Buddhist Values and Actions Towards Peacd and Environment Protection.[1] A Sociological Perspective[2]

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Abstract

Peace and Environmental Protection are two key issues and central avenues of Buddhist global social and political action contributing to a better future world.

This paper looks into the social values and actions of Buddhist people of some Asian countries regarding war-peace and environmental protection issues. I try to place the analysis within the Buddhist cosmovison (meanings and practices) regarding the self (or no-self) and specially regarding the other beings (interconnection, dependent origination). Buddhist orientations and practices such as Loving Kindness of the Four Immeasurable are also part of such cosmovison. I use loving kindness (love and orientation towards others) as a larger cultural and social identity frame acting as umbrella under which views and practices towards peace and environment emerge.

Keywords: Buddhist Values, Towards Peace, Environment, Protection

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HOW

The theoretical and methodological approaches used in the paper are the result of combining, and in some cases fusing, Buddhism with Sociology.

Using survey data, I explore the existence of similarities and differences between Buddhist people of different countries of the region. The objective is to understand some of the social cognitive and action structures existing aimed at providing useful knowledge to strengthen relations among Buddhist people as a way to make a stronger contribution to global peace and environmental sustainability.

I use the best and largest global sociological survey currently being carried out (World Values Survey) which focuses on general social values and attitudes and has questions and indicators related to the issues of war and environmental protection. The latest wave of the survey (2014) gathers information from more than 90 thousand people from 62 countries worldwide with an important presence of countries with large Buddhist populations. This ample data-set will allow me to compare Buddhist people in Asia, where the vast majority (99%) of Buddhist live[3]. The data-set includes Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore (of the ASEAN Region) along with China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and India. It will provide a glimpse of how, through their positions and actions, Buddhist people help to contribute to a better world.

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[3]Pew Research Center: The Global Religious Landscape. http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-buddhist/

As technical, and conceptual, apparatus I use Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) and Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (HCA) with the statistical program SPSS.

MDS is a statistical procedure that calculates similarities and differences between countries and translates them into Euclidean distances in order to place countries in a two dimensional space. The positioning in the Euclidean space is metrically equivalent to the physical distances between all countries in the standard geographical map. Here however physical distances are substituted by social distances producing social maps. Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (HCA) mathematically identifies and groups together the most similar countries in what we could think of as social regions.

The journey starts with the analysis of the background values and action towards others followed by those related to war and peace and the environment. Each dimension starts with a comparative study of the indicators and it is completed by a MDS and HQ analysis placing Asian countries in a two dimensional social map representing their proximities and distances to each other.

THE OTHERS

The views regarding others and the actions towards others are the general meaning and practice frame nurturing the positions and actions towards peace and the environment.

The values and practices of Buddhist people in the Asian countries studied regarding others can be seen as part of Loving-Kindness[4] and The Four Immeasurable.[5] They are indicators of their visions and actions contributing to a better world by focusing on the wellbeing of others and facilitating peace and harmony, dialogue and cooperation (Table 1).

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[4]Loving-Kindness is an English equivalent for the term Metta, described in the **Metta Sutta** of the **Pali Canon**'s **Sutta Nipata** (Sn 1.8) and Khuddakapatha (Khp 9)

[5]Mettam Sutta: The Brahma-viharas. SN 46.54

May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes,

May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes,

May all sentient beings never be separated from bliss without suffering,

May all sentient beings be in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger.

As indicators (proxies) for **Visions of Others** we are using several variables (meanings and practices) dealing with importance given to tolerance values in children, social closure towards others (not wanting to have them as neighbors), and trust (general and towards specific population groups).

As with other indicators analyzed, the distribution of these values and practices in not even throughout the Buddhist population, existing contrasting positions and similarities between countries. Thailand and Malaysia follow Hong Kong and Taiwan stressing the importance of **tolerance** in the value system of children, well above the Buddhists and overall population means. In this dimension, Singapore and Vietnam coincide in lower rates than the average, just behind South Korea with the lowest.

Social closure somehow reflects equanimity as their visions and perceptions of others. Vietnam Buddhists stands out, following Buddhists from Japan, as the most socially open and differ from those from Thailand and Malaysia along those of South Korea and India with higher rates of closure and non equanimical positions. Buddhists in general, and especially Asian Buddhists, are more socially open than the global non-Buddhists and general population.

More than one third of the Buddhists (35%) believe that **most people can be trusted**, and their trust in others is above that of the overall population average and global non-Buddhists (25%). The are some differences among countries worth mentioning: Vietnam follows India and China trusting most people (48%, 53% and 65%) while Malaysia stand out with the lowest trust rate (7%) (Graph 1).

