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GOING FORTH IN THAI SOCIETY

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his study is a research survey with the objective of examining the factors related to going forth (ordination of a Buddhist monk or novice), the objectives of going forth, and the various problems encountered during the time spent in the robes.

The results of the research comprised:

- a. Initial data concerning the population studied
- b. Objectives of going forth
- c. Factors related to going forth
- d. Comprehension of going forth
- e. Problems encountered during the time spent in the robes

(a) Initial data concerning the population studied

The population studied consisted of 920 monks (*bhikkhu*) and novices (*sāmaṇera*) from a total target of 1,000, the full number of which, due to various difficulties, it was not possible to collect data from.

Details of the population studied are as follows:

(a.1) Number included in the study

The population studied consisted of 700 monks and 220 novices, comprising a percentage of 76.8 and 23.2 respectively of the total number.

(a.2) Location of population studied

The population studied were scattered through various localities as follows:

Bangkok and environs: 200, or 22%.

Central Thailand and Choburi province, 90, and Petchaburi, 100, making a total of 190, or 21%.

Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai province: 180, or 19.5%.

Northeast Thailand (Isan), Khon Kaen province: 180, or 19.5%.

Southern Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat province: 170, or 18%.

(a.3) Level of education

The group studied had received both worldly and religious education. Worldly education is the compulsory and general education of the Ministry of Education and tertiary education.

Religious education is study according to the curriculum determined by the Sangha, namely the study of the *nak tham* and Pāli studies, from *nak tham tree* (third-class dhamma), *nak tham tho* (second-class dhamma) and *nak tham ek* (first-class dhamma) levels to the Pāli levels (*prayok*) of 1, 2, 3 and up to 9. This religious study is referred to by the name of *pariyatti dhamma* studies.

Apart from these a certain number of the monks and novices had received both worldly and religious educations, having completed studies at one of the two Sangha universities, Mahachulalongkorn Rachavidyalaya and Mahamakut Rachavidyalaya, and at one of the *pariyatti* schools for general education, which teach first year to sixth year secondary levels in conjunction with Buddhist studies.

The results of our study showed that most of the population studied had received both worldly and religious education, with the majority completing *nak tham tho* (second grade Dhamma) and fourth *prayok* (level) Pāli.

(a.4) Age of the population studied

The population studied was mostly in the age group of 20–24 years. The next largest group was 25–29 years, followed by 30–34 years, 35–39 years, 15–19 years and 40 years and over age groups respectively.

(a.5) Length of stay in the robes

The sample population had lived for different lengths of time in the robes. Both monks and novices had an average monastic age of between 4–8 *vassa* (years). The monks and novices with the lowest age in the robes, between 1–3 months, and the highest, 10 years and over, were the minority.

This accorded with the researcher's objective to divide the population group into three groups as follows:

1. Newly ordained monks and novices
2. Monks and novices who were students

3. Monks of *thera* (elder) status (having gone forth for 10 years or more)

The data obtained was in accordance with real ratios. Monks and novices living in urban monasteries were mostly students studying in both general and *pariyatti* subjects in the Sangha universities.

(b) Objectives of going forth

The study found that most of the monks and novices had gone forth according to tradition, following the custom upheld and maintained from ancient times. This means going forth in the belief that all sons, before getting married, should become monks to repay their debt to their parents, to make their parents happy, and after a period of time disrobe and raise a family.

Next in frequency were those who went forth for the purpose of studying the Dhamma-Vinaya and the subjects made available for study, such as general education, by Sangha institutions, and then those who went forth to dedicate the merit to benefactors, both deceased and living, to preserve the religion, to make a living, and out of faith in the teaching.

(c) Factors related to ordination

The study found three important factors related to the going forth, as follows:

1. Going forth due to the influence of another person
2. Going forth as a personal decision
3. Going forth due to influence of the mass media.

The percentages of going forth resulting from these factors are as follows:

1. Influence of other people: 56.8% (520)
2. Personal decision as a result of own learning: 23.5% (216)
3. Influence of the mass media: 20.22% (184)

The details of these motivations are as follows:

(c.1) Influence of others

Most of those who went forth did so on the instigation of one of their relatives, such as father or mother. This refers to those who had

no previous intention to go forth but did so because they could no longer endure the demands of their parents. In addition there were those who had gone forth as children, giving as reasons that the teacher (abbot) in their locality encouraged them to do so for the purposes of learning the Dhamma-Vinaya and continuing their general studies. If they had continued to live as lay people their educational opportunities would be limited on account of poverty. Their going forth was a way of providing them with higher educational opportunities.

There were those who gave as extra reasons for their going forth a friend from the same peer group donning the robes and having no companion, so they went forth to accompany their friend. For this to take place a certain amount of support would also be required from the ordinand's own parents and relatives.

Another group were those who went forth out of respect for another person, to whom they wished to dedicate the merits of their going forth. In this group would be senior civil servants who went forth to dedicate the merits to the king or members of the royal family.

(c.2) Own decision

From the questionnaire it was found that a number of monks and novices had gone forth as a result of a personal decision, and not as a result of any encouragement or coercion from others. The reasons for their decisions to go forth were sorrow as a result of loss of a loved or esteemed one, sickness, surviving a serious accident, a predilection for the monk's life from childhood, and economic pressures such as poverty.

(c.3) Influence of the media

Not a few of the monks and novices had gone forth as a result of the influence of mass media, such as newspapers, radio and television. Most of this group tended to go forth according to a model set by a revered monk seen in magazines such as fortnightly and monthly religious periodicals. Such going forth may be called emulative behavior in which the ordinand wishes to model a life-style on a revered personality or an ideal.

(d) Comprehension regarding going forth

Comprehension is ability in noting things in terms of their meaning, their component factors and their roles and functions, as well as effort to penetrate their truths. In essence comprehension means in this sense profound understanding of something; i.e., it is a deeper kind of knowledge than mere apprehension and is a kind of knowledge that also relates to other kinds of knowledge. Thus comprehension of the life style of a renunciant must be taken to mean profound knowledge in relation to going forth and, once gone forth, being able to practice correctly according to the rules and regulations of a renunciant.

To have proper comprehension of something necessarily entails a number of factors, such as family background, level of education, etc.

The study revealed a fairly disparate level of comprehension concerning ordination, which may be broken down as follows:

(d.1) Comprehension of the meaning of going forth

When asked about going forth, monks and novices gave answers on its meaning, in order from more to less, as follows:

1. Going forth means refraining from all evil (22.5%).
2. Going forth means "going forth in the mind," meaning refraining from all mental misdeeds (17.39%).
3. Going forth is conducting oneself strictly according to the principles of Dhamma-Vinaya (12.73%).
4. Going forth is living the holy life (*brahmacariya*) (11.73%).
5. Going forth is the only way to attain enlightenment (9.24%).
6. Going forth is donning the ochre robe (6.53%).
7. Going forth is dedicating oneself to the religion for the whole of one's life (4.43%).
8. Going forth is not attaching to things (4.34%).
9. Going forth is abandoning the life of a householder to take up the renunciant's life (3.82%).
10. Going forth is restraining and controlling body, speech and mind (3.04%).

The meaning of going forth given in the first answer was that given by the greater number of respondents, comprising 22.5% of the total. This definition corresponds with one part of the three-fold all-encompassing description of the teachings of Buddhism—giving up all evil, doing only good, and purifying the mind. The meaning described in this first answer accords with the original Pāli term, *pabbajā*.

It is to be noted that there was a number of monks and novices (6.53%) who understood going forth as being merely the donning of the ochre robe.

(d.2) Comprehension of the objectives of going forth

Most of the monks and novices understood the objective of going forth to be repaying the benefaction of parents. Next in frequency of response were following the tradition and study, as shown below.

1. The objective of going forth was to repay the benefaction of parents (30.97%).

2. The objective of going forth was to follow the tradition (14.66%).

3. The objective of going forth was to study the Dhamma-Vinaya (10.66%).

4. The objective of going forth was to preserve the religion (10%).

5. The objective of going forth was to raise one's spiritual status by practicing strictly according to the Dhamma-Vinaya (9.79%).

6. The objective of going forth was to practice according to the teaching (8.70%).

7. The objective of going forth was to attain enlightenment (8.59%).

8. The objective of going forth was to fulfill a pledge or avert bad luck (6.63%).

It is to be noted that these different kinds of comprehension of the objectives of going forth lean more heavily to repaying the benefaction of parents than to any of the other objectives, which indicates the level of devotion of sons to their parents. It also shows the gratitude (*kataññū*) and recognition of the benefaction of parents and the response (*katavedī*) to the parents' benefaction by going

forth. Thai society holds the going forth to be one of the loftiest kinds of good deed with especially meritorious results.

Following a long-held tradition was another of the objectives of going forth cited by many respondents. In practicing according to a tradition, the person so practicing may not understand the real meaning or value of that tradition, but simply follow it out of obedience to what the elders have taught. Thus there were some respondents who understood that going forth was following a preferred social tradition, seeing a neighbor going forth, for instance, and following his example, or a younger brother seeing his older brother going forth and following suit.

The custom of going forth provides many kinds of benefit to both those who go forth and to others involved in the act. If it had no value it would probably have disappeared long ago, as shown in the discussion on the purpose or objectives of going forth in Thai society.

*(d.3) Comprehension of the monks and novices
regarding the renunciant's life*

The life of a renunciant is the lifestyle that accords with the observances and practices which one gone forth must hold to and conduct his life by.

In Buddhism these observances and practices are the *sīla* or precepts of the *Vinaya*, consisting of 311 precepts for the *bhikkhunī* (female monks), 227 precepts for the *bhikkhu* (monks), 10 precepts for the *sāmaṇera* (novices), 8 precepts for *upāsaka* and *upāsikā* (male and female lay followers) and 5 precepts for ordinary people. One gone forth must conduct his or her life according to these precepts. In addition he must also practice in accordance with the teaching of the Fully Enlightened Buddha.

From the question, "How do you understand the life-style of one gone forth to be?" results were obtained as follows:

1. A renunciant must lead a life that is independent and free of attachments (26.3%).
2. A renunciant's life is one that entails enduring great difficulty (20.21%).

3. A renunciant's life is made possible through the faith (i.e., support) of the people (11.84%).

4. The renunciant's status is one that enjoins on him to have the constant control of mindfulness (9.57%).

5. A renunciant must work for the benefit of the religion and the country (6.52%).

6. If one who is a renunciant does not repay the benefaction provided by the faithful in the form of offerings of the four supports he becomes indebted to their benefaction in this world and the next (6.09%).

7. A renunciant has the duty of teaching the Dhamma to the people (5.76%).

8. A renunciant must practice strictly according to the principles of the holy life (*brahmacariya*) (5.43%).

9. The renunciant's life must be a homeless one (*anāgārika*) (4.69%).

10. A renunciant must not seek wealth and must not use the Buddhist religion just to make a living from day to day without any effort to bring benefit or any objective in life (3.59%).

From the results given above, we see that most of the monks and novices understood the life of a renunciant to be necessarily one of freedom, without attachments, a life that is beyond the mundane capacity. This indicates a good comprehension of the life of a renunciant according to the teachings of Buddhism. All ten of the answers given above, while seemingly different, are in principle not conflictive and all of them accord with the Dhamma-Vinaya.

(e) Problems encountered during time gone forth

The important factors of going forth are:

1. The preceptor (*upajjhāya*)
2. The teacher (*ācāriya*)
3. The one going forth (ordinand)
4. The equipment for going forth (*aṭṭhaparikkhāra*: the eight requisites)
5. The four supports

6. Sponsor/relatives
7. The ceremony
8. Fellow monks (*sahadhammika*)

From the questionnaire it was found that there were different problems in regard to each of these factors of going forth. The one for which no problems were found at all was the ceremony. This may be because the ordination ceremonies are conducted in accordance with the principles of Dhamma-Vinaya and customs long upheld in each locality.

Here I would like to analyze the problems encountered in regard to the other factors of going forth as follows:

(e.1) Problems concerning the preceptor

The word *upajjhāya* literally means "one who notices faults large and small," meaning he is one who accepts "sons of good family" for higher ordination amid the assembly of monks. Thus the duty of the *upajjhāya* or preceptor is to be chairman of the ceremony that gives the Buddhist going forth and the guardian of sons of good family responsible for their training and education. The preceptor is thus like a father or mother who begets a child, i.e., he gives birth to monk- or novice-hood to a son of good family. A son of good family who has gone forth must receive close training and education from the preceptor.

The duties of the preceptor are called in Buddhism *saddhivihārikavatta*, which are the customs or observances a preceptor must do for his *saddhivihārika*, or pupil, comprising the following four things: to see to his education; to provide him with bowl, robes, and other requisites; to make an effort to prevent or suppress blemishes—to quench, for instance, a desire to disrobe or relieve a pupil of his wrong view; and to look after him when he is sick.

