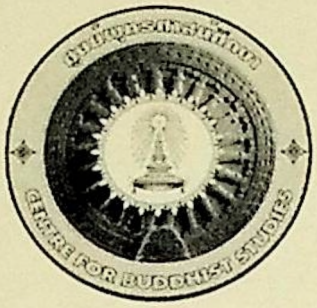

THE CHULALONGKORN JOURNAL OF

BUDDHIST STUDIES

Volume 12, 2018 ❖ ISSN 2229-1229

ARTICLES

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PUBLISHED BY

CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand

THE CHULALONGKORN JOURNAL OF BUDDHIST STUDIES

Content

Note from the Editor

After a one-year hiatus to restructure the organization of *The Chulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies*, our English-language journal, the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University, is proud to release Volume 12 (2019) which it hopes reflects the editorial team's recognition of an increased need for research works in Buddhist Studies that are socially and politically relevant to contemporary concerns of a globalized world. The papers collected in this volume deal with diverse aspects of Buddhist Studies in Thailand and beyond. Lowell Skar's paper, "Negotiating Dhamma amid Uncertain Democratization: A Perspective on Myanmar's Buddhist Responses to Sociopolitical Change," examines the intricate interactions and negotiations between the *sangha* and the political powers in Myanmar during its time of democratization amidst uncertain socioeconomic changes and conflicted transnational forces. Apichai Puntasen in "From Wealth to Wellbeing and Finally *Nibbāna*: A Transcendence from Traditional to Buddhist Economics" deals with alternative paradigms of sustainable development such as "Gross National Happiness" and sufficiency economy, and argues that Buddhist economics may supplement these paradigms with a concrete conception of wellbeing. Channarong Boonnoon's paper "Justice in the *Tipitaka*" studies two conceptions of justice in Buddhism: universal justice based on teachings on the law of *karma* and social justice rooted in sociopolitical

context, and argues for the wider applicability and greater benefit of social justice.

We also would like to announce the launch of the online version of our Thai-language journal, *The Journal of Buddhist Studies Chulalongkorn University*, according to the standard and requirements of the Thai Citation Index (TCI). Since January 2019, it is available for download through the link on our website: http://www.cubs.chula.ac.th/.

We thank our readers for their continued support, and hope that our authors' efforts are met with enthusiastic interest.

Supakwadee Amatayakul
Editor

From Wealth to Wellbeing and Finally *Nibbāna*: A Transcendence from Traditional to Buddhist Economics

Apichai Puntasen[1]

Abstract

This paper traces the origin of Western economics from the time of Greek civilization to the present. It discusses the ultimate goal of economic activities from Aritotle's "good life" or "moral life" to the search for wealth during the emergence of the Nation States in Europe, to capitalism and mercantilism in the 16th century, to trade monopoly facilitated by colonialism, to national wealth and aggregate production, culminating in the systematic calculation of gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic product (GDP) in the present.

The rapid growth of GNP which has become the development objective of many nations resulted in a rapid deterioration of natural resources and environment – a condition not suitable for the flourishing of all living things, especially

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human beings. Alternative paradigms of sustainable development were proposed by various parties such as the United Nations in 1987 and the former King of Bhutan in the 1970s through the concept of gross national happiness (GNH) of which good governance is a key component. In the Kingdom of Thailand, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej advanced his concept of "sufficiency economy" in 1974 as an alternative to the growth-led approach. Together with GNH, sufficiency economy brings the systems analysis for sustainable development into a complete form, consisting of inputs, process output, outcome and impact, taking into account the Buddhist notion of *sukha* or wellbeing. *Sukha* is the state of mind completely liberated from all defilements – the ultimate goal of Buddhist economics which is not widely known or clearly understood. Therefore, sustainable development, GNH and sufficiency economy may serve as the bridge between the two main modes of development, and may help us gain a deeper understanding of Buddhist economics.

Keywords: good life; wellbeing; sustainable development; GNH; Sufficiency Economy; *sukha;* Buddhist economics; *nibbāna*

Introduction

The birth of the economic subject can be traced back to Hesiod of Greek origin about 800 BC. He suggested that economic utopia for human beings would be akin to living in heaven where everything that one desires is available without limit. Unfortunately, the real world is not like heaven. Its main feature is scarcity. People work hard all day long and risk not waking up after a night of sleep. Such conditions of scarcity can be partially settled when labor and raw materials are used in the production process in the most efficient ways. Work is an important part of human life as it is necessary for satisfying one's basic needs. The attempt to follow the consumption pattern of others will stimulate competition which is a good conflict, as competition can help reduce the basic problem of scarcity (Rothbard, 1995).

Although the plentiful nature of heaven is much more desirable than the human world of scarcity, it does not exist in reality. The ancient economic thoughts during the time of Aristotle (384-322 BC) did not advocate for a life with plentiful materials to meet the unlimited desires of humans, but the flourishing life which involves little more material than what is necessary for survival. Having a "good life" was what counted. Aristotle explained further that the "good life" is the moral life of virtue through which human beings attain "happiness." Therefore, the relevant economic dimension in this regard is to produce enough materials to meet the basic needs as well as to

attain "happiness" or a "good life." Wealth is good for people because of its use value. However, there is also another kind of value – exchange value. This value is determined in the market and originates from market demand driven by desirability. Aristotle did not advocate this kind of value because it is neither necessary nor good for human life. According to Aristotle, the highest good is *eudaimonia*, happiness, or having good spirit – in other words, "human flourishing" (Summer and Tribe, 2008).

Ever since the development of money in Europe three centuries before Aristotle, money was already widely used as a medium of exchange. The concept of exchange value of goods and services gained much wider acceptance than their use value, as increasingly more of goods and services were traded through the markets. At the same time, the concept of happiness itself had gradually shifted from the Aristotelian *eudaimonic* tradition of living good and virtuous life based on self-actualization to the hedonic tradition of the good in life – enjoyment, excitement, pleasure and prosperity – not unlike the modern concept of "happiness." This tradition may be traced back to Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who explained good and bad in terms of pleasure and pain. A thing was good because it resulted in our own pleasure, and bad because it brought us pain. Therefore, to live a gainful life was to seek as much pleasure as possible (Burns, 1958). It was no longer a "good life" that counted but rather what was good in life. Jeremy Bentham (1784-1832), a utilitarian philosopher, translated Hobbes' pleasure into utility.

From then on, the concept of "utility" has become the supreme goal in economic life. However, Bentham always advocated for greater social utility, currently known as social welfare, rather than individual utility. His follower, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) contended that the great social enjoyment could only be achieved when individuals were allowed to seek their enjoyments freely. Government intervention into individual rights would only result in pain, hence reducing social enjoyment (Randall, 1976). It should be observed that to Mill, the word utility also means enjoyment which is close to the modern meaning of the word "happiness" (Puntasen, 2007).

Such concept of "happiness" was developed in parallel to the concept of progress that implied "scientific progress," that eventually was used to represent and replace the concept of "God" itself. This idea can be traced back to St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who emphasized not faith or inspiration but human rationality. Not only has a human being been created in the image of God but also as a rational being to understand the rules that govern the operation of the universe. Human attempts to reach the apex of the rational is to move closer to God. This teaching has turned sciences into theological tools that bring humans much closer to God than anticipated by St. Thomas Aquinas (Whitehead, 1967). The concept was demonstrated by Isaac Newton (1642-1727) in the form of the Law of Gravity that controls the movement of stars in the universe, especially in the solar system. This idea further led to the beginning of Enlightenment

in the 18th century (Berlin, 1968). Scientific progress was further achieved during the Age of Industrial Revolution in the 18th century in terms of more modern living. Scientific progress was equated to technological progress, and technological progress also implied more material wealth. Material wealth was further interpreted as one of the main sources of hedonic happiness. Towards the end of the 18th century, after the publication of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith in 1776, material wealth was considered to be the primary thing that human beings should seek. Since then, under the various forms of capitalism, wealth has become increasingly synonymous with happiness. This new understanding marks the end of the *eudaimonic* tradition of happiness put forward by Aristotle.

The Search for Wealth

The search for wealth actually began long before the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776. The hunt for colonies by Europeans (especially Spain and Portugal) that fully emerged between the 16th and 18th centuries under the guiding principle of mercantilism brought with it the era of gun boat technology. The source of wealth was gold and silver. This could be accumulated through trade by buying cheap from and selling dear to the colonies. Colonies were served as the sources for cheap raw materials as well as the markets for their finished products. If necessary, silver and gold could be obtained through direct plundering from the weaker nations and indigenous peoples.

Gold and silver would bring prosperity and progress to the colonizers.

Adam Smith (1723-1790) did not negate the effort in accumulating wealth but pointed out that trade monopoly was not the source of wealth. Wealth came from real production, and the only way to increase production in the most efficient way was through specialization and division of labor. Specialization and division of labor were made possible through competition where a large number of buyers and sellers were available in the markets such that none of them could dictate the market price. The price mechanism kept the economy moving, and more production implied a genuine progress for humankind. As production was only a means to the end of consumption, and the purpose of consumption was to generate utility, and as Jeremy Bentham advocated for greater social utility, Smith's idea of production as the source of national wealth faced no challenge. From then on wealth and progress became synonymous. The goal of economic process was to produce as much wealth as possible in order to produce the highest possible social utility.

There had been various attempts at using national wealth as indicator of national economic success. Simon Kuznets (1901-1985), a Russian American economist, was the first who succeeded. He won the 1971 Nobel Memorial Prize "for his empirically founded interpretation of economic growth which has led to new and deepened insight into the economic and social

structure and the process of development" ("The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1971, Simon Kuznets," 2019). Although Kuznets is not the first one who tried to measure gross national product to represent national wealth, he was the first one who did this systematically since 1934 and calculated the GNP of the US back to 1869. He broke the GNP down by industry, by final product, and checked it with the expenditure side. However, he warned that his measure of national income should not be used to imply the welfare of the nation as many kinds production could result in undesirable situations such as crime, air pollution and no health care ("Simon Kuznets," 2019).

In spite of his warning, however, economic growth has become increasingly desirable and has been continuously used as a basis to imply welfare improvement. For most countries, economic development is considered successful when the economy grows as fast as it possibly can. In most cases, rapid growth means overutilization of resources, not always for necessary productions. This has been accompanied by a rapid deterioration of natural resources and environment, that are not conducive for human lives. The first sound of warning came as early in 1962 in Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring* (1962).

Not too long after, Robert F. Kennedy, then a US Presidential candidate, offered the following campaign speech at the University of Kansas on March 18, 1968, just months before his assassination:

Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product, now, is over $800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product – if we judge the United States of America by that – that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry, of the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate, of the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud

> that we are Americans. ("Robert F. Kennedy's remarks at the University of Kansas," 2018)

After that, the warnings only became louder. In 1972, mainstream economics suffered another jolt from the publication of *The Limit to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* by Meadows et al (1972). This time the shock was more real because it was followed by the first oil price spike in 1973-4, driven by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The result was known to the so-called developed nations or members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as "stagflation." It was stagnation with inflation, a condition that had never existed before and was not predictable from the known economic theories before that. At the same time, another little book that quickly became famous was Ernst Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973). Although a British Catholic, he introduced Buddhist economics in Chapter IV of this book, and reminded us that Buddhist economics could serve as an example for those who regard human beings more highly than money. Buddhist economics is based on sustainability instead of unlimited growth (Sulak Sivaraksa, 2009).

Despite the warnings of Robert F. Kennedy that GDP cannot reflect wellbeing or human dignity, and despite the introduction of the new concept of "sustainable development" in 1987 by the United Nations in the Brundtland Report, GDP continued to be

used as the indicator of national economic performance that represents the improvement of national welfare. Many of those whose attempt to look for alternative indicators of national wellbeing will traditionally start with a criticism of the GDP. Ronald Coleman (2008), for example, in his attempt to develop the new index called genuine progress index (GPI), began his work as follows:

> We are not seeking either to replace or modify GDP. Rather we seek to replace the widespread misuse of GDP as a measure of progress, wellbeing, and prosperity-a purpose for which it was not intended or designed. GDP will always be needed to assess the size of the market economy. But, confined to that role and put in its proper place, so to speak, it becomes far less important – and certainly not needed nearly as frequently as currently produced. Even logically, a quantitative measure of economic size cannot possibly assess quality of live. We know well what's wrong with GDP-based measures – no need to dwell further on that. (Ronald Coleman, 2008, 23-4)

According to Coleman, GDP is precise only for measuring the size of the market economy and should be used for that function only. The problem in calculating GDP is that it only calculates the value of product based on all the market costs of all factors of production involved. It does not take into consideration

the externalities that have actually become part of the cost of production. Neither does it consider any undesirable or harmful effect from consumption of such product. The failure to include other related costs in the production process and "clean up" costs after the consumption process is the source of criticism against the feasibility of using GDP to measure national welfare or wellbeing. This is one of the reasons why the new index such as genuine progress index must be attempted.

After the so-called "sub-prime crisis" caused by inflating the sub-prime assets took place in the US in 2008 and spread globally, especially in Europe, then French President Nicolas Sarkozy who was not satisfied with GDP and its growth as indicators for economic success appointed two Nobel laureates, Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen to be members of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress in February 2009. The two produced their final report in early 2010. Like Coleman, Stiglitz began by explaining why the GDP was not a good measurement of wellbeing. In an interview to launch the report, he says: "There's no single number that can capture anything as complex as our society. ... So what we argue for is the need for an array of carefully-chosen numbers, with a better understanding of the role of each of those numbers." The report argues that GDP could be misleading as a quality of life index; for example, an increase in fuel consumption would boost growth figures even if it only reflected more unproductive traffic jams and pollution.