Trust in others connects us to concepts such as interdependence and no-ego, equanimity, and interrelation and closeness. It becomes a crucial indicator of social richness and potential. By facilitating interaction with others, cooperation can be very intense and with a potential social impact.
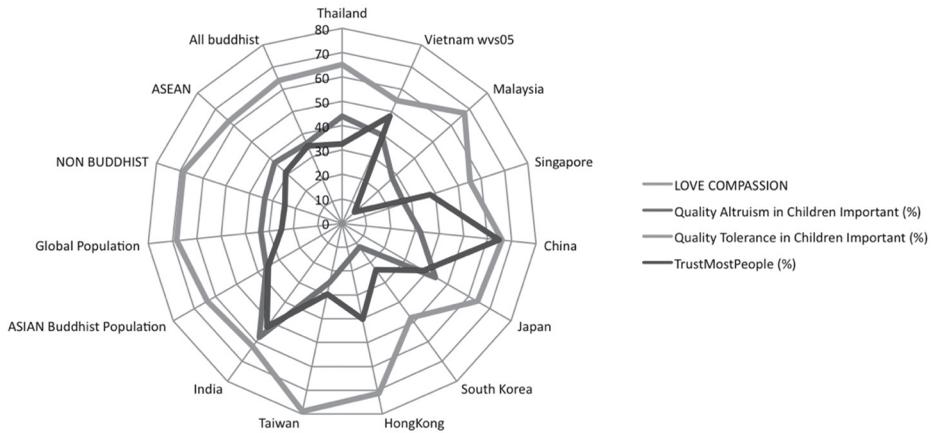
GRAPH 1: Love and Compassion

When trust refers to specific groups of people (in a scale of 1: total trust to 5: no trust) the indexes vary, with middle low levels of **trust towards people from other religions or other nations**. Buddhists in Singapore along with those of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and India stand out for their highest level of trust towards others, above the Buddhists and overall population averages. The rates in Vietnam are the lowest of all.

As a resume of the contrasting positions, it is interesting to note some tension between tolerance values and social closure. Thailand and Malaysia are the ones that most support give to tolerance in children, however they have high levels of social closure (number of types of people not wanted as neighbors). On the opposite situation we find Singapore and Vietnam. Their support for tolerance in children is almost the lowest but their level of social closure is also very low.

Regarding trust, it is worth looking into the different behaviors when talking about trust in general and when referring to specific groups of people. For instance, Buddhists in Vietnam stand out for the high proportion (48%) considering most people can be trusted, however they highly distrust people from other religions and nations. Buddhists in Hong Kong and Singapore, 40% and 38% of which trust most people, stand out for trusting people from other countries and regions. Malaysia is the opposite of Vietnam: low levels of trusting most people but high levels of trusting people from other nations and/or religions. In Thailand, where 33% of Buddhists trust most people, they trust people from other nations but much less from another religion. In contrast, the majority of Buddhist from China trust most people in general and they also trust people from other religions.

In order to look into the ways Buddhists articulate their **Action Towards Others** I use several variables as meanings and practices indicators (proxies) representing Supporting altruism in children, Being member and active in civil organizations; and Caring for others.

Buddhist people in Malaysia and Singapore, along with those from South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, are below the mean considering the value of **altruism in children**. Only India has a larger proportion of its Buddhist population (53%) stressing altruism in the new generations.

Action towards the **wellbeing of others** often takes the form of participation in social life, of membership and active volunteering in civil organizations dedicated to issues such as religion, sports and recreation, education and culture, labor unions, political parties, environmental, professional, or charity. Altogether the Buddhists are slightly more socially involved than non-Buddhists and global population. Comparing Buddhist populations, the ASEAN average is a bit lower than that of the global Asian countries (but higher than non-Buddhist and the global population of the survey) (Graph 2).

The form and intensity of **active participation** (membership and volunteering) in civil society differs among countries producing an interesting image. Thailand follows Taiwan, Hong Kong and India, as the most social active Buddhist populations with level of membership above average and with also the highest active volunteering rates. The other Buddhist populations have participation and active rates below and/or close to the mean.