From the study it was found that preceptors did not perform fully the duties of one who begets. Most of the preceptors, having ordained their pupils, did not teach them the Dhamma-Vinaya, and did not really look after them; monks and novices, after going forth, did not live with their preceptors but in different monasteries;

preceptors lacked the knowledge and ability in the Dhamma, were too old, or were too busy; and preceptors were not selective enough, not looking into the histories of the pupils to whom they gave the going forth.

(e.2) *Problems with teachers*

The *ācāriya* is a monk who performs the duty of teaching monks and novices. Here the term refers to the abbot and guardian (*philiang* in Thai) monks who look after the new monks.

In some places an abbot is also an *upajjhāya*, but most abbots in rural areas are not. Etymologically, the word *ācāriya* means one who imparts knowledge. In this respect an *ācāriya* must be endowed with qualities such as a good knowledge of the Buddhist teachings and good conduct that is worthy of respect, and he has the duty to teach his pupils and impart to them a knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Buddhism.

The results of the study indicated many problems concerning teachers (*ācāriya*), and these problems were the same in almost every locality surveyed except for Bangkok and environs, where teachers were inclined to perform their duties fairly fully. The important problems with teachers, especially in regions far from Bangkok and the large cities, were similar to the problems with preceptors: teachers did not take an interest in teaching and lacked knowledge and ability to teach; they were embroiled in wealth, rank and praise, were too old, could teach only chanting and ceremonies, did not conduct themselves in a way that is worthy of respect and reverence, were authoritarian, and did not encourage the study of general subjects.

(e.3) *Problems with ordinands*

The ordinand is a monk or novice who has received the going forth from a preceptor or teacher. A newly ordained monk is called a *navaka bhikkhu*, while a newly ordained novice is called a *navaka sāmaṇera*. According to Buddhist teachings, a monk who has received the higher ordination (*upasampadā*) from a preceptor is known as a *saddhivihārika* of that preceptor. *Saddhivihārika* means "pupil," one who lives with the preceptor. It is the name given to

one who has received the higher ordination, who must receive attention from the preceptor in many ways, such as education, supply of bowl and robes and other requisites, the suppression of harmful wrong views and nursing care when they are sick, as already stated in the duties of the preceptor.

According to Buddhism, a *saddhivihārika*, an ordinand who lives with his preceptor, is obliged to uphold a tradition of practice or certain duties to his preceptor. This tradition of practice is called “*upajjhāyavatta*” (duties to the preceptor) and briefly it consists of (as in the *saddhivihārikavatta*): taking an interest in serving his preceptor; applying himself to learning from him; making an effort to prevent or suppress any harm, such as a desire to take leave of the robes or wrong view; having respect for the preceptor; when going anywhere to take leave of the preceptor and not simply travel around as one pleases; and taking an interest in nursing the preceptor when he is sick.

Usually, once a son of good family has ordained as a monk or novice, he must learn the principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya to be practiced, and know the various duties involved in his work. But since those going forth do so as a result of different motivations or objectives from the very first, interest in studying the Dhamma-Vinaya also varies. Here differences in upbringing may also be cited as an important factor determining differences in the basic character and predilection for the objectives and comprehension of going forth.

Overall, from the survey, it can be stated that problems relating to the ordained, or monks and novices, are as follows: lacking a proper knowledge of the Buddhist teachings due to lack of attention to teaching on the part of preceptors and teachers; difficulty in adjusting to the new way of life—this point is probably rooted in their not having gone through a period of training in the wat before taking the going forth, so that newly ordained monks and novices tended to be in a constant state of confusion and stress; not having time to serve their preceptors and teachers; some ordinands possessing no prior faith in the going forth, but doing so perfunctorily just to please their parents or to abide by the tradition;

a number of ordinands having weak constitution and physical disabilities; some of the ordinands being stubborn and taking no interest in learning, not believing or obeying the instructions of their preceptors and teachers; some finding the food insufficient, etc.

(e.4) Problems with the equipment of going forth

The equipment for going forth refers to the things necessary for going forth, which are the eight requisites (*aṭṭhaparikkhāra*). The eight requisites are the utensils of a Buddhist monk, comprising: lower robe (*antaravāsaka*), upper robe (*cīvara*), outer robe (*saṅghāṭi*) (the robe folded over the shoulder when monks are wearing their upper robes folded over one or two shoulders), bowl, razor or nail-cutter, needle, belt, and water filter. Apart from these there is the later addition of the inner vest (*aṇṣa*) (a thin cloth that covers one shoulder and is sewn together near the waist. It is used like a singlet but is of different shape).

The survey revealed that there were not many problems with these necessary requisites of the going forth, but problems such as scarcity, insufficiency, high prices and frequent theft of requisites were found in some areas. For example, in Chiang Mai in the north there was one wat with a great many monks and novices staying in a student's dormitory in the wat which was difficult to oversee and theft of requisites was a regular occurrence.

(e.5) Problems with the four supports

The Buddhist teachings list the four supports as the necessities of life. They are food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Problems with the four supports or necessities of life differed. Most problems were with dwelling places. Next in frequency were problems with food and with clothing respectively. Not many problems were found in regard to medicine.

Senāsana are dwelling places such as *kuṭi* (monks' dwellings), *vihāra* (halls) and furniture such as tables and chairs. Even the foot of a tree, if used as a place to live, is called *senāsana*. *Senāsana* is one of the four supports which are necessary for the life of monks and novices (the four supports are food, shelter, clothing and medicine). Monks and novices rely on *senāsana* as dwelling places,

to sit and sleep. Thus the *senāsana* is important and of use to the monks and novices, and these *senāsana* are made possible by the faithful offerings of people who revere the Triple Gem. *Senāsana* are regarded as communal belongings. Thus it is the duty of a monk living in a *senāsana* to look after it, not to let it become dirty, to keep it clean, neat and tidy, to use it carefully so that it does not become dilapidated or damaged, and to put his belongings away and not leave them scattered around in a mess.

The survey revealed a number of interesting problems in regard to *senāsana*. Mostly they were problems of lack of dwelling places, dwelling places in a state of deterioration, dwelling places disturbed by houses (being too near the dwellings of householders), dwelling places dirty and unkempt, dwellings soiled by domestic animals such as dogs and cats, householders encroaching on monastery grounds to conduct their businesses, rendering the dwelling places of the monks unsuitable as places for the practice of Dhamma, and in some places it was found that abbots were so intent on building their *uposatha* halls that monks and novices were forced to work like laborers and had no time to study the Dhamma-Vinaya or practice the Dhamma. These problems were found in varying degrees in all regions.

(e.6) Problems with sponsors of the going forth

The sponsor of the going forth is a person who takes on the burden of expenditure involved in the going forth. Generally sponsors are of two kinds: parents and relatives, and non-relatives.

Sponsors who are parents or relatives do not just abandon their sons or nephews after their ordination, but tend to visit them regularly and see to their needs. Conversely, sponsors who are not relatives will tend to leave the ordinands in the care of the abbot of that monastery after their going forth and will not visit them, see to their needs or ask them how they are going and whether they have enough requisites. In Thai society there is the general belief that once a sponsor has helped someone go forth, he will take on responsibility of looking after the monk or novice as if he were the sponsor's own son. Whatever the sponsored monk or novice lacks,

sponsors will offer it to him and will pledge to look after the monk or novice for as long as he remains in the robes.

The survey revealed that sponsors who were not relatives tended to not visit or look after the ordinands, but those who were relatives would visit ordinands regularly, as shown in the table. This may be because people who volunteered to sponsor ordinations intended merely to buy the robes and eight requisites and take on the other expenditure of the ordination ceremony itself with no obligation to look after the ordinand afterwards. For example, some people may become sponsors of an ordination at the recommendation of a fortune teller who foretold that a dire misfortune may befall them because their star was not good, but that they could escape their fate by going forth or sponsoring someone else's going forth, in which case once the ceremony for going forth had been completed their obligations were over. However, this kind of problem was fairly scarce.

In addition, it was found that sponsors organized ordination ceremonies that were too extravagant, with shows and lengthy ceremonies, and encouraged gambling during the accompanying celebrations, which indicates a lack of understanding of the true objectives of going forth.

(e.7) Problems with fellow monks and novices

Sahadhammika are monks and novices who live together in the same wat or center, comprising monks and novices ordained before, together with and after the ordinand.

The survey revealed a number of interesting problems related to the monks and novices living at the same center or wat as the ordinand, such as inappropriate conduct, lack of control by the preceptor or teacher, selfishness and lack of mutual help.

(f) Recommendations from survey results

(f.1) The results of the survey show that most people understood the going forth to be an accepted custom, which indicates an acceptance of the form of going forth and belief handed down from the past. Few people understood that real going forth according to

the Buddhist principles is for the objective of practicing the holy life (*brahmacariya*). Most ordinands adhered to the example and teachings of their preceptors and teachers as their principle for conduct. This caused their conduct in going forth to incline toward *ācāriyavāda*, believing in and practicing according to the teachings of the teacher, which is a kind of behavior and practice long upheld in Thai society. If the ordinands lived under the care and teaching of a teacher who well knows and understands the teachings of Buddhism, problems of breaches of the discipline would not arise in junior monks. But the problems that are arising in the Thai Sangha at present are partly due to monks and novices not receiving close attention and training from preceptors and teachers. Thus the recommendation here is that preceptors and teachers, who are the leaders responsible for the care and control of junior monks, must be of good quality in terms of learning and conduct. Only learned monks and good teachers should be chosen for the positions of preceptor and abbot. If there were preceptors and teachers of good quality, they would be able to select those individuals who are of good quality for the going forth. This would certainly have the effect of providing the religion with quality religious members. Quality preceptors and teachers would apply themselves to tending and teaching their pupils more strictly and earnestly than preceptors and teachers without quality, and the problem of monks with bad conduct would not arise.

(f.2) The survey revealed many kinds of problems concerning going forth: in the ordinands, in environments not suitable for practicing the Dhamma, in overcrowding of monks and novices in urban monasteries, in insufficient food, and so on. These problems are all a result of social, economic, political and cultural changes. The Sangha institution is part of society. Changes in society must also affect the Sangha.

The strength and development of the institution of Sangha will have a close relationship with the development of society. Thus, if the society is at peace, religious institutions are not disturbed and can carry out their duties smoothly. This in turn helps the society to

grow in a more desirable direction, as for example in the past when the Sangha performed the duty of teaching so that the people lived in peace and harmony.

Again, the development of the Sangha is related to the ruler of the country. In the past administrative leaders also undertook to control and oversee the personnel of the religion. If any problem was found in the Sangha organizations, such as phony or immoral monks (*alajjī*), they would have them disrobed and then punished according to the laws of the land. This meant that religious personnel consisted of people who practiced well and did not transgress the established customs as much as we see nowadays. True, even though in the present the law grants the Sangha the authority to govern itself and solve its own problems, the structure of Sangha organizations is weak, which in turn is a result of organization by past governments in their issue of Sangha Acts which did not allow the Sangha to organize itself and solve its own problems. The matter of problems in the structure of Sangha administrative organizations has resulted from lack of dedication on the part of those governing the country. Since this is so, there will always be problems with the Sangha organizations and no solution or improvement will be possible. Thus the government should take on the task of revising and improving the laws and regulations of Sangha administration. This will help to stabilize and improve the Sangha and make it more efficient in the solution of its problems.

(f.3) Nowadays it is not difficult to go forth and most people judge people who are renunciants merely on their external appearance. Sometimes it is impossible to distinguish between true renunciants and phony ones. This point very often causes confusion in the people when a problem arises in the Sangha. This problem of ordination being too easy would no longer be a problem if the regulations in regard to going forth were strictly observed and there was selection of candidates for ordination by strictly examining their qualities in terms of the Dhamma-Vinaya. However, as already stated, most preceptors tend to not be very selective of candidates: i.e., they do not study their past histories or their personal particular,

and conduct ordinations as soon as there is a request or a sponsor, a candidate (*nāga*) and the equipment of going forth.

(f.4) Again, from the survey it was found that comprehension of the going forth tended to accord with the principles of going forth in the texts of the Tipiṭaka, even though some parts of these teachings were not thoroughly understood. In order to have the people comprehend the going forth more correctly and comprehensively, it is necessary to provide the “sons of good family” and guardians of candidates for ordination with information on the real objectives of going forth according to the Buddhist teachings so that faith arises in them prior to the going forth, otherwise problems will arise. Once the going forth has been given, preceptors and teachers should make an effort to look after and teach their pupils thoroughly rather than just leaving newly ordained monks and novices on their own, without an instructor or supervisor.