Stiglitz added that in the runup to the credit crunch of 2008, many world policy makers had sought to follow the American growth model because it had produced impressive GDP increases for the United States. He suggested that had countries focused instead on plans to increase the median income of households, they might have protected themselves better from the crisis and improved the general wellbeing of their population. New alternative systems should take into account environmental health, safety and education – what Bhutan already calls its Gross National Happiness ("Stiglitz report calls for measure of 'well-being' alongside growth," 2009).

In spite of this evidence, the use of GDP to measure welfare and wellbeing continues as casualties increase. Its attractiveness lies in the fact that it is a single indicator that has been widely used for comparison within and among countries for quite some time, and therefore it is not easy to convince users to shift to alternatives that may be slightly different yet equally beneficial. Another possible reason for the popularity of GDP may be the identification of wellbeing and welfare with wealth which is often taken to be the means to achieve happiness through the accumulation of comfort materials. However, once happiness is defined not as material comfort but as a state of wellbeing resulting from training and developing the mind, like in Buddhist teachings, and once material comfort is regarded as a distraction from attempts to develop one's mind, one sees a glimpse of the possibility of a viable alternative for measuring wellbeing and welfare in a different sense.

Sustainability as a Middle Path Philosophy

Towards the end of the 20th century, it became clear that pursuing material wealth had its own physical limits, the most obvious of which are environmental and ecological. Also, the belief that economic growth can definitely eradicate poverty has become increasingly questionable as the problem surrounding modern poverty is that it is no longer an absolute but rather a relative one caused by increasing income gap. It became apparent that material growth alone cannot contribute to reducing, not to mention eradicating the income gap. On the other hand, social problems seem to be rising globally in spite of continued material growth, which further calls into question the viability of its strong emphasis. Both environmental and social problems have been increasing at such rapid rates that they represent threats to the material growth itself. As such, the call for a different kind of development – a sustainable development – has become much more urgent. However, those who advocate for sustainability must start from the point of human need instead of human greed, following what Gandhi once said: "the world has enough for everyone's need but not everyone's greed." "Human need," therefore, becomes the prerequisite for any talk about sustainability.

Those who advocate for sustainability actually do follow this tradition. In 1987, the United Nations released the Brundtland Report, which defines sustainable development as "development which meets the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own

needs" (ES Global Consulting, n.d.).

It has now been recognized that without environmental and sociopolitical sustainability, the economy is most likely not going to be sustainable on its own. The well-accepted definition for sustainable development nowadays is the creation of environment, social and economic balance. However, among various international forums, a fourth pillar for sustainability has been added, namely that of culture. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity further elaborates the concept by stating that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature; it becomes one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence (UNESCO, 2001).

A key word of the current concept of sustainable development is the "balance" among these four pillars: environment, society, economy and culture. The word "balance" resonates with the words "moderate" and "middle path" of the *Buddha Dhamma*, otherwise known as the teaching of Buddha where the middle path or the middle way plays a core role in all aspects of human life. The "middle way" or *majjhima patipada* in *Buddha Dhamma* is not the middle position between the two extremes as it is commonly understood. In his own words, the Buddha explained the following to monks that followed him:

Dear monks, these two extremes are the ones that those who seek purification must avoid. One is indulgence in *kamasukha* or *sukkha* from acquisition and sensual pleasure. This is the common and low level of *sukha*. It is for common people and not for *ariya* or a noble one. It does not result in any useful thing.

The other is to live in hardship or live a very difficult life, or to live in *dukkha* (or pain). It is not the way for a noble one either. It does not result in any useful thing.

Tathagata or the Accomplished One has already achieved enlightenment. It is the middle way that does not involve the two extremes. It is the way to create the "eye" to see, to create *paññña* to know. It is the way for peace, for ultimate knowledge, for enlightenment and for *nibbāna*.

What is the middle way? It is the way for a noble one consisting of the whole eight parts. They are *sammaditthi* or right understanding, *sammasankappa* or right mental attitude, *samavaca* or right speech, *sammakammata* or right conduct, *sammaajiva* or right livelihood or right means of living, *samavayama* or right effort, *sammasati* or mindfulness, and *sammasamadhi* or right concentration. (Puntasen, 2008)

This middle way is the way that does not involve the two extremes and is not the middle between the two extremes.

The two extremes are

1. *Kamasukkhallikanuyoga* - the extreme of sensual indulgence or extreme hedonism.
2. *Attakilamathanuyoga* - the extreme of self-mortification or extreme asceticism.

Like sustainable development, the middle path serves only as a tool to reach a definite goal. This goal is the eradication of *dukkha* or pain which leads to the attainment of the conditions of emancipation or freedom from all defilements of the mind – the state of being free from pain eventually. Thus, the conditions required for the mind to reach the stage of *nibbāna* is the complete eradication of *dukkha*. However, the concept of sustainable development as has been introduced in the Western world is restricted to the consideration of the output of the development process, without any final goal or outcome. Most of the time sustainable development has been considered as a goal in itself, with the implicit goal for humans to survive "happily." As it is restricted merely to a goal in itself, it does not necessarily imply the relationship between sustainability and happiness or wellbeing.

Unlike sustainable development as conceptualized in the Western world, teachings of the middle path explain further that *dukkha* or pain is mainly caused by *avijja* or ignorance of

things: to be more specific, ignorance about what is *dukkha* itself, ignorance about the causes of *dukkha*, ignorance about the cessation of *dukkha*, and ignorance about the *magga* or the way to end *dukkha*. The tool to combat *avijja* or ignorance is *vijja*, better known as *paññā* – the ability to understand everything in its own nature. *Paññā* can only be acquired through the continuous training of the mind know as *sikkattya* or the threefold training, *adhisilasikkha* (training in high morality), *adhicittasikkha* (training in higher mentality or mental discipline) and *adhipaññasikkha* (training in higher level of *paññā*). This threefold training serves also as *magga* or the path to end *dukkha*. Thus, the middle path in Buddhist Economics contains also a relationship between the mind, happiness, and material production.

The middle path was strongly recommended by the Buddha because without it, *paññā* cannot be generated. Both extremes of sensual indulgence or extreme hedonism and of self mortification or extreme asceticism only result in ignorance. Extreme hedonism tends to lead to excess, while extreme asceticism tends to result in perpetual pain where *paññā* cannot be stimulated. This is why the middle path or moderation has become a necessary condition for the generation of *paññā* which is considered to be the most important tool to end *dukkha* caused by ignorance.

One may safely say that sustainable development conceptualized as a balanced development among the four pillars, namely,

environment, society, economy and culture for sustainable living of human beings can be considered as heading in the same general direction as the middle path philosophy. It can be preliminarily concluded at this point that the concept of sustainable development that moves away from the extreme concept of material growth orientation is moving towards the middle path philosophy available in *Buddha Dhamma*, or the teaching of Buddha.

Unfortunately, in the world where most decision makers believe that "scientific" measurement is the only way to evaluate the application of any policy, there are problems in finding such measurements for sustainable development. So far, there has been no widely accepted indicators to measure the level or even the direction of sustainable development. Various attempts have been made in this direction. Among the most recent one is by Jon Hall (2009), the Director of the Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies, supported by OECD who also organized the World Forum on "Charting Progress, Building Visions, Improving Life" in Busan, Korea during October 27-30, 2009. What is explained below was his view given to the audience in Thailand in July 2009 at Sasin International Business College, Chulalongkorn University. Instead of defining progress, he questioned what should be defined as progress. One suggestion among many others was the balance development of the three components, namely, economy, environment and society which is the same as sustainable development. In the end he suggested that the measure should include the interdependence between the

two systems, namely, the human system and ecosystem or the condition of ecosystem. The set of measurements for the ecosystem condition should include its "health" such as the quality of air, atmosphere, land, fresh water, oceans and seas, and biodiversity. For the human system, it should include culture, economy and governance. The cultural aspect should comprise the creative, expressive, and symbolic aspects of ways of life, including art, crafts, food, games, gardens, literatures, language, music and religions. The economy and government should include the stocks and flows of an economy (income and wealth), democratic participation, access to services, order and safety, political rights, responsiveness, and transparency. The human system must eventually lead to human wellbeing. Such measurements should include health, knowledge and understanding, freedom and subjective wellbeing, individual and social/relational wellbeing, while the economy, governance and culture must support the said wellbeing.

It should be observed that subjective wellbeing has been mentioned for such scientific measurements. However, Jon Hall also admitted that wellbeing is difficult to measure and that it is very difficult to find policy relevance for measures (at least for generalized measurement of life satisfaction). Nevertheless, he indicated the evidence of a strong relationship between subjective wellbeing (happiness) and good physical health. In the end he also admitted that progress – or in this case, sustainability – is only useful as a process, and also questioned the one-directional

aspect of such progress. At this point, it should be apparent how difficult it may be to put the promising idea of sustainable development into actual practice.

The Resurgence of the *Eudaimonic* Tradition of Happiness

In the small and remote Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, however, things have been developing along different lines. It is very difficult to imagine that such a small Kingdom with the population of less than one million can ever successfully compete in producing material growth compared with most material growth-oriented nations. In 1972, the same year that Meadows book *The Limits to Growth* was published, in the Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan, Jigme Singe Wangchuck ascended to the throne at the age of 16 as its King. He cautiously led his country in its development following a new concept currently known as "Gross National Happiness." In response to a journalist from the UK's *Financial Times* in 1987 who remarked that the pace of (material) development in Bhutan was slow, the King said, "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product" (Greenwald, 2004). Also to be noted is the fact that 1987 was the year that the United Nations released the Brundtland Report on sustainable development – an act that may have helped strengthen the former King's position. It should be observed also that although the King stood firmly on the issues that Jon Hall mentioned, he was cognizant of the problem surrounding the measurement of subjective wellbeing in the *eudaimonic* tradition of Aristotle that he himself called "good life."

The King went further in answering Jon Hall's question of the goal of progress: for him, it was progress towards happiness. Since then, the study of happiness has received much greater attention from economists. Even Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman questioned the link between the level of income and happiness (Kahneman, 2000). Richard Layard (2005) the well-known British economist took it further in writing his book on the 'economics of happiness' in which he concluded, "happiness depends on your inner life as much as on your outer circumstance." Like Schumacher, Layard looked to Buddhism for inspiration for an alternative path, and found useful insights that people are adaptable; that they need to cultivate trust, compassion, and positive thinking to overcome envy; and that societies need to concentrate more on "education of the spirit" (UNDP 2007). It is also rather clear that the work of Stiglitz and Sen discussed earlier was also inspired by the GNH arguments. The most difficult part of this concept, however, is still the question of how to measure it, since it is largely a subjective concept with highly complex characteristics.

After introducing the concept of GNH, the former King of Bhutan also provided the guidelines to achieve it based on the four pillars. The fact that Bhutan is a predominantly Buddhist country, his focus was on the conviction that humans are bound by nature to search for happiness, and that this is the single strong desire for every citizen (Thinley, 2007). The four pillars include sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, conservation of the

environment, prevention and promotion of culture, and good governance. Furthermore, GNH is also a balanced approach to development. From the carefully identified four key pillars, the pursuit of economic growth can be balanced out with the goal of preserving the environment and culture (Thinley, 2004). This would possibly be the way to measure progress on all four pillars that Jon Hall tried to develop.

Finally, the GNH Index was successfully developed. While the four pillars serve more as the process, the goal of GNH is gross happiness at the national level. The engineer of this index is Karma Ura (2008) of the Centre for Bhutan Studies. The index was released on November 7, 2008, the coronation day of the fifth King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the son of the previous King, popularly known as King Khesar. It is the measure for collective happiness of the people of Bhutan. It goes beyond individual self-interest which is considered egocentric and therefore unethical. It is a perception of happiness that blossoms through enhanced relationships, arising unbidden when the relationships improve. So, development is about progress in relationships, not of individuals.

GNH is a single number index and its component indicators provide Bhutan with three different levels and types of indicators:

- GNH status indicators - Hundreds of such indicators are calculated from the primary data.

- GNH demographic indicators - They show distribution of GNH dimensions across different social, economic and demographic groups.
- GNH causal and correlation indicators

The GNH indicators have been designed to include nine core dimensions that are regarded as components of happiness in Bhutan. They are selected on normative grounds and equally weighted as intrinsic components of gross national happiness. Within each dimension, several indicators that seem to remain informative across time, with high response rates and relatively uncorrelated, are selected. The nine dimensions of GNH and their related set of indicators are as follows:

1. Psychological wellbeing
   - General psychological distress indicators
   - Emotional balance indicators
   - Spiritual indicators

2. Time use

   An important function of measuring time use is to acknowledge the value of non-work time for happiness – the time available for non-work activities such as sleeping, personal care, community participation, education and learning, religious activities, social and cultural activities, sports and leisure and travel. These diverse activities can enrich life and contribute to levels of happiness.