In the realm of meanings and closely associated to love and compassion, we use the Schwartz indicator (Table 1) of level of identification (in a scale from 1 total identification to 6 no identification at all) with a person for whom it is important to do things for the good of society. The Buddhist population of the survey (WVS) strongly identifies with those who **do things for the good of society** (means 2.9) but a bit less than the general and non-Buddhist populations. ASEAN Buddhists have stronger orientation towards others than the average of Buddhists in Asia, but still below global non-Buddhist and global population. In brief, Buddhists in Vietnam and India are the ones more oriented towards and loving others, but in contrast, those from Thailand and Hong Kong are very socially active but with lower orientation towards others.
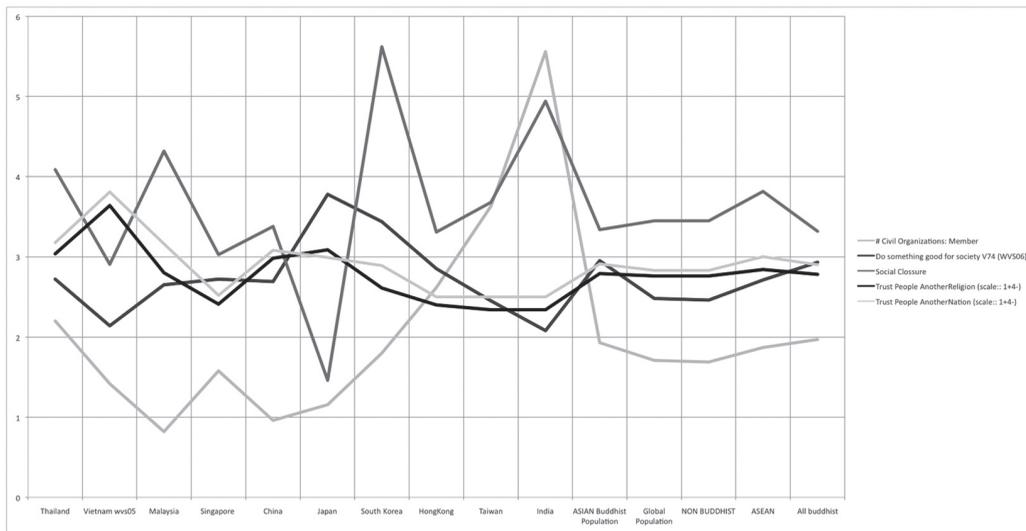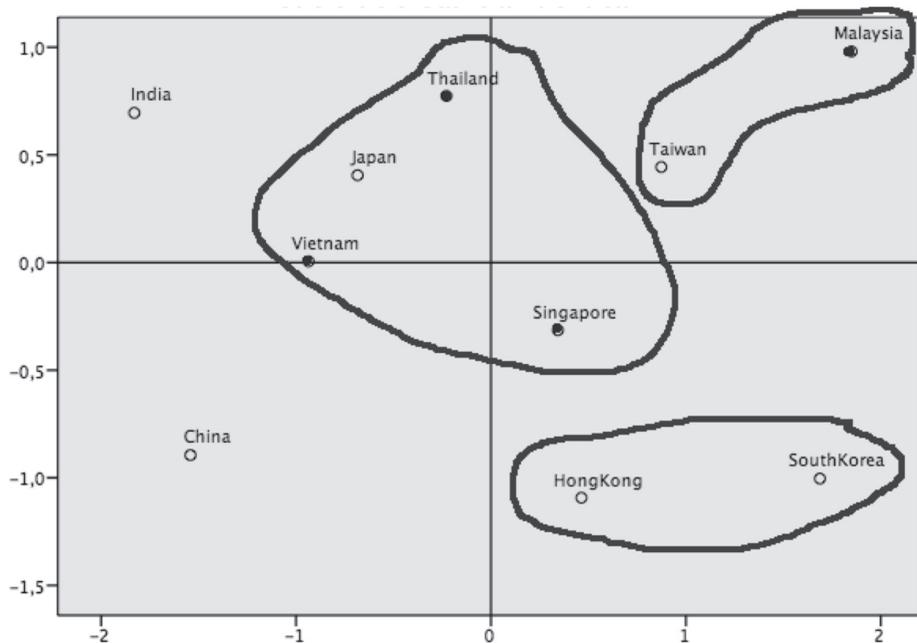
GRAPH 2. Towards Others

On average, Buddhists from the ASEAN region seem to be more involved and active in civil society than global non-Buddhist and General population (although less than the average of Asian Buddhists); they seem to care less about others than global non-Buddhist and General population (although more than the other Asian Buddhists).

In summary, Buddhist views and actions towards others are definitely seeds of peace and environmental sustainability which will grow into a better future.

The representation of distances (similarities and differences) between Asian Buddhists populations done with MDS produces a social map (with characteristics similar to geographical maps) according to their values and actions towards others. MDS places the countries (their Buddhist people) spread through the space, some countries close to the center (Vietnam, Singapore) and others around towards the edges (Malaysia on the extreme right top corner, South Korea in the right bottom corner, India on the left top corner, and China on left bottom) (Graph 3).

The amount of trust towards most people in general seems to be a strong force placing countries along the horizontal axis, from more trust on the left towards less trust on the right.

GRAPH 3: Social Map of Towards Others

Hierarchical Clustering (HQ) identifies three clear groups of countries, with high levels of similarities, and leaves India and China isolated on the left due to the fact that the majority of their Buddhist people consider, above the rest of people, that most people can be trusted. The group formed by Malaysia and Taiwan, towards the top right corner, is characterized by their high support to values of tolerance in children but their levels of trusting people (specially Malaysia) are low. The cluster on the bottom right formed by South Korea and Hong Kong, having many other elements in common with all Buddhists, can be differentiated by their low support to values of altruism in children. The central and larger group gathers the other three ASEAN (dots in red) countries (Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore) with Japan differentiated by their middle positions trusting most people.

WAR AND PEACE

As indicators of Buddhist values and actions toward war and peace, I use several variables dealing with justifications of violence and war, eventual participation in war, and concern about war.

As expected, (or wanted to) Buddhists, in average, do not consider violence against others justifiable (a value of 1,95 in a scale from 1 to 10) and most of them do not support war (even to attain justice).

In average, Buddhists, and specially the Asian ones, are the population that **least justifies violence against other people**, less than the general and non-Buddhist populations. However, in few countries (India, followed by Singapore and China) the Buddhist populations justify violence a bit more.