(f.5) The majority of problems found during the time in robes concerned lack of care and supervision from preceptors and teachers. There was also the problem of insufficient living space. Urban monasteries, in particular, tended to be in crowded areas with many monks and novices living in them. Most of the monks and novices living in these urban monasteries are students. In order to relieve this problem it is necessary to expand the venues of higher education for monks and novices out to the provincial towns and make education there stricter and of higher quality in terms of scholarship and personnel. This is in order to attract monks and novices to the provincial towns or to the provinces of their own homes and not have to migrate to the big cities like Bangkok. While at present the two Sangha universities, Mahachulalongkorn Rachavidyalaya and Mahamakut Rachavidyalaya, have expanded their campuses to other provinces, it is necessary to improve the academic standard and quality of personnel and to support increased budgets both from the government, the Sangha and the general population. This is in order to improve monks and novices who wish to study, so that they have greater learning and ability and can become valuable citizens after

they forsake the renunciant's life and become aids to the growth and prosperity of the religion while they are in the robes.

(f.6) Going forth should involve not only the Dhamma-Vinaya, but also social standards as well. That is to say, it is necessary to inspect the conduct and perseverance of candidates with a trial period in the monastery, in which they practice according to the standards determined by the monastery. Once they have passed the standard, then they can receive the going forth, as some monasteries like Wat Dhammakai, Amphur Khlong Luang, Pathum Thani province, have already put into effect with good result.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*]

POLITICAL BELIEFS OF THE THAI SANGHA*

Pbolsak Jirakraisiri

ithin a political system there will be smaller parts or political institutions with their own structural and functional features.¹ When these various lesser parts are brought together in a political system, they enable that system to perform three important functions: firstly, to respond to the needs of the people both on the individual and group levels; secondly, to preserve the system by choosing individuals to perform political duties and providing political education for members of the political system; thirdly, to adjust to changes rapidly.² The performance of these three duties is the transforming process of political institutions to introduce inputs (needs and supports) into the process of decision

* This research report is taken from a thesis for a doctoral degree in political science at Chulalongkorn University in 1984 (BE 2527) entitled "*Buddhist beliefs, status within the Sangha and political beliefs of the Thai Sangha*." For his research, the writer sought the views of members of both orders (*nikāya*) of the Thai Sangha, i.e., Mahānikāya and Dhammayuttika, within the Bangkok area, as follows:

1. 96 monasteries (*wat*), consisting of:
 - 1.1 Mahānikāya 74 monasteries
 - 1.2 Dhammayuttika 22 monasteries
2. 439 monks, consisting of:
 - 2.1 Mahānikāya 278 monks
 - 2.2 Dhammayuttika 161 monks
- 3 Status of monks asked:
 - 3.1. Monks with ecclesiastically administrative position (*saṅghādhikāra*) 32
 - 3.2 Ordinary monks (*luk wat*) 407

The text presented here is taken from Chapter 8 of the thesis. In reproducing it here the editor has modified the text only slightly for editorial purposes. The content remains the same as the original.—*editor*.

¹ David Easton, "An Approach to the Analysis of Political System," *World Politics*, 9 (April, 1975), pp. 383–400.

² Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: System, Process and Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), pp. 9–12.

making which then emerge as output in the environment. If this transforming process is efficient the political system will be able to maintain itself. In other words the system will have equilibrium. There is one kind of input that is very important for maintaining this political equilibrium, and that is symbolic inputs, such as stress on the importance of social values and standards and the presence of democratic values. The social institution responsible for responding to these needs as symbolic outputs is religion. Since the religious institution is part of the political system, political activities will not be complete if the influence and output from religious teachings are not taken into consideration when responding to the demands of mental development and cultural preservation to bring order to the political system in the form of systematization, stability and ability to adjust to environmental changes.³

In Thai politics Buddhism is an important institution for creating social order and a medium through which that order can be controlled. In the Thai political system, for instance, it is necessary to constrain the members of society within standards and procedures for peace, happiness and security. To this end, the Thai political mechanism has issued acts, decrees, regulations and procedures to be enforced throughout the kingdom. These regulations are merely physical constraints applying to external behavior. It is to be expected that Buddhism will have an important role to play in helping to train and induce its followers to conform to those social and political procedures, and also have an influence on mentality and create a moral awareness conducive to following the political order.

In Buddhism the Sangha is the essential body of persons for training and teaching the people to be good citizens. It does this through disseminating worldly teachings (*lokiyadhamma*), such as the teachings on *dhammādhipateyya* (sovereignty of the Dhamma),

³ Adapted from the ideas in Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils (eds.), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), part 2.

dasabidharājadhamma (the ten qualities for a king), *cakkavattivatta* (the duties for an emperor), *saṅgahavatthu* (the bases for sympathetic action), *brahmavihāra* (the holy abidings), *sāmaggī-dhamma* (teachings on harmony), *aparihāniyadhamma* (the conditions for durability), *santidhamma* (teachings on peacefulness), human equality, the worldly dhammas and the qualities of a good person (*sappurisadhamma*). If they receive Buddhist teachings that support democracy more than authoritarianism, those who adhere to these Buddhist teachings will incline to democratic political beliefs. This would help reduce contention in terms of political ideals within the Thai political system. Thus the Sangha is one population group worthy of study to ascertain:

1. What kind of Buddhist beliefs the Sangha has.
2. What kind of political beliefs the Sangha has.
3. Whether the Sangha holds any Buddhist beliefs that are related to political beliefs.
4. Whether the status of Sangha members has any effect on their political beliefs.
5. Whether the status of Sangha members has any effect on the relationship between their political beliefs and Buddhist beliefs.

Our study of political beliefs, degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs and status within the Sangha institution emphasized factors within the Sangha institution: i.e., emphasis on Buddhist teachings and status of the Sangha. This does not mean, however, that factors within the Sangha institution have any more importance than factors outside of it, only that studies of the social and political structure of the Sangha have already been conducted.⁴ The reason I give importance to Buddhist teachings and the status of Sangha members is that, from observations of the lives of monks in wats, I have found that they perform many duties. One of the important duties is long-term study of the Buddhist teachings (*pariyattidhamma*), in which belief in the teachings of Buddhism is added to that already obtained

⁴ As for example, Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

in the school and the family. This belief can also be a foundation for other beliefs, such as political beliefs. Also, within the Sangha institution monks do not all hold the same status. Differences in monks' status arise from the different duties they do, their study, their age, their abilities and the observances they undertake, all of which lead to differences in lifestyle and opportunities in life. These differences should have some bearing on the monks' Buddhist and political beliefs.

The summary has been divided into three parts. In the first part I will summarize the results of the study according to the five objectives established above, and also give an overall summary, in order to submit new overall findings. In the second part I will submit new findings as a proposed role for the Sangha in the future. In the last part I will submit proposals and recommendations for further search.

the Sangha's Buddhist beliefs

These can be summarized as follows:

1. The Thai Sangha gives a good deal of importance to almost all of the Buddhist teachings. There are only a few teachings that are given less importance, as follows:

1.1 The majority of the monks gave only moderate importance to belief in the noble truths and the five khandhas. There was a high level of belief in the Middle Way (*majjhimāpaṭipadā*), the impermanence of the five *khandhas* and non-attachment. Low priority was given to suffering and happiness as arisen in the mind.

1.2 The majority of the Sangha gave relatively little importance to the Three Characteristics and kamma, stressing more the principle of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). The hopes of those who have morality and the impermanence of sensuality were all given low priority.

1.3 The majority of the monks gave fairly high importance to the *principles* for governing by Dhamma, emphasizing the importance of the *kalyāṇavatta* (good behavior), adherence to the supremacy of the Dhamma, the ten principles for kingship (*dasabidharāja-*

dhamma), the duties of an emperor (*cakkavattivatta*) and the divine abidings. Moderate emphasis was given to the importance of revering the Dhamma and the bases for sympathetic action (*saṅgahavatthu*).

1.4 The majority of the monks gave moderate importance to the *methods* for government by Dhamma: high priority was given to harmony (*sāmaggīdhamma*), adherence to good conduct, adherence to wisdom, peace (*santidhamma*) and adherence to virtue. Moderate priority was given to using the voice of the majority, no-seniority according to rains retreats, the *aparihāniyadhamma*, congenital equality and social parity. Fairly low priority was given to universal friendship.

1.5 The majority of the monks gave high priority to a Dhammic life-style, giving high emphasis to beneficial social action, social responsibility, not trading in arms, the absence of ecclesiastical rank among enlightened (*ariya*) monks, helping others, shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*), and the qualities of a good person (*sappurisadhamma*). Moderate priority was given to social welfare, virtue being independent of rank and praise, not being deluded by the worldly dhammas, penetrating the truth (*saddhamma*), and being a good citizen. Fairly low priority was given to broad mindedness, the teachings for a lay person and diligent effort.

2. The kinds of status that had most influence in determining differences in the Buddhist beliefs of the Sangha were learning (*pariyattidhamma*) and seniority in rains retreats, as follows:

2.1 Those monks with higher learning had a tendency to stress the importance of the Buddha's teachings more than those with a lower level of learning.

2.2 Those monks with greater seniority in rains retreats had a tendency to stress the importance of the Buddha's teachings more than those with fewer rains retreats.

3. The kinds of status that were tested and found to have no bearing on the degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs were ecclesiastical duties, order and ecclesiastical rank. This leads us to conclude that there is no effect on the monks' Buddhist beliefs due

to ecclesiastical position, ecclesiastical rank or sect, be it Dhammayuttika or Mahānikāya.

Political beliefs of the Sangha

These can be summarized as follows:

1. The monks had more democratic than authoritarian beliefs, as follows:

1.1 The monks gave more priority to democratic principles than authoritarian principles: they had a high degree of belief in righteous authority obtained from the agreement of the people and the people's right to oppose government. They had a moderate level of belief in the ability, intelligence and rationality of the human being, that human beings have rights, liberties and freedoms, and that human beings have equality with the highest administrative power, which has come from the people.

1.2 The monks gave more emphasis to belief in democratic methods rather than authoritarian methods. They had a high level of belief in meeting to consult and exchange views, in determining the powers of the government, in providing legal and political protection, in providing the right to vote, in decentralizing power and in free expression of the people's will.

1.3 The monks gave more emphasis to belief in a democratic way of life rather than an authoritarian way of life: they had a high degree of belief regarding interest in political participation, in adhering to the regulations of democracy and awareness of one's duties as a citizen. They give a moderate degree of emphasis to confidence in abilities, intelligence and rationality, belief in equality, looking at the world in a positive light, adhering to the importance, value and honor of the individual, the desire for democracy, respecting the rights and freedoms of others, and rational and constructive criticism, and they had a tendency to liberalism.

2. The kinds of status that had an influence on political beliefs of the Sangha were order and scriptural learning, as follows:

2.1 Mahānikāya monks had a higher tendency to stress democratic political beliefs than Dhammayuttika monks.

2.2. Monks with a higher level of scriptural learning had a higher tendency to stress democratic political beliefs than monks with a lower level of learning.

3. The kinds of status that were tested and found to have no influence on differences in political beliefs were ecclesiastical position, ecclesiastical rank and seniority in rains retreats: the monks had similar degree of emphasis on democratic political beliefs regardless of their level of ecclesiastical position, level of ecclesiastical rank or seniority in rains retreats.

***Relationship between political beliefs
and Buddhist beliefs of the Sangha***

This can be summarized thus:

1. On the average, the political beliefs of the monks had a fairly high relationship to the degree of emphasis in their Buddhist beliefs, as follows:

1.1 The more the monks stressed belief in the Buddha's teaching, the more likely they were to have democratic beliefs and less likely to have authoritarian beliefs.

1.2 The higher the degree of the monks' emphasis on the Buddha's teaching, the more they believed in democratic principles and the less in authoritarian principles.

2. The group of Buddhist teachings that had a fairly high relationship to the monks' political beliefs included the principles for governance by Dhamma, methods for governance by Dhamma and the Dhammic way of life, as follows:

2.1 The more the monks emphasized belief in the principles for governance by Dhamma, the more they believed in democratic principles, methods, and way of life and the less they believed in authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life.

2.2 The more highly the monks emphasized belief in the methods of governance by Dhamma, the more they believed in democratic principles, methods, and way of life and the less will believed in authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life of.

2.3 The more highly the monks emphasized belief in the Dhammic way of life, the more they believed in democratic principles, methods, and way of life and the less they believed in authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life.