3. Community vitality
   - Family vitality indicator
   - Safety indicator
   - Reciprocity indicator
   - Trust indicator
   - Social support indicator
   - Socialization indicator
   - Kinship density indicator

4. Cultural diversity and resilience
   - Dialect use indicator
   - Traditional sport indicator
   - Community festival indicator
   - Artisan skill indicator
   - Value transmission indicator
   - Basic precept indicator

5. Health
   - Health status indicator
   - Health knowledge indicator
   - Barriers to health indicator

6. Education
   - Education attainment indicator
   - Dzongkha language indicator
   - Folk and historical literacy indicator

7. Ecological diversity and resilience
   - Ecological degradation indicator
   - Ecological knowledge indicator
   - Afforestation indicator

8. Living Standard
   - Income indicator
   - Housing indicator
   - Food security indicator
   - Hardship indicator

9. Good governance
   - Government performance indicator
   - Freedom indicator
   - Institutional trust indicator

In calculating GNH, a "sufficiency" cutoff point is applied to all indicators. The ones that are at the sufficiency cutoff point and above are considered to indicate wellbeing. The ones below the cutoff point are considered to indicate unhappy situations. The greater distance below the sufficiency point indicates the increasing degree of unhappiness. The proportion of the distance from the sufficiency point will be recorded. Finally, GNH can be calculated from the following relationship:

GNH = 1-Average square distance from the sufficiency cutoff point

It currently appears that GNH is not merely a policy framework of the Bhutanese government but it also has explicit indicators to measure the country's performance that may affect government policy to try to improve the calculated GNH. It is premature to argue against the validity of all these indicators, as they are still in the process of being developed.

However, the Bhutanese government is not content with such an incremental approach. It continues to find ways to instill the values of GNH in the long term in the people of Bhutan. Changing the mindset of the people of Bhutan in the direction of GNH is deemed to be essential. After all, happiness is a subjective value that people can gradually orient towards. In 2009, the Centre for Bhutan Studies was asked by the government to find ways to develop GNH value education in schools (Karma Ura, 2009). Attempts in this direction have continued.

From what we have discussed in this section, it may be seen that, like sustainable development, GNH has been significantly influenced by the middle path philosophy in *Buddha Dhamma*. It has already moved beyond sustainable development in that it has a much clearer vision of the goal that it wants to achieve: GNH is not meant for individuals alone, but for the collective members within the society. It is also ready to face the challenge in trying to measure subjective happiness which is considered to be the most difficult task. Moreover, the country also looks for a transformation into GNH value in the long term through proper

forms of education. All these activities indicate a clear commitment to the *eudaimonic* tradition of happiness, or what Aristotle simply called the "good life."

Sufficiency is Both Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Happiness

Unlike Bhutan where the main emphasis is on GNH, in the Kingdom of Thailand the emphasis in on identifying the process for sustainable development that will eventually lead to happiness from being useful, also known as "*Prayote Sukha*" (similar to that of GNH). In trying to measure GNH, the Centre for Bhutan Studies tried to locate the area of unhappiness by using the concept of sufficiency as a cutoff point, with the implication that any point higher than the cutoff point is already in the realm of happiness. The point or a band of sufficiency is the one that separates the realm of unhappiness from the happy one. Therefore, the concept of "sufficiency" is used as a demarcation between happiness and unhappiness in Bhutan but is used as a process to achieve happiness in Thailand. The commonality of this concept reflects the fact that both GNH of Bhutan and Sufficiency Economy of Thailand are drawn from the middle path philosophy from *Buddha Dhamma*, and the concept of sufficiency is common for both countries in this middle path philosophy.

In the Kingdom of Thailand, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927-2016) who ascended to the throne in 1947, traveled extensively overseas with the Queen as a young married couple.

Many of their destinations gave them the opportunity to learn about the country's development and the state of technological progress at that time. After that, they both visited almost all difficult regions in Thailand and witnessed the suffering of most rural Thai people with their own eyes. In 1961 when the Thai government adopted the first economic development plan as suggested by experts from the US and the World Bank, it was clear that the focus of the plan was to stimulate material growth. The late King conducted his own research and acquired his own empirical evidence, and in 1974, one year after the launching of Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, he had the following to say:

> National development must be carried out step by step, starting with laying the foundation to ensure that the majority of the people have **enough** to live on and to live for as a basic step using economical yet theoretically sound methods and equipments. When the basics are securely established, higher levels of economic growth and development should be promoted. (The National Research Council Committee on Economic Branch, Office of the National Research Council of Thailand, 2004, emphasis added)

His comment seems to suggest that he personally advocates for the development approach that is based first on a stable economic foundation rather than emphasizing growth itself. The word "enough" in above is the key word to understanding the idea of

"sufficiency." Unfortunately, this comment did not seem to have the desired impact on most policy makers in Thailand, as they continued to pursue almost exclusively economic growth, following the advice of foreign experts and Thai economists trained abroad. As the course of development proceeded in this way, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej continued to work on his royal-initiated projects with the goal of promoting sufficiency for all Thais.

This seems to have continued throughout the time of economic growth in Thailand from 1987 onward. At the peak of this growth, in 1994, the King surprised many by announcing a scheme that seemed to contradict Thailand's formula for miraculous growth. He unveiled a model of the self-reliant family farm on which he had begun his experiments a few years earlier (UNDP, 2007). After 1994, in spite of the well-performing economy judged by the measurement of GDP, the King seemed to have foreseen the economic catastrophe that would follow. He cautioned the Thai people every year in his annual public speech on the event of his birthday eve, December 4, to be mindful and to heed the principle of sufficiency. It was unfortunately only during the economic collapse of 1997 that his advice on Sufficiency Economy was heard loud and clear. Yet again, this scenario seemed to have repeated itself in 2008 when the "sub-prime crisis" that began in the US spread rapidly all over Europe and eventually hit Thailand again. This fact indicates that, unlike Bhutan, the Thai government policy had greatly deviated from the principle of sufficiency

advocated by the late King. A possible explanation of why Sufficiency Economy has not made significant progress in Thailand as GNH did in Bhutan might be due to the fact that Thailand operates under a constitutional monarchy, and although they King's advice is highly valued, the development policy depends ultimately on the government. Despite its slow progress, it is timely to consider and discuss the philosophical aspects of Sufficiency Economy as the alternative development paradigm for Thailand as well as the rest of the world.

Sufficiency Economy is officially defined as follows:

> "**Sufficiency Economy**" is a philosophy that stresses the **middle path** as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. This applies to conduct starting from the level of the families, communities, as well as the level of national development and administration so as to accommodate change in line with globalization.
> "**Sufficiency**" means **moderation, reasonableness,** and the need of **self-immunity** for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external shocks. To achieve this, an application of **knowledge** with **due consideration** and **prudence** is essential. In particular, **great care** is needed in the utilization of theories and methodologies for planning and implementation in every step. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen

> the **ethical integrity** of the nation, so everyone, particularly public officials, academics, businessmen at all levels, adheres first and foremost to the principles of **honesty** and **integrity**. In addition, a way of life based on **patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom** and **prudence** is indispensable to create **balance** and be able to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid **socioeconomic, environmental** and **cultural** changes in the world. (Sufficiency Economy Movement Sub-committee, 2007, 7-8, emphasis added)

The emphases above serve to highlight keywords of the systems analysis in the diagram below:

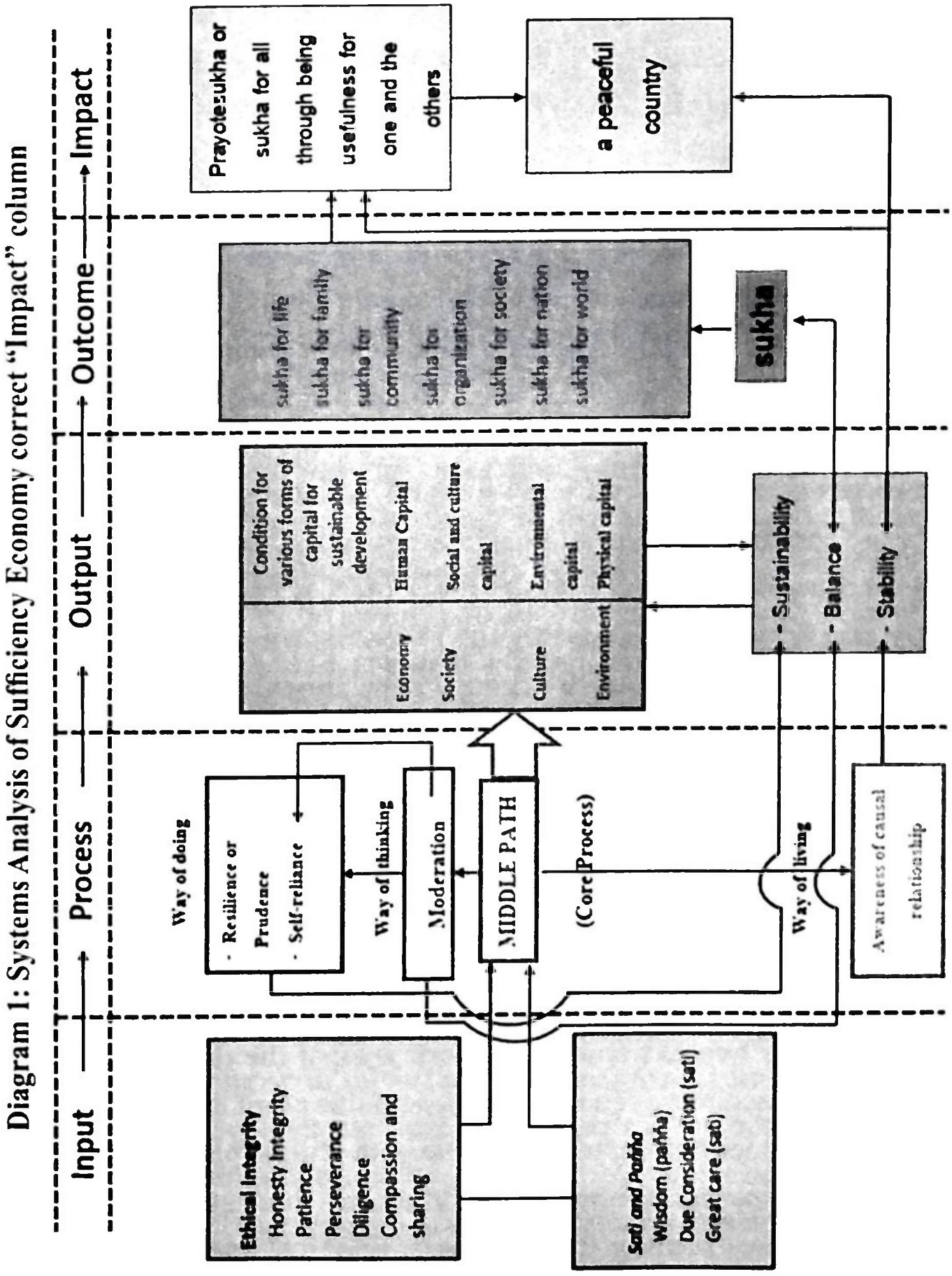
Diagram 1: Systems Analysis of Sufficiency Economy correct "Impact" column
Input
Process
Output
Outcome
Impact
Ethical Integrity
Honesty Integrity
Patience
Perseverance
Diligence
Compassion and sharing
Sati and Pañña
Wisdom (paññā)
Due Consideration (sati)
Great care (sati)
Way of doing
· Resilience or Prudence
· Self-reliance
Way of thinking
Moderation
MIDDLE PATH
(Core Process)
Way of living
Awareness of causal relationship
Condition for various forms of capital for sustainable development
Economy
Human Capital
Society
Social and culture capital
Culture
Environmental capital
Environment
Physical capital
- Sustainability
- Balance
- Stability
sukha for life
sukha for family
sukha for community
sukha for organization
sukha for society
sukha for nation
sukha for world
sukha
Prayoteːsukha or sukha for all through being usefulness for one and the others
a peaceful country

From the above diagram, inputs of this Sufficiency Economy process can be divided into two conditions, namely knowledge and ethical integrity. Knowledge consists of wisdom or *paññā* and due consideration that can be interpreted as *sati* or mindfulness and great care that also implies *sati*. This necessary condition of knowledge can be interpreted as *paññā* working under the control of mindfulness or *sati*. This condition will ensure that any best possible result of knowledge or understanding is one that is generated through mindfulness. This, in turn, becomes necessary for the cultivation of ethical integrity – the other condition for the process of Sufficiency Economy. This is because without *paññā* being controlled by *sati*, ethical integrity will not make much sense to those who are strongly wealth-oriented. If *paññā* is controlled by *sati*, it will be very difficult to justify the accumulation of wealth at all cost. On the other hand, ethical integrity can be classified further into honesty and integrity, patience, perseverance, diligence and compassion. These are the five qualities of a person who acts with compassion in an ethical and honest way not only for his own good but also for the good of others.

The condition of ethical integrity is sufficient for continuing the process that can be called the middle path – the path that does not involve the two extremes that work against the development of *paññā*. It becomes even more evident at this point that Sufficiency Economy does belong to the middle path philosophy explained in *Buddha Dhamma*. Within this middle path, there are three related sub-processes starting from the most practical and easy one, the

"way of doing" or being resilient or prudent. The "way of thinking" is the understanding of the concept of sufficiency or moderation and the regular practicing of the concept until it becomes "the way of living" – the component known as awareness of causal relationships. These three components are formed into one process known as the middle path.

