealed. It is a Treasure because it is hidden. It is a Treasure because it is inexhaustible. It is a Treasure because it fulfills needs and wishes."<sup>12</sup>

There is, however, little reason to believe that Ratna Lingpa's arguments actually ever succeeded in persuading any number of skeptics of the spiritual validity of the Treasures. On the contrary, it seems that the attempts by Treasure apologetics to argue that Treasure revelation is an integral part of mainstream Buddhism-or rather, that mainstream Buddhism *is* Treasure revelation-fell on deaf ears as critics continued to advance their objections in much the same manner of the early centuries.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the exchange of views came to a hermeneutical halt, and as late as the nineteenth century, we find Jamgön Kongtrul defending the Treasures with essentially the arguments of Guru Chōwang against criticisms not unlike those advanced by Chak Lotsawa.<sup>14</sup>

We have witnessed here some traditional attempts to argue the deceitful nature of the Treasures and followed the subsequent replies to this critique by the followers of the Nyingma School.

<sup>11</sup> Guru Chökyi Wangchuk 1979; Ratna Lingpa 1977. Apart from these two compositions we also find several shorter apologetic remarks on Treasure revelation scattered in works concerned with the general defense of the texts and practices of the Nyingma School. See for example Sok Dokpa 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Ratna Lingpa 1977: 39.3. Elsewhere, I have described Ratna Lingpa's Treasure defense in detail (Doctor 2005)

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, skeptics never countered the Nyingma School's equation of the general Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna canons with its own Treasure revelations by pointing out the difference between the highly institutionalized form of revelation practiced by the Nyingma School and the much less formalized Indian revelations.

<sup>14</sup> See Doctor 2005: 204-5, n. 98.



We have also noticed how a number of basically unconvincing arguments, advanced by skeptics and apologists alike, remained surprisingly stagnant over the centuries and, on the whole, failed to effect any significant change of opinion on either side of the religious divide. Surely, the perceived need by Tibetan scholars to follow established party lines and adhere to positions already formulated by the founders of their respective traditions must have inhibited the vitality of the Treasure debate considerably. Nevertheless, the inherent difficulty of determining the validity of claims of revelation *per se* no doubt also contributed to this situation. Let us now look closer at this issue and try to gauge its effect on the way that the Treasures have been perceived.

Although Tibetan attempts to bridge the divide between the skeptic and the devotee generally are few and far between, their influence cannot be dismissed offhand. Importantly, the famed master of the Nyingma School, Ju Mipham composed a brief commentary on this issue, seeking broader perspectives outside the traditional dichotomy of right and wrong.

### **Mipham's View: A New Hermeneutics?**

The text in question belongs to the Treasure tradition and discusses the identity, not of the Treasures, but of the visionaries who claim to have uncovered them. Previous scholarship in this area is sparse and little information on the Treasure revealers is available. This text, entitled *Gem that Clears the Waters: An Investigation of Treasure Revealers*, is composed by the renowned nineteenth-century master of the Nyingma School Ju Mipham.<sup>15</sup> It is more concise than many other works by Mipham, yet it is an excellent source of information on Treasure revealers and questions of their validity. Right from the outset, Mipham acknowledges that the Treasure tradition, to which he himself belonged, contains certain fraudulent elements who exploit the good faith of devotees by posing as genuine Treasure revealers.<sup>16</sup> In this way Mipham does position himself within the traditional polemical framework of right

<sup>15</sup> Mipham 1984 (abbr. *Gem*). On Mipham see Pettit 1999; Schuh 1973b. For an introduction to his collected works see my "Introduction to the Tibetan Text" in Ju Mipham 2004. The complete translation, juxtaposed to the original Tibetan, appears as Chapter 3 in Doctor 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Mipham was posthumously recognized as a revealer of mind Treasures (Dudjom 1991: 880). More importantly, he was one of the foremost students of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, who was intimately involved in Treasure revelation throughout his life.

and wrong, and he certainly writes hoping to expose those who unjustly pose as genuine visionary masters. However, in the course of writing, Mipham also touches on a number of issues of intrinsic interest for the study of the Treasure tradition that differentiate his text from the standard presentations of the saint–fraud dichotomy so often found in Tibetan polemical writings on this topic.

Mipham diverts from his usual scholastic writing style and presents a lively critique, full of both humor and sternness, of spiritual fraud in the name of Treasure revelation. His thoughts on this subject are noteworthy for several reasons. Most important, they are a rare acknowledgement that the issue of authenticity is more complex and warrants deeper methodological consideration than the standard polemical evaluations would have us believe. Second, as a critique of the Treasure revealing community from within the tradition itself, it provides important insights into the challenges the Nyingma School faced in curbing what appears to have been a widespread presence of deceit in the name of Treasure revelation. This insider’s challenge to the authenticity of proclaimed revealers indicates the difficulty the Nyingma School experienced in maintaining a clean name and reputation in the public perception. Perhaps Mipham felt that this type of challenge would be difficult to address effectively in an environment of traditional philosophical discourse and that by adopting a more colloquial and direct style of writing he could better address the issue in a straightforward manner that would prove comprehensible to both commoners and scholars alike.

Acknowledging the polemical nature of the text, the editors of Mipham’s collected works placed it adjacent to his famous replies to Gelugpa criticism of his controversial *Bodhisattvacāryāvatāra* commentary.<sup>17</sup> According to the brief colophon, it was composed “suddenly as it came to mind,”<sup>18</sup> and its style and language convey a sense of freshness and directness rarely encountered in classical Tibetan literature. The text contains no opening verses of praise or prayer and immediately tackles the issue at hand in a straightforward manner free from distracting philosophical sophistications. The fact that this is not an “ordinary” scholastic composition makes it all

<sup>17</sup> Kunzang Palden: 67.

<sup>18</sup> Mipham 1984: 487.



the more intriguing and fascinating as a window into the Treasure tradition, as Mipham speaks from his heart and addresses the culprits directly in a way that hits home much more effectively than would the elegant prose style for which he is otherwise so well known.

Mipham's homeland of eastern Tibet was generally inclined towards a charitable view of the Treasure tradition, so Mipham is not obliged to defend the tradition's basic premises. Instead he can concentrate on weeding out negative elements within the Treasure culture. In this process, he commences by characterizing the false revealers and then proceeds to evaluate the damage they inflict. Toward the end of his analysis, he offers devotees suggestions on how to identify such imposters. Mipham's admission that charlatans exist within the ranks of Treasure revealers indicates that even the Nyingma School's east Tibetan heartland must have harbored significant public concern that not all revelations could be trusted. Previous studies have for the most part described criticism of the Treasure tradition as stemming from scholars outside the Nyingma School, but Mipham makes it clear that the issue of authenticity was a concern for the Nyingma School as much as for anyone else. In fact, he urges its followers to take the outsiders' critique to heart and calls it "nectar-like advice."<sup>19</sup>

Although Mipham admits to the falsity of certain Treasure revelations, we should not therefore conclude that he generally finds Treasure revelations suspect or spurious. Rather, his goal is to expose the false revealers and expel them from the community so that the inspired lives of genuine Treasure revealing masters can shine unblemished by public mistrust brought on by frauds and imposters. Clearly a level of public criticism of the Treasure revealers existed at the time. The internal controversies over the compilation of the *Store of Precious Treasures*<sup>20</sup> would no doubt have contributed to the tattered image of the tradition, but the misgivings Mipham addresses here seem to have been rooted in a more fundamental and widespread suspicion among the general populace. Mipham acknowledges this mistrust, and speaks to the frauds as follows:

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: 476. 1.

<sup>20</sup> See Khakyab Dorje 1981b; Blondeau 1988.



Hey Treasure revealers! Although all inhabitants of the Snowy Land claim to have heartfelt interest and trust in Guru Padmasambhava, they do feel weary seeing the deceit of liars claiming to be Treasure revealers...so stop lessening the fortune of those who have trust in Padmasambhava.<sup>21</sup>

Later, Mipham supports this statement by quoting from Urgyen Lingpa's *Chronicle of Padmasambhava*, which says "except for dead dogs, anything is revealed as Treasure,"<sup>22</sup> referring, in Mipham's interpretation, to weariness with random objects being presented by imposters as religious artifacts blessed by saints in a bygone dynastic era. The scholarly establishment of the Nyingma School seems to have viewed so-called "new Treasures" (*gter gsar*) with a certain measure of skepticism while referring to the "older Treasures" (*gter rnying*) as genuinely authentic and worthy of practice. The idea that past things are better, of course, reflects a universal concern in matters of religion that spans all cultures and regions.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, given that Treasures in their very being represent an endorsement of spiritual and religious innovation, it is fascinating to find Mipham extolling this principle. He makes it clear on several occasions that he prefers the older Treasures and hails such early figures as Nyangral Nyima Özer, Guru Chöwang, Rigdzin Gödem (1337-1408), Ratna Lingpa, and Karma Lingpa (1326-?) as authentic masters whose Treasures can be followed with confidence. Likely, many masters within the Nyingma School were concerned that emerging revelations would include some works of charlatans. As for Mipham, how does he characterize such frauds? He makes no attempt to conceal his disdain for those who deceptively claim to possess the spiritual qualities required for Treasure revelation. He describes these people as power hungry individuals who will do anything to achieve the fame and economic benefits afforded genuine spiritual masters. In a lively blend of prose and poetry he exposes the many tricks that such individuals employ to gain their desired

<sup>21</sup> Mipham 1984: 476.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 484. The original passage is found in Urgyen Lingpa 1996: 576.

<sup>23</sup> A fact noted by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who comments, "That 'the world lieth in evil' is a plaint as old as history... All agree that the world began in a good estate, whether in a Golden Age, a life in Eden, or a yet more happy community with celestial beings. But they represent that this happiness vanished like a dream and that a fall into evil... presently hurried mankind from bad to worse with accelerated descent; so that now (this "now" is as old as history) we live in the final age, with the Last Day and the destruction of the world at hand" (Kant 1960: 15).



goals. According to Mipham, these goals are dominated by the wish for fame and wealth and their coveted byproducts. Lamenting the prevalence of such desires, he exclaims:

When examining closely those who announce Treasure teachings, they wish for fame, look for wealth, and search for women and so place hope in their Treasures with expectations burning like fire. How rare are those free from lies and deceit!<sup>24</sup>

These of course are not novel themes in the life of a fraud, but their mention in this text is intriguing as it offers a glimpse into the culture and politics surrounding the Treasure tradition and its revelatory output. As Mipham introduces the schemes of the false revealers we hear of practices such as inserting the names of wealthy people into the preceding prophetic inventory (*byang bu*) of the Treasure, lobbying spiritual authorities for recognition, declaring beautiful women as religious emanations especially suited for partnership, and the common Tibetan (and perhaps universal?) practice of denouncing all adversaries as deceitful demons.<sup>25</sup> The predictable result is that the community's faith is shaken and decreases. Mipham deplors this state of affairs and speaks directly to the imposters in an attempt to change their crooked ways. In addressing the false revealers he adopts a common Tibetan strategy in communicating with obstacle makers by first issuing a polite request followed by a wrathful threat of the unpleasant consequences of non-compliance. He first appeals to the moral conscience of the false revealers by reminding them of the destabilizing effect they have by causing the faithful to question the entire Treasure tradition, thereby severing the connection to the liberating instructions of Padmasambhava. For those who ignore such requests, Mipham then issues a warning of the dire karmic consequences awaiting such liars when, in future existences, they will find their tongues transformed into plows employed for farming. Thus, Mipham reminds the false revealers that there are severe consequences to all parties when someone falsely assumes the mantle of a spiritual adept.

<sup>24</sup> Mipham 1984: 482.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 485.2-3.



Despite Mipham's lively account of the imposters and their unfortunate effect on the Treasure tradition, the issue of definitively determining the authenticity of such figures has not yet been resolved, and one is still left wondering what to do about the Treasure revealers

and their claims. Since Tibetan religious history is amply filled with accounts of respected saints behaving in highly unconventional ways, the roguish actions described above cannot in themselves constitute any final measure for conclusively identifying a fraud. Although the ways of the charlatans appear deplorable by any standard, evaluations based on mere behavioral observation therefore seem insufficient. At the very end of his essay, however, Mipham proposes a measure by which one can, in his view, finally settle the question of authenticity. The text's concluding verse suggests that: "If you should ever feel doubt in this regard, it is best to resolve this hesitance in the presence of a powerful person."<sup>26</sup>

This simple advice points directly to the fact that although the Treasure community is plagued by a group of deceitful charlatans behaving in outlandish ways, ultimately there is no verifiable evidence to aid the devotee in distinguishing deplorable frauds from those beings lauded by Mipham as authentic compassionate masters. Naturally, the lifestyle of a fraud would be predictably short-lived if it did not outwardly resemble its object of imitation, but the real reason that makes the two groups so difficult to distinguish is that both parties identify the source for their discovery in the mental visions of the revealer, thus suspending the availability of the kind of verifiable evidence on which people ordinarily rely when assessing claims of origin.

Mipham's suggestion that only a spiritually powerful person can determine the validity of the Treasure revealers is an acknowledgment that evaluations based exclusively on historical premises or observations of behavioral conduct will fail to provide any final and definitive answers. According to Mipham, ultimately it is only the spiritual intuition (i.e. the mastery of supramundane knowledge that perceives the minds of others) of authoritative leaders that can validate the claims of the Treasure revealers.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 487.4.



On what grounds can he say this? To answer this we must first look at some of the ways in which Treasure revealers traditionally emerged as successful visionaries in Tibet.

The religio-political realities of nineteenth century east Tibet where Mipham lived were to a large extent governed by the mechanics of a feudal-like society in which major decisions were taken by a relatively small and exclusive financial, political, and religious elite. In such a society any suggestion of delegation of authority to the masses would certainly not have been encouraged, if even conceived of. Thus, an aspiring Treasure revealer would often ascend to fame only through active endorsements by the established regional powers.<sup>27</sup> In theory (and certainly rhetorically), this support would be extended based on a recognition of certain spiritual qualities in the Treasure revealer whereby his revelations, by extension, would be considered endowed with the liberating potency of a genuine Treasure. In reality this process was of course open to the negotiations of spiritual or political intrigue, and the outcome not always a given. Nevertheless, although such social and economic realities had a real and lasting influence on the way the Treasure tradition developed and flourished, one must also consider other more diffuse elements to the validation of the Treasure revealer such as the influence of his personal charisma and magnetism, and his ability to fulfill both the practical and spiritual needs of the general populace. Although political and religious connections often could go a long way in advancing a given Treasure revealer's career, Tibetan history is also rich in examples of charismatic visionaries rising to prominence primarily through the strength of their personal magnetism, only subsequently to be aided by established authorities. This latter factor, while more vague and hard to pinpoint than political backing, seems to have been one of the key ingredients in the success of the Treasure tradition, and would occasionally provide a validating capacity rivaling even that of the religious and political establishment.

<sup>27</sup> Martin has noted the importance of strong aristocratic affiliations for the potential Treasure revealer and points out that some of the most successful visionaries, headed by Nyangral Nyima Özer and Rigdzin Gödem, were themselves of blue-blooded descent (2001: 26-27).



Regardless of whether Treasure revealers ascended to fame primarily through the support of a religio-political power base or via their personal magnetizing qualities ultimately they would have to persuade a broader public – monastic and lay - of the value of their Treasures so that they could be adopted into a broader social religious framework. Considering the hierarchical structure of traditional Tibetan religious society, much of this communal adaptation would certainly have occurred almost by default simply through the type of authoritative adherence that Mipham prescribes. Although it is doubtful whether any ordinary follower of the tradition ever felt blessed with a real mandate to validate the spiritual leaders of the Nyingma School, one should not disregard the influence of the collective devotional following in authenticating religious figures such as the Treasure revealers. Regardless of their charisma or political support, the Treasure revealers would eventually have to sustain and fulfill the needs of a faithful audience through their revelations. Not only in the short term by providing an attractive novelty, but also by establishing over time the value of their revelations to Buddhist practitioners by demonstrating such Treasures to be a reliable medium for spiritual growth and fulfillment for those who embrace them.

The process through which a devotee of the Treasure tradition can arrive at a final conclusion regarding the validity of a given Treasure revealer does, as Mipham points out, not include any foolproof checklist of outwardly observed characteristics. Mipham's solution to this problem is an appeal to authority; a move that in the traditional Buddhist context has long precedence in the practice of relying on the matured wisdom of spiritual elders. In the context of finding authenticity as an insider within a tradition dominated by revelatory activity, Mipham's advice therefore constitutes a traditional but also quite pragmatic approach to validation. Implicit in his advice, however, is the deeper consequence that to invest a spiritual teacher with full authority each devotee is ultimately forced to perform a validation based on a leap of faith. In the absence of any empirically verifiable modes of evaluation, Mipham suggests that the doubtful should rely on "a powerful person" in matters of authenticity, but, of course, identifying such an authority must eventually be performed on similarly faithful grounds as the initial



evaluation of the Treasure revealer takes place.<sup>28</sup> Significantly, the validating onus thus returns to the individual devotee who is required, in the final analysis, to form a personal judgment of the Treasure revealer based on the strength of faith rather than any tangible and verifiable evidence of his credentials or the simple endorsement of a religious or political elite.

Recognizing that the final authenticating measures for Treasure revelation lie beyond what can be objectively verified, it appears a less rewarding exercise to perpetuate a debate of the Treasures along a simplified framework of true or false. Instead, looking beyond the traditional saint–charlatan paradigm may allow for other more rewarding perspectives for studying this fascinating literature that would enrich our understanding of the philosophical and hermeneutical value of this unique Buddhist tradition. To acknowledge the influence of the community—a community that is, of course, composed of faithful individuals—in authenticating scripture does not necessarily entail a failure to critically examine the religious claims of the Treasure tradition. Rather, this understanding allows us to engage with the Treasure revealers and their texts in a manner free from the confines of methodologies tainted by the influence of religious politics. In this way we may explore with fresh eyes the intricate drama that unfolds when religious claims, inspired saints, deceitful frauds, and Tibetan politics all come together in the complex phenomenon of Treasure revelation. Although Mipham is firm in his denunciation of fake revealers, we may today, while not abandoning careful philological and historical evaluations of individual Treasure scriptures, modify and soften the rhetoric that so often accompanies Treasure evaluations in Tibet and the West by acknowledging that what makes a visionary a saint or transforms a revelation into scripture is indeed a complex interplay of many factors, among which the faith and intuition of the devoted community plays no small or insignificant part.

<sup>28</sup> Here the encouragement of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to develop faith “on the strength of the absurd” may come to mind (e.g. 1985: 79). Kierkegaard’s positions on faith and its relevance for the religious life and ethics contain a number of notable parallels in the Buddhist Mahāyāna tradition, such as the perceived legality in Mahāyāna Buddhism of a spiritual being discontinuing his or her outward ethical behavior for the sake of a greater and higher good that may not always be identified through reason alone. However, in this particular context of evaluating religious authorities Mipham, while possibly approving of the basic principles in Kierkegaard’s famous “teleological suspension of the ethical” would no doubt have questioned his exhortation to abandon the universal ethics prescribed by tradition.

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