3. The Buddhist teachings which had a fairly low level of influence on political beliefs of the Sangha and had no relational value were belief in the noble truths and the five *khandhas*, followed by the Three Characteristics and the teaching of *kamma* in that order: i.e., regardless of the degree of emphasis on belief in the noble truths, the five *khandhas*, the Three Characteristics and the teaching of *kamma*, it could not be said for certain whether and how highly a monk would believe in democratic or authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life.

Relationship between political beliefs and the status of the monks

This can be summarized thus:

1. The status of the monks in terms of scriptural learning had a part in causing the monks to hold different political beliefs in terms of principles, methods and way of life, as follows:

1.1 Monks who had a higher level of scriptural learning had a greater tendency to hold beliefs in democratic principles, methods and ways of life than monks with a lower level of scriptural learning.

1.2 Monks who had a higher level of scriptural learning had a lower tendency to hold beliefs in authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life than monks with a lower level of scriptural learning.

2. The status of the monks in terms of sect and ecclesiastical duties had a bearing on the different political beliefs monks had in terms of methods and way of life (principles excepted), as follows:

2.1 Mahānikāya monks had a greater tendency to hold democratic beliefs regarding methods and ways of life than Dhammayuttika monks.

2.2 Mahānikāya monks had a lower tendency to hold authoritarian beliefs regarding methods and ways of life than Dhammayuttika monks.

2.3 Monks with high ecclesiastical positions had a greater tendency to believe in democratic methods and ways of life than monks with low ecclesiastical positions.

2.4 Monks with high ecclesiastical positions had a lower tendency to believe in authoritarian methods and lifestyles than monks with lower ecclesiastical positions.

3. The status of the monks in terms of ecclesiastical rank and seniority in rains retreats played no part in determining differences in their political beliefs regarding principles, methods and way of life.

Relationship between political beliefs and Buddhist beliefs of monks of different status

This can be summarized as follows:

1. When the relationship between political beliefs and Buddhist beliefs was arranged according to the monks' status, it was found that the relational value in every kind of status differed from the value obtained before the classification in terms of status was made. That is to say:

1.1 The relationship between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs of the Mahānikāya monks was lower than that for Dhammayuttika monks.

1.2 The relationship between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs of monks with ecclesiastical position on the level of abbot was higher than for monks with ecclesiastical positions on level of *chao gana* (section head).

1.3 The relationship between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs of monks with ecclesiastical rank had a value descending in order from the *rāchāgana* monks down to the *phra khru saññābat* and *phra khru thānānugrom*.

* Words in italic refer to the Thai Sangha ecclesiastical ranks which are divided into three main groups. The first is the highest, the second and the third are lower respectively—*editor*.

1.4 The relationship between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs of *parian* (Pāli studies) monks and *nak tham* (Dhamma studies) monks was of equally moderate value.

1.5 The relationship between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs of the elders (*thera*), the mid-level monks (*majjhima*) and the new monks (*navaka*) was of equally moderate value.

2. When the monks' status was considered in detail it was found that only the level of scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats had a value on the relationship between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs, as follows:

2.1 The more emphasis was placed on Buddhist beliefs by *nak tham* monks and *parian* monks the higher was their belief in democratic principles, methods and ways of life and the lower was their belief in the authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life.

2.2 The more emphasis was placed on Buddhist beliefs by new (*navaka*) monks, mid-level (*majjhima*) monks and elder (*thera*) monks the higher was their belief in democratic principles, methods and ways of life and the lower was their belief in authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life.

2.3 Other kinds of status within the monkhood had no value on the relationship between political beliefs and emphasis in Buddhist beliefs.

2.4 When the relational value between political beliefs and degree of emphasis in Buddhist beliefs was compared with that between political beliefs and status of the monks, the relation of the first pair was greater than the latter pair. Thus it can be concluded that emphasis in Buddhist beliefs has a greater influence on political beliefs of the Sangha than status within the Sangha institution.

Conclusion

The study of political beliefs, Buddhist beliefs and status within the Sangha institution may be generally concluded thus: the Thai Sangha holds political beliefs that are more democratic than authoritarian in terms of principles, methods and ways of life, and

these political beliefs are related to a high degree of emphasis on the mundane group of Buddhist teachings which contain the principles for governance by Dhamma, methods for governance by Dhamma and the Dhammic way of life. This is in keeping with the Thai Sangha's fairly high level of belief in this group of mundane Buddhist teachings. The kinds of status within the Sangha which had an influence on the relationship between democratic political beliefs and stress on mundane-level Buddhist teachings in the Sangha were the level of scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats. The status of the monks in terms of order, ecclesiastical position and ecclesiastical rank had only a little influence on that relationship. From these findings, the general conclusion can be made that:

If monks have a high awareness of beliefs concerning governance by Dhamma, methods of government by Dhamma and a Dhammic way of life (the group of mundane-level teachings) they will have a tendency to believe more in democratic principles, methods and ways of life than authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life, with the added condition that this relationship will be higher in monks with more scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats. This means that if monks have higher degrees of scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats and have a greater awareness of beliefs concerning the mundane teachings, they will have a tendency more to democratic than authoritarian political beliefs. The status of the monks in terms of order (*nikāya*), ecclesiastical duties and ecclesiastical rank will have only little effect on the above relationship.

From this general conclusion we can see that not all groups of Buddhist teachings have the same relationship on political beliefs of the Sangha. The group of teachings that has a real effect on the Sangha's political beliefs is that which deals with principles, methods and ways of life in politics and administration, both in the worldly sphere and the Buddhist sphere, which are altogether called the "mundane teachings." The reason political beliefs are related more to mundane teachings than transcendent teachings may be that the teachings of Buddhism are divided into two levels which are

based upon different truths. The transcendent teachings (*lokuttaradhamma*) are based on the ultimate truth (*paramatthasacca*)⁵ and can be considered rationally. The mundane teachings (*lokiyadhamma*) are based on conventional truth (*sammutisacca*), truths that are generally accepted everywhere, as in good actions bring good result, bad actions bring bad results; on this level a person has a self and must relate to other people as fellow members of the family, society or nation. Since politics is more of the nature of conventional truth than ultimate truth, political beliefs are more related to the principles of conventional truth than the principles of ultimate truth, as M.R.V. Kukrit Pramoj explains:

“...When we are still living in society we must accept the way things are, be it conventional truth (*sammutisacca*) or whatever. We must accept that living in society involves duties toward society and service to other people. If we practice according to the mundane teachings (*lokiyadhamma*) this will present no problem. The transcendent teachings (*lokuttaradhamma*) deal with isolating oneself from the group or separating oneself from society for one's own salvation, but the mundane teachings deal with living in society, teaching us to create goodness for ourselves and for others, to establish ourselves in the *brahmavihāra*—goodwill (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*)—toward the people who associate with us. Apart from this there are many other teachings on the mundane level impossible to recount in full which teach people not to harm each other, to live together harmoniously and to help each other.”⁶

Where it was stated that the degree of scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats are important contingencies in the relationship between political beliefs and the group of mundane teachings, this means that the level of scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats are statuses which have an effect on the relationship between political beliefs and the degree of emphasis

⁵ Such as the noble truths, five khandhas and three characteristics.

⁶ M.R.V. Kukrit Pramoj, *Buddhism and the World in Buddhism* (Bangkok, Syamrath Press, 2520), pp. 111–112.

placed on belief in the mundane teachings by the Thai Sangha. That scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats have such importance is due to many reasons.

Firstly, the curriculum for the Dhamma (*nak tham*) examinations is geared to monks who are determined to devote themselves to Buddhism. The study thus stresses solving Dhamma problems, the monks' discipline (*Vinaya*), and religious ceremonies. The curriculum for the Pāli course (*parian*), on the other hand, aims for an academic foundation for monks who, likewise, are devoted to studying Buddhism, as the curriculum stresses translation and composing verse. Translation requires an understanding of the Dhamma-Vinaya. Monks who have higher levels of scriptural learning will have a more profound level of understanding of the Buddhadhamma, and the more rains retreats a monk has the more opportunity he has for scriptural learning, and thus more opportunity for implanting in himself belief in the Buddhadhamma.

Secondly, in BE 2507 the Council of Elders announced a revised curriculum for the learning of Pāli⁷ in which many secular topics, such as Thai, English, mathematics, science, geography and history, were included into the Pāli curriculum, and this had a beneficial effect on the Sangha: monks were able to learn a broader range of topics and broaden their world outlook. The addition of secular topics to the curriculum had an important effect on the monks' political learning in that they developed an awareness of political information and had a greater appreciation of the role of political institutions. These things were instrumental in guiding the monks toward democratic political beliefs.

Thirdly, observation reveals that the scriptural learning of the Sangha employs a non-compulsory method of teaching the Buddhadhamma. All study is voluntary, since any monk who does not like it may freely take leave of the robes at any time. The content of the Buddhadhamma also leans heavily toward democratic principles, as can be seen from the *Navakovāda* text or the text for

⁷ Sangha Announcement, Vol. 52 (BE 2507), pp. 196–197.

studying the “groups of Dhamma-Vinaya” produced by the Ministry of Education.

Finally, monks with higher levels of scriptural learning and more seniority in rains retreats will give greater emphasis to belief in the Buddhadhamma and have greater opportunities to believe in democratic principles, methods and ways of life than those that are authoritarian. Thus we find that the level of scriptural learning and seniority in rains retreats are important connections in the relationship between degree of emphasis on belief in the mundane teachings and political beliefs.

The next salient consideration is that, since the curriculum, time, content and teaching method for scriptural learning tend to be important factors for the extent that scriptural learning affects the monks’ political and Buddhist beliefs in a way that benefits Thai society, both in the respect that Thai people are Buddhists and should believe in the Buddhadhamma, and in the respect that the government has an aim to develop a more democratic government, it is possible that the system of scriptural learning used up till now will continue to be of help in realizing all of these objectives. The study of Pāli in the present moment includes modern subjects and practical training. It does this by dividing the curriculum into three subjects: Pāli studies, secular studies and research studies. Pāli studies are spread over ten years, consisting of third-class parian lasting three years, second-class parian lasting three years, and first-class parian lasting four years, culminating in ninth-grade parian. In the tenth year research of the Tipiṭaka is increased. Secular studies are equivalent to primary, secondary and tertiary education (faculty of literature, Thai language, English language and history) and the research studies provide practical training and research in religion, ancient history, psychology and philosophy.⁸

⁸ Venerable Maha Prayudh, Payutto, “Role of the Sangha in Modern Thai Society” in *Buddhism and Modern Thai Society* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 2513), p. 41–42.

The Thai Sangha, benefiting from this revised system of scriptural studies, should not lower the standards of their Pāli studies, because the high standard of Pāli studies may help the monks to understand the Buddha's teaching more profoundly. As for the study of more modern subjects, these are useful to the Sangha for gaining an understanding of life and the world which then reflects back on their study of the Dhamma and improves their understanding of it. Thus it is important to preserve the program of Pāli studies, and maintaining the standards therein would seem to be more beneficial than relaxing the standard in order to allow more monks to pass the tests or to hearten the monks in their studies—whether a greater or smaller number of monks succeeds in their studies is probably not so much due to the difficulty of the Pāli studies curriculum, but to the monks not applying themselves earnestly enough to the study and the reduction of the status of monks who have completed the program. It is now evident that even monks who have completed the highest grade of scriptural study have less standing than those who have completed a bachelor's degree. If they remain in the robes they are not given much recognition; if they disrobe they gain even less recognition and may even be the objects of disapproving glances. Some even hide their past out of fear that others will find out that they have come from a Sangha institution. Thus, since modern academic knowledge grows rapidly, it is the secular side of scriptural learning that needs to be revised. Revising the curriculum of secular studies will enable the monks to understand new advances in knowledge, which will provide the state with monks who can eventually add to the work force, and not be a burden on the society in the form of educationally backward citizens or an addition to the ranks of unemployed. Importantly, they will benefit Buddhism as Sangha members with abilities worthy of respect.