Resilience or prudence in one's "way of doing" is the first step in the direction of Sufficiency Economy. This is because there can be various motivations for being resilient. The main purpose for that is the ability to face unforeseeable events and still be able to flourish in the long run. The result of this ability is a long-term benefit through avoiding short term risks. It may be called a risk aversion attitude or behavior, and serves purely for the sake of self-protection. There are also other methods for doing so. However, once one begins with the sub-process of resilience or prudence, it can be rightly considered that such person has already moved in the direction of Sufficiency Economy. Hence, the practice of resilience or prudence alone for whatever motivation should be considered as "partial practice" of Sufficiency Economy.

The real understanding of Sufficiency Economy comes from the fact that actually sufficiency means moderation – a natural law for optimal living with regard to life itself, for all living things. Anything that is either too little or too much is not beneficial for any life, the point of optimality must be the one that lies between the two points. For example, having too little food is not good for

life and neither is having too much. The moderate amount of food is good for the body and the life involved. We can think of almost anything relating to life in these terms: too little or too much rest, too little or too much exercise, too little clothing or too much clothing. This, of course, applies also to too little wealth and too much wealth. If a person's mind is controlled by ignorance and/or greed, he would try to accumulate more than what is optimal for his life out of insecurity. This unnecessary accumulation has become part of the global crises nowadays. It requires *paññā* controlled by *sati* to be able to determine the point at which having something is optimal for one's life. If sufficiency or moderation is understood this way, it can be considered a "way of thinking," and such practice an act of "comprehension." With this understanding, the practice of resilience or prudence will be undertaken with a clear sense of the concept of Sufficiency Economy. A person should be able to understand in addition that the practice of self-reliance is the best way to achieve resilience or prudence.

With such a thorough understanding of Sufficiency Economy, a person may cultivate good causes and good supporting factors in order to achieve good results in return. Through such practice, he will come to understand the "awareness of causal relationships" from his good deed, which is the last process in the Middle Path of Sufficiency Economy. Having experienced prior good consequences, a person logically is inclined to continue this practice as his "way of living." This level of practice of the Sufficiency Economy may also be called an "inspiration." The

understanding and practicing of ethical integrity as a way of living with the aim to avoid any undesirable results will most likely yield only right livelihood. It can be seen as an ideal way to live one's life.

All the three components discussed are part of the process of the Middle Path, that will lead to the output from the Sufficiency Economy process. The output is basically sustainability of the four components, namely, economy, society, culture and environment. Output of this nature is the same as sustainable development that consists of the balanced development of the four pillars, namely, economy, society, culture and environment. It is also similar to the three out of the four pillars of GNH, namely, economy and society, culture and environment. However, GNH considers good governance as the fourth pillar. Good governance can also serve as one component of the process for sustainable development that eventually leads to gross national happiness. As for Sufficiency Economy, it is the process leading to the output of sustainable development in such a way that the economy, society, culture, and environment are sustainable, balanced and stable.

This output of sustainable development can be interpreted as the process that results in at least the maintenance of all forms of capital or the increase of some or all forms of the following: human capital, social capital, environmental capital and physical capital. Human capital implies increase in human knowledge, skill as well as work satisfaction that would lead to increase in

productivity. Sufficiency Economy considers human capital to be the most important one among the four, as it places greatest emphasis on human happiness. Social capital is the capital that results from human interaction in ways that capitals can be generated. In this respect, culture is also considered as part of a social capital. In the West, for instance, trust is considered as one of the most important social capital because it results in significant reduction of transaction costs in the market. In Thailand, apart from trust, the more important aspects of social capital are compassion, mutual help or assistance and unity or social cohesion. These various aspects of social capital will contribute to the increase in productivity of social organizations. Unlike capitalism that regards physical capital as the only relevant form, Sufficiency Economy ranks physical capital as the least important one as it prioritizes human and social capitals. Environmental and physical capitals which include financial capital can always be regenerated if human and social capitals are most efficient in the production process. Therefore, Sufficiency Economy ranks human capital, social capital, environment capital and physical capital respectively. The increase in at least one form of capital while the rest remain the same implies sustainable output of this system. However, sustainability is often not the final goal as living things, especially humans, want happy lives. Such happy lives can be gained from a balanced living. Things that are out of balance tend to lead to problems and will most likely not result in happiness. On the other hand, moderation actually implies balance as well as an optimal or a happy life.

As the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy can be adopted for practical purposes at all levels of every unit, starting from an individual, a family, a community, an organization, a society, a nation and the world, in the end, the outcome will be the achievement of happiness of all of these related units. At the individual level, the outcome will be a happy life or a "good life." At the family level, the outcome will be a happy family. At the community level, the outcome will be a happy community, and so on to national and global levels. At the national level, the outcome will be similar to GNH. However, Sufficiency Economy's emphasis is rather on inputs and process in order to ensure that sustainable development will be the output, and that the outcome of moderation will lead to a balanced and happy life. Additionally, Sufficiency Economy does not stop at happiness of the unit who practices the concept as there also exist unhappy persons who for some reason do not or cannot practice Sufficiency Economy at the levels of resilience or prudence and moderation. The question of stability arises as vulnerable ones remain in the community or society, ones who would need external support to reduce their own suffering or unhappiness. The additional concept for this situation is "*prayote sukha*" or happiness from being useful to others. If the concept of awareness of causal relationships is practiced as a way of living, it will bring about happiness not only for the one who practices it but also for others who are still suffering or unhappy for various reasons. If an increasing number of persons constantly do good things not only for themselves but also for all the others, the community and

the society will achieve stability from "*prayote sukha*" or happiness from being useful to others. In this way, sustainability, balance, and stability will all be attained goals. This last part would be the impact of Sufficiency Economy.

It can be seen that unlike sustainable development where only the output is emphasized without much elaboration of the process and the outcome of happiness, Sufficiency Economy starts from inputs, process, output and outcome that is happiness, as well as its impact of achieving happiness through being useful to oneself and to others. While GNH discusses output and outcome more clearly than sustainable development, it only considers good governance in the broadest sense as the process with no clear inputs. Therefore, Sufficiency Economy can be considered as complementing GNH by providing a more complete picture of the systems analysis.

In terms of actual application, GNH has been more advanced than Sufficiency Economy. Apart from being the idea initiated by the revered former King of Bhutan at the time of absolute monarchy, the concept of GNH is rather simple and more straightforward, and therefore can be understood more easily. The philosophy of Sufficiency Economy is much more complex especially as it places stronger emphasis on the inputs and the process than the output, outcome and its consequential impact. It is difficult to comprehend even for Thai Buddhist who do not have thorough knowledge of the *Buddha Dhamma*, and may be

the most important reason for the delay of its actual application in comparison with that of GNH of Bhutan.

The late King Bhumibol of Thailand proposed the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy for all Thais and not only for Buddhist Thais, even though it is drawn directly from Buddhism. The common ethical ground of Sufficiency Economy available in all religions are honesty and integrity, patience, perseverance, diligence and compassion with strong emphasis on sufficiency – ethical values that are mostly already practiced in the daily lives of people of all faiths.

The part of Sufficiency Economy that is most difficult to embrace seems to be its renunciation of human acquisitiveness or greed. The fact that acquisitiveness has been propagated by capitalism for more than five centuries makes it difficult to change people's mindset within a short period of time. This would also explain the slow progress of Sufficiency Economy in Thailand, in spite of many favorable factors available within the country itself. The study of Boonyarattanasoontorn and Komoltha (2009) revealed that in the case of Thailand, the national and local governments are the main obstacles in adopting Sufficiency Economy for practical purposes. This is because most political parties subscribe to business politics dominated by the ideology of capitalism. As Sufficiency Economy tends to work against business interest in politics, politicians tend to only give lip service to its implementation. At the same time, local politics

tend to operate in the image of national politics, and national politicians tend to use local politicians to help them win the national election.

Despite the dim prospect, there seems to be hope, as the private business sector and civil society are more active in adopting the Sufficiency Economy philosophy. They have done this out of their own necessities and have found it to be useful for solving their own problems. The main problem was due to the 1997 economic crisis in Thailand as most businesses suffered from severe loss close to the point of bankruptcy. Adopting the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy helped improve their businesses significantly, and many have been extraordinarily successful. At the same time, most farmers with small land holdings in Thailand also suffered loss from the practice of monoculture. Adopting a new theory of agriculture – a practical part of Sufficiency Economy in farming activities suggested by the late King Bhumibol since 1984 – helped the farmers to regain and improve their livelihood significantly. Successful cases have been replicated, and many of them have grouped into Sufficiency Economy communities. These are the two sectors that have made some advancement in the direction of Sufficiency Economy philosophy.

The military coup in Thailand in September 2006 justified itself partly through the criticism of business politics which was given as a reason to overthrow the elected government of Thaksin

Shinawatra. The action of the coup also meant that the 1997 Constitution had to be abolished. The new Constitution of 2007 proclaimed Sufficiency Economy as the model for national development. An autonomous organization under the name of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC) was established to evaluate the incumbent government and to make sure that the it acts within the objectives of the Constitution of 2007. On that basis, indicators used to evaluate the performance of the incumbent government on the issue of Sufficiency Economy development have already been developed in Thailand. Such set of indicators was completed in 2007 (Working Group on Academic Affairs, NESAC, 2007). Unfortunately, such indicators have not been used for the intended evaluation, as the elected regime returned and amended the law to limit NESAC's responsibility to only providing advisory service to the government.

In the area of education, Dr. Priyanut Dhammapiya, former Director of the Sufficiency Economy Unit, Bureau of the Crown Property under the guidance and support of H.E. Dr. Chirayu Israngura Na Ayuthaya, former Director General of the Bureau of the Crown Property, and with the cooperation from the Ministry of Education, has led the formal curricula design of basic education for schools in Thailand to operate under the direction of Sufficiency Economy for all levels (12 years) since 2007. Presently (2016), around 20,000 schools all over Thailand have successfully adopted Sufficiency Economy curricula. Not much more progress regarding the application of Sufficiency

Economy can be claimed in Thailand other than what has been indicated above.

Unlike the GNH movement in Bhutan which already has its index, all related indicators as well as a long-term plan to instill GNH value into the country's education, the Sufficiency Economy in Thailand has made considerably less progress. Nevertheless, both GNH of Bhutan and Sufficiency Economy of Thailand have laid some firm foundation for further development in the direction of Buddhist economics.

Buddhist Economics May Save this World from Consumerism[2]

Buddhist Economics is generally defined as "the subject that is derived from the lessons of the Buddha's discoveries on his path to enlightenment to explain economic activities with the aim for both individuals and society to achieve peace and tranquility under resource constraints" (Puntasen, 2005).

The difference between Buddhist Economics and mainstream economics reflects different paradigms of human nature. Under the scientific materialist paradigm, mainstream economics observes that each human being normally follows his self-interest. Economics also adopts the Darwinian Theory of "the survival of

[2] This section is drawn mostly from Puntasen, Apichai. "Buddhist Economics: Evolution, Theories and Its Application to Various Economic Subjects" *The Chulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Special Issue 1 (2008) : 2-104.

the fittest" to imply that competition leads to progress. Hence, the core values of mainstream economics (more popularly known as "capitalism") are "self-interest" and "competition." Because of such development of thought, mainstream economics defines the pursuit of self-interest as a "rational behavior" and competition as factors that contribute to an increased generation of utility. The thought behind Buddhist economics is Buddhism, with the clear understanding that for all living things, their existence is never without *dukkha* or suffering. Such suffering or pain is basically caused by changes involving aging, illness and eventual death. For animals with the highest level of mental development like human beings, additional *dukkha* or suffering can also arise if their minds are controlled by defilements such as *kilesa* or stimulation caused by greed and *avijja* or ignorance. Those who have *vijja* or *paññña* will understand that there is no sense in inflicting more pain to others, since doing so does not bring about one's happiness. Most of the time such actions will end up causing them unhappiness as well. On the contrary, helping others to reduce their pain will more likely result in happiness for those who can do so. On the said basis, Buddhist economics advocates for non-self (since all things are changing at all times, including the "self" itself) compassion and cooperation.

In a system of capitalism combined with industrialism and consumerism, one can visualize growth without end. Nevertheless, the increase of economic growth is limited by the amount of non-renewable resources available and the globe's carrying capacity

for waste from production and consumption. In reality, pushing for more production will turn into an unsustainable downward-spiral resulting in more waste generation and resource depletion causing environmental degradation and eventually human self-destruction.

As such, because of the nature of capitalism coupled with industrialism and consumerism, consumption-efficiency becomes key for the survival of humanity in a foreseeable future. Yet, this issue cannot be discussed in a meaningful way in the framework of mainstream economics. I believe that only Buddhist Economics can deal with this key concept in a meaningful way, thereby possibly saving humanity from self-destruction.

Efficiency of Consumption

Efficiency of consumption is similar to that of production, as a consumption process can be analyzed in the same way as the production process. Consumption and production can be viewed from the same vantage point as they are both economic processes, and the understanding of the efficiency of production will inform the understanding of the efficiency of consumption as well. The fact that mainstream economics cannot explain efficiency of consumption as clearly as that of production is because the goal of consumption has already been set to maximize pleasure or utility rather than to optimize consumption efficiency.