Two thirds of the Buddhists (the same amount as the entire and non- Buddhist populations) considers that **war is not necessary, not even for justice**. There is a split regarding war. In Malaysia and Singapore, along Japan and South Korea, there is little support for war. However, in Thailand, following China, Hong Kong and India, more than half the Buddhist consider war might be necessary for justice. Buddhists, as most people in the world in general, would fight for their country. Two of the ASEAN countries along Taiwan stand out for their positions. In Thailand 90% of the Buddhists would fight for their country, 89% in Vietnam and 86% in Taiwan (Graph 4).

The idea of order is sometimes associated to the justification of violence and war. Here we see that about 40% of Buddhists in general consider maintaining order as important, a bit less than the general and non-Buddhist populations. However, in Vietnam and in Malaysia about half of the Buddhists consider order important. In Thailand only one third is concerned about it.

People, Buddhist and non-Buddhist are indeed always **concerned about war**. They have some worries about the possibilities of civil war or wars involving and/or affecting their countries. In a scale from1 (more) to 4 (less) Buddhists worry an average of 2,28 about civil war and 2,12 about war involving their country. The least worried are those from Singapore and Thailand in the ASEAN region and Hong Kong and China in the vicinity. Buddhists in Malaysia seem to be the most concerned about the possibilities of war.
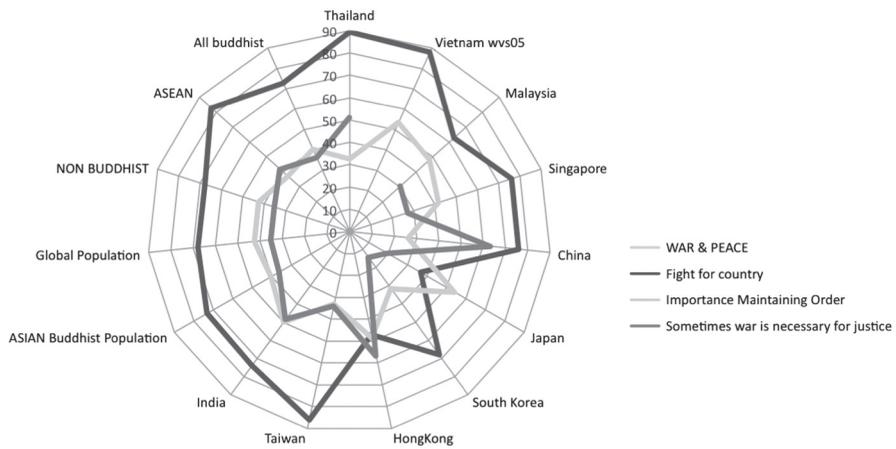
GRAPH 4: War and Peace

In Graph 5 it is interesting to note the negative relation between worries of war and justification of violence in Singapore where there is little concern about the possibilities of war but higher justification of violence. In China and Hong Kong there is also justification of war. In Japan and Taiwan, the relation is the contrary: more worries but not justification of violence.
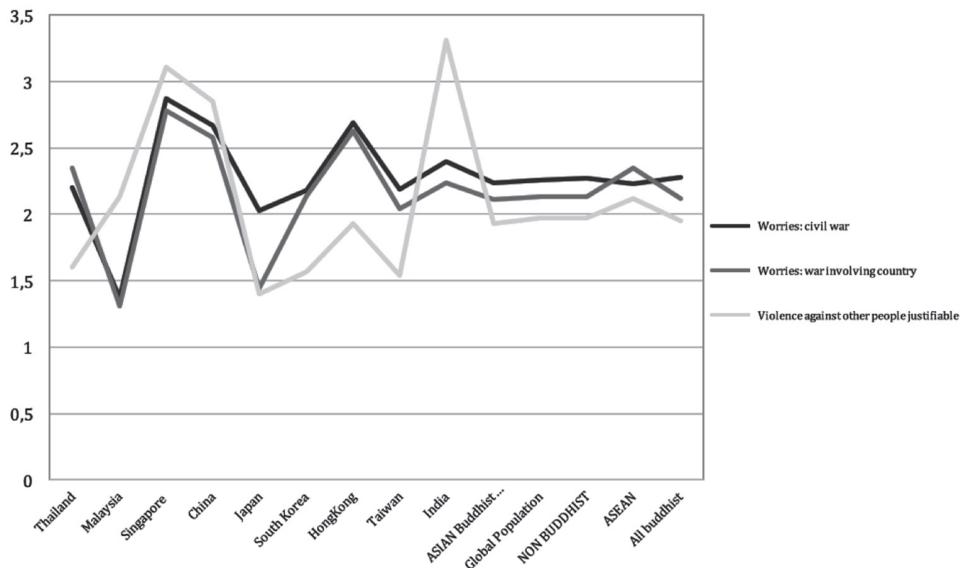

GRAPH 5: Regarding War

In brief, overall Buddhists are definitely against violence and against war. They are against violence a bit more than non-Buddhists but a bit less against war.

MDS represents the system of similarities and differences, translated into metric Euclidean distances, placing Asian countries in a two dimensional space according to distances between their values and actions regarding war and peace.

Countries, their Buddhist populations, are placed around the center, close to which is Singapore (Graph 6). The axes cut the space providing meaning to the positions. From left to right countries seem to be placed according to be less or more in favor of the idea of fighting to defend the country. The left cluster is formed by populations where the idea of fighting for the country has the least support (Japan and Hong Kong). Buddhists in the right cluster are more in support of the idea of fighting for the country.

The top and the bottom of the space is also divided according to the more or less agreement with the importance given to maintaining order in the country. Those at the top agreeing more with the need of order and those at the bottom considering it less important. And Singapore plays again a central reference role in the Asian region.
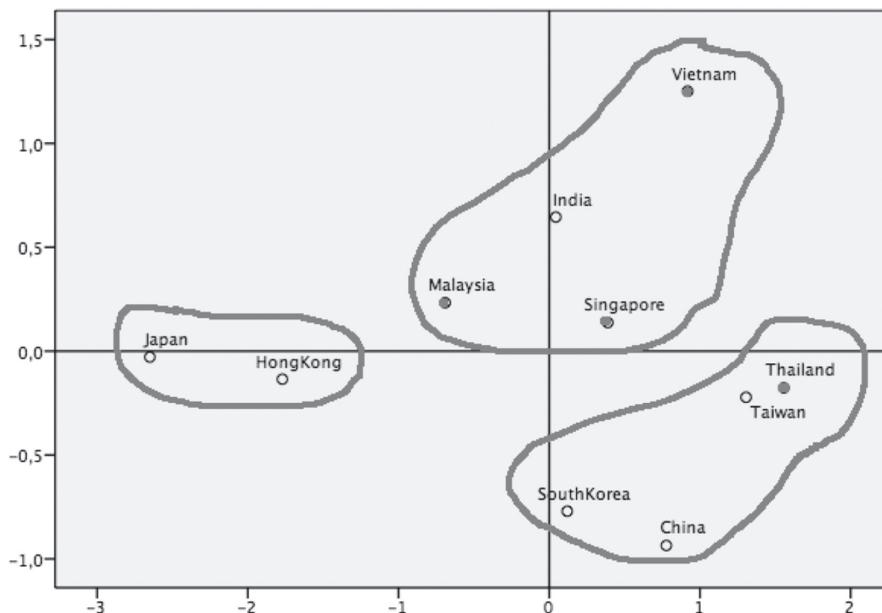
**GRAPH 6: War and Peace Social Map**

ENVIRONMENT

To assess the positions and actions of Buddhist people I use several variables as indicators of meaning and practices of caring for the environment.

The first one is a Schwartz indicator (Table 1) of level of **identification** (in a scale from 1 total identification to 6 no identification at all) with a person for whom it is **important to look after the environment**. Even though Buddhist people do not identify/ see themselves the most as people caring for the environment, they do so in their practices. Compared to general and non-Buddhist populations, Buddhists are more directly active to protect the environment.

In average, Buddhists in the ASEAN region identify themselves as caring for the environment more than the rest of Buddhists. Among them Vietnam and Malaysian Buddhists are the most identified with that kind of person. On the opposite position, Japan, Singapore and South Korea seem to be the ones caring least.

One fourth of the Buddhists (double percentage than the general and non-Buddhist people) believe the deterioration of the **environment to be the most serious problem** nowadays. Buddhists from Japan, Taiwan and South Korea lead in this perception while those from the ASEAN region and India are the ones least considering it as the most serious problem (Graph 7).
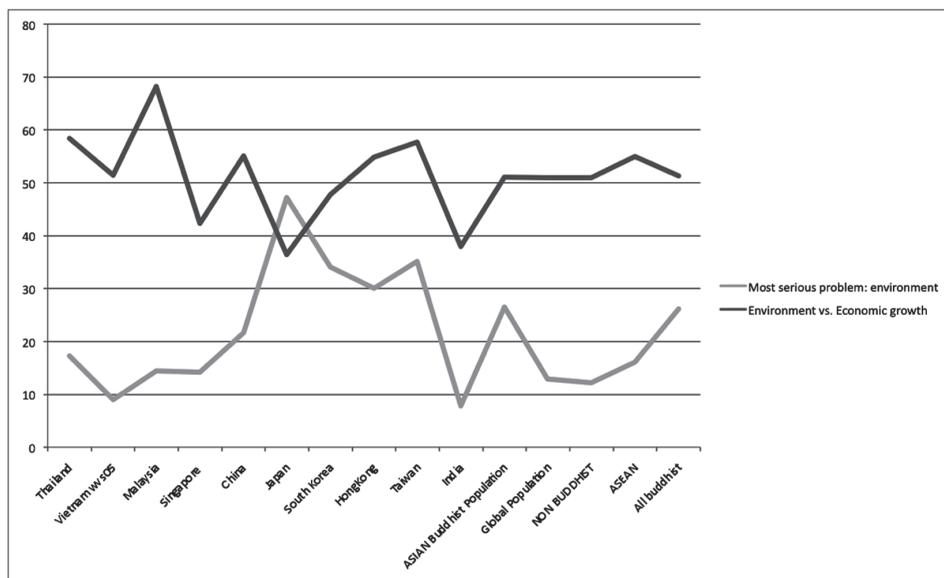

GRAPH 7: Views of the Environment

But not only Buddhists in general are the ones most considering the environment as a prime importance but they also favor, a bit more than the general and non-Buddhist people, **environmental protection over economic development**. Buddhists in Thailand and Malaysia, along with those from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong are the ones favoring the most the environment over the economy. Alternatively, those from Singapore, following those from Japan and India, are the ones favoring the most the contrary position (economy over environment). It is worth noting that, even though ASEAN Buddhists are (in average) below the mean considering the environment as the most serious problem they do lead placing environmental protection as more important than economic growth (Graph 7).

Buddhists also stand out with **direct action in the protection of the environment** by giving money to environmental protection organizations and also belonging and/or being active in them. Their level of action is above the general and non-Buddhist populations, with the exception of attendance to political demonstration for the environment (Graph 8).

Buddhists, in this aspect, have a leading active and direct role protecting the environment. In average, some ASEAN countries have a prominent role giving money (Vietnam and Malaysia, following Hong Kong and India); being members of organizations to defend the environment (Thailand, following Hong Kong, Taiwan and India); and as active members in those organizations (Vietnam, following Taiwan and India) (Graph radial).

In brief, Buddhist people nowadays stand out, and have a leading role, in both their convictions and their actions to protect the environment as a priority.
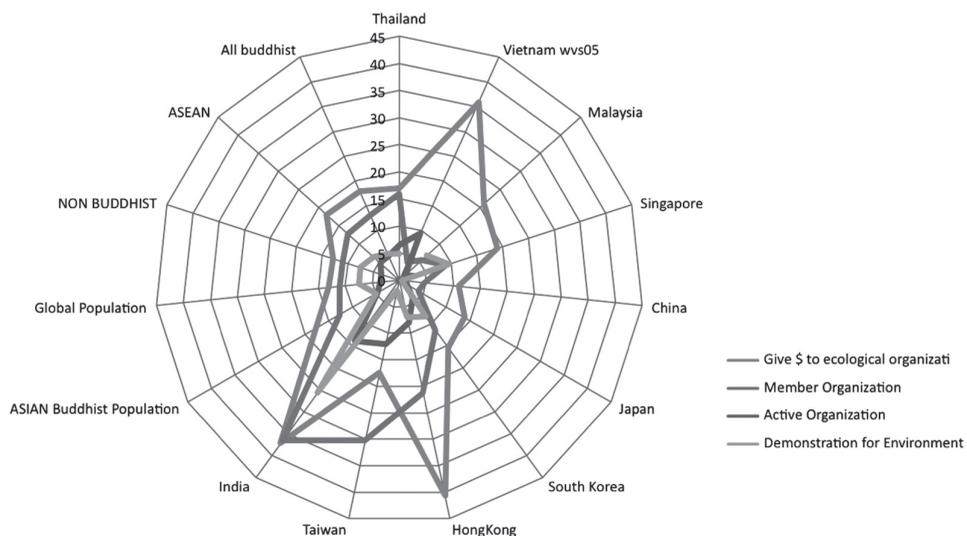
GRAPH 8: Protecting the Environment

The representation of distances (similarities and differences) between Asian Buddhists populations done with MDS produces a social map according to their values and actions towards the environment. MDS places countries around the center occupied by Thailand (playing therefore a reference and intermediating role for the entire Asian space). The axes divide the social space in a somehow meaningful manner. The vertical axis divides the space between less care for the environment on the left and more care on the right side. On top, with the exception of India, we find Buddhist considering the environment as the most serious problems and on the bottom those not seeing it as the most serious problem.

Hierarchical Clustering (HQ) identifies four different groups of countries internally quite similar in their values and actions towards the defense of the environment. ASEAN countries are close together forming, along China, the largest cluster placed at the bottom of the map. Singapore is placed again at the center, as a reference, of a star system formed by ASEAN and China Buddhists (Graph 9). This points to a quite similar model of values and actions towards the care of the environment by ASEAN Buddhists. They might not see themselves as caring too much for the environment, or even considering the Environment as the most serious problem, but however they stand out by their very high levels of practices and actions towards the protection of the environment (either giving money or/and participating and being active in environmental organizations).
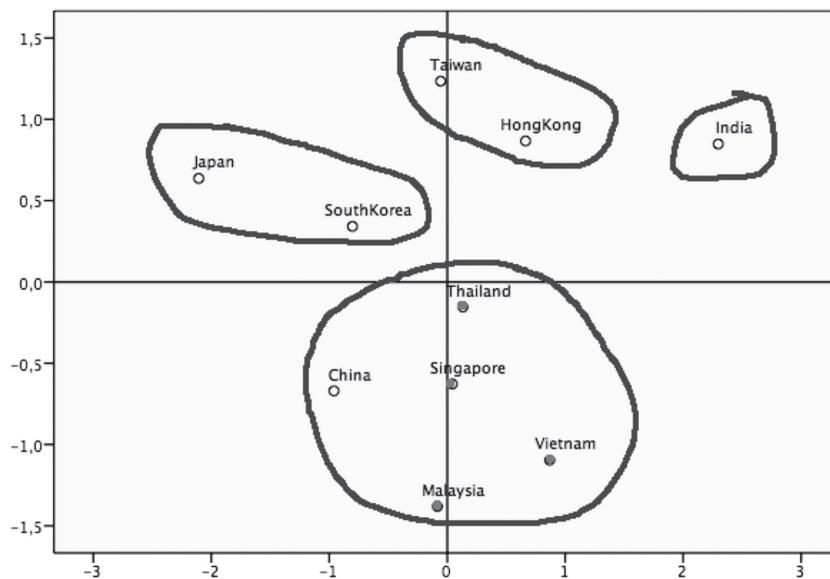

GRAPH 9: Towards the Environment's Social Map

The two top cluster (with the exception of India) formed by Japan and South Korea, and Thailand and Hong Kong, highly consider the environment as the most important problem. India, on the right toper corner, is isolated with some extreme high levels of providing money, being member, and participating actively in environmental organizations.

WAR-PEACE-ENVIRONMENT

When we add the war-peace indicators and the environment ones MDS calculates the entire system of proximities and distances and places the countries (their Buddhist populations) in a two dimensional space (similar to a physical map). It is worth noting the central position again of Singapore and Malaysia, as main reference points for the whole system (Graph 10).

Environment and war-peace issues interact creating horizontal forces (where the will to fight for country stands out) as well as vertical forces (here represented by the importance given to environment as a problem). The direction of the forces is as follows: less will to fight for the country on the left and more on the right. Being the most serious problems on the bottom and not being such a serious problem on top.
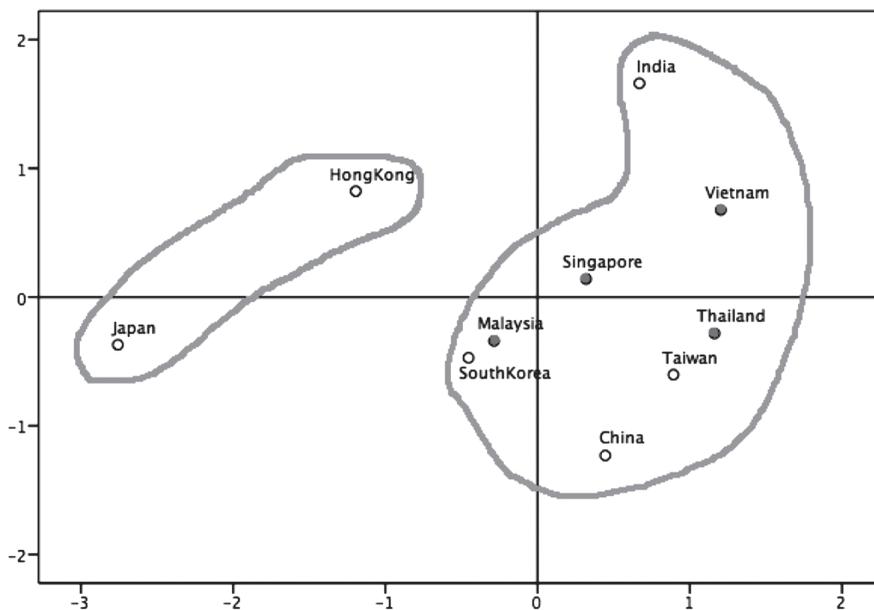
GRAPH 10: WAR-PEACE-ENVIRONMENT

As before, HQ helps to identify the best grouping of the countries according to their characteristics. It identifies two clusters. A very large one, occupying almost the whole right side of the graphic, gathering almost all the Asian Buddhist pointing to a high level of values and actions shared. It is made up by the ASEAN countries (dots in red) plus South Korea and Taiwan, and China and India on the extremes. Singapore and Malaysia are close to the center in both dimensions. Vietnam and Thailand are more leaning towards fighting for the country and India and China are in the extremes between almost not seeing the environment as an important problem on top and considering it as the most serious problem at the bottom. The smaller one on the left, formed by Hong Kong and Japan whose Buddhist populations coincide being the least inclined to fight for their country.

Overall, and spite of differences, there is a high level of similarity among many countries. ASEAN countries are spatially quite close together which means a high level of similarities in their values and actions both towards war and towards the environment. Singapore and Malaysia occupy a central middle point in the whole system with values and position closer to middle views and paths.

Conclusions

Buddhist views and actions towards others are seeds of peace and environmental sustainability.

Overall, their level of trust towards other people in general and their participation in society as members of civil organizations is higher than the average for the global and the non-Buddhist populations.

Regarding war, Buddhists share their opposition with the global and non-Buddhist populations in a very similar pattern. Most, with obvious differences, do not support nor justify violence against others or war, even for justice. It seems to be some concern for potential future wars affecting their countries and lives and most would fight to defense their country.

Buddhists also stand out by their high level of social activity, above the means of the global and non-Buddhist populations, defending and caring for the environment, which a substantial part of them consider as the current most important problem in the world. Their values and practices caring for the environment place Buddhists in the leading positions of the social activity addressed to defend and improve the environment.