Future social and political role of the Sangha

Monks at the present time live in wats, leading a principled life and following the Buddha's teaching and discipline (Dhamma-Vinaya). In the Dhamma-Vinaya it is stipulated that the monks'

lives are to be bound to both the Sangha community and the householder community. As to the Sangha community, this bond can be seen in the various injunctions of the Buddha dealing, for example, with living together in wats, determining boundaries for the *uposatha* observance, invitation and other Sangha acts, and with the giving of respect according to seniority in rains retreats. As to householder society, the Dhamma-Vinaya stipulates that the monks depend on householders for the four supports (food, clothing, shelter and medicine), warns the monks to bear in mind their duties and to have a sense of responsibility to live for the benefit and happiness of the many, enjoins the monks to have a proper relationship with the society, maintaining their honor and position befitting the respect and trust afforded them by society, and to assist the society virtuously, for the real benefit of society, not with hidden motives for material rewards.⁹

The name for a Buddhist monk is “*bhikkhu*,” which means “almsman.” The monks lead a life dependent on alms and the alms round. Being almsmen, the monks are not only reminded of their bond and their responsibility to society, but also trained to reduce attachment: regardless of the monk’s former status or origin, he must take on a life of an almsman, more or less. The Buddha himself referred to the life of an almsman as *paradattūpajīvī*: a life made possible through the generosity of others. In return the monks must imbue their minds with goodwill (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*) and other qualities, in keeping with the traditional term used for a monk going on alms round—“helping sentient beings.” The monks are one of the mediums through which Buddhists can approach the Dhamma-Vinaya.¹⁰

Modern development in Thailand has caused changes in the traditional society, both in the cities and in the countryside. It has led to social and economic changes in which success and wealth are the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 7–14.

¹⁰ Phra Maha Somsong, *The Future Role of Monasteries and the Thai Sangha* (Bangkok, Committee for Religious Development, 2525), p. 20.

objectives. These changes have created confusion in ethics and the meaning of good and evil. As the emphasis in society inclines more towards money and power, Sangha members who lack understanding of these complex social issues have allowed the liberal-capitalist system to dominate their views so that they see good people as people with money and power. Monks who feel this way draw themselves and their monasteries closer to those who have money and power. In so doing they become economic and political tools of society's elite. Some of them get caught up in material gains (*lābha*), rank, praise and other worldly conditions. Such attachment to worldly gains presents no problem from the point of view of a lay person, but for one gone to homelessness (*pabbajita*) it can be a point of censure. Even so, from the perspective of the Buddhist principles on the social level, it should represent no adverse effect on the Sangha, because attachment to these things has very little effect on the Sangha's beliefs both regarding Buddhism and political doctrines.

Problems in the role of the Sangha in the present time probably come more from Sangha members failing to adapt themselves to modern developments than from falling prey to worldly conditions (*lokadhamma*). Not a few members of the Sangha try to maintain the old status within a changing society, leaving the lay community to associate (more closely) with Western civilization. This has thinned the long-standing relationship between the Sangha and the people. On the educational front, once householders begin to get the idea that monks are old-fashioned and out of date, communication between monks and lay people falls down, since the monks lack the knowledge needed to bring the people to the Buddha's teaching. With the passage of time their understandings drift further and further apart, and eventually they can barely understand each other at all, with the result that lay people feel that the subjects studied by monks are of no use in daily life or to society.¹¹

¹¹ Phra Maha Prayudh Payutto, "Role of the Thai Sangha Today," pp. 19-20.

Adaptation does not mean that monks should try to make themselves acceptable to the ordinary person, or follow the whims of the majority, by gladly accommodating them if they want ceremonies for opening new homes, anointing their new shops, doing ceremonies for good luck, or unthinkingly responding to the foolishness of the people when they ask them for auspicious dates, names for their children, and holy water to treat their illnesses, or even implementing the government's policies when the government wants the monks to help broadcast democracy.¹² The monks should be founded on the Dhamma-Vinaya, not on the whims of the state and the people, so that their conduct does not exceed the bounds of what is clearly prescribed as appropriate to the status of a renunciant (*samāṇa*).

It is right that the Sangha plays some role in helping the government in various areas, but the monks should guard their actions to see that they accord with their renunciant lifestyle. Monks and politics cannot be separated, but it would not be praiseworthy behavior for a renunciant to openly support or become a member of a certain political group or party, or lead the people in demonstrations to support some political cause. The Sangha should rather help the government in gradually instilling democratic political beliefs into people, through their sermons, local development projects, publications, or Buddhist Sunday schools. This would be a viable way of propagating democracy since the monks are representatives of the *wats*, which are spiritual centers of the community. Thus the monks are spiritual leaders of the people and are a guarantee of national security in that they can help harmonize and unify the people. As Venerable Maha Prayudh states:

“... In a fully developed democratic society, what controls the conduct of the people in the administrative sector is the voice of the people, meaning people who are educated. But if the people are poorly educated and the institutions that have previously helped in

¹² Chamnong Thongprasert, *Buddhism and Society and Politics* (Bangkok, Phraephetaya, 2520) p. 81.

this field lose their relevance, the system of control becomes faulty, and this could be a dangerous situation."¹³

Thus the Sangha should have a political role and a duty in helping the state. Academically speaking this conforms with the idea of the structure and duty of a political system¹⁴ as a compound of various institutions working and interrelating with each other like a machine to help alleviate the problems that arise from human beings living together. Each of these institutions performs its duty in response to the needs of the members of society and also of other institutions, and the performance of these duties will ultimately be mutually supportive.

As one of the institutions of Thai society, the Sangha, whose members are responsible for the perpetuation of the religion, should have a political role as spiritual leaders of the people. They should lead the people to objectives in life that are right and good. This is to be achieved not only through giving sermons, but also through action and development of the people's minds and quality of life.

Nowadays monks in and outside of Bangkok are beginning to accept their status as one of the mechanisms in an institution of development. This may raise the effectiveness of local development and help the Sangha perform a service to the community upon which they depend for the four requisites. Thus it is to be hoped that the monks, in their role in the national development process, will be able to respond effectively to the needs of the people in specific localities, and strengthen their relationship with these communities. At the same time, the community service offered by the Sangha will help to create and successfully integrate Buddhist beliefs, practices and motivations for development.

In Thai society the monks have the time, knowledge and ability to benefit the people on a very wide scale. The Sangha and the people

¹³ Phra Maha Prayudh, Payutto, "Role of the Sangha in Modern Thai Society," p. 18.

¹⁴ David Easton, *A Framework of Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice -Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 112.

can live and work together closely in local communities. The people's faith in Buddhism is increased by the support of the Sangha, which is given without any expectation of reward. The householders will not forsake Buddhism and will apply themselves to helping the Sangha to combat their problems of livelihood and correcting and improving the quality of life and the environment. The Sangha's shouldering of responsibility in community development will be a psychological response arisen from its long-standing close relationship to individuals and the surrounding society,¹⁵ or as Neils Mulder suggests:

"... The religious behavior shown by Thai people in general is based on the motivation of wanting to do good, because the doing of good is what leads to social stability, i.e., to honor and social esteem. When the Sangha invites people to carry out various development activities in which the monks are the leaders, they are more likely to meet with success because those activities will be ones that people in general regard as forms of doing good or making merit."¹⁶

The Sangha's involvement in community development, regardless of the intention behind it, is such that it helps the state develop the nation, and it is a fundamental principle of the democratic system that all people voluntarily join together in developing the country. The Sangha's involvement in rural development helps bring harmony to the group. The organization of rural work groups and providing of political information to the people¹⁷ are important to the democratic political system. Research shows that people who are better informed politically will have a better knowledge and appreciation of the importance of the roles played and duties performed by the state's institutions and organizations, a higher rate

¹⁵William J. Klausner, "The Thai Sangha and National Development," *Visakha Puja BE 2521* (1978) (Bangkok: The Buddhist Association of Thailand, 2521) pp. 30-35.

¹⁶J.A. Niels Mulder, *Monks, Merit and Motivation* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1973), p. 44.

¹⁷Somboon Sukhsamran, *Buddhism and Political and Social Change* (Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press, 2527), pp. 134-138.

of political participation and voluntary exercise of voting rights than those less politically informed.¹⁸

Thus, if the government has a plan to train development monks or form an organization or commission for that purpose, it would be fitting to increase the amount of training to enable the monks to lay more foundations for democratic government and administration, both by choosing Buddhist teachings that are commensurate with democracy and choosing methods for laying down such a foundation, as in bringing the people together in groups like cooperatives, and providing regular, accurate and clear political information to the people in sufficient quantities through the various communications media of the wat. The addition of these items into the rural development process will be tantamount to providing political development for the people at the roots level, and will be of benefit to the development of Thai democracy in the future.

Proposals for future research

In letting the Sangha act as a medium for the broadcast of democratic thinking as part of the rural development process, while we may be certain that the Thai Sangha has more democratic than authoritarian political beliefs in terms of principles, methodology and ways of life, it would be advisable to reflect more deeply on what other factors may help to reinforce democratic beliefs in the Sangha. Thus it is necessary to conduct further research in three major areas, viz.:

1. One factor worth researching that is likely to increase the Sangha's beliefs in democratic principles is the access to political information, and the political feelings and the political behavior of the monks in general.

2. One factor worth researching that is likely to increase the Sangha's beliefs in democratic methodology is the method of administration in the wats, both in the urban and rural areas, and the

¹⁸ Phornsak Phongphaew, *Political Informedness of the Thai People* (Bangkok, Chao Phraya press, 2526), p. 140.

method of administration of the Thai Sangha according to the Sangha Act of 2505, because both of these factors are regularly discussed on the front pages of daily newspapers such as *Syamrath* and *Matichon*.

3. One factor worth researching that is likely to increase the Sangha's beliefs in democratic way of life is the life style of the monks within the wats and their secondary work or professions after their lives as bhikkhus.

Research of these points may be helpful in adjusting the outlook of the Sangha towards politics so that it is more sympathetic to democracy. This is not to say that the present state is antithetical to democracy: simply that further research on these issues will provide more data for adjusting whatever of the present state of the Sangha needs to be adjusted. This is because from research conducted so far we have found that some groups of the Sangha still have beliefs in authoritarian principles, methods and ways of life. It may be said that the Sangha in the Bangkok metropolis has mixed beliefs on democracy and authoritarianism, leaning more toward the former.

Another point worthy of research would be another, more comprehensive, review of the Sangha's status, especially in terms of scriptural learning. Our research focused particularly on two branches of monastic study: the *nak tham* tests and the *parian dhamma* tests. However, the Sangha's system of education has grown to include secular subjects, and to see the establishment of different kinds of schools and Sangha universities. Thus it would be advisable to study the Sangha's education system, and compare scriptural learning, secular learning, and tertiary learning, each of which has its own centers.

Apart from reviewing the status of the Sangha in terms of scriptural learning, future research should expand its scope to provincial areas. While most of the monks who live in the area of the Bangkok metropolis are from provincial homes, they are monks who have not lived in the provinces for long periods of time. Studying on the basis of location may provide new angles of thought or politico-sociological perspectives. If the rural area alone is

researched, it could be divided into two study groups—those who are local leaders, and those who are ordinary monks—in order to compare and research the Buddhist and political beliefs of these two groups to determine their supporting and opposing factors, by reviewing the original idea that the influential or important factors on Buddhist and political beliefs of the Sangha are factors that come both from outside and within the Sangha. If it is possible to show other factors as summarized in the three main points, this will help to fill out these ideas.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*]

BUDDHISM AND HUMAN GENETIC RESEARCH

Somporn Promta

What I am trying to do in this paper is to explore how Buddhism, especially Theravāda Buddhism as adopted in Thailand, responds to the advancements of human genetic research in the modern world. Buddhism has a certain number of doctrinal beliefs normally differing from those in the theistic tradition, making Buddhism respond to genetic research in a certain way. The way Buddhism responds to genetic research could be characterized as a kind of humanistic view. This kind of view is mainly based on human wisdom and rational investigation of the problem. Belief as normally understood in terms of religion plays a lesser role in Buddhist ethics. The following will show the positions of Buddhism on the problems raised by genetic research. As the concept of personhood plays the key role in the debates over human genetic research, we will start with this point. And as human genetic research raises many issues, it is impossible to explore all of them; the paper will focus on some of them – human cloning and the use of embryonic stem cells in medical practice – as the examples for discussion.

1. The concept of personhood in Buddhism

The concept of personhood plays a significant role in modern bioethical debate as a number of the biomedical problems are concerned with the question of what should be counted as a person. For example, the embryo explored by the scientist could be harmed in some cases. Normally such harm is meaningful if it occurs to a person. The problem then arises that if the embryo is a person, the work done by the scientist in such cases can be debated in terms of morality. Abortion seems to be an explicit case showing that the definition of personhood is the most basic task. To judge whether abortion is morally wrong or not, we must first decide whether the fetus is a person or not.

The question concerning personhood is problematic in that it is closely involved with human biological developments in the womb. Certainly, at some stage of development we could argue that the fetus is person because he or she can express some human basic qualities, such as the response to external objects, the reaction implying the feeling of pain, and so on. But at some stage of development, the very beginning state in which the fetus has no any biological properties indicating that it is different from a cluster of cells, the concept of personhood seems to be hardly attributable to the fetus. There has been some attempt by philosophers and scientists to establish a clear-cut definition of personhood through empirical measures such as medical data. For example, they use the appearance of the nervous system as a clear indication that the fetus is person, whereas before that it is not. Even though this method greatly benefits us, that does not mean it is unproblematic. It could be said that such a definition of personhood is more practical than philosophical. Something practical does not necessarily need strong justifications. So those who adopt the definition of personhood as stated above can be questioned as to why something without a nervous system should not be counted as a person.