A further question to be raised is how one may consume without involving pleasure. Buddhist Economics can provide the answer to this by considering the meanings of the words "needs" and "wants." It can be traced back to the explanation of Abraham Maslow where needs are classified into three levels: physiological, social, and moral needs. In *Buddha Dhamma*, there is only one form of needs – physiological ones. The other levels in Maslow's hierarchy are not needed. They all can be accounted for through the understanding of *paññā*.

To summarize, according to *Buddha Dhamma*, consumption is needed to relieve the pain of physiological needs, and resources needed for the development of the mind is to be distinguished from the consumption for desires and wants (*kammasukha*). If a person has sufficient *paññā* to understand that *kamasukha* is in fact *dukkha*, that person will understand that consumption for *kamasukha* is not really needed. Consumption informed by needs can be considered the most efficient and it can minimize resources used for consumption.

The ultimate goal of most human beings is to be completely free from *dukkha* or to reach the stage of *nibbāna*. The most direct way to *nibbāna* is through the middle path. Consumption to satisfy desire or craving is not conducive to the development of the mind. It only relieves craving temporarily, but stimulates a greater craving in the future. It also promotes excessive use of limited natural resources. Thus, it does not bring about true

sukha. Such consumption is clearly inefficient. At the same time consumption that is inadequate to maintain a healthy body and a healthy mind cannot be considered as efficient consumption either since it does not optimize the output of *sukha*.

Therefore, efficient consumption[3] is consumption according to the principle of the middle path or *majhima patipada*. This type of consumption cannot be meaningfully analyzed by mainstream economics as there is no analytical tool available for doing so. Without such a tool, one easily misunderstands and is easily misled. It should be observed that a certain level of *paññа* is necessary for consuming according to the principle of the middle path. As a result, *paññа* is a crucial factor for the most efficient consumption: that is, the least use of resources given the goal of being free from *dukkha*. The mainstream economic term that is closest to the concept of efficient consumption is cost effectiveness. It is similar to the meaning of efficiency of production but seen from a different vantage point.

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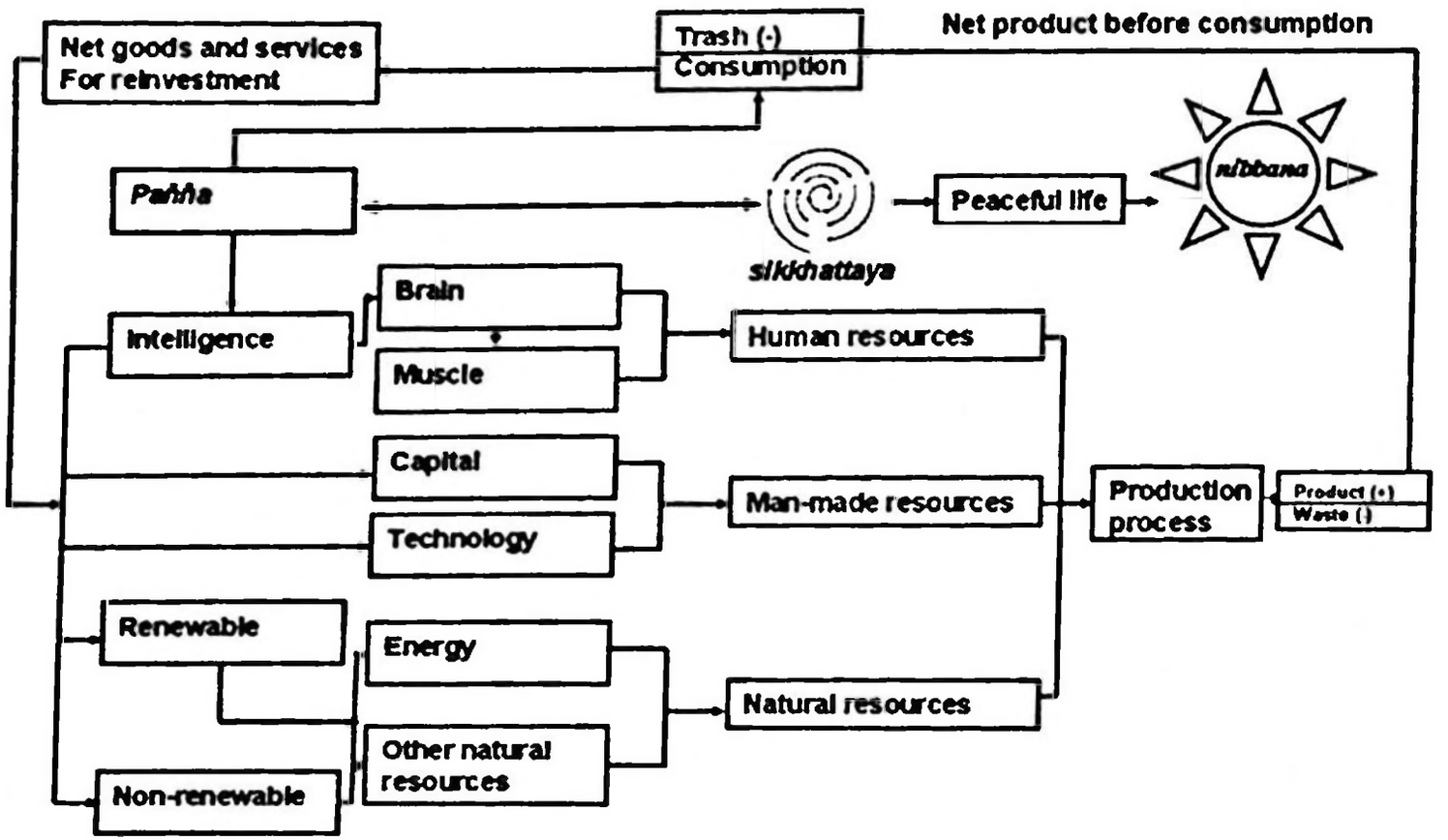
[3] It may also be called "sufficient consumption" as sufficiency also means moderation. Moderation is a natural law that governs all forms of life. Anything that is too little or too much is not optimal for life; the point of moderation is the optimal point for life in that specified time and circumstance. Hence consumption efficiency is the same as sufficient consumption.

Combined Production and Consumption for Sustainable Development and Increased Wellbeing

Having discussed efficient consumption from the point of view of Buddhist Economics, one can link it with efficient production. This linkage will demonstrate the conditions for sustainable development as well as the improvement of wellbeing in a society. It should now be evident that wellbeing or *sukha* does not result from consumption. Consumption only serves as a process to provide the basic necessities and to eliminate the pain due to their absence. Without this level of consumption (sufficiency), there would be a negative impact on the further development of *samādhi* and *paññā*. Consumption beyond sufficiency will stimulate *tanhā* (craving or more desire). Apart from being the cause for *dukkha* or suffering or pain, excessive consumption will also lead to a wasteful use of resources. Consumption only serves as a necessary condition that enables us to live according to *majhima patipada* or the middle path. The true wellbeing or *sukha* can only result from the development of *paññā* through the rigorous training of *sikkhattaya*.

Having gained a clearer understanding of these related components in Buddhist Economics (production, consumption and wellbeing or *sukha*), Diagram 2 is used to illustrate how one can achieve the conditions for sustainable development and the improvement of wellbeing through the development of the mind toward *nibbāna*.

Diagram 2: Consumption and Production Theories of Buddhist Economics: The system of production and consumption providing the conditions for sustainable development and promotion of a peaceful life.



When net goods and services produced are more than enough to maintain the existing system of production, sustainable development and the reduction of conflict result in a more peaceful body and mind. Excess production can be used to reduce the pain and suffering of those who need it. With the help of technology, production efficiency can be improved.

The above diagram demonstrates the interaction of production and consumption in Buddhist Economics that can eventually lead to a peaceful life and eventually *nibbāna* – the state of mind that is free from all defilements – and sustainable development on the production side. *Paññā* is the mode of production in the sense that it controls all input factors ranging from human resources to man-made and natural resources. All these resources can be further divided into brain and muscle power for human resources, and energy and other natural resources for natural resources. Man-made resources are the product of human intelligence and energy and other resources that can be either renewable or non-renewable. *Paññā* will in turn control human intelligence in a way that man-made resources are produced only in creative and positive ways, and natural resources should be used in such a way that non-renewable resources are consumed minimally. All these are aimed at producing products most needed for sustaining lives with minimum amount of harmful waste. Production in this way is considered to be the most efficient; it is known as sufficiency production in Buddhist Economics.

It can be seen from this diagram that the first part of the consumption process yields net products to be used in consumption, with the assumption that part of the products can be used to clean up waste from the production process. The second part is waste resulting from the consumption process itself. Consumption in Buddhist Economics is not for the sake of "satisfaction" as explained by mainstream economics but rather for the maintenance

of the physical needs of human beings as well as for the physical production process to continue on its course. The goal of the whole production process is to produce wellbeing that eventually leads to the state of *nibbāna*. The main emphasis in this diagram is a circular flow of goods and services for the maintenance of the whole production process. The nature of this flow will indicate whether the system is sustainable or not.

The real wellness of human beings only depends on *sikkhattaya* which is a separate process but is directly related to *paññā*. *Paññā* also controls production and consumption processes in this diagram as already discussed. Also to be observed is the two-way arrowhead between *sikkhattaya* and *paññā*. It demonstrates the dynamism between the two concepts. They represent the possibility of solving the current crisis that is causing great damage to resources and the environment on earth in both the production and consumption processes.

Unlike GNH and Sufficiency Economy, the ultimate goal of Buddhist Economics does not stop at happiness or wellbeing that has already advanced into a spiritual realm beyond the worldly pleasure. It aims at the state of *nibbāna* in which the mind will be completely liberated and free from defilements. It is not an easy process that every human being can achieve without many supporting preconditions. Yet each of us can attempt to approach this ultimate stage of spiritual wellbeing. Like Sufficiency Economy, Buddhist Economics puts more emphasis

on the process that leads to spiritual wellbeing. The process can be classified into three sub-processes already discussed above.

The first sub-process, production efficiency has been designed to be a firm foundation for other sub-processes. Having *paññā* instead of capital as the mode of production, efficiency in this case goes much beyond the concept of minimizing inputs for maximum output. It must be a global one in the sense that external diseconomy cannot be allowed. If external diseconomy cannot be avoided, it must be kept at a minimum, or alternatively such process should be terminated before it is started. What is meant by global efficiency is that the process must generate all four capitals – human, social, environment and physical – at the same time, especially human and/or social capital, while at least preserving the environment and/or physical capital. The next and the crucial sub-process, which is both the key and rather unique to Buddhist Economics, is consumption efficiency or sufficiency consumption. The consumption of output at this level must be slightly more than what is required for survival and meets the four basic needs – food, clothing, housing and medication. It must cover the cost of the process to facilitate the training of the human mind for further development (Phra Brahma-Gunabhorn-P.A. Payutto, 2008). This level of sufficiency consumption is similar to what Aristotle takes to be a component of the "good life." The next and the most important sub-process is the process of the training of the mind itself through *sikkhattaya,* the threefold training of *paññā, sila* and *smadhi.* Training of this nature is only to be found in

Buddhism. It is the last sub-process that will help to purify and calm the mind so that it may concentrate to a state of clarity. This is the state of *nibbāna*. At this stage, the mind is free from all defilements, the ultimate goal of Buddhist Economics. Without any attempt at improving the existing situation dominated by consumerism under the ideology of capitalism, degeneration and self-destruction almost seem to be inevitable. Following what has been discussed, a viable alternative is to develop a "global *paññā*" according to Buddhist Economics as rapidly as possible through sustainable development, using GNH and Sufficiency Economy as the bridge leading to this new development.

Conclusion

This paper began by pointing out that spiritual wellbeing or the "good life" was considered the goal of economic activities since the time of ancient Greek civilization. Aristotle further elaborated the "good life" as a flourishing life with little more material than what is necessary for survival. The "good life" for Aristotle is a moral life of virtue through which human beings attain happiness. Therefore, the relevant economic dimension in this regard is to produce enough materials to meet the basic human needs for attaining happiness or the "good life". Aristotle seems to have well understood that happiness is a state of mind rather than physical pleasure or material comfort.

The world has only acknowledged the alternative paradigm of sustainable development since 1987. Coincidentally, this was

followed by the announcement of GNH of Bhutan to the world in the same year. Sufficiency Economy in Thailand contributes more in this direction by incorporating necessary and sufficient conditions of inputs and a more elaborate process. The two will eventually serve as a solid foundation for understanding Buddhist Economics and its clear path to *nibbāna*. Under the present circumstances of deteriorating resources and environment of the existing globalized world, such understanding of human life is quite crucial to the survival of humanity itself. The race toward destruction and the attempts to revive the existing situation is still ongoing. It is the same race for more advanced *paññā* or *vijja* against increasing *avijja* or ignorance caused by rising materialism partially supported by rapid technological progress. The survival of humanity in the long run is still at risk.

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Negotiating *Dhamma* amid Uncertain Democratization: A Perspective on Myanmar's Buddhist Responses to Sociopolitical Change

Lowell Skar[1]

Abstract

This essay examines some ways that the Buddhist monastic community (*sangha*) in Myanmar has been part of the political transition in that country after 2010. It relates these recent Buddhist-state interactions to deeper developments in Myanmar society and culture, especially those from the early 20th century. It argues that current developments in the Buddhist *sangha* and Myanmar's political transition toward democracy are part of an ongoing and uncertain negotiation process. These negotiations are between a new, hybrid, and still embryonic democratically-elected government constrained by military power and diverse evolving forms of Buddhist organization and practice. Both are entangled within an anxious and fractious society that is experiencing uncertain socioeconomic

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changes and conflicted transnational forces. The negotiations of a diverse Buddhist community thus have complex and unresolved relations to Myanmar's society and its fledgling democratization.