In spite of some differences, there is an overall high level of similarity among Buddhists with respect to most values and actions. Among them, ASEAN Buddhists are spatially positioned quite close together and near the center and middle of the social map indicating a high level of cohesion and centrality in the spatial system. And the central position of Singapore and Malaysia Buddhists points to the relevance of their values and actions as reference for the whole Asian Buddhist system.

In conclusion, Buddhists values and practices are a very positive contribution to a better and more harmonious world.

TABLE 1: Values and Actions regarding War, Peace, Environment and the Others in Buddhist people of the ASEAN Region and neighbors.

WV06 2015*	Thailand	Vietnam wvs05	Malaysia	Singapore	China	Japan	South Korea	Hong Kong	Taiwan	India	ASIAN Buddhist Population (all countries)	Global Population	NON BUDDHIST	ASEAN BUDDHIST (mean for the 3 countries)	All Buddhist
WAR & PEACE															
Fight for country %	89,4	88,0	62,7	76,0	75,9	36,5	68,3	47,2	86,0	74,0	73,2	67,9	67,7	82,8	72,7
Importance Maintaining Order %	32,4	53,6	48,2	41,9	26,4	54,1	31,6	48,6	33,0	50,0	40,3	42,6	42,7	37,0	40,3
Sometimes war is necessary for justice %	51,1		30,5	27,3	63,2	19,1	14,2	56,8	34,0	48,5	36,1	35,3	35,3	41,8	36,2
Worries: civil war (scale: 1+4-)	2,20		1,37	2,87	2,67	2,03	2,18	2,69	2,19	2,40	2,24	2,26	2,27	2,23	2,28
Worries: war involving country (scale: 1+4-)	2,35		1,31	2,78	2,58	1,44	2,14	2,63	2,04	2,24	2,11	2,13	2,13	2,35	2,12
Violence against other people justifiable (scale: 1-10+)	1,60	2,13	2,13	3,11	2,85	1,40	1,57	1,93	1,54	3,31	1,93	1,97	1,97	2,12	1,95
ENVIROMENT															
Care for environment (scale: 1-6-)	2,61	2,22	2,27	2,99	2,78	3,26	2,89	2,50	2,53	2,71	2,81	2,52	2,51	2,68	2,80
Give $ to ecological organization	16,9	35,9**	20,9	19,0	11,0	13,8	15,4	40,7	17,6	37,3	17,7	13,1	12,9	18,0	17,9
Member Environmental Organization %	15,9	3,6	5,5	9,0	4,7	4,1	11,4	21,2	30,1	36,6	12,7	11,0	10,9	12,8	13,1
Active Environmental Organization %	6,5	9,4	1,4	2,6	0,5	1,4	4,1	8,0	12,1	13,9	4,7	3,6	3,5	4,8	4,9
Most serious problem: environment %	17,3	9,1	14,5	14,3	21,7	47,2	34,1	30,1	35,2	7,8	26,5	12,9	12,3	16,2	26,2
Environment vs. Economic growth %	58,4	51,4	68,2	42,3	55,1	36,4	47,8	54,9	57,7	38,0	51,1	50,9	50,9	55,0	51,3
Demonstration for Environment %	4,8		6,8	9,6	0,5	0,5	8,4	7,1	2,0	25,7	5,0	7,5	7,6	6,4	5,3
TOWARDS OTHERS															
Quality Altruism in Children Important (%)	43,9	39,5	27,7	26,5	32,1	44,2	12,1	15,0	24,9	57,8	35,9	33,5	33,4	37,2	36,0
# Civil Organizations: Member	2,20	1,42	0,82	1,58	0,96	1,16	1,80	2,62	3,63	5,56	1,93	1,71	1,69	1,87	1,97
Do something good for society (scale: 1+6-)	2,72	2,14***	2,65	2,72	2,69	3,78	3,44	2,85	2,45	2,08	2,95	2,48	2,46	2,71	2,93
Quality Tolerance in Children Important (%)	65,1	55,1	67,3	55,1	66,0	64,2	48,1	71,7	78,9	62,7	64,1	68,3	68,5	62,5	64,2
TrustMostPeople (%)	32,5	48,1	6,8	38,0	64,7	38,7	23,5	40,2	29,7	52,5	35,0	25,1	24,6	31,0	34,8
Social Closure (- to +)	4,09	2,91	4,32	3,03	3,38	1,46	5,62	3,31	3,68	4,94	3,34	3,45	3,45	3,82	3,32
Trust People AnotherReligion (scale:: 1+4-)	3,04	3,64	2,80	2,41	2,98	3,09	2,61	2,4	2,34	2,35	2,79	2,76	2,76	2,84	2,78
Trust People AnotherNation (scale:: 1+4-)	3,18	3,81	3,16	2,52	3,08	2,99	2,89	2,50	2,51	2,50	2,91	2,83	2,83	3,00	2,90
N	1154	276	220	532	212	893	214	113	342	102	3876	90167	86310	1906	3876

*Sources of data: WVS wave 06 (2015), WVS Wave 05 (2007)   **$ to Stop Pollution (%) in (WVS05)   *** V74 in WVS05

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