It seems that ultimately the views concerning the problem of personhood can be grouped into two sets. The first set looks at the issue in terms of convention. For the philosopher of this set, personhood is merely a convention of society. We stipulate conventions for the purpose of social utility. For example, to protect good people from harm by bad people, we stipulate that people have the right to their life and property; and we say that in such a case people are persons in the sense of those who can claim rights over their life and property when these things are violated. The murderer before committing murder is counted as a person also, but after that his personhood can be changed. In the case of the death sentence, it seems that we do not accept that the murderer is a person. If we accept him as a person we can never punish him that way. From the above, we find that one may be person at some time and not a person at another time. It is a convention of society to determine

personhood through the process of law. Another set of philosophers does not agree with this theory of personhood. For them, the study of personhood should not be associated merely with legal convenience. On the contrary, legal reasoning must be based on metaphysical reasoning or something deeper than legality. It seems that for the philosophers of the second set ontological investigation must be inevitably applied to the study of personhood.

In general, Buddhism shares the idea of the second set. One of the major characteristics of Buddhist philosophy is its naturalistic feature. Being naturalistic in this context means that truths are out there in nature, not in human imagination. So, in exploring truth, Buddhism explores nature. In the case of personhood, what is explored by Buddhism is the nature of human beings. This leads to questions concerning the basic concepts of human life, such as: what is the meaning of personhood according to Buddhism; when does personhood occur; what should be counted as a violation of personhood. We will examine these questions below.

1.1 The meaning of personhood

Normally, Buddhism is viewed as a religion that rejects the existence of the self. This sometimes leads to the belief that there is no concept of personhood in Buddhist teaching. As understood by Buddhism, there are two meanings of personhood. One is the substantial meaning, and another is the non-substantial one. The Hindu theory of personhood can be cited as an example of the first meaning. For Hinduism, the self (*atman*) is the essence of human life. The definition of personhood in Hinduism is based on this self. The self as taught by Hinduism is rejected by Buddhism, as Buddhism states that human life is composed of the five aggregates – namely, materiality, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness – and these aggregates are not substances. But the rejection of the self does not mean that there is no concept of personhood in Buddhist teaching. Personhood according to Buddhism is still possible even though there is no self in human life.

Buddhism defines personhood in terms of psychological facts. For example, somewhere in Buddhist texts the Buddha says that if someone tries to kill you and you feel that you dislike the action of that man, the same action done by you is also disliked by other people. Buddhism believes that all human beings share a set of psychological properties such as self-love, hatred of death, and desire for a good future. These psychological facts are something to be respected by other persons. Killing is wrong in Buddhist teaching because it violates self-love. Other moral tenets in Buddhism can be also understood in this light.

The concept of personhood in Buddhism can be better understood if it is related to the contents of morality taught by Buddhism. The Five Precepts constitute the basic moral code of Buddhism. They state that killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants is wrong. The first four precepts involve other persons, while the last one involves oneself. In the first four precepts, two things are mentioned: the person's life and the person's belongings. Killing is concerned with a person's life, and we see from the above that killing is wrong because it violates the psychological reality of self-love. Stealing, sexual misconduct with another's beloved and lying are wrong because they violate a person's belongings. It should be noted that when we say that killing is wrong, Buddhism does not think that it is wrong because it violates the self of another person. The transcendental self is something beyond our observation, but psychological facts are totally observable. So using these facts as the grounds of personhood is more reliable. The last statement of the Five Precepts is involved with oneself. Taking intoxicants is wrong because it violates self-love. The person who takes intoxicants does not love himself, Buddhism argues.

It should be noted that the concept of personhood in Buddhist teaching is in some sense closely connected with the concept of human life as the composition of the five aggregates. The connection between these two concepts can be illustrated as follows. First of all, the five aggregates function as the foundation of personhood. The dead man cannot be a person because he possesses

only the body, which is just one component of the whole five parts. The man in a comatose state is regarded by Buddhism as a person because he possesses all five aggregates, even though he is not conscious. Buddhism believes that the five aggregates under some conditions may not function, but they exist. When we sleep and do not dream at all, it could be said that the mind and its components (mind and feeling, perception and mental formation) temporarily do not function. So killing a sleeping man is wrong because the man still has all five aggregates. This line of argument is applied to the case of person in a coma or in any deeply unconscious state. Euthanasia given to a person in such a state is viewed by Buddhism as no different from killing a conscious person.

It seems that such a definition of personhood in Buddhism may give rise to some epistemological problems. We know that a sleeping man has all five aggregates because he can awake from sleeping. With the patient in the comatose state, it may be very difficult to determine whether or not he or she will awake again. So the point is: we know that a person has all five aggregates after his or her return from sleeping or from a state of deep unconsciousness. If we have a comatose patient who finally dies in that state, the question is: in the view of Buddhism, does that person have all five aggregates, or does he not?

The answer to this question is partly based on a religious belief that cannot be justified by sense experience. Buddhism argues that the body of human beings cannot survive without the support of the mind. As long as the body of the patient still survives, we can assume that the mind still exists. As the five aggregates are equated to the body and the mind, so in such a case we can say that the person still possesses all five aggregates; and that makes him or her a person in Buddhist perspective.

1.2 When personhood occurs

Normally the theory of the soul claims that personhood occurs when the soul enters the body. In the Buddhist texts there are some passages indicating the same idea. The Buddha says that a person arises when three conditions appear: the mother and father have

sexual intercourse, the mother possesses a good biological state, and the mind is present. This statement mentions two components of human life. The first is the biological (or material) process, and the second is the non-material one. What is called "mind" in Buddhism means something containing properties of energy rather than substance, like the soul. So the Buddhist image of "mind" could be likened to the image of electricity. According to Buddhism, mere biological fertilization is not enough to give rise to a new life. Modern Buddhist scholars seem to believe that when the egg and the sperm have united, if the mind does not enter as another condition the process of fertilization can never start. In the case of natural abortion, these scholars explain that it occurs because of the departure of the mind from the ongoing fertilization process.

The Buddha did not give an explicit statement about when personhood starts, but indirect sources seem to suggest that according to Buddhism personhood starts at the first moment of fertilization. It is recorded in the monastic rules that a monk once performed an abortion on a girl; the Buddha judged his action seriously wrong and that brought him a monastic crime of the highest sort. A monk committing this kind of wrongful deed must be expelled from the monastic community. The Buddha considered the embryo to be a person like an adult, so the monk who killed the embryo through abortion was judged by Buddhist monastic rules as having committed a crime equal in gravity to killing an adult. In the commentary on the rule stated above, it is stated clearly that killing a human being means destroying human life from the first moment of fertilization to human life outside the womb. So, even though the Buddha himself did not give a clear-cut pronouncement about when personhood occurs, the Buddhist tradition, especially the Theravāda tradition, clearly states that personhood starts when the process of fertilization takes place.

1.3 The conditions under which personhood is violated

Normally Buddhism views killing as a violation of personhood. The first precept in Buddhist morality prohibits killing on the grounds that it is a violation of personhood. It seems that killing in

this context does not necessarily include suicide. In some religions suicide is prohibited as an evil. Buddhism regards suicide as something to be examined in detail before judging it in terms of morality. That is, Buddhism does not view all suicides as wrong. Taking one's own life for the benefit of other persons could be considered "suicide," but this kind of suicide is not wrong from the Buddhist perspective. In the Buddhist texts, there are a number of stories about the merit accumulation of the *Bodhisatta* (one with the intention to be a Buddha in the future). To be a Buddha in the future, the *Bodhisatta* must practice what are called "perfections" (*pāramī*). One of the major perfections is the donation (*dāna*). It should be noted that there are two kinds of donation in Buddhist thinking: donation of life and donation of property. Of these two, the latter is superior. The stories relate that in some circumstances the *Bodhisatta* donates his life. This seems to imply that the taking of one's own life under reasonable circumstances is not a violation of personhood and counts as a good deed from the Buddhist perspective.

In modern genetic research, sometimes questions concerning a possible violation of personhood arise. The use of stem cells from the embryo for medical purposes can be cited as an example. The major objection to the use of embryonic stem cells is that such use is no different from killing one person and using the body of that person to cure the body of another person. This objection is very strong and makes any attempts to support the use of stem cells difficult. Even though the concept of life donation as described above could be employed to provide a rationale for the use of embryonic stem cells, the embryo whose stem cells are used is in no position to judge whether or not he or she is willing to donate his or her life, so the use of stem cells can be construed as either (if the embryo is not willing) killing or (if the embryo is willing) donating life, and between these two possibilities we can never know which one is true.

According to Buddhist ethics, the killing of even a willing person is to be regarded as killing and therefore wrong. There is only one

case in which the taking of a willing person's life is not killing. It is the taking of life done by that life's owner and done for good reason, such as to protect a great number of people or to save the life of someone more valuable than the life donor. We find that this principle cannot be directly applied to the case of the embryo, as we cannot know how the embryo thinks. Actually, the embryo at the beginning stage, say within two weeks of fertilization, has any thoughts. How should we deal with such a situation? Some people argue that this case is like the case of a person in a persistent vegetative state. A man in this state has no thoughts. So society must make a decision on behalf of such a person. Normally, when we have to judge on behalf of another person, we use ourselves as the frame of reference. Buddhism, Confucianism, and some other systems of belief share the ethical principle that the good thing is what we want other persons to do to us and what is bad is what we do not want other persons to do to us. In the case of the embryo, we could apply this principle thus: if the embryo were a member of society and shared our knowledge of the situation concerning the need for embryonic stem cells, how would he or she judge the matter? If the embryo in our imagination says that in such a case it would be unreasonable not to allow the use of the embryonic stem cells, what we can conclude is that the use of embryonic stem cells in such use is morally right.

Capital punishment by its very nature is a violation of personhood, but some of us think that society has to allow this practice on the grounds of social necessity. In terms of personal ethics, Buddhism views the killing of a criminal who has committed a very serious crime as wrong, as it is a violation of personhood. But in terms of social ethics, Buddhism states that if the death sentence has been proved to prevent serious crimes, this practice can be allowed in a Buddhist community. So we can say that the violation of personhood is possible in some cases within social dimensions with regard to society's needs. The use of embryonic stem cells is somewhat like the case of capital punishment, abortion and

euthanasia. These practices can be either socially moral or immoral depending on the reasons behind the actions.

This does not mean that Buddhist ethics is relativist or situational. Buddhism believes that things in nature have some essential properties and these properties will determine the results of what we have done. Actions performed by human beings are one kind of natural phenomena. Human actions in themselves contain certain moral properties. Killing regardless of conditions is a violation of personhood, so killing is a bad thing in itself to some extent. However, Buddhism teaches that killing when judged as a situation related to certain conditions can vary in terms of moral justification because of those conditions. It may be possible that in some cases the weight of necessity determined by conditions seems to outweigh the badness of killing; in such cases Buddhism teaches us to use wisdom. This principle is readily applicable to research in human genetics.

2. The Buddhist Approach to Genetic Research

One of the most basic beliefs of Buddhism is that proper questions lead to proper answers. The ethics of Buddhism, looked at in light of this principle, could be viewed as an ethics of questioning, meaning that before answering any question of ethics we must first ask what is a proper approach to that subject. In this section we will consider the Buddhist way of viewing genetic research, with human cloning and embryonic stem cell research as two examples illustrating how difficult it is to judge research in human genetics in terms of ethics.

Human cloning and embryonic stem cell research are involved with the interpretation of human life and its values, such as personhood and human dignity. Normally, theistic religion seems to have more explicit religious grounds pointing to how human life should be respected by persons who are involved in research on human beings. God is the source of human dignity in theistic religion. Buddhism, as a non-theistic religion, is based on another ground in moral reasoning. The Buddha says that what he teaches

are natural phenomena. The *dhamma*, which refers to the teaching of the Buddha, is understood by Buddhists as natural things and natural laws. For non-Buddhists, the best way to understand Buddhist teaching is to view it as they view natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology. Buddhism teaches that the universe is naturally given, and the Buddha himself clearly declares that he is not interested in exploring the origin and the end of the universe. What he wishes to explore is the universe as it appears. Great enlightenment brings him the insight that the universe is regulated by five kinds of natural law (*niyāma*): namely, the physical law (*utuniyāma*), the biological law (*bījaniyāma*), the law of action (*kammaniyāma*), the law of mind (*cittaniyāma*), and the law of dhamma (*dhammaniyāma*). Buddhist morality is based on belief in these natural laws. Goodness and badness in human actions are based on the laws of nature, especially the last three types.

2.1 *Naturality and unnaturality*

The debate over human cloning and other human genetic research normally involves discussion about its unnaturalness. Some of the arguments against human cloning state that such a practice is unnatural in the sense that it is not provided by nature. Some people who believe in God might think that anything unnatural means it is not permitted by God and for that reason is dangerous. Sexual reproduction is natural in this sense and thus it is established by God. Human cloning is an attempt to produce a human being through unnatural means, and thus it is against the work of God. In this line of argument, we will find that the concept of being moral is equated to the concept of being natural. By the same token, the concept of being immoral is equated to the concept of being unnatural.

This argument seems to be used by some people to argue against human genetic research. Some scientists who support human cloning state that human cloning should not be viewed as unnatural because there is a kind of human cloning permitted by nature: the case of identical twins. According to these scientists, human cloning performed by scientists can be viewed as the making of identical twins. What is different is merely that natural identical twins are of

the same age, while artificial identical twins are of different ages. Looked at from this point, human cloning is not immoral because it is natural in the sense that it follows the law of nature as found in the case of natural identical twins.

In Buddhism, morality can be separated from the concept of being natural because according to Buddhist teaching it seems impossible to say that such and such a phenomenon is unnatural. Buddhism proposes that the moral goodness or badness attributable to any action depends solely on the moral properties. Actually, Buddhism does not think that there is anything unnatural. Buddhism believes in the Five Laws of Nature as we have observed previously, and thinks that there is nothing which is beyond these laws of nature. In Buddhist texts, for example, reproductive methods other than the sexual one we are acquainted with are mentioned. For those of us who never perceive such methods, they could be considered unnatural. But they are natural in the sense that they are permitted to appear in the universe through any of the five natural laws.

Man according to Buddhism is a natural thing. When man creates something, Buddhism regards that something as natural, too. So, natural things in the Buddhist perspective are of two kinds: those created by man and those not created by man. Between these two kinds of things, there is no difference in terms of ethics. That is, some natural things are good and some are bad. Likewise, some things created by man are good and some are bad. So, moral goodness or badness has nothing to do with *naturality* or *unnaturality*.

Moreover, Buddhism considers man and nature to be a single system. That is, Buddhism accepts that nature has its own long history and that man in his present form has a much shorter history compared with nature. However, there is some potentiality in man which cannot be found in nature: namely, the potentiality of consciousness and intelligence (or wisdom, if that is the more preferred term). Through consciousness, man learns to solve certain problems which may take a very long time to solve by natural processes, or which may be impossible for nature to solve by itself.

When we break our arm, surgery is done to heal the broken arm. This surgery is done by man, but it does not join the broken arm. Nature instead plays the role behind the process of joining the broken bone. So, it can be said that in the joining of the broken arm two things are equally needed – man and nature. Following this line of thought, Buddhism does not posit a separation between man and nature. The notion that we can trust only natural phenomena is viewed by Buddhism as extreme. Buddhism likewise views as extreme the idea that man can dominate nature or do anything unconditionally.

So Buddhist ethics does not consider the issue of human cloning through the concept of naturalness. In general, Buddhism admits that whatever happens in the world is natural. It does not matter whether or not something appears by virtue of human technology. Natural things in Buddhist perspective include both what is given by nature and what is created by human beings. The fact that Buddhist ethics does not utilize the concept of naturalness makes it harder for Buddhism to deal with modern bioethical problems. But this could be also considered a strong point as it provides more space for debate. That is, sometimes we might find that labeling something immoral because it is created by human beings is seemingly irrational. The world today has greatly benefited from *unnatural* products of science and technology.

It seems that the basic difference between Buddhist ethics and theistic religious ethics is that Buddhism holds a humanistic attitude while theistic religion does not. For theistic religion, human beings are just like innocent babies whose knowledge of the universe is very limited, while God is the father who knows everything. The scientist's attempt to reveal the secret facts hidden behind natural things is considered no different from the action of an innocent baby who puts her fingers into the unknown holes in the walls of a room. Inside some holes there could be some dangerous things; we cannot know. For the sake of safety, we should not go beyond what has already been prepared by God as found in nature. Human cloning is forever questionable in terms of safety regardless of the data gained

from scientific research because there could be danger within it, as it has not been prepared by God. Buddhism partly agrees with such a warning. However, the best way, to decide whether such a thing contains danger or not is to undertake experiments. Buddhism supports attempts to gain new knowledge as long as such attempts are governed by wisdom. Wisdom in Buddhist teaching is a process of learning through doing, not imagination or speculation. The enlightenment of the Buddha is not a state of mind gained independently from a process of long-term learning. In short, wisdom in Buddhist teaching is a practical term.

2.2 The harm principle

The spirit of Buddhism is not-harming (avihimsa). Harm (vihimsa) is one of the major criteria used by Buddhism to determine the morality of an action. This principle says that any action which does harm is morally wrong; otherwise, it is not. Harm in Buddhist teaching can be divided into two main categories: harm to oneself, and harm to others. Harm to oneself means the action is intentionally performed by a person and that the action harms him in one of two ways. It harms him in terms of physicality, or it harms him in terms of dignity. Taking intoxicants is prohibited by the Fifth Precept in Buddhism on the grounds that taking such substances does physical harm to oneself. Selling body organs such as kidneys could be viewed as harm in terms of dignity. The person who does such a thing, for whatever reason, could be viewed as not respecting his own status as a human being. He treats his life as if it were a nonhuman product that can be sold. This interpretation makes it possible to state that the sale of human organs constitutes a harm with regard to one's dignity.

The second kind of harm, harm to others, can be of two meanings as well. Normally, in a free society, some personally harmful actions may be tolerated by the laws of that society. Drinking beer, for example, is harmful to one's own person; but this kind of action is tolerated by the law in Buddhist countries because it is accepted that only serious harmful actions should not be tolerated by the law. Using drugs is prohibited by law in Buddhist countries because it is

believed that the harm resulting from drug use is much more serious than that which results from drinking beer. So, it can be said that according to Buddhist morality personal freedom does not cover personally serious harmful actions, in terms either of physical damage or of damage to one's human dignity. Harm to others is more obviously seen as wrong by nature, whether it relates to physical damage or to damage to human dignity. However, as the intention behind an action plays a significant role in the Buddhist system of moral judgment, investigating harm to others cannot be separated from consideration of the intention of the doer.

Then the problem arises: is there some kind of harm allowable in the Buddhist community, or is any kind of harm strictly prohibited? In utilitarianism, it seems that some kinds of harm are permitted. That is, for the benefit of the greater number of people, a violation of the rights of the minority may be permissible. But the violation of rights involved in such a case is understood in terms of the right to property, not the right to life. Government policy in any country in the world is more or less utilitarian. The expressways in Bangkok are at the cost of people whose lands have been chosen by the state for this purpose. But for the benefit of the majority, this kind of harm can be accepted. Moreover, this kind of harm can be compensated by the state because it is an economic harm. By contrast, a harm to life seems to be immoral in every respect because it is a harm that we cannot compensate.

Applying the harm principle to the issue of human cloning, it seems that the first question is: can human cloning be interpreted in terms of harm? It is clear that the cloning of human beings in some cases could be questioned whether or not it is personal issue. For example, a man clones himself to use the embryonic stem cells. In such a case, can we say that it is really a personal matter, implying that the harm principle to be used for this case is the harm to oneself only? According to Buddhism, a clone is a person from the first moment of fertilization, so it is very difficult, if not impossible to locate human cloning within the area of personal activity. It seems obvious that the harm in the case of human cloning is the harm to

others. However, this does not mean that any case of human cloning is viewed by Buddhism as a harm to others. Buddhism merely says that any harm caused by human cloning must be regarded as harm to others. Simply speaking, Buddhism does not accept that human cloning can be understood in terms of personal activity. Therapeutic human cloning and the use of embryonic stem cells could be considered in terms of harm to the life of the embryo. Can we accept such harm for the benefit of us or not? The same question may be rationally posted apropos other areas of human genetic research as well.

According to Buddhist teaching, we must distinguish between life and property. The right to the former is considered the primary right, while the right to the latter is the secondary one. The great difference between the primary and the secondary right is that the former can never be transferred, while the secondary right can be. In the Buddhist texts, it is recorded that voluntary euthanasia constitutes a violation of one of the Four Rules of Defeat (*pārājika*) for the monk who commits it. That is, in Buddhist monastic rules, a monk violates the Four Rules of Defeat if he engages in sexual intercourse, commits robbery, kills a human being, and denies the existence of a higher goodness. Killing a human being at his or her request is wrong on the grounds that the right to life cannot be transferred. Suicide is found in the Buddhist texts, and in some cases it could be argued that no guilt attaches to a monk who commits suicide. The difference between suicide and euthanasia according to Buddhist teaching is that, in committing suicide, a person is not violating the right to life because he is the owner of that right, while a person who commits euthanasia at the request of somebody else is violating that right. The request cannot justify euthanasia because the right to life can never be transferred. Only the owner of the right can forsake it.

Applying what we have considered above to the embryo, it could be the case that the embryo as a person must be accepted as the owner of a right to life. There are many sources in the Buddhist texts pointing out that killing an embryo is no different from killing an

adult. So, the use of embryonic stem cells even for curing disease, according to Buddhism, is no different from sacrificing the life of one adult to save the life of another. If the use of an adult life for this purpose cannot be accepted, the question is: on what grounds can use of the embryo be justified?

As the Buddhist view on any subject is not absolute, in the sense that what the Buddha teaches is not dogma to be accepted unconditionally, Buddhism's view of the right to life could be discussed further. Actually, the sacrifice of one's life for the benefit of another can be found all over the world, including a Buddhist country like Thailand. We have the soldier acting as the guardian of the country. The death of a soldier for his country suggests that in some cases the sacrifice of one's life for the benefit of one's country or the majority of people in one's country may be necessary. In Buddhist literature, a life donation is sometimes found. As we have said previously a *Bodhisatta* sometimes donates his life for the benefit of another and such doing is deemed good. This seems to imply that the right to life in some cases could be transferred.

By distinguishing between life donation and euthanasia, it may be possible to perceive how Buddhism regards the issue. What is the difference between these two issues? In a donation of life, the donor is fully aware and understands what merits will accrue as a result of his action. In euthanasia, a man who requests death is understood by Buddhism as acting so from an unwholesome impulse, and a man who commits euthanasia is understood as doing so without moral authorization. That is, no one can take another's life without violating the other's right to life and personhood, regardless of conditions. But the case will change if the owner of life donates it. Therapeutic human cloning and embryonic stem cell research, if they can be justified, seem to obtain such justification within the category of life donation.

Taking one's life for the benefit of another is not necessarily evil in Buddhist perspective. At least, Buddhist doctrine permits the taking of life under certain circumstances. However, donation is a concept in personal ethics. Donation must come from consent and

wisdom. We do not know whether embryo is willing or not. This is the most difficult problem to overcome. Maybe the idea of enforced donation could be a way out of this difficulty. Enforced donation is self-contradictory in Buddhist personal ethics, but it could be possible in the social ethics of Buddhism. In Buddhist Thailand, a girl who gets pregnant as a result of rape has the right to abort the child. The child in this case can be understood as being the “*enforced donor*” of his life for the benefit of the mother. Why do we think the mother deserves such protection? The answer is: because not giving her the right to abortion is socially immoral. If we can prove that in some cases not giving a person the right to benefit from therapeutic human cloning or the use of embryonic stem cells is socially immoral, it means that we have found a way to justify these practices.

2.3 *The principle of analysis*

Sometimes the Buddha identifies Buddhism as “a religion that teaches analytical morality.” The term “*analytical morality*” is a rough translation of the Pāli word “*vibhajja*.” This term, as understood by Buddhist scholars, denotes a system of thought that does not look at the world through *a prism of black and white*. Actually, Buddhist logic, or the Buddhist epistemological outlook, has much criticized *the black and white logic* found in the work of great thinkers such as Aristotle. Applying the principle of analysis to the case of human cloning, the advice from Buddhism is that, first, to assume that all kinds of human cloning and other genetic research are solely right or wrong is not valid. Buddhism considers all that happens in the world as matters of varying complexity; some events may be less complicated, while some are much more complicated. Analysis will reveal the proper way to deal with specific events. The cloning of human beings or any kind of human genetic research has originated in the human mind, and the human mind must always have its reasons for thinking in a particular way. From this viewpoint, it could be that in some cases the human mind behind these activities has a good intention, while in some cases everything

is directed by a bad intention. So, what we must do is to analyze the given case and find the details within.

As noted above, Buddhist ethics is analytical ethics. After the process of analysis, it may be found that in some cases the cloning of human beings or other kinds of human genetic research does not harm anyone, that all persons involved are happy, and thus that such research is tolerated by Buddhist ethics. The problem is: when we talk about the concept of harm from the Buddhist perspective, does such harm involve only the person, or can it be extended to society? This question is important because some arguments against cloning and other human genetic research suggest that though we possibly cannot find any obvious victim of harm in terms of individuals, it can be said that society is harmed by allowing such activities. *Legal moralism*, as presented by legal philosophers such as Patrick Devlin, is of the view that one of major structures that support the existence of society is the moral structure. Devlin argues that even though drinking intoxicants can be viewed as personal freedom, we should remark that if most members of society are those who persistently exercise such a habit, our society must be weak. In this case, intoxicants cannot be viewed in terms of freedom only. It can be related to the moral structure of society as well. Human cloning and other human genetic research considered in this light could be viewed as harmful to society, even in a case where we think that everyone involved is happy and no one is harmed at all.

One of the Five Laws of Nature taught in Buddhism, the Law of Dhamma (*dhammaniyāma*), seems to share the above view in part. For Buddhism, the moral tendencies found in society have an effect on the well-being (or otherwise) of people in that society. In short, Buddhism agrees that human society is not just a place where people gather and do only what benefits themselves; on the contrary, society has a spirit, and this is nothing but the common ideal to meet certain moral standards. We are not just living, but we are living a good life as noble humans. However, the moral structure that supports the existence of society in Buddhist perspective must be identifiable, not merely an abstract vision of our imagination. One

process that helps us to reduce the degree of abstract imagination is to relate the moral structure of society to what individuals do. Cloning and other forms of human genetic research can be viewed as something that points out the level of morality in the minds of people. So, we can say that allowing such research for any purpose other than that which promotes human welfare affects the moral structure of society. As the actions of individuals in society are related to law in the sense that the law must determine what actions are permissible and what are not, so the law practiced in society can be viewed in part as an indicator of the moral structure of that society as well.

Social necessity is a notion Buddhist ethics tolerates in some cases. Buddhism teaches that killing is an evil; but Buddhism never teaches against having an army. Reasonable capital punishment is sometimes interpreted by Buddhist thinkers as a social necessity, implying that it should be tolerated or deemed legal in a Buddhist community. If in some cases we can rationally prove that cloning or other human genetic research is a social necessity, Buddhist ethics would appear to deem it acceptable as shown in other cases mentioned above. Analysis of the context and surrounding data will help us to classify the various categories of human cloning, and other human genetic research, of which some categories may meet the conditions tolerated by Buddhist ethics. At this point, we will find that human cloning and related genetic research are an open-ended subject in the Buddhist community, meaning that some doors are open for the further exploration of these activities in Buddhist society. What is required are merely the reasons and explanations for why such should be allowed?

2.4 Individual and social dimensions of ethical problems

As noted previously, in the Buddhist community the ethics of Buddhism is considered in two dimensions: individual and social. The ethics taught by the Buddha is in the first place intended for personal use. Buddhist ethics in this respect considers human lives as individual units; each of them facing some common problems, and every individual bears responsibility for solving these problems

by him- or herself. So, what is good and what is bad within this dimension of Buddhist ethics are personal matters in the sense that if something is considered good, its goodness is explained with reference solely to its effect on the individual. In the Buddhist community, when people request the Five Precepts, the request form states that these precepts are to be adopted by each person individually (*visum visum rakkhanatthāya*). So, it is understood among Buddhists that goodness or badness in one's life is a personal matter. Each person must monitor his or her own life.

Consider this example: It is very clear that abortion is wrong according to Buddhist ethics. But to say that abortion is an impermissible sin in Buddhist perspective could be misleading, as sometimes people understand this to mean that abortion must be illegal in Buddhist society. To say that abortion is a sin is to say it is so within a personal code of morality. That is, abortion is equated to killing a human being, so committing an abortion violates the first clause of the Five Precepts. The Buddha says that to attain *nibbāna*, one should avoid unwholesome actions. Abortion is an unwholesome action, meaning that committing it will lead to a path away from *nibbāna*. Following the advice of the Buddha, a Buddhist who is confronted with a dilemma concerning abortion should consider by herself how to handle the problem. The Buddha never claims that a woman confronting such a dilemma must not commit abortion. He just says that a woman should consider by herself what is the best thing within response to such a condition. Suppose finally she finds that the best way response is committing an abortion, Buddhist ethics has nothing to say. It is her choice and her responsibility. However, Buddhist ethics still continues to claim that as abortion is the killing of a human being, the woman who decides to choose abortion must be responsible for the choice in terms of the *kamma*. It is a bad *kamma*, and its result is already determined by the law of *kamma*.

The above remarks represent a consideration of abortion in terms of personal morality. As there is a child playing a role as the victim of a killing, so abortion cannot be considered solely with regard to

the personal morality of the mother. The Buddhist Harm Principle should be brought in to deal with the issue. It is so evident that abortion is very harmful to a child, even in his/her earliest stages of development. So the state, as the authoritative power whose most basic function is to provide justice for the people involved in a conflict of interest, has the right to prohibit abortion if it is deemed that between a mother and a child the child's right to life is more deserving of protection.

Human cloning or any other kind of human genetic research can in one sense be considered in this light. That is, if the morality of these activities is raised in the Buddhist community, one possible approach to this problem is: let it be personally judged by each member of the community. Certainly, different persons can have different views of the same matter. But Buddhism believes that ultimately enlightened Buddhists will arrive at the same conclusion of the same ethical dilemma. Looked at from this perspective, the way to deal with ethical problems raised by human cloning and the like does not necessarily require the establishment of certain rules to be followed by all members of the community. On the contrary, these problems can be resolved through the moral education of each member. For Buddhism, solving ethical problems by changing people's minds is evidently more effective than passing laws to regulate external behavior.

However, if we accept that a community is composed of different members, of whom some are bad and some are good; an understanding of Buddhist ethics in terms of the personal dimension alone will leave some problems behind. How to judge human cloning and other kinds of human genetic research may not be a problem for the enlightened members of a community, but it may be greatly different for the unenlightened ones. Without rules or laws, the unenlightened members of a community may sometimes harm others, intentionally or unintentionally.

It is clear that Buddhist personal ethics is based on the law of *kamma* taught by the Buddha. To judge whether the response to a given moral question is wrong or not according to personal ethics is

not difficult. Human cloning according to personal ethics is not immoral insofar as it is undertaken for reproductive purposes. Buddhism adheres to a moral principle that what conduces to the harm and suffering of oneself and others is unwholesome. By the same token, that which conduces to the benefit and happiness of oneself and others is wholesome. Destroying life or prohibiting birth can be considered as harmful, while prolonging life or giving birth is beneficial. Reproductive cloning could be judged as not immoral in this sense. By contrast, stem cell research could be interpreted as harmful, since the embryo is destroyed. This is not to suggest that according to Buddhist personal ethics reproductive human cloning is totally right and stem cell research totally wrong. It just means that we can interpret the issues in both directions.

According to Buddhist social ethics, on the other hand, stem cell research could be viewed differently from what we have seen in the Buddhist personal ethics. In reliable reproductive cloning no one is harmed, so it is not against either the personal or the social morality of Buddhism. It is only therapeutic cloning, the cloning for medical use in which the clone (including the clone generated solely from a woman's egg) is destroyed, that could be problematic.

Modern ethical dilemmas are usually concerned with the conflict of interest between two persons or two groups of persons. In the issue of abortion, the two parties involved are a mother and a child. The mother's interest is protected if an abortion is permitted, while the child's interest is protected if an abortion is prohibited. Likewise, in therapeutic human cloning and embryonic stem cell research, there are two persons or two groups of persons involved. In terms of rights, the patient's right to health is protected if therapeutic cloning and stem cell research are allowed. But in carrying out such practices, the clone's or embryo's right to life is violated. The hard task to be undertaken by any ethical school or ethical theory, including Buddhist ethics, is to decide, between the two sides in the conflict of right or interest, whose right or interest should be protected and on what grounds.

At this point, we find that the ethics at the heart of the issue is social ethics, and socially ethical dilemmas are more difficult to solve compared with personally ethical dilemmas because in personal ethics only a single person is involved. It is much easier to find a solution to a conflict affecting solely one's own life. When a man is deciding whether or not he should clone himself to have a clone for purposes of medical healing, the principles of wholesome and unwholesome deeds given by Buddhism seem sufficient to provide him with a solution. Religious ethics normally endorses the altruistic way in moral decisions. So, the devout Buddhists are those who prefer not to clone themselves, for the reason that death is not dreadful compared with the sin committed in cloning an embryo for medical use. But when society tries to judge the claim of some of its members that they have the ultimate right over their own bodies, and thus the right to clone themselves for medical use, finding a solution is not easy. Whose rights should be protected between the patient and the clone? Between the benefit of the greater number of people and the violation of the embryo's rights, which should be chosen? How Buddhist social ethics deals with such a dilemma is not easy to answer even for those who are well-versed in Buddhist doctrines.

2.5 Principle of freedom

One of the basic features of Buddhism is that freedom is highly valued. The principle of freedom in Buddhism is closely related to the humanistic tendencies generally found in Buddhist texts. There are two meanings of freedom: positive and negative. Positive freedom means freedom to do something. Negative freedom is freedom from that which does not allow us to do something. Ultimately these two meanings are undividedly related to each other. Buddhism does not think that all forms of freedom are right. It is merely some kinds of freedom that are valuable. Freedom in Buddhist perspective can be both a means and an end. An enlightened person in Buddhist view is one who is free. He is free in two senses. First, he is free in the sense that he is not under the influence of anything, especially the desires which Buddhism considers to be the blind forces that push sentient beings into the

struggle for desirable things. Secondly, he is free in the sense that his actions are totally pure. This kind of person can never harm anything. We will see that freedom as the highest quality of life is the end. In Buddhist perspective, the end and the means must share some basic nature. Freedom as the means will support freedom as the end. This is why in Buddhism religious dogmas are less influential. The Buddha gives his disciples the freedom even to argue against what he has stated. It could be said that the first kind of freedom (methodological freedom) is required to attain the second kind of freedom (ultimate freedom).

In the Buddhist community, the personal freedom of believers is accepted through social tolerance of some kinds of evil. For example, even though the Fifth Precept says that taking intoxicants is wrong, intoxicants can still be sold in the Buddhist community. This does not mean that Buddhist ethics accepts that Buddhists are free to take these substances. It just means that the freedom to learn about moral lessons in one's life is needed to be a free person in the future. Taking intoxicants is always wrong, but it might be more wrong if society did not give its members the freedom to learn this lesson by themselves.

Applying the principle of freedom to the cloning of human beings or any kind of human genetic research, two things should be considered. Cloning and other genetic research can be viewed both as an activity and as an object. Cloning as an activity means that it reflects an attempt by scientists to search for something relevant to the advancement of scientific research. Cloning as an object means that it produces something and introduces that something into society. The debate over human cloning appears to stress the second meaning of the term. We look at the product resulting from the process (the clone) and ask: should we tolerate this kind of thing? It may be that the most important meaning of the term is the first one. The serious question then arises: should we tolerate an attempt to search for something valuable in terms of scientific advancement?

The history of science is filled with results that we had feared at the beginning but that was proved not wrong over time. The

technique of fertilization called IVF at first was expected to produce a monster without a human soul. Nowadays, such a fear has been proved not true. The process of learning something does not necessarily yield pleasurable results. But if we are not free to learn, how shall we know what is right and what is wrong?

Buddhism believes in human wisdom and considers the history of humankind in terms of a learning process. Wisdom includes knowing to stop at the point when the inner moral whisper advises us to stop. However, the inner moral whisper about something never occurs without serious study of that subject. The serious study of any subject can never occur without freedom to study. Today we have many conceptions of the activities conducted by scientists, some of them negative and some positive. So long as actual study has not yet started, conceptions will forever remain conceptions. The problem is: should some conceptions be the dominant idea, under which the real study of the subject must be aborted? There can be different answers to this question. But the answer from Buddhism appears to be: to abort the study of something on the grounds of negative conceptions is unreasonable and unjustifiable.

[This paper is mainly based on the interpretation of the Theravāda Buddhist Pāli Canon used in Thailand and other Theravāda Buddhist countries such as Burma and Sri Lanka. For English translation, see *The English Tipitaka* by the Pali Text Society. There are a very few scholarly books on Buddhism and genetic research. For further reading, the works of Damien Keown, such as *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (1992) and *Buddhism and Bioethics* (1995), are recommended.]

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