Keywords: Myanmar Buddhism, sociopolitical change, nationalist monks

Introduction

Buddhism and politics have had complex and sometimes confusing relations in Myanmar. During the last decade, international media have shown divergent images that are hard to reconcile and puzzling. Familiar images from August 2007 depicted hundreds of monks in Myanmar cities protesting the authoritarian government of the time and promoting democracy before being crushed by the military a month later. In June 2012, in the wake of violence against Rohingya people in Rakhine state promoted by some monks and in the aftermath of the 2012 by-elections won by the National League for Democracy [NLD] and discussion of democratization, the July 2013 *Time* magazine cover depicts the firebrand monk U Wirathu with the caption "The Face of Buddhist Terror." More recently, a landslide election victory by the NLD and its Nobel Peace Prize winning leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in November 2015 occurred despite nationalist monks advocating votes for the military-backed party. Moreover, since the new NLD-led government came to power in April 2016, but especially since August 2017, monks have been accused of involvement in the Myanmar military's violent expulsion of some 750,000 Rohingya from Rakhine state, while many critics lament that Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's State Counsellor, has offered little condemnation or equivocal responses to these events. And in June 2018, after Facebook shut down the accounts of several hardline monks and a nationalist Buddhist organization just days after meeting with Myanmar government

officials and NGOs, citing their divisive hate speech, these banned monks and their supporters publicly protest the NLD government's role in limiting their free speech, while also seeking ways around the Facebook ban. What are we to make of these episodes? What do they say about the relations of politics and Buddhism in Myanmar? Rather than providing a clear view of state-*sangha* relations in Myanmar or between democracy and Buddhism, these contrasting images confound presumptions and expectations of their relations, raising more questions than providing answers. Their puzzling nature has two main sources. First, they seem to undercut common views of Buddhists in Myanmar as being peace-loving promoters of democracy like many saw on their TV screens in September 2007. Second, they question whether a democratically-elected government headed by the Nobel Peace Prize winning leader and human rights promoter can bring about a peaceful and harmonious society based on respect for minority rights and religious freedom – or at least to clearly condemn unjustified anti-Muslim violence and ethnic cleansing.

Some of our puzzlement may dissipate if we remind ourselves that Buddhism, politics, and democratization in Myanmar are as complex, messy, diverse, uneasy, and multifaceted as is Myanmar's rapidly changing society. The above divergent images and the stories behind them point, moreover, to richer possible stories of their relations, ones which are grounded on recognizing a more diverse set of roles of the Buddhist *sangha* in Myanmar's current transition than presented in most media accounts or which are

part of the public imagination. To understand these richer stories of Buddhism's complex roles in a changing Myanmar, more attention to historical and cultural contexts is warranted, and that attention may need to recognize their entanglement in messier sociopolitical processes. When Buddhism is understood as part of Myanmar's remarkable, but fitful, transitions toward a kind of hybrid military-democratic government amid dramatic socioeconomic changes that are also open to fractious and ambiguous links to the rest of the world, we can better see Buddhism as more complex than many familiar storylines normally allow.

While many observers admired Myanmar's moves from a military dictatorship toward democracy in recent years, these changes did not repair deep communal conflicts between Buddhists, Muslims and other ethnic groups in Myanmar. Firebrand monks continue their anti-Muslim hate campaigns even though state agencies, the State Buddhist Council, and even Facebook condemn them. Like the rest of Myanmar society and its fledgling democratically-elected hybrid government, the Buddhist *sangha* in Myanmar is not unified or able to speak with one voice, but is part of an evolving Burmese society. The *sangha* is no less messy, diverse, and uneasy about the changes going on in the country than the laypeople who support its monks. And the public ties to the *sangha* and to the new government are no less fraught than they have been in the past. The new government is nominally run by an elected parliament chosen in November 2015 filled overwhelmingly with NLD representatives, but headed by Daw Aung San Suu

Kyi who is serving as the Supreme Councillor, since she is constitutionally barred from being named President. The powers of the elected government are also constitutionally limited, with the military retaining control over three key ministries – Defence, Border, and Home Affairs – as well as being guaranteed 25% of the seats in parliament, and its Commander-in-chief retaining power over the President. Myanmar's democracy is limited in many ways, and highly constrained by the military.

This essay explores some of the ways that the Buddhist monastic community in Myanmar has been part of the sociopolitical reforms undertaken in that country in the last decade. It relates these involvements to wider developments in Myanmar society and culture, and touches on earlier 20th century developments and dynamics in Burmese history. The research is based on examining a wide range of journals, videos, news reports, scholarly analyses, social media tied to Myanmar monks and political economy, as well as a series of interviews with several dozen monks at 16 separate visits to monks and monastic organizations in the Mandalay and Yangon area in 2016.[2] The essay argues that current dynamic roles of the Buddhist *sangha* in Myanmar's political transition are part of a continuing and fitful negotiation

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[2] This research received funding gathered by Professor Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond for a project called "Myanmar's Buddhist Sangha: Responses to Sociopolitical Change since 2010." I am very thankful for his generosity. He selected my assistant, Dr. Soe Thuzar Myint, who gathered a variety of resources in late 2015 and early 2016.

process that has been going on between a new and still embryonic elected government heavily constrained by the military and evolving forms of Buddhist organization and practice at a time of great uncertainty and uneasiness. These claims are grounded on the notion that the identities and ideas like state, *sangha*, democracy are fluid, dynamic and negotiable – neither as innate as claimed by nationalists nor as fixed and essential as promoted by some monastic or government sources. In this time of change in Myanmar, the *sangha* is as the various parts of the *sangha* do, so paying some attention to the diversity and variety of various parts of Buddhism in Myanmar is important to understanding their evolving roles in the current transition.

By providing some historical context to the two episodes in Burma a century apart, we can better compare how the Buddhist *sangha* were part of political developments in the 1910s-1940s and how it has been part of Myanmar's transition during the past decade.

The structure of this paper is as follows. After a brief look at recent approaches to analyzing religion and democratization, I present a historical context of key ways that politics and Buddhism have been entangled and evolved in modern Burma in a complex negotiation process. I next examine some of the views of some monks and monastic organizations in Myanmar in 2015-6, and conclude by examining some of the dynamics between Buddhist *sangha* and political developments between 2007 and 2018.

Religion, Politics, and Democratization

Religion and politics have long been conceptualized separately, but in fact they are interdependent spheres of modern life. Many scholars used this conceptual separation until the 1980s to argue that modernization processes would lead to the separation of religious institutions from the state and the privatization of religion, and that this would be seen in a global decline in religion's social and political importance. This "secularization paradigm" expected religion to fade from the public sphere as nations modernized. Because this has been a key tenet of the 20th century social sciences, religion's roles in politics have been understudied. However, since the 1980s many were surprised at the continued value of religion in peoples' lives and in how they still shape political movements. Contrary to the expectations of the secularization paradigm, many have noticed a widespread resurgence of religion, and a strong role of religion as a political actor in many countries. José Casanova noted this fact more than 20 years ago, writing that "religion continues to have and will likely continue to have a public dimension" (Casanova, 1994, 66).

The current increase in various forms of spirituality and religiosity can be seen in how many religious organizations openly seek to articulate viewpoints on many political and social issues and to have political impact in many countries. Religious actors and forces are now involved in many political issues, processes and controversies. This "return" of religion in both politics and international relations has been confirmed by recent research.

A new perspective has come to realize that a simple dichotomy of state and religion cannot make sense of the complexity of recent changes. Religion remains an important part of political processes, both by stressing that there is more than one relevant interpretation of modernization and by noting that religion can and does play a role in political changes. Now governments, scholars, analysts and observers agree that religion is a significant domestic and international political actor in today's world, both because it is an important form of identity and belonging, and because of the impact of global processes, which have expanded the channels, pressures, and agents via which norms are diffused through transnational and international networks and interactions. These developments have led religious actors to pursue diverse political goals nationally and internationally as tied to concerns of the economic, social, and political consequences of globalization. Meanwhile, in many countries, the state plays a major role in shaping, if not determining, the limits of religious experience, by regulating aspects of religious belief, practice, property, education, and/or law (Kunkler and Leininger, 2011). The understandings of the relations between democratization and religion have also changed over time. A common assumption in the social sciences has been that modernization, democratization, and secularization were part of any process of political development. As such, many studies on religion and democratization once focused on aspects of religious traditions and often stressed that some of these traditions are more democratic (Christianity) while others are more anti-democratic (Islam). Several decades

of development have moved the study of the role of religion in democratic or political changes beyond the presumption of secularization to a recognition that religion matters to the state.

There are three major ways that religion and democratization have been related in recent research. First, the relations between religion and democratization are now seen as being both dialectical and interactive. Recent studies have argued that *state–religion relations*, more than *religious traditions*, may influence democracy (Kunkler and Leininger 2009). Second, since religions are creative parts of society and are constantly changing, their relations with democratization can also vary over time. This means that political actors and religious entities can only usefully be discussed in terms of specific contexts. Scholars now often examine how state institutions and actors interact with religious organizations and actors, recognizing the diversity and complexity of relations between religion and the state, especially the government. Beyond the commonly assumed tensions between religion and the state, the two may also show forms of competition, adaptation, and cooperation. Third, while earlier studies analyzed how religious beliefs or affiliations shaped political outcomes, including those related to democratization, now scholars attend more to specific political contexts and how they affect the roles of religious entities in democratization processes. By recognizing that state and religious actors may play multiple and complex roles and also work at dierent levels, it is important to note that religion works through

scholars, associations, clergy, laypeople, and educational institutions. When democratization is seen as a complex and evolving process involving diverse types of actors and activities beyond just what the political elites are doing or the ways that authoritarian rule ends, we can find room to include analyses of how state interacts with religious ideas, individuals and religious institutions in our explanations.

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2015) has provided a new way to think about religion and governance that I will apply to recent developments in Myanmar. She distinguishes between "expert religion," "official religion," and "lived religion," in order to better understand religiopolitical realities. Taking Buddhism in Myanmar as an example, "lived" Buddhism would refer to the practices of ordinary Buddhists as they interact with monks, rituals, texts and monasteries as they seek to navigate and make sense of their lives, connect with others and find a place in the world. This rich area of human activity, relations, investments and beliefs may or may not be captured in the human activities identified as "Buddhist" for the purposes of democracy, politics or governance, however. "Governed" or "official" Buddhism is the religion as construed by those holding positions of political and religious power, whether in the state or in various forms of secular or religious law. Examples include the official Buddhism of state institutions – such as the *Maha Nayaka* in Myanmar – and the official Buddhisms of supranational institutions – including the World Fellowship of Buddhists, or the International Theravada

Buddhist Missionary University. Finally, "expert" Buddhism refers to Buddhism as construed by those who generate knowledge about Buddhism including scholars, policy experts, monks and government officials such as in the Myanmar Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture.

Disentangling Buddhism into these three categories shows that expert and official views of Buddhism do not contain all of contemporary Buddhist religiosity in Myanmar. Lived Buddhism does not line up with a view of Buddhism as a single, limited cause of political behavior. It often diverges from Buddhism as construed by the Myanmar, Thai, Lao, Cambodia, Sri Lankan, Japanese — or even American — state. The practices and traditions of lived Buddhism often differ from orthodox, elite or official understandings of what Buddhism is or should be. Neither "Buddhism" nor "Buddhist political actors" are unified agents or forces that can be easily analyzed, quantified, engaged, celebrated, condemned, or divided. Given this situation, references to Buddhist political activities per se should be met with scepticism. To rely for policy purposes on the category of a Buddhist actor or Buddhist state mistakenly presumes a type of factor motivated by Buddhism, but this is not sociologically tenable.

There is no singular Buddhism, just as there is no unified Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism. As Anthropologist Samuli Schielke (2011) notes for Islam, but also applies here: "...any major faith, is not simply something – it is a part of people's lives,

thoughts, acts, societies, histories and more. Consequently, it can be many different things – a moral idiom, a practice of self-care, a discursive tradition, an aesthetic sensibility, a political ideology, a mystical quest, a source of hope, a cause of anxiety, an identity, an enemy – you name it."

Singling out Buddhism as a cause of any political behavior and a motivation for some foreign policy ignores that religion is always entangled in economic, historical, geographic, political and religious contexts that permit discrimination, harmony, violence and coexistence. Social tensions and conflicts in a place are rooted in a complex ground of multiple factors, including political factors, which cannot be explained away by referring to religious ideology.

So the perspective used here is that religion is better understood as something that is part of the social and national culture rather than institutions and political parties, and therefore "requires a more historical and dialogic approach to religion and politics" (Cesari, 2016, 134). Religious actors – including hardline Buddhist groups in Myanmar – have had an impact on issues of Myanmar's democratization, democracy, and secularization, but not always in ways expected. By shifting "from a polarized state–religion situation to focus on complex sets of interactions between the two entities such as adaptation, cooperation, and competition ... [So] no religion is antidemocratic per se" (Cesari and Fox, 2016, 254). To understand them, history and context must be examined.

The Dynamic of State-Sangha Relations in Modern Burma

Relations between the Buddhist *sangha* and the political sphere have always been flexible and contested parts of Buddhist communities, subject to diverse forms of interaction. Monks, leaders and laypeople alike take part in these negotiations. Monks' presumed social detachment seems to limit their political activity. Laypeople, including political leaders, seem to oscillate between using Buddhist reasoning and action to support what they do or exploiting Buddhism for political legitimacy. Myanmar's style of Buddhist political thought has not developed much during the nearly half-century of military rule. But since its political reforms started in 2010, with greater opportunities for public political participation, we see a wider range of opinion and action tied to the relevance of Buddhist teachings to politics and the relationship of Buddhist identity to Burmese national identity. That includes diversity of thought and action among monks. Although the amount of research in Burmese Buddhist politics is still small, it has expanded in Myanmar's current sociopolitical transition.

Monastic involvement with political issues, whether supporting or challenging political authority, blurs the line between the mundane and the spiritual. A monk's moral authority rises from his presumed focus on religious practice. His effort produces a general respect that adheres to every member of the *sangha* as an institution, beyond any individual monk's accomplishment. Monks are also expected to protect the religion and reduce suffering,

but there are no universally agreed on means or reasons to do so. Since monks mediate the spiritual and the social realms, even though they live apart from the laity, they are close to lay society. As the details on what monastic work in the social realm can and should be and what politics is acceptable will never be settled, they are always subject to discussion, debate and negotiation. This truism is even truer in times of great change. In Myanmar, today as a hundred years ago, monks still hold much social respect and regularly contribute to the country's development, but because of this, they are also caught up in negotiating their place in the sociopolitical transition.

Buddhists have discussed and debated ideas of democracy in Burma since the late 19th century. As democracy is being realized in the current 21st century political transition, concerns and uncertainty reigns supreme. Many Buddhists – both monks and laypeople – worry about what democracy may mean and are concerned with protecting Buddhism and reclaiming its dominance in society and culture. These concerns ensure that democracy will be debated for a long time – likely with no clear result. This means that there have been, there are now and there will be a range of ways that Buddhists in Myanmar articulate and act in relation to democracy. This runs on a spectrum between a democracy based on liberal rights to a democracy mainly based on morality. Debates persist about to what extent each can be grounded in Buddhist ideas and what role secular ideas play in them. While moral discourse and reasoning are part of Burmese notions

of politics, tensions shaped the links between moral practice and democracy, and still need to be addressed by Burmese political thinkers as part of Myanmar's emerging democratic discourse. Buddhism alone will not settle the debate.

Buddhism and Political Resistance in Colonial Burma

Underlying the politics and ideals of precolonial Burma was a basic sociopolitical diversity and fluidity. Both ethnicity and sociopolitical status were fluid, porous and contingent. To provide some order, an ideal Buddhist king was expected to protect the Buddhist monastic establishment by not just defending and supporting it, but also by preventing its moral decay. Because of this royal support of Buddhism, the *sangha* will then be expected to legitimize the state. Donald Smith has shown that promoting and defending Buddhism confirmed a king's legitimacy, but also that the king was expected to protect the *sangha* (Smith, 1965). By defending the Buddhist faith, the king was duty-bound to show reverence to the *sangha* and to care for its welfare. He also was expected to be an exemplar of good conduct and righteous behavior. The precolonial Burmese polity distinguished between affairs of state (*nain ngan ye*, mostly affairs of the king and his advisors) and political practices beyond the court, which were often based more on local tradition and custom than royal decree (Sarkisyanz, 1965). Colonial independence in 1948 did not erase this basic distinction for many in Burma, meaning that many Burmese still tend to see politics (*nain ngan ye*) in general as a practice of and for elites – now mostly government officials and

leaders of political parties – whose actions were far removed from the customs of village life. During the 1950s and 1960s, *nain ngan ye* was used by villagers to refer to what government leaders in the capital were doing, while traditional community practices of cooperative action, compromise, and reconciliation were *ayu ahsa* (beliefs) or *atway ahkaw* (ideas) (Badgley 1965). To what extent these older ideas remain valid for Myanmar society today is unclear, since there has been little research on it during the last half century of military rule.

Buddhism was central to changes in Burma after Britain colonized it between the 1820s and 1885. From the late 19th century, after the British dismantled traditional Buddhist kingdoms in Burma, some Buddhist pressure groups sought to "restore Buddhism" to its "rightful place" in a colonized society. A key catalyst for the social and political change in Burma at the time was Britain's colonial occupation that lasted to 1948. British colonialists made Burma part of Britain's Empire of India and worked in Burma with tools that they had developed to colonize India. They created borders, religions and ethnic groups of people who often had little in common with anything Burman or Buddhist in a new territory. The British aimed to develop fixed and numerically clear classifications for territory, people, and resources using maps and the census toward these ends. Information from censuses may have helped outsiders control foreign areas, but they also froze the shifting categories of precolonial Burma into presumed fixed "races" with permanent

characteristics, mostly by tying individuals to one distinct language, religion, place, gender, etc. Indian censuses by the British that were used in colonial Burma do not define ethnicity, but are mostly based on language, including dialects and sub-dialects, and religions. A sidebar in the 1931 census lists 20 ethnic groups, as a kind of footnote to the rest of the text, but establishing ethnicity was not their main goal. The British colonial system also brought in many Indian government workers and money lenders to help with Britain rule in Burma, and they often displaced Bamar elites, which led to resentment centering on a narrow nationalism that excluded those thought to be colluding with the British colonial power. This included many ethnic minorities and eventually centered on Muslims. Many forms of resistance arose as a result of these developments, and they often used Buddhist symbols and ideas to communicate with Burmese people.

After a few rebellions whose leaders wanted to restore the monarchy after it fell to the British in 1886, most anticolonial activism in Burma from the early 20th century involved monks and laypeople. They often saw in British colonial rule over Burma signs of moral and religious decline, and shared common views about ending colonialism, even though they promoted diverse methods to end colonial rule and to start a postcolonial regime. Alicia Turner (2014) argues that these diverse efforts are less attempts to protect any Burmese nation than they are efforts to restore and strengthen a lapsed Buddhist identity by protecting

the *sāsana* (the Buddhist religion). Many of the anti-colonial nationalists of the 1920s and 1930s portrayed the populations from the Indian sub-continent that the British brought in as their biggest threat, since they were outsiders who had economically subjugated and culturally overwhelmed the Burmese natives. These migrants included both Muslims and Hindus. A key anti-colonial nationalist slogan of the time – *'Amyo, Batha, Thathana'* (race, language/religion and teaching of Buddha) – became the centerpiece of much of the Bamar Buddhist independence movement in the early 20th century. It implied a narrow religious and racial hierarchy that could counter the British-generated South Asian socioeconomic and religious threats.

Buddhism thus became a key part of Burmese nationalism. Hundreds of Buddhist associations formed to protect Buddhism in the early 20th century (Turner, 2014). Some resistance to British colonial rule took shape in new nationalist associations, like the *wunthanu athins*, or "Loving One's Race" associations. Buddhist revivalism largely overlapped with ethnic majoritarianism, and led to the popular slogan "To be a Burmese is to be Buddhist," coined by the Young Men's Buddhist Association in the early 20th century (Schober, 2009). U Ottama (1879-1939), a leading monk and national independence hero, promoted the *wunthanu athins* idea.

Much of the era's Buddhist political thought assumed that

individual and collective moral practice could produce concrete political results (Walton, 2017). The monk Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) articulated this view even before the British had fully taken over the country. His *Nwa Myitta Sa* ("Cow Letter") of 1885 saw Burma's defeat and humiliation by the British as partly due to the failure of Burmese Buddhists to uphold the precepts and act morally. To counter these lapses, he promoted new moral activities – like refraining from eating beef – to help return Burmese Buddhists to the moral path, and lay the foundations for gaining political independence. Ledi won support for these religious reforms by traveling around the country to promote *vipassanā* (insight) meditation practice and by organizing lay study and discussion groups on subjects previously done only by senior monks, such as the *abhidhamma* (Buddhist philosophy of existence). Erik Braun's (2013) study of Ledi Sayadaw shows that his stress on lay practice is a creative response to the colonial encounter that included Burma's Buddhist traditions.

From the early 20th century, politically active Burmese monks also linked religious and political liberation (Walton, 2017). U Ottama, who had been educated in India and was deeply influenced by India's independence struggle at the time, saw political freedom as providing the basis for being able to strive for enlightenment. He gave a speech in 1921 that contrasted Burma's colonialism with the political situation at the time of Buddha, arguing that life under non-Buddhist colonial rule was

keeping Burmese Buddhists from reaching enlightenment: "When Lord Buddha was alive, man had a predilection for Nirvana. There is nothing left now. The reason why it is so is because the government is English" (cited in Smith, 1965, 96). By linking political and moral practice, U Ottama suggested that Buddhists may have to temporarily focus on gaining political freedom so they could be able to seek enlightenment. Similar arguments have been used since 2012 by political authorities and monks tied to current nationalist movements in Myanmar.

Another monk of the time, U Thilasara, also saw colonial rule as negatively affecting the mental state of colonial subjects, and argued that spiritual and moral benefits would only come from Burmese self-government: "Without being free from bondage, which stems from the fact that one nation is subject to the rule of another, one can hardly find peace in one's heart or in one's environment, the environment in which the Buddhist way of life may be practiced or the compassionate love of a true Buddhist disseminated to humanity at large" (cited in Sarkisyanz, 1965, 125). He thus saw British colonial rule as bad for the Burmese people since it made it hard for them to effectively practice such moral ideals as cultivating *mettā* (loving-kindness). U Thilasara's view of spiritual and political liberation as complementary also appears in his desire for Burmese who "through the attainment of political and personal freedom, they may be more favorably and firmly placed on the road to Nirvana" (*ibid.*, 125).

Besides seeking to create new political conditions that could improve Buddhist practice in colonial Burma, some monks of the time also stressed resistance. Ascetic withdrawal, they argued, could lead to moral empowerment. Millennial movements have often arisen in times of social upheaval in Theravāda Buddhist societies, and some leaders of millennial movements gained recognition by withdrawing from the world to enhance their moral practice. Niklas Foxeus (2011) sees the rise of millennial cults in post-independence Burma as responding to modernizing tendencies of the new state, with some of these groups seeking to revitalize a tradition of ethical Buddhist kingship shaped by esoteric interpretations of Buddhism. Even when religious figures do not withdraw to cultivate their moral power and challenge authorities, political leaders often see the power that accrues to these figures as a threat. Since the late 1980s, Burmese governments have attempted to co-opt the legitimating moral authority of these forest "saints" as they aimed to centralize the *sangha* (Rozenberg, 2010).

Ingrid Jordt's (2007) study of an important mass lay meditation movement in Myanmar shows that the emergence of lay moral groups, constituted through *vipassanā* (insight) meditation were an indirect, yet culturally relevant, challenge to the ruling military regime. Although Buddhists in Myanmar may not have supported the regime, Jordt argued that their attitudes were ambivalent, since, by building pagodas and patronizing monks, ruling generals were in part governing as a good Buddhist king

ought to, creating opportunities for their subjects to make merit. People could also (privately) question the generals' intentions in making their donations. Jordt calls this questioning the "politics of sincerity." While direct political opposition was punished harshly during military rule, Jordt sees lay meditators as being critical of morality (as previously available only to monks), and creating an alternate vision of the moral community. The recent opening of spaces for political protest now in some parts of the country makes it unclear what political role *vipassanā* meditation might play in Myanmar's democratic future.

The Evolution of Democratic Politics and Sangha Activities in Independent Burma

As noted above, Buddhists have discussed and debated various ideas of independence and even democracy as part of political change in Burma since the late 19th century. Democracy was also discussed – and repressed – for much of the period of independent Burma after 1948 by monks, laypeople and political leaders. Some used Buddhist ideas to articulate these views. With democracy being realized in the current political transition after 2010, concerns and uncertainty reigns supreme. Many Buddhists – both monks and laypeople – worry about what democracy may mean and are concerned about protecting Buddhism and ensuring its dominance in society and culture during this time as a way of providing a source of familiarity amid change. These dual concerns ensure that democracy will be debated for a long time, and may not coalesce into a clear result. This means that there is a range

of ways in which Buddhists in Myanmar understand democracy, which may be seen on a spectrum between a democracy based on liberal rights and a democracy based mostly on morality. To what extent each can be grounded in Buddhist ideas and what role secular ideas play in this is still being debated.

Current developments in Myanmar in the relations of the Buddhist *sangha* and the state resemble those of a century or so ago. From the late 1800s to the 1930s, many Buddhists in colonial Burma experienced dramatic changes that came with colonial rule and responded with a variety of ways to ensure that Buddhism retained its value for Burma's future, and involved many aspects of society, social organization and anti-colonial nationalist politics. During this key historical juncture, diverse patterns of renegotiation occurred in Burma as a new state-*sangha*-society nexus slowly emerged that remains relevant for understanding the current Myanmar transition. The developments in Burma's state-*sangha*-society nexus up to around 1940 are comparable to changes in Myanmar from the last decade or so.

After Burma became independent from Great Britain in 1948, U Nu became the first elected Prime Minister of the Union of Burma, ruling from 1948 to 56, 1957 to 58 and 1960 to 62. Under democratic rule, U Nu's government encouraged Buddhist meditation and international Buddhist missionary work as part of the new state, and the *sangha* became key political influences and U Nu ruled as a *dhammaraja* in an independent and secular Burma.

U Nu had close relations to monks, and as a layman, he mixed Buddhism with Burmese beliefs in spirits (*nats*) and with politics into his speeches and government ceremonies. His government made the Ministry of Religious Affairs a strong agency of state policy. Some even criticized the U Nu era as one long Buddhist ceremony (Gravers, 1999). U Nu sponsored the Sixth Great Buddhist World Council in 1956, which led to the translation of the Buddhist textual canon, the collection of Buddhist relics from Ceylon, and the building of a World Peace Pagoda. U Nu's government also put Buddhist teachings into the school curriculum, and new national Ecclesiastical Courts and Pali universities took shape. His government likewise instituted the Buddha *Sasana* Council which, led by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, aimed to promote Buddhism as fully as possible (Ibid.; Spiro, 1982). When in 1960 the *sangha* pressured U Nu, his electoral campaign promised to make Buddhism the official state religion and, in 1961, he followed up on the promise by doing so.

Although striving to give ethnic minorities more independence, U Nu's efforts to meet the demands of radical monks and to officially make Buddhism the state religion fueled ethnic and religious divisions across the country, and contributed to the military coup that toppled him in 1962. Smith notes that U Nu took his quasi-royal functions seriously (Smith, 1965). Since Burmese kings felt a need to gain enough merit to overcome the consequences of their own immoral and sometimes bloody acts,

U Nu argued that the government had responsibility to look after the welfare of the people, both in the current world and in their countless future existences. This situation made it necessary to make Buddhism the state religion in Burma (*ibid*). U Nu also saw it as his personal duty to gain merit so as to help his subjects reach *nirvana* (Chirot, 1994). U Nu thus made the *sangha* a key part of the new independent and democratic state of Burma. He sought to extend the notion of responsibilities of the new democratic regime beyond just the welfare of the people and his potential voters, but also to shepherd non-voting monks who would assist the state by providing dharma to care for the recently deceased and future lives of Burmese citizens and its leaders. U Nu's downfall could thus partly be attributed to his excessive support of the *sangha* and its activities, and the neglect of social and political divisions. This neglect helped prompt the Burmese military to overthrow him in 1962.

Under the following regime led by Ne Win as President of Burma between 1962 and 1981, the "Burmese Way of Socialism" reworked Buddhism in a socialist direction. Due to the ethnic, religious, and communist divisions threatening the Union of Burma, Gravers argues that Ne Win, in 1962, assumed the position of a national savior like a *Cakkavattin* (a wheel-turning universal monarch) or a *min laung* (challenger to the throne), one who had ended the growing religious and ethnic split while also limiting foreign influence (Gravers, 1999). After gaining power, Ne Win undid U Nu's religious laws, nationalized much of the

economy, and monopolized foreign and internal trade for the state. Bechert notes that his policies were tied more to old Burmese tradition and royal monopolies rather than to Marxism (Bechert, 1995), while Matthews argues that the military regime, beginning with Ne Win in the 1960s, has always sought support from the animistic powers associated with various rituals to overcome bad omens, avoiding a loss of power that would follow their karmic destiny, and easing the guilt associated with clearly dreadful sins (Matthews, 1998). Chirot notes that when Ne Win isolated Burma in 1962 he acted more like a traditional Burmese king. From the mid-1970s, he married an heir of the last Burmese royal family and began appearing at state functions in full classical regalia, convinced that the last royal family were among his ancestors (Chirot, *ibid.*). Lintner believes that Ne Win saw himself more as an absolute monarch than a military usurper who had overthrown an elected government (Lintner, 1989). Gravers counters by arguing that Ne Win was hated, presumably because he had not openly assumed the guise of a *Cakkavatti* or a *Dhammaraja* (*Dhamma*-king or righteous ruler), likely since such claims could have backfired and made it hard for him to wield power (Gravers, *ibid.*).

For most of his rule, Ne Win aimed to control the Buddhism or the *Sangha*. The Burma Socialist Programme Party's (BSPP) guiding ideology was published in 1963 with the title *The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment: The Philosophy of the Burma Socialist Programme Party* (BSPP 1973). Seekins

argues that this text shows the BSPP's philosophy as "a purely mundane and human doctrine," purely secular and with no connection to religion (Seekins, 2002, 46). He believes that although it uses Buddhist and metaphysical terminology, this text shows Ne Win's views on the relationship of religion and politics to be closer to Aung San's secularism than U Nu's religionism, seeing them as "separate spheres of life" (*ibid.*). The BSPP used Buddhist and metaphysical terms for rhetorical reasons, but Ne Win's rule mostly made Buddhism the work of the *sangha* and monks remain out of politics. The government tried in 1964 and 1965 to register monks and monk associations, and to set up a reform council, but these measures were mostly resisted by the *sangha* and the repeal of the State Religion Promotion Act along with government subsidies was compensated by donations from laypeople (Bechert, *ibid.*; Matthews, 1993). Ne Win arrested many monks several times, including in 1965 and in 1974, when he refused to allow a proper funeral for the former United Nations Secretary General, U Thant.

From 1980, a unified *sangha* organization which cut across sectarian and regional boundaries took shape in Burma under the Ne Win government. By establishing in 1980 the Sangha Maha Nayaka Council, Ne Win's government sought to control monastic institutions by requiring monastic registration and monastic examinations. This served to limit the sources of wealth and influence of powerful monks at the time. This institutionalization of the *sangha* in Burma was a key turning

point. By calling for in 1979 and then convening in 1980 the First Congregation of the Sangha of All Orders, and then by holding the subsequent election of the central and regional *sangha* bodies, a formal hierarchical structure for monks across Burma was formed, and was able to guide and supervise all monks and novices in Burma. Backed by the power and authority of the socialist state under Ne Win, efforts at "purifying, perpetuating, and propagating" the *sasana* took off in earnest (Tin, 1989). The 1980 Congregation sought to register all monks and organized a Supreme *Sangha* Council, or *Sangha Maha Nayaka*, that embodied both sectarian and regional differences and whose hierarchical structure sought to tighten the state's control over the *sangha* (Matthews, 1993). *Sangha* organizations or councils were also set up at the village, township, city and district levels, and their members were appointed by the government. Boards of trustees in charge of administering monasteries and pagodas were filled with retired military officers who took over the handling of finances and donations from the public. Bechert argues that this new religious policy allowed Ne Win to have continuities with both the tradition of Burmese kings and U Nu's religious policies. Unlike U Nu, however, Ne Win did not himself take part in the *sangha* convention, and all decisions were made by the *sangha* and not by government institutions. Ne Win managed to win over much of the population who had so far disapproved of government policy (Bechert, *ibid.*). Ne Win followed U Nu by seeing to the editing of Buddhist texts, openly donating to monks, and also began a pagoda-building project behind the Shwedagon

pagoda in Rangoon, personally raising the *hti*, or spire – a royal act symbolizing power, glory, and religious merit (Seekins, *ibid.*). In March 2001, Ne Win also hosted a lunch in a Rangoon hotel for 99 senior monks.

Some have wondered about Ne Win's Buddhist "conversion" because of these matters and reports that he wished to avoid going down in history as a tyrant (Chirot, *ibid.*). He was also openly involved in parallel Burmese sacred traditions of worshiping animistic cults of spirits and deities (*nats*), astrology, and numerology, all of which aimed to offer further guidance or perhaps the opportunity to neutralize the karmic consequences generated by worldly wrongs.

Ne Win's reorganization and institutionalization of the *sangha* hierarchy seem to have failed to protect him, since he lost power in 1988, partly due to protests on the streets by monks. Following the military's refusal to hand over power to the NLD after the May 1990 general election, in October 1990, the first chairman of SLORC, General Saw Maung, moved to suppress a rebellion by over 7,000 monks in Mandalay. This followed their senior abbots' (*sayadaw*) decision to discourage the performance of religious services for families of the military. Having ordered the end of the religious boycott, the dissolution of all independent Buddhist organizations and monks associations, the surrounding of monasteries, the arrest of over 400 monks, and the destruction of buildings near the monasteries, Saw Maung then claimed, in a

meeting with the senior abbots, that his regime's actions against the monks was "analogous to the action of King Anoryahtah of the 13th century in the purification of religion and monks during his reign" (Mya Maung, 1992, 184). Moreover, Mya Maung said that, "quoting the Buddhist scriptures and king's law, *yahzathart*, he claimed the right of the Buddhist rulers to invade and purify the domain of the Buddhist monks" (*ibid.*). Soon after, the SLORC issued a law stipulating the proper conduct for a Buddhist monk and penalties for their violation by monks or monk organizations. Monks would have to obey the orders of the state *sangha* organizations, whether or not they belonged to them, and any new construction in or around monasteries as well as traditional religious ceremonies would require the permission of local *Sangha Maha Nayaka* committees. By December 1991, Saw Maung announced that he was the reincarnation of King Kyanzitha of the Pagan period (Chirot, *ibid.*). Since then, the military government has sought after the blessing and support of senior monks with a carrot and stick policy. Those who resist joining local *sangha* committees have their monasteries placed under surveillance and are sometimes arrested, while those who join the ranks receive lavish donations, gifts, and sometimes elaborate ceremonies to grant honors and titles that were previously rarely awarded. Depending upon their level of support, they can also often find themselves shunned by the public.

Buddhism's links to political authority relate to the nature of that authority. Two key political players in Burmese politics during the

1980s and 1990s were the military regime that ruled in various forms since 1962, and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Gustaaf Houtman's study of Burmese Buddhist politics argued that this clash was tied to two distinct manifestations of power, associated with these two groups: *ana* is the idea of order, command, or authority, most commonly associated with the top-down disciplining power of the military, while *awza* denotes influence, most tied to self-purification through moral practice. Rather than existing in a binary relation, they are ideally part of a model that combines righteous and ethical rule. But Houtman notes that the story of political authority in Burma is mostly an *ana*-based, centralizing power faced by an *awza*-based moral opposition: "The idea of *ana* is that it is limited by boundaries and frameworks – a domain and some kind of lifespan such as a period of government; *awza*, however, is so fluid that it transcends and trickles through all boundaries of time and place" (Houtman, 1999, 169).

From 1987, there was a growing public resentment against military rule in Burma. This was intensified by ongoing police brutality, economic mismanagement and government corruption. Lacking other channels to address these grievances led to widespread demonstrations in 1988 that were generally in support of democracy. The demonstrations were started by students in Rangoon on August 8, 1988 (hence the name "8888 Uprising"), but protests quickly spread throughout the country. Hundreds of

thousands of monks, children, university students, housewives, and doctors protested the regime. Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the slain General Aung San, father of Burmese Independence, who came to Rangoon to care for her mother in 1988 gave an important speech to hundreds of thousands of people at the Shwedagon Pagoda on August 26, below a portrait of her father at the same site that he had delivered some of his most important speeches. While quoting her father's thoughts in this speech, she did not discuss religion and politics, but urged the crowd not to turn on the army, and to find peace through non-violence. She became a symbol for the struggle for democracy in Burma. Other former democracy leaders also returned to the scene, including former Prime Minister U Nu and retired Brigadier General Aung Gyi, in what was described as a "democracy summer." The uprising ended on September 18, 1988, after the military, led by General Saw Maung, took power in a coup d'état. He established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), imposed martial law and laid down harsher measures than those of Ne Win. After violently breaking up the protests, the new military government announced on the state-run radio that it had taken charge "in order to bring a timely halt to the deteriorating conditions on all sides all over the country." Although thousands of people were reportedly killed by the military in the uprising, Burmese authorities claim around 350 people died.

The generals have been pressured into proving their worthiness to the people, as their *Cakkavatti*, so to speak, in response to Suu Kyi's *min laung* rhetoric. They renamed their country Myanmar and Rangoon became Yangon. Yet huge pressure from the international community forced it to arrange for elections in May 1990, the first held in thirty years. Although the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won 80% of the seats in Parliament (398 out of 447), the results so surprised the military junta that it cancelled the election results and refused to hand over power. Besides arresting many members of the NLD and other opposition groups, the military put Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest in Rangoon and did not release her until 1995. In an essay written before her house arrest, she discussed the ten duties of Buddhist kingship and how they reinforced the Burmese desire for democratic government. Many took her to be the natural leader of Burma's pro-democracy movement. While under house arrest, she continued to advocate non-violence as the best way to achieve lasting political change. She developed an interest in Buddhist *vipassanā* practice and the sermons of Sayadaw U Pandita. Her commitment to meditation practice is seen in her writings. Upon her release, she visited U Pandita and the famous Karen-based monk, Sayadaw U Bhaddanta Vinaya (Thamanya Sayadaw).

The military government needed legitimacy beyond mere force, and so started promoting Buddhist culture. This need intensified after many members of the *sangha* had sided with protesters

and opposition parties in 1988 and 1990, and when the media reported the offerings made by National League for Democracy (NLD) candidates to the *sangha* prior to the 1990 elections. Suu Kyi developed her Buddhist political thought while under house arrest from 1990 to 1995, and paid visits to monks and monasteries after her release. The more than 80% of the Burmese who are Buddhist likely forced the military regime to respond both to vocal opposition to their rule in the *sangha*, and to the publication of Suu Kyi's actions, speeches, and writings by creating an image of themselves as better Buddhists than Suu Kyