

# BUDDHIST MONKS AND PERSONAL PROPERTY\*

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The decision to become a monk, whether in the Buddha's time or today, is essentially influenced by the desire to leave behind worldly goods and happiness and purify oneself to such a degree that one can reach nirvana/*nibbāna*. The only possessions that monks in the Buddha's time were allowed to have were three yellow robes and a few other necessary items. Under the Buddhist code of monastic discipline (*Vinaya* Code), monks are not allowed to accumulate wealth as the practice will interfere with the religious pursuit. Yet, today a large number of monks are known to own personal property, and Thai society seems to take it for granted. No study has been made to explore whether such accumulation of wealth violates the Code. Thus, one does not hear much from the academic circle and society about the situation. If it violates the Code, studies should be conducted to assess why and how the practice is acceptable. Who should set the criteria on the extent to which monks are allowed to own personal possessions? So far, no leading authority has come forward to do so.

Another issue to explore is what to do if having worldly possession is against the *Vinaya*. How should the monk institutions deal with the matter to ensure that the monks conduct themselves without breaking the Code? If society in general agrees that monks should be allowed to own

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property, a practice that goes against the monastic discipline, will such condoning affect other *Vinaya* regulations? All these considerations have a strong impact on Buddhist practice in Thailand and, therefore, are worth studying.

## 1. Property in the Pali Canon or *Tipitaka*

### 1.1 Meaning of property

There are several mentions of “property” in the Pali Canon and its commentaries. The Thai dictionary defines property as “money, possessions, and other tangible objects”, while asset is taken to mean “both tangible and intangible objects which may carry some price and can be owned. Houses and land are examples of tangible objects, while copyrights and patents are examples of intangible ones” (Royal Institute Dictionary, 2003: 503). The *Abhidhānavaṇṇā* scripture touches upon the issue of property in 8 chapters – *Dhana*, *Sa*, *Dabba*, *Sāpateyya*, *Vasu*, *Attha*, and *Vibhava* (Phra Maha Sompong Mudito, 1999: 598). The Thai word “Sap” or property is close to the Pali “*Dabba*”, while wealth could be best rendered into *Sāpateyya*. The word *Dabba* derives from “*Du Gatiyam + Abba*”, meaning property. In Pali, the expression “*Dunatīti Dabbam*” means “on-going property”. *Sāpateyya*, on the other hand, comes from “*Sapati + Neyya*”, meaning asset. The Pali expression “*Sassa Dhanassa Pati, Tasmiṃ Sadhu Sapateyyam*” means “the owner of the asset is called *Sapati*, while good assets found in the owner are named *Sāpateyya*” (Phra Maha Sompong Mudito, 1999: 598). In other words, property is “something owned by someone or related to the owner”.

### 1.2 Types of property

According to the commentary to *Ratana-Sutta*, there are two kinds of property: living property, e.g. elephants and people, and non-living property, e.g. gold and money (Mahāmakutārajāvidyālaya, *Khuddakanikāya Khuddakapātha* Vol. 1, 1994: 243). The commentary to *Nidhikanda-Sutta*, on the other hand, mentions four types of property as follows:

1. Unmovable property (*Thavaraniidhi*), e.g. rice farm and land.
2. Movable property (*Jaṅgamanidhi*), e.g. serfs, elephants, and horses.

3. Property that always accompanies oneself (*Āṅgasamanidhi*), e.g. knowledge and art.
4. Property that always accompanies oneself everywhere (*Anugāmikanidhi*), i.e., merit due to giving (*Dāna*), practising moral precepts (*Sīla*), and meditation (*Bhāvanā*).  
(*Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, Khuddakanikāya Khuddakapāṭha* Vol. 1, 1994: 306-307)

Nevertheless, the present study classifies property into two categories: worldly property and *Dhamma* property. Types 1-3 of property above are in this respect worldly property, while the fourth type is *Dhamma* property. In addition, the Buddha also mentioned both types of property in *Ugga-Sutta*. He states that worldly property will eventually decline because of fire, water, monarchs, thieves and unloved descendants, while *Dhamma* property will not suffer the same fate (*Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, Āṅguttaranikāya Sattaka-Aṭṭhaka-Navakanipata* Vol. 4, 1993:14). Hence, it can be averred from the Buddha's words that there are two types of property:

1. Worldly property, i.e. material wealth that is subject to change due to various factors. Some examples are money, gold, rice fields and plantations.
2. *Dhamma* property, which is abstract and not subject to change, e.g. goodness.

### **1.3 Possessions that the Buddha allows:**

The Buddha allowed the Bhikku or monks to possess some items necessary for a life of recluse. These items must be comparable to the eight requisites in the *Vinayapiṭaka* where only alms bowl and robes are allowed (*Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 359-360). Thus, the bowl and robes are the monks' only fundamental possessions. After passing the ordination vow, the novice monk is required to observe a life of dependence on four basic necessities: living on food offerings received, wearing robes given at a cremation, living in a natural abode – in a cave or under a tree – and taking medicine when needed, even if it is urine (*Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 361).

Sometime later, the Buddha allowed other requisites. These are “the three robes, alms bowl, razor, needle, girdle, and water strainer necessary for the Bikkhu’s daily living” (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Part 1, 1993: 769). Delving further into the *Vinayapiṭaka*, one finds that there are still other items allowed, for example, a fan with a handle, palm-leaf fan, stick to keep mosquitoes away, umbrella, tooth-cleaning pick, metal tool except that used for killing purposes, water pot, broom, foot-cleaning material made of stone, gravel or tile, sponge stone, knife, needle, strainer, girdle, robe-cutting knife, knife with a handle, razor, razor-sharpening stone, razor sheath, razor cloth wrap, all head-shaving implements, ear picks, wooden pins for robe stitching, needle box, box for storing sewing items and thread-woven strings, pouch to put away socks, water-straining cloth, water-straining cylinder, stick to swab medication on the eyes, knee-wrap, girdle cloth, buttons and buttonholes, and toothpick (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 48-63). Medicinally-related items that the monks are allowed to keep are medicinal substance, thread-woven strings (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 26), stone grinding container, grinding stone, mortar, pestle, medicine grinder, medicine straining cloth, eye-medicine box made from bone, ivory, horn, reed, bamboo, wood, rubber, metal and conch shell (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 5, *Mahāvagga* Part 2, 1994: 62-67).

To be more precise, the Buddha allows all these possessions in order to facilitate a life of virtue that the monks are supposed to follow. In this regard, all their possessions are designed to do away with hardships and problems that might prevent such a pursuit. It is inevitable that more items have been allowed since the Buddha’s time. They are geared toward the same goal of helping the monks end suffering and reach *Nibbāna*. The Buddha also sets the limit for the possession – the topic of the next section.

#### **1.4 Time-bound possessions**

In the *Vinayapiṭaka* a time limit is set for monks to possess their belongings starting from the food in the alms bowl. The time limit is called

“*Kālika*” which means time-bound. A monk is allowed to receive, keep and eat food within a certain time. There are four such periods:

1. *Yāvakālika*: The monk is allowed to temporarily receive and eat the food sometime in the morning to noon on the same day, e.g. rice, fish, meat, vegetables, fruits, and sweets.
2. *Yāmakālika*: The monk is allowed to receive and eat the offerings for one day and one night, i.e., before the dawn of the following day. The offerings are beverages made from a number of fruits allowed by the Buddha.
3. *Sattāhakālika*: The monk is allowed to receive and eat the offerings within 7 days. These are the five kinds of medicine.
4. *Yāvaciivika*: After receiving, the monk can take the offerings without time constraints. These are medicinal substances except for the three types of *Kālika* above (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 6).

All the above evidence from the Pali Canon shows that there are a large number of possessions that the monks are allowed to have although they are subject to certain rules and regulations regarding time and amount. The *Vinaya* code is enforced to ensure that the monks can own something and yet nothing at the same time.

### **1.5 Criteria to decide whether property is collectively or individually owned**

Various commentaries clearly differentiate various possessions between an individual monk and the collective *Saṅgha*:

1. Whether items are offered to the *Saṅgha* or an individual monk. If they are offered to the former, they are collectively owned. If they are offered to an individual monk, consideration must be made whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code.
2. Whether items offered are large or small. Larger items are deemed to be collective, while smaller items have to undergo consideration as to whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code.

3. Whether items offered are of much or little value. Valuable articles belong to the collective, while less valuable ones have to undergo consideration whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code.
4. Consideration is also given to whether or not the items offered are weapons. If they are weapons, it does not matter whether they are collectively or individually owned. They all need to undergo consideration whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 221-223).

Thus, large and valuable offerings must be collectively owned by the sangha, while smaller and less valuable objects can be individually owned, depending on the *Vinaya* consideration. The *Parivāra* scripture makes the following observation:

There are four requisites: those that should be maintained and considered to be ours to use, those that should be maintained but not considered ours to use; those that should be maintained but not considered ours and not to be used; and those that should not be maintained, not considered ours and not to be used.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 8, *Parivāra*, 1994: 477)

The scripture goes on to explain each category of requisite as follows:

In considering the four categories of requisites, there are those owned by an individual monk, those owned by the *Saṅgha*, those for the *Cetiya*, and those from the laymen. The requisites from the laymen are something that is offered for personal use such as alms bowls, robes, repaired items, and medicine. The monk can keep them and put them under lock and key.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 8, *Parivāra*, 1994: 543)

The *Parivāra* scripture thus provides some criteria for the monks to hold possessions as follows:

- a. Requisites that an individual monk owns and should be kept and used are personal belongings.
- b. Requisites that the *Saṅgha* owns and should be kept and used are not personal belongings.
- c. Requisites for the *Cetiya* that should be kept and not be used are not personal belongings.
- d. Requisites that belong to the laymen and should not be kept, protected and used are not personal belongings.

Such explanation clarifies how and what requisites should or should not be used or maintained. Therefore, property that belongs to the *wat* and that is kept by the monks cannot be considered anyone's personal belonging. If the monks today understand this principle and can differentiate between individual and collective property, their conduct will be more in line with the *Vinaya* code, especially when it comes to the issue of money, as will be discussed next.

## 2. Money and the monks

Before touching on the disciplinary rule observed by the monks, the researcher wants to talk about the discipline for the novices or samanera, the spiritual saplings (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 333) that will grow to become monks. The novices observe 10 disciplinary rules, the tenth being to refrain from receiving gold and money (*Mahāmakaṭarājavidyālaya*, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 285). In other words, they are not allowed to receive money and gold.

### 2.1 Money in the *Vinayapitaka*

Certainly, monks are obliged to observe more rules. In *Kosiyavagga* *Vinayapitaka* scripture, there is a rule forbidding the monks to receive money and gold. The Venerable Upanandasākyaputra was reputed to give rise to the rule. The story goes like this.

A man approached Upanandasākyaputra, paid respect, and sat in an appropriate place beside him. He said, “Your Reverend, yesterday evening I obtained some meat, part of which I intended to offer to you. However, early in the morning there was this boy who kept asking me for it. Eventually, I gave him your share of meat. Should I offer you something instead? One Kahāpana. Yes. Upanandasākyaputra then asked whether he intended to give him the money.

Man: Yes.

U: Then, you give me one Kahāpana.

The man then gave the monk the money and went out to tell others that the Buddhist monk of the Sākyā clan received money just like others. Other Buddhist monks heard the story. Those who lived a life of frugality and solitude felt ashamed, while those who adhered to the disciplinary rules began to blame the monk in question. The story was then told to the Buddha.

(Mahāmakaṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 938-939)

The Buddha held a meeting with the monks to inquire about the incident. Upanandasākyaputra admitted receiving one Kahāpana for the meat worth the same amount. The Buddha admonished the monk and put in place a rule forbidding monks to receive money and gold. The incident goes as follows:

The Blessed One admonished thus, “You, misguided man, your conduct was inappropriate and unbecoming for a recluse. It wasn’t right. You should not have done it. Why did you receive the money? Your action would not instill confidence in people who do not yet have faith or more confidence in those who already do. On the other hand, your act would win no confidence from those who do not yet have faith and lead astray others who already do.” The Blessed One admonished

Upanandasākyaputra in the following terms. He explained the negative consequences of when a person was difficult to train and nurture and when he was greedy, immodest and lazy. He cited the positive consequences of when a person was easy to train and nurture, when he was not greedy and when he was modest and tried to refine himself in every way. The Buddha then gave a discourse on the subject, saying to the monks, “Bhikku, this is a disciplinary rule for you to uphold. Any monk who receives or asks to receive gold or money or is willing for others to keep it for him has committed an offence entailing expiation and forfeiture (*Nissaggiyapācittiya*).”

(Mahāmakuṭarājavyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 939-940)

This disciplinary rule is quite explicit in forbidding the monks from receiving or having another person receive money and gold from others. It even forbids them from taking delight in having others keeping it for them. The disciplinary rules of *Vibhāṅga* spell out several instances and nuances, including the meaning of gold and money, receiving it or having another person receive it for the monk:

By gold, it is pure gold. Money includes Kahāpana and Māsaka made of metal, wood and lac – monetary units used for transaction purposes. If the monk receives the money himself, he commits an offence of *Nissaggiya*. If he has another person to receive it for him, he also commits an offence of *Nissaggiya*. If he is happy that somebody else keeps it for him or is happy when he is told that this belongs to him, he also commits an offence of *Nissaggiya*. Gold and money which are considered *Nissaggiya* must be sacrificed among the sangha.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 941-942)

It is clear from the disciplinary rule and its explanation that monks are not allowed to receive gold and money whether in person or through

another. It is even an offense to take delight in having it. Money and gold, thus received, will have to be sacrificed to the *Saṅgha* as an act of expiation. Such offense is, therefore, called *Nissaggiyapācittiya* or *Nissaggiyavatthu* which means an act of sacrifice and expiation. The guilty monks are required to renounce it before the confession and engage in subsequent atonement (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 128). Nevertheless, a question may arise about what is meant by gold and money. Does it include currency? A commentary to the *Vibhaṅga* has this to say:

The disciplinary rule includes any *Kahāpana* used in transaction. In the section on *Rajatam* mention is made of *Kahāpana* and metal *Māsaka*. *Kahāpana* can be made of gold or gold or of ordinary kind. They are all *Kahāpana*. *Māsaka* can be made of copper. It is metal *Māsaka*. It can be made of wood, bamboo joint, palm leaf, lac, or resin. In *Ye voharam gachanti*, all *Māsaka* can be used in business transactions in rural areas and can take any form including bone, hide, vegetable or seeds. Some have a clear form, while others do not. There are four kinds: money, gold, silver and gold *Māsaka*. They are all *Nissaggiyavatthu*. There are also others, including pearl, gems, cat's eye, conch, stone, coral, ruby, yellow sapphire, seven kinds of rice, male and female slaves, rice fields and farms, flower gardens and orchards. On the other hand, there are objects that are suitable for monks to keep: thread, spade, cotton cloth, cotton, all kinds of beans, and medicine including soft butter, hard butter, honey and sugarcane juice. These are *Kappiyavatthu*.

(*Mahāmakaṭṭarājavidyālaya*, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 and 2, 1994: 945-946)

Thus, it is evident that monks cannot receive or possess money and gold as well as other objects that have certain transactional value or possess characteristics of money and gold. In modern terms, *Kahāpana* and *Māsaka* can be compared to banknotes, coins, checks, cash cards, ATM cards, debit cards, credit cards and other such things that have transactional values. The

commentary also lists a number of reasons why monks can and cannot receive money and gold as well as the related offenses as follows:

Monks should receive neither *Nissaggiyavatthu* nor *Dukkaṭavatthu* whether for themselves, groups and *Cetiya*. It is an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya* for monks who do so for themselves. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks who do so for others. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks to do so even for the good of others. It is no offense, however, for monks to receive *Piyavatthu*.

(Mahāmakaṭarājavyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 946)

In summary, (1) if the monk receives money and gold for personal use, he is said to commit an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya*.

(2) If the monk receives them for others, whether the *Saṅgha*, a group of people, or *Cetiya*, it is an ecclesiastical offense.

(3) If the monk receives any kind of *Dukkaṭavatthu* like pearls, gems, cat's eye, conch, stone, coral, ruby, yellow sapphire, seven kinds of rice, male and female slaves, rice fields and farms, flower gardens and orchards for himself or for others, it is an ecclesiastical offense.

(4) If the monk receives such *kappiyavatthu* as thread, spade, cotton cloth, cotton, all kinds of beans, and medicine including soft butter, hard butter, honey and sugarcane juice, it is not an ecclesiastical offense.

In other words, receiving money and gold for whatever purpose is a violation of the *Vinaya* code. The monk who does so is said to commit an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya*. The monk should not be involved with something called “*Anāmās*” or something that he should not lay hands on such as female body, female clothes, money and gold, and weapons (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 368). The commentary goes on to conclude that the only way the monk can receive money and gold without breaching the *Vinaya* code is to let *Kappiyakāraka* or his attendant carry such money and gold and turn it into the four suitable basic necessities. In this case, the monk will not commit an ecclesiastical offense. The monk should have no part in dealing with money and gold. He cannot even tell others where to put it. In

addition, an offense is said to have taken place if the monk is involved in its management, even the management of the basic necessities. It does not become the monk (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 797-948).

## 2.2 Money and gold in the *Suttantapiṭaka*

Besides the *Vinayapiṭaka*, the *Suttantapiṭaka* provides a wide perspective on the subject. In *Caṅkī-Sutta* mention is made of how Prince Siddhatha renounced all the possessions to live the life of a holy man:

Behold, Noble men, we have heard that Gotama renounced so much money and gold on land and in the sky when He entered monkhood ... He was only a young man with black hair and in the prime of life...When His parents implored Him in tears not to do so, He cut off his hair, shaved his beard and put on a saffron robe, signifying a life of a religious person.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Majjhimanakāya*, *Majjhimapaññasaka* Vol. 2 Part 2, 1993: 343-344)

Other *Suttas* also mention the renunciation of money, gold and property by monks before and during monkhood. In *Sundarī Therī Gāthā*, there is a passage about *Bukkhunī Sundarī*:

Look here, Sundarī, your father has renounced elephants, horses, oxen, precious stones, wealth and other worldly possessions to go into monkhood. You'd better take over all the property and become heir to the family wealth ...Mother, my father was overwhelmed by the loss of his son and decided to renounce the elephants, horses, oxen, precious stones, wealth and worldly possessions. I am also overwhelmed by such a feeling and want to become religious as well.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya*, *Therī Gāthā* Vol. 2 Part 4, 1993: 400)

Likewise, the Venerable Kassapa mentioned how he too renounced money, gold, and wealth to enter monkhood in *Mahā Kaśsapa Padāna*:

I had moral property in my last life. I was born in a Brahmin family with so much wealth. I renounced ten millions of wealth and decided to lead a religious life. I have such wonderful virtues as *Paṭisambhidā* 4, *Vimokha* 8, and *Abhiññā* 6. I have understood them all. I have understood the Buddha's teachings.

(Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya*, *Aparadāna* Vol. 8 Part 1, 1995: 514)

What the Buddha, senior monk and nun said in the *Suttantapitaka* points to the same thing that a person who wishes to enter monkhood must renounce all property including money and gold and must observe the rule before and during monkhood. The Buddha has this to say in *Attantapa-Sutta*:

When a person thus enters monkhood...he will not receive gold and money...he will not receive male or female slaves...he will not receive goats and sheep...he will not receive chickens and pigs...he will not receive elephants, horses, oxen and donkeys...he will not receive farms and land...he will not participate in buying and selling.

(Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Ānguttaranikāya*, *Catukaniipāta* Vol. 2, 1994: 515-516)

There are other *Suttas* that touch on the monk's lack of pleasure in receiving money and gold, e.g. *Manicūlka-Sutta*. The Buddha said that His monks do not take pleasure in gold and money. Those who do are involved in the five sensual pleasures and cannot thus be considered Buddhist monks:

The Blessed One said, "Good, Mr. Gāmanī, when you predict thus, it is in line with what I said. You do not refer to Us with false words but say things that fellow *Dhamma*-farers can go along with. Gold and money are not appropriate with Buddhist monks who do not take delight in them. They are not allowed to possess gems, gold and money. Look here, Mr. Gāmanī, those to whom gold and silver are appropriate take delight in the five sensual pleasures. The sensual pleasures do not become Buddhist monks. They are not what Buddhist

monks adhere to. I say this to you. Those who want grass will seek for grass. Those who want wood will seek for wood. Those who want a wagon will seek for a wagon. Those who want masculinity will seek for masculinity. We say thus that Buddhist monks do not take pleasure in gold and money at all.

(Mahāmakaṭarājavidyālaya, the *Samyuttanikāya*, *Sala-yatanavagga* Vol. 4, Part 2, 1993: 213)

The religious verse of Nun Subhākammāradhidātherī re-affirms that entering monkhood entails renunciation of money and gold. It is not appropriate, therefore, for monks to return to such possessions. Monks should take no pleasure in them:

I have given up relatives, slaves, workers, home, land, wealth and entertainment that people so much enjoy. I have left behind quite a large amount of property in order to live a religious life and follow the Buddha's teachings. It is not right for me to return to money and gold after I have given them up. I want a life without care. How can a person rise among the pundits if after renouncing gold and money he returns to them? Gold and money cannot bring him peace and solitude. They are not worthy of a Buddhist monk. They are not noble treasure. On the contrary, they give rise to greed, delusion, and addiction, bringing danger and bitter feelings. They are not permanent at all. Many people are made unhappy by them. They cause enemies, quarrels, murder, corporal punishments, imprisonment, degradation, sadness, and destruction. This is what people stuck in karma suffer.

(Mahāmakaṭarājavidyālaya, the *Samyuttanikāya*, *Sala-yatanavagga* Vol. 4, Part 2, 1993: 415-416)

Thus, the *Tipiṭaka* and commentaries all point to the same thing that it is not acceptable for monks and novices to take pleasure in receiving gold and money. They are no longer laypersons who take delight in sensual activities. The Buddha gives several discourses on the danger of sense-

desire. The subject of monks receiving gold and money was also an important reason for the second Rehearsal of Scriptures (Mahāmakutārājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 530-558). Thus, the subject has played an important part in the security of Buddhism.

### 3. Monks' property today

Based on the documentation and interviews, monks' personal property could be classified as follows:

1. Monthly food allowances: They vary according to positions as well as ecclesiastical titles and rank, e.g. abbot and Chaokhun.
2. Teaching fees for monks who teach at various education institutions, e.g. Pali schools, religious schools, and monk universities.
3. Money received when invited to perform certain activities, e.g. funeral, cremation, and making merit for house-warming.
4. Money from special religious activities, e.g. ceremonies offering robes and other necessary items to monks (Tot Pha Pa) and ceremonies offering robes to monks at the end of the Buddhist Lent (Tot Kathin).

From the interviews conducted, an abbot receives a monthly food allowance of 1,500 baht. The allowance will increase if he also teaches. Usually monks receive a wide range of money when requested to perform special activities at various functions. All this is their personal income which can be turned into property of some kind – something that may or may not go against the *Vinaya* code. As far as a wat is concerned, its income and sources of income depend on the number of activities organized and on popular faith. The amount of the wat property more or less corresponds with the document registering its wealth.

Personal expenditure of the monks can be classified as follows:

- (a) Personal expenditure, e.g. water and electricity bills, telephone bills, travel expenses, and money sent to support their relatives
- (b) Charity expenditure, e.g. contributions to merit-making events at various places

- (c) Educational expenditure, e.g. textbooks and other pedagogical equipment.

The *wat* expenditure, on the other hand, revolves around material construction and monk dwellings (Ruangrit Prasanrak, 1997: 4-46). In light of the interviews, personal expenditure varies from monk to monk. Those who are more educationally-minded will pay more on educational material. Those who have to support their family or disciples will see their money go toward that direction.

With regard to property management, the interviews reveal that most *wat* tend to follow the rules and regulations of the *Sangha*, while there is no clear practice regarding personal property since there exists no law governing the issue. The following are some of the common practices:

- (a) Monks put the money in the *wat* account.
- (b) They open a personal bank account.
- (c) They do not open an account but keep the money in the donation boxes or in the abbot's dwelling.

For money that belongs to the *wat*, usually there are three people involved in its management: two laypersons and an abbot. Some *wat* that undergo construction depend on a friendly loan agreement. For personal money, on the other hand, each monk can do whatever he pleases depending on the situation. However, the interviews shed light on various attitudes of the monks toward money today:

### **3.1 That money is just make-believe.**

A number of monks today think that (1) money is a necessary make-believe imposed by the external world and that (2) money in the past was more valuable than that today. The money today comes in the form of banknotes with no real inherent value, whereas gold and money in the past were worth something by themselves.

### **3.2 That money is a personal matter.**

A number of monks believe that (1) if money is given to a monk it is his to keep, but if money is meant for a collective good, e.g. Kathin or Pha

Pa, it belongs to the wat, (2) it is crucial that money is a personal matter because some monks have to support their relatives, and (3) it is true that a monk has no property, but if it is given to him he can use it, for example, to support his family, to buy something he needs, or even to pay off debt.

### **3.3 That money should come under strict *Vinaya* code.**

A number of monks think that (1) monks cannot have money of their own because the Buddha does not allow them to get involved in it, (2) if monks want to get involved there must be *Veyyāvaccakara* and wat committee members who work in a transparent manner, and (3) money is make-believe that leads to worldly involvement and it is not a basic necessity or requisite for monks.

### **3.4 That the *Vinaya* code should be made more flexible.**

A number of monks think that (1) as the present age is unlike the Buddha's time, the *Vinaya* code should be more flexible in that the Buddha allows some rules to be changed, (2) the consideration whether the use of money is appropriate should be based on the intention, and (3) in view of the change of social contexts the use of money has become an everyday part of life because several activities entail the use of money which the disciples have no control over.

## **4. Issue of monks' property**

The possession of personal property has led to innumerable problems. The researcher wishes to quote ecclesiastical rules in the Code of the Three Great Seals. In the reign of King Rama I there was concern that the monks' involvement with money could result in unsuitable behaviors and practices. Section 5 prohibits laypeople from presenting offerings unfit for monks such as money, gold and other precious stones:

Formerly, laypeople offered a spoonful of rice to the monks, and the merit was made. Monks who received such offering were pure. The laypersons did not include money as part of the offering in line with the Buddha's instructions. Both parties were honest and felt good. Today, however, monks and

novices have gone astray. They want and ask for money from laypeople. Some claim to be able to do all sorts of things including masseurs, pharmacists, fortune tellers, and healers, asking money for those services. This is so inappropriate... Monks today do not follow the *Vinaya* Code. They live an aberrant life, wanting to be well fed like cattle. They do not seek spiritual fulfillment and do not deserve to be called Buddhist monks. Likewise, the laypeople have no idea that such offerings would do no one any good. They would give money, thinking that it would be good for them in return. The inappropriate money they give to the monks would only lead to more greed, which is against the Buddha's teaching. Such laypeople can be said to encourage ill-behaved monks to inadvertently destroy the religion. The act of giving that leads to such destruction will come to nothing.

(Royal Institute, 2007: 1015-1016)

The researcher wishes to quote the Buddha's words in *Mahādukkhakkhandha-Sutta* in support of the belief that monetary problems have much to do with *Kāma* or sense-desires as follows:

Bikkhus, there is also an issue of *Kāma*. *Kāma* is the cause, the origin, and the driving force. Because of *Kāma*, several princes or rajas quarrel. Monarchs get into dispute. Brahmins are in contention with each other. Wealthy people do not see eye to eye. Mothers fight against their children and vice versa. Fathers fight against their children and vice versa. Siblings are against each other. Friends vie with each other. People quarrel with each other and hurt each other with hands, dirt, wood or weapon. Some are killed, others seriously injured. Bikkhus, all this is the consequence of *Kāma*. *Kāma* is the cause, the origin, and the driving force. It is all due to *Kāma*.

(Mahāmakutārājavidyālaya, the *Majjhimanakāya*, *Mūlapaññāsaka* Vol. 1 Part 2, 1999: 117)

One can see for oneself, therefore, whether the monks' behavior with regard to money goes against the Buddha's word. The interviews reveal that most monks have personal possessions to a degree. Money can be turned into all kinds of assets. In addition, lax behaviors regarding the *Vinaya* have resulted in a host of other problems, including fraud in the wat assets, inappropriate collection taking, crime, and fake monks. The researcher wishes to deal with them one by one:

#### **4.1 Fraud in the wat assets**

The fraud case here is based on the incident at Wat Sichum, Lampang province. It started with a conflict between a group of *Veyyāvaccakara* and abbots over the wat's enormous wealth. Eventually the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Lampang had to intervene, issuing an order that every monk and novice staying at Wat Sichum return to their original wat and that every *Veyyāvaccakara* and committee member be relieved of their duties effective 25 June 2007 (*Khon Muang Nua* Newspaper, 2007: 1). The incident took place after eight committee members of Wat Sichum led by Mr. Bandan Klaphachon accused Abbot Chaleo Sakukkayano of taking arbitrary action without the approval from the *Veyyāvaccakara* and committee. For instance, the wat's original account of about 2.4 million baht dwindled to 0.5 million baht, and the abbot opened another account with Krung Thai Bank in the name of Wat Sichum to which money from the Lampang Buddhism Office was transferred. This was done without the knowledge of the wat committee. The abbot kept all the account books and personally carried out all transactions. The Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Lampang set up an investigation committee asking the abbot for clarification. The monk in question could answer some of the queries, while the opening of the secret account remained shrouded in secrecy. He admitted, however, that there was only five baht left in the account.

#### **4.2 Taking collections**

The issue of taking collections was a frequent occurrence. For example, on 20 May 2008, Pol. Lt. Manu Pinchai, an officer on duty at a provincial police station in Pichit province, received a call from Mr. Paisan Tirachusak, a wealthy businessman and chairman of Pichit Business Group,

that he could no longer tolerate the behaviors of ill-behaved monks asking for collections on a daily basis without intervention from any wat or authority. In return they would give away a small yellow plastic container. Money and other objects of donation were shared among the bad people. A team of police officers were dispatched and found Monk Bunlai Koedliam, aged 30 years, of No. 62 Mu 2, Kosampi village, Kosampi district, Kamphaengpet province, asking for collection. The monk together with other two women and three strong men were taken to the police station for inquiry. It was found that these people used a black Nissan pickup, with a registration plate number Bo Bo 7071 Nakhon Sawan province, for the activity. The monk had a certificate showing that he belonged to Wat Dongchoi, Wang Pikun sub-district, Wang Thong district, Phitsanulok province. The yellow plastic containers, on the other hand, belong to Wat Nong Bot. The police also found other collection notes from several provinces in the Central Region used by a group of bad monks for illicit activities. They were fined and told to go back to their original wats and not to return to Pichit without proper authorization (Sitthipot Kebui, 2008).

#### **4.3 Deception and stealing of monks' property**

On 13 December 2007, at 1100 hours, Pol. Sen. Sgt. Maj. Udom Waewkham, Pol. Sgt. Maj. Manit Trutdi and Pol. Sgt. Maj. Chalong Phaobang, all patrol police for Bang Phongphang Police Station, received a call from a good citizen that a group of people arrested a bad guy trying to steal property in a monk dwelling at Wat Khlongphum, Rama III Road, Soi 46, Bang Phongphang sub-district, Yannawa district, Bangkok. The three police officers went to inspect the crime scene and found a man being attacked by a group of people. They intervened and arrested the man whose name was Mr. Phirom Laothong, aged 26 years and whose address was No. 117/38 Soi Wat Chong Lom, Bang Phongphang subdistrict, Yannawa district. On the man were found 42,000 baht in cash and a screwdriver. He was later sent for further interrogation with Pol. Sub-Lt. Phonchai Phengrungruangwong at Bang Phongphang Police Station and was charged with theft. The abbot of Wat Khlongphum explained that at 9 o'clock he was requested to perform a house-warming ceremony and lunch at Soi Kamnan Maen 19, Thonburi. Eight taxis came to collect all 15 monks from

the wat to the scene. On arrival there was nothing to be found. When the taxis took them back, they saw that a monk dwelling was broken into. On entering, they found the bad guy ransacking the place and taking donation money. So, they asked the people nearby to stop the man (*Thai Rat Newspaper*, 2006: 12).

#### **4.4 Crime**

A famous development monk and preacher, Monk Kraison Manunyo, aged 51, director of Thammasathan Sutthiwong Monk Sancturary at Ban Thung Lung, Mu 2, Patong sub-district, Hat Yai district, Songkhla province, was inexplicably found dead. The police could not conclude whether the death was suicidal or criminally related. There was a lot of talk and criticism that the monk had a huge amount of property, donated by disciples in Thailand and other countries, including Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia. The donation was intended for the establishment of a foundation for sick monks and for other charitable causes. After the unresolved death his property was divided among relatives and others. His dwelling was opened to the public all night, and some of the money was lost. A group of foreign disciples lodged a complaint to the Thai Embassy in Singapore and traveled to Thailand to complain to other Thai authorities (*Thai Rat Newspaper*, 2008: 19).

#### **4.5 Fake monks**

There are numerous cases in which men put on saffron robes to make money. The National Office of Buddhism organized a seminar on “Phra Winyathikan” or “Police Monks” to deter ill-behaved monks at Wat Samian Nari, Chatuchak district, Bangkok. It was attended by 200 police monks and other officials concerned. Phra Thamsuthi (his rank at the time), Ecclesiastical Governor of Bangkok, presided over the meeting, saying at one point:

The economic situation today has led to the phenomenon of fake monks because people believe that monks are in a good position to obtain money. You simply have your head shaved and put on saffron robes. This is gravely detrimental

to Buddhism. Recently, police monks in Bangkok told the police to arrest a group of fake monks. It was found that they all came from a sub-district in Chaiyaphum province. They were rice farmers. After the farming season they would come as a group to Bangkok posing as monks to take collections. It seems to be the practice of this sub-district...Police monks also received complaints from the Priest Hospital that some monks come to take advantage of the situation at the hospital where people are more than willing to donate money for charitable causes, especially if the patient beds are situated near the door. Some monks will do everything to occupy such beds and stay at the hospital as long as possible. Some take a lot of sugar to ensure that their blood sugar level is high. The hospital had to inform the police monks so that the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor will take action

(*Khao Sot* Newspaper, 2008: 14).

There are cases in which deception is carried out by the entire family. The father will pose as a monk, mother as a nun, and their son as a novice. The topic has been much talked about with no solution in sight. The law is too lenient, so people are not afraid. Venerable Teacher Monk Santi Chanthawimon, abbot of Wat Sa Kaew, Nai Muang sub-district, Muang district, Chaiyaphum province, commented that there are many fake monks and bad guys wearing saffron robes today but the problem continues unchecked. A fake monk can collect as much as several thousand baht but when he is caught he is required to pay a fine of 500 baht. So, it is worth the risk. He will certainly do it again. Some monks like drinking and have sex with women. These are real monks. Not long after they are caught and defrocked, they will ask to be ordained again. Mr. Saeng Chanthabutsa, chief of Nong Kham sub-district, said that it is difficult to catch all the fake monks in the locality, because most villagers have gone to work abroad. Monitoring cannot be carried out as often as it was. He agreed that the law should be amended with harsher penalties. Some fake monks from Thailand went to Malaysia to deceive people. When they were caught and repatriated, they were fined 400-500 baht and imprisoned for not more

than seven days. These people will go back and do the same thing and give Chaiyaphum province a bad name (*Khom Chat Luek* Newspaper, 2008: 32).

In the researcher's view, if monkhood is not well respected by people, there will be fewer problems, whether the issue of fake monks or fraud. The problems may not all be due to the fact that monks own personal property but to the fact that wat assets are managed by the monks concerned. Fraud occurs because monks want to have them as their own. If they are not allowed to own personal property, the problem will be less serious.

## 5. Analysis of monks and personal property

In this section the researcher wishes to analyze the monks' attitudes based on the interviews and existing problems against the *Vinaya* Code. For a monk to have an income, whether personal or collective, is against the code in any case. When a monk comes into possession of money and turns it into other assets, this act also violates the code because it involves transactions. With regard to personal expenditure, this may include something for personal use, charitable causes, and education. The amount will vary from monk to monk. Those who are more educationally-inclined will pay more on educational material. Those who have to support their family or disciples will see their money go toward that direction. Such expenditure, unless supervised by *Veyyāvaccakara*, will still be considered a breach of discipline. There are no clear legal provisions on the management of the monks' personal property; as a result, a number of practices are open. Some have their account incorporated as part of the wat account. Others may have their own personal account. Still, others do not open an account but keep the money in such places as donation boxes and abbot dwelling. Unless supervised by the *Veyyāvaccakara*, such practice is an ecclesiastical offense.

From the interviews there are several attitudes on money. One is that money is just make-believe and that money is just a piece of paper used for transactional purposes with no real inherent value compared to the money and gold in the Buddha's time. Therefore, monks can use banknotes. This is in violation of the *Vinaya* code. The Buddha forbids not only money and gold but also resin, bones, hide and fruit seeds that can be used as money as well:

The disciplinary rule includes any Kahāpana used in transaction. In the section on *Rajatam* mention is made of Kahāpana and metal Māsaka. Kahāpana can be made of gold or gold or of ordinary kind. They are all Kahāpana. Māsaka can be made of copper. It is metal Māsaka. It can be made of wood, bamboo joint, palm leaf, lac, or resin. In *Ye voharam gachanti*, all Māsaka can be used in business transaction in the rural area and can take any form including bone, hide, vegetable or seeds. Some have a clear form, others no clear form. There are four kinds: money, gold, silver and gold Māsaka. They are all *Nissaggiyavatthu*. There are also others, including pearl, gems, cat's eye, conch, stone, coral, ruby, yellow sapphire, seven kinds of rice, male and female slaves, rice fields and farms, flower gardens and orchards. On the other hand, there are objects that are suitable for monks to keep are: thread, spade, cotton cloth, cotton, all kinds of beans, and medicine including soft butter, hard butter, honey and sugarcane juice. These are *kappiyavatthu*.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 and 2, 1994: 945-946)

Thus, a claim that money is just a piece of paper and can be used is against the code. Besides, if money is just a piece of paper as claimed, one will not see such problems as fraud, inappropriate collection and fake monks. A claim that it is make-believe goes contrary to the Buddha's saying in the *Ahiddammapiṭaka* that money comes from the Earth element which by itself has no inherent value. One should not get attached to it and not use it at all. Interestingly, monks today say, contrary to the Buddha, that money is make-believe and therefore can be used.

Some say that the Buddha does not allow monks to carry money because it is unsafe to do so. They can be robbed or physically assaulted. Today money is just a make-believe piece of paper and does not have the same worth as gold. One has often heard, however, of monks being murdered, deceived and robbed all for that said piece of paper. *Mahājanok-Jātaka* mentions that those who possess money can be killed:

I have seen a mango tree bear fruit outside the palace wall, within which there is much music, singing and dancing. I have left the tree whose fruit are so desired by people for another. Soon the tree with fruit is barren without leaves and stems, while the other remains green and pleasant. Our enemies want to kill free people like us just as people want to rid a mango tree of its fruit. A tiger is killed for its hide, an elephant for its tusks, and a person for his money. Who wants to kill a person without home and without desire? I have learnt the lesson from the two mango trees, one without fruit and the other with fruit.

(Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya*, *Jātaka* Vol. 4 Part 2, 1995: 88-89)

Thus, if monks have no property, the crime rate against monks will be much reduced. Therefore, the claim that money is only a make-believe item carries no weight. The evidence from the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and the situation today prove otherwise.

We come to another claim that money can be personal property if a layperson specifically offers it to a particular monk. This is in violation of the *Vinaya* which says that receiving money and gold is an ecclesiastical offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya*. The monk has to renounce it before he can be cleared of it. The more money he has, the more serious the offense. Therefore, receiving money, whether for personal or collective purposes, is an offense:

Monks should receive neither *Nissaggiyavatthu* nor *Dukkaṭavatthu* whether for themselves, groups and *Chetiya*. It is an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya* for monks who do so for themselves. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks who do so for others. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks do so even for the good of others. It is no offense, however, for monks to receive *Piyavatthu*.

(Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 946)

The claim that if money is specifically offered to a monk it becomes his personal property is against the *Vinaya* rule. Money is not one of the eight requisites for monks. It is neither basic nor additional property allowed by the Buddha. Even the four basic necessities allowed by the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, if derived from the money received by monks, should not be consumed by the monks concerned in any case (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 948-950). In addition, money is *Anāmās*, something that should not be touched in the same way as female body and female clothes, gold and weapons should not be handled (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 368). The claim that a layman specifically wants the monk to keep mobet is not right. Monks who thus claim are negligent of their duties to educate the laypersons what is right and wrong according to the *Vinaya* rule. Laypersons should not act out of ignorance. The Venerable Yasakākaṇḍakkaputra taught the people of Vajjī that Buddhist monks cannot receive money and gold during the second Rehearsal of the *Tipiṭaka* (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 530-558).

Besides, a person who makes an offering to an unspecified monk or to monks in general is said to make greater merit than if he singled out a particular one. This is supported by the Buddha's talk to Queen Mahaprajāpati in *Dagsināvibhāṅga-Sutta* (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Majjhimanakāya*, *Uparipaññāsaka* Vol. 3 Part 2, 1993: 391). So, it is not right if the monk claims that he is obliged to keep money as his personal property as the presenter so wishes. Instead, it is his duty to refer to the Buddha's saying, explaining why the offering should be made to no specific monk or monks in general because the merit is greater. Another claim is that some monks have to support their family. Admittedly, the *Vinaya* code allows monks to support their parents to a certain extent. The commentary says that regarding the question who the alms food should go, it is first to the monk's mother and father. If the offering has a price in terms of Kahapanā, the practice still stands" (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 2, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Part 1, 1994: 436). Another place in the *Vinayapitaka* says that the monk is allowed to sacrifice robes to his mother and father (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 5, *Mahāvagga* Part 2, 1994: 294). In the commentary to *Sālikedāra-Jātika* there are similar

statements that the monk can take care of his parents (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya-Jātaka* Vol. 3 Part 6, 1994: 352).

Although the *Tipiṭaka* and commentary say the same thing that monks can look after their parents, the support can only take the form of four basic necessities only, like food and water. The texts do not say anything about money and gold. At any rate it is an offense for a monk to receive them. He has no choice but to renounce them and cannot say who they should be given to. He cannot renounce them in favor of his parents, for that would constitute a breach of the *Vinaya*. An offense will not occur if he does not mention who the money and gold should go to (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Vinayapitaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhāṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 942-951).

When monks are allowed to possess money as personal property, untoward incidents may occur, e.g. money collection and fraud of wat property, because of greed and desire to become someone influential. Crimes can be committed for money, as already described by the researcher. Possession of money can lead to all four major offenses, e.g. having sexual intercourse with a person of the same or opposite sex, simply because a person has a lot of money and can use it as sexual favors. Even stealing more than five Māsaka is considered a fraud. An influential person with a lot of money can be involved in murder cases. Some monks can even claim to have supernatural powers in the attempt to raise more money and favors for themselves. In *Appaka-Sutta* the Buddha gives a discourse explaining that most wealthy people tend to engage in immoral acts (Mahāmakuṭarājāvidyālaya, the *Samyuttanikāya Sagāthavagga* Vol. 1, Part 1, 1993: 431).

There are several reasons cited that the *Dhamma-Vinaya* should be made more in tune with the present age. For instance, if monks use money for the good of Buddhism and not for personal gains or pleasure, the practice should not be considered wrong. Such an attitude is not right, because the only people responsible for handling money for monks according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and monk law are *Kappiyakāraka* or *Veyyāvaccakara*. The term “*Kappiyakāraka*” means people who make things suitable for monks, who find food for monks to eat, and who attend to monks” (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 9). The word “*Veyyāvaccakara*”, on the other hand, means people who do things on behalf of the monks who help run errands, and who serve monks” (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 289). Another claim is that one

should look at the intention of the monk who uses money. The Buddha says clearly that all activities involving money and gold are not in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya* regardless of whether or not the monk receiving money is happy.

Another common attitude used to support the monks' lax behaviors is that the present age is different from the Buddha's time. One should not use the standard of one age to compare with that of another. This claim is counter to the *Mahāpadesa 4* which are used as criteria against which monks' behaviors are judged outside what the Buddha has said. The principles of *Mahāpadesa 4* are always up to date and flexible. If a monk does something like a layperson, e.g. opening a bank account, using a credit or debit card, such practice may not be mentioned in the *Vinaya*. Such monetary transactions correspond to a principle of *Mahāpadesa 4* that says "whatever has not been objected to as not allowable, if it fits in with what is not allowable and goes against what is allowable, is not allowable". Therefore, the Buddha may not say anything against the use of credit card and so on, but He forbids the acceptance of money and gold. Such things as credit cards fit in with money and gold that He forbids, so they are not allowable. Without *Mahāpadesa 4* monks may come up with other excuses that encourage them to behave contrary to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. If this is allowed to continue, eventually there will be no difference between a monk and a layman, and that will spell the end of monkhood in Buddhism.

Nevertheless, the Buddha has already made it clear that it is not right for monks to receive money and gold. There is no need to take recourse to *Mahāpadesa 4*. Similarly, the claim that the *Dhamma-Vinaya* should be reviewed to be in line with the modern way of life is not correct either. The *Dhamma-Vinaya* has already spelled out the practice of receiving money and gold. There is no need for any further review or revision. On the contrary, it is against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* to review itself. Such practice would devalue the scripture, as it means that the Buddha's teaching is merely ephemeral, and, therefore not the permanent truth. Such thinking shows disrespect for the Buddha Himself. The *Dhamma-Vinaya* was created by Him. Not respecting it is paramount to not respecting the Buddha and will lead to the degradation of Buddhism, as mentioned in *Kimbila-Sutta*

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Ānguttaranikāya*, *Pañcaka* and *Chakknipāta* Vol. 3, 1994: 446)

Some claim that the Buddha allows for some minor disciplinary rules to be amended, hence the attitude that receiving money is a minor matter that can also be revised. Monks can no longer observe the rule governing money. Admittedly, before the Buddha passed away, He said, “Ānanda, if monks wish to repeal some minor disciplinary rules, let it be” (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Dīkanikaya Mahāvagga* Vol. 2, Part 1, 1993: 321). At the same time, He also said to the Bhikku thus:

Bikkhu, you shall not set disciplinary rules that I have not made. Nor shall you revoke those that I have established. You shall conduct yourselves at all times according to the disciplinary rules as I have made. Monks who look for development will not fall into degeneration.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Dīkanikaya Mahāvagga* Vol. 2, Part 1, 1993: 240).

The Buddha’s word led the Venerable Kassapa who presided over the first Rehearsal into deciding together with 500 other Arahanta to keep all the disciplinary rules. Not a single one was left out. This was done to ensure the continuity of Buddhism. Otherwise, there might be some lax monks who would remove the rules one by one down to four major offenses of *Pārājika* on pretext that those rules are minor. This would naturally lead to instability of religious life and eventual degradation of Buddhism. Besides, the commentaries state that “the *Vinaya* will be as old as Buddhism. When the *Vinaya* stays, Buddhism also stays” (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 1, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Part 1 1993: 34). The Venerable Kassapa knew full well how closely the existence of Buddhism was associated with the *Vinaya*. He also did not want to see laypersons accuse monks of behaving themselves only when the Buddha was alive (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 517).

Theravāda Buddhism has accepted the decision of the Rehearsal assembly presided over by the Venerable Kassapa. No disciplinary rule was omitted. So, the claim that monks can use money as part of the action

to revise the disciplinary rule is not valid. In *Milindapañhā* scripture there is an explanation why the Buddha mentions the possibility of some minor amendments. The Buddha's real intention is to ensure that the monks observe all rules just as a dying king of a vast empire tells his heir that if the latter wants to reduce the empire to a lesser extent he can do so. The real intention of the monarch, of course, is not what is said but to maintain the existence of the empire (Venerable Tipiṭakaculābhaya, 1996: 162-165).

Another view is that many monks say that it is very difficult to observe all the disciplinary rules. They, therefore, apply the rules as far as it is convenient to them or even change the rules as they see fit. This is against the word of the Buddha in *Sikkha-Sutta* in which mention is made of Bikkhu and Bikkhunī whose blameworthy behaviors caused them to leave monkhood as opposed to those who the Buddha praises for their purer existence thus:

Bikkhu, although some Bikkhu and Bikkhunī are inflicted with suffering and in tears, they always practice a pure religious life and are praiseworthy for five righteous conducts: *Saddhā* (faith), *Hiri* (moral shame), *Ottapa* (moral fear), diligence, and *Paññā* (wisdom). Behold, Bikkhu, although some Bikkhu and Bikkhunī are inflicted with suffering and in tears, they always practice a pure religious life and are praiseworthy for such five righteous conducts

(Venerable Tipiṭakaculābhaya, 1996: 8).

The Buddha also talks about the wonders of Buddhism in *Uposatha-Sutta* that His disciples will never violate the disciplinary rules even in the face of death (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya*, *Udāna* Vol. 1 Part 3, 1993: 526). So, the claim that it is difficult for monks to observe the rules about money simply shows that such monks are not praiseworthy. They breach the rule simply because it is difficult not to use money today, especially when such difficulty does not lead to tears or death. They seem to be ready to break the rule. There is another attitude about monks who hold administrative positions such as abbots, Ecclesiastical Sub-district Governors and so on. They are entitled to monthly allowances for their jobs. This claim is contrary to the *Dhamma-Vinaya* on being a monk as opposed

to being a civil servant. Part of the confusion arises from the Act on the *Saṅgha* B.E. 2505 (1962) and its amendment B.E. 2535 (1992). Section 31 of Chapter 5 of the act says that a wat has a status of juristic person represented by the abbot in general administration (Administrative *Saṅgha* Handbook: 9), while according to Section 46 monks who are appointed with administrative responsibilities and *Veyyāvaccakara* are competent officials as specified in the Criminal Code (Administrative *Saṅgha* Handbook: 4).

The crucial issue is that an abbot is a competent official under the law and is therefore entitled to an allowance like a salary given to a civil servant. Such act is against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* which forbids the ordaining of civil or royal servants (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 245). Yet, the law cited above goes the opposite direction. When a monk stays long enough to become an abbot or governor monk, he then becomes a competent government official with an allowance or salary. This is contrary to the *Dhamma-Vinaya* even it is allowed by the Act of the *Saṅgha*. The Proverbial Verse of Buddhist Nun Subhākammaradhitā confirms that to enter monkhood entails a renunciation of money and gold; it is, therefore, inappropriate for monks to re-possess them again (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya*, *Therī Gāthā* Vol. 2 Part 4, 1993: 371). So, it is against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* for a monk to possess money. Monks should pay no heed to money.

Thus, there are numerous arguments against the claims made above on the basis of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and facts. The best course of action is to adhere to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, for it is wrong for monks to possess money and gold.

## 6. Suggested solutions

### 6.1 Promote the quality of monks according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*

This is one of the most important approaches. Monks that do not know the tenets of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* will not be able to practice them. The adherence of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* will have an impact on the study, practice, dissemination and continuity of Buddhism (Danai Preechapoemprasit, 2003: 38-95).

### 1) Instilling the ideology of ordination into monkhood

This is fundamental. If a person entering monkhood understands the objective of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, the problem of monks possessing and accumulating money will be minimized. A person with a religious life should renounce it. The Buddha explains in *Attantapa-Sutta* how a religious person understands the danger of *Kāma* before entering monkhood and is freed from the worldly entanglements:

A wealthy person, his son, and other members of the family listened to the *Dhamma* and had faith in me. They realized how limited the life of a layperson was. Monkhood would provide a clearer and freer path. It was not easy for a layperson to live a holy and chaste life like a polished conch shell. “Why don’t you cut your hair shave your beard, wear a saffron robe and enter monkhood?” Later on, they renounced all wealth, left their family, cut their hair, shaved their beard, wore saffron robes and became monks.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavyālaya, the *Ānguttaranikāya*, *Chakkaniipāta* Vol. 2, 1994: 515)

If monks are instilled with such ideology and realize that monkhood entails renunciation of possessions in order to achieve complete freedom, the researcher believes that they will not want to accumulate money and other possessions. A concrete method is to train candidates for ordination or ordinands, their friends and relatives. Training may take place before ordination regardless of how long one intends to stay in monkhood.

### 2) Studying the *Dhamma-Vinaya*

Several *Suttas* contain the teachings of the Buddha and His disciples concerning money and possessions. For instance, in *Patisalalana-Sutta* “Buddhist monks should not try to commit general sins, be the servants of other people, and give a *Dhamma* discourse to get money” (Mahāmakuṭarājavyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya*, *Udāna* Vol. 1 Part 3, 1993: 599). Their sole purpose is to obtain *Dhamma* from within. In *Sonaka-Jataka* the Buddha explains how Buddhist monks who have no possessions and live a secure life can advance in the path of *Dhamma*:

[One] Monks who have no possession or home always advance. No possession or rice husks will go into their barns, pots and baskets. Monks who seek food already prepared have a graceful routine life. They manage to live on the given alms food. Two, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They consume harmless alms food, and no *Kilesa* or impurities will fall upon them. Three, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They consume alms food without desire, and no *Kilesa* or impurities will attack them. Four, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They are absolutely free and travel to places without concern. Five, monks who have no possession or home always advance. When the city is on fire, whatever the monks have will not be burnt. Six, monks who have no possession or home always advance. When bandits plunder a place, whatever the monks possess will not be lost. Seven, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They have a graceful routine behavior with alms in their hands, wearing robes. Even when they go through places guarded by bandits or to other dangerous paths, they will fare safely. Eight, monks who have no possession or home always advance. In whatever direction they take there is no concern.

(Mahāmakaṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya-Jātaka*  
Vol. 4 Part 1, 1994: 121-122)

A study of the Buddha's sayings will make the monks aware of how they should behave toward money and property. A practical way is that after pre-ordination training that helps ordinands in their transition to monkhood they should be required to study the *Dhamma-Vinaya* on a regular basis no matter how long they intend to stay. The *Sangha* authority will need to put in place measures that require wat to follow, providing budgetary support and quality training personnel. Training programs should appropriately correspond with the length of the monks' intended stay. For a short stay in monkhood a training program could be for 7 days, 15 days,

one month, or 3 months. The training curriculum should provide adequate and correct understanding of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

For a longer stay in monkhood a more serious program should be instituted. For instance, a Buddhist-monk university may have a non-diploma curriculum on *Tipiṭaka*. The course may consist of the *Vinayapitaka*, the *Suttantapitaka*, the *Abhidammapitaka*, and *Suddhāviseṣa* focusing on learning the Pali grammar. Further sub-divisions based on the *Dhamma-Vinaya* are also possible (Danai Preechapoemprasit, 2002: 176-182). The objective is to enhance the quality standard of monks, paving the way for further selection of those who intend to live a permanent religious life.

### 3) Observing the *Dhamma-Vinaya*

Another effective way to solve disciplinary problems is to observe the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. In a nutshell, the observation of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā* will lead to renunciation of money and possessions and to higher *Dhamma*. Monks should practice *Satipaṭṭhāna* to reduce a material desire. In *Salalāgara-Sutta* the Buddha says that monks who practice *Satipaṭṭhāna* will not leave monkhood for possessions. Therefore, if monks practice *Satipaṭṭhāna* well, they will not accumulate wealth or take pleasure in money and property while leading a religious life. This is supported by the following:

All the elderly people, kings, grand royal courtiers, their friends, relatives and children will persuade monks who practice *Satipaṭṭhāna* 4 well to take pleasure in wealth, saying “Noble men, come away. Why do you want to wear these saffron robes? Why do you stay head-shaven, carrying an alms bowl? Leave the monkhood. Come and enjoy wealth and do other goods.” It is not possible for monks who practice *Satipaṭṭhāna* 4 to leave monkhood. Why? Because the mind that inclines and moves toward *Viveka* (solitude) long enough will not make it possible to leave monkhood.

(Mahāmakaṭarājavyālāya, the *Samyuttanikāya*, *Mahāvāravagga* Vol. 5, Part 2, 1994: 198-199)

The practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Maranānussati* will help let go of the desire and egoism. If the monks follow this path, the researcher is

confident that they will be less attached to money and property as taught by the Buddha. However, *Dhamma* alone may not resolve the issue altogether, the researcher thinks that it should be complemented by a structural solution.

## 6.2 Systematic solution by the State

### 1) Development of a quality screening system for monks

Based on the interviews the issue of monks possessing money and property could be resolved by the following methods:

- a) A more effective screening of candidates for monkhood should be put in place.
- b) Harsh penalties should be imposed on fake monks as a deterrent measure.
- c) A monk database should be developed to keep track of monks with bad records and to prevent their repeated ordination as well as attempted ordination of fake monks.

### 2) Property management and provision of four basic necessities

A structural approach to the problem can be summarized as follows:

- a) A wat fund should be set up as the central funding source for monks to use. It should be managed by the wat.
- b) The State should provide a budgetary support for all wat expenses under legal provisions on supervising the property of the wat and individual monks.
- c) The *Saigha* structure should be modified in such a way that accounting audit can be made transparent at every level. Separate accounts should be kept for personal and wat property.

Based on the information obtained, it seems that the State's effort to patronize and look after Buddhism has met with much resistance. Much of the resistance is due to conflicts of interest. Some well-to-do wat are afraid that they might lose their property, while others think that their attempts to produce amulets might lead to the State's confiscation if they come under the State's supervision. All this clearly reflects to what extent monks are attached to property.

### 3) Others views

The following are some of the views suggested that may help solve the money-monk problem:

- a) Set up an organization made of up the social sector and Buddhist council consisting of the State, the *Saṅgha* and people to manage Buddhist affairs and to patronize monks
- b) Set up a Buddhist bank acting as a *Veyyāvaccakara* managing financial affairs for the monks
- c) Return to the original *Dhamma-Vinaya* in which an honest *Veyyāvaccakara* system manages the financial affairs for the wat.

### 6.3 Summary of the suggested solutions to the problems of monks and personal property

- 1) Problems at an individual level can be solved by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* + *Veyyāvaccakara*.
- 2) Problems at the wat level can be solved by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* + *Veyyāvaccakara* + support and monitoring by the wat and community and auditing by a central authority.
- 3) Problems at the *Saṅgha* level can be solved by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* + the Buddhist Bank or Buddhism Property Office (*Veyyāvaccakara*) + auditing system (the *Saṅgha* laws + State control).

The researcher believes that at an individual level the solution is by observing the *Dhamma-Vinaya* with the support of a system of honest *Veyyāvaccakara*, as found in such wat as Suan Mok and other Wat Pa (forest monasteries) including Wat Pa along the line of Venerable Luang Po Cha and Wat Chakdaeng. At a wat level the solution lies in observing the *Dhamma-Vinaya* with *Veyyāvaccakara* of the wat looking after financial management. For this to work properly, the wat and the community need to provide support to ensure transparency. Auditing must be conducted by the central authority, possibly the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council or National Office for Buddhism. The management of the *Saṅgha* property, on the other hand, needs the government support, especially budgetary support, through the National Office for Buddhism or the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council. Other financial support may come from donation or Buddhist Bank. The Buddhist

Bank should act as *Veyyāvaccakara* managing the *Saṅgha* affairs, which is not in violation of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* subject to a transparent auditing system from the *Saṅgha* and the government. It is evident that the system will consist of 3 elements:

- a. *Veyyāvaccakara*
- b. the *Dhamma-Vinaya*
- c. Transparent auditing.

The solution will not be possible without a quality *Veyyāvaccakara* system. The researcher believes that the National Office for Buddhism should put in place central *Veyyāvaccakara* officials to look after the monks' financial affairs in every wat. These are salaried positions with clear job descriptions regarding the monks' financial management and offerings given by others in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. This should be the best possible option. So, there needs to be a screening system for selecting suitable candidates for *Veyyāvaccakara* positions to prevent fraud and corruption. The information of wat's income and expenditure should also be made available and subject to auditing by the people sector, *Saṅgha* and government. The State needs to pass necessary legislation in support of these activities and in line with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

All the suggested solutions and approach need to be based on the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. This makes it imperative for monks to study and follow the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, e.g. the principle of solitude. The outcomes will be beneficent for all concerned including the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and Thai society. If the monks do not behave themselves according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, no system will solve the perennial problem of monks' personal property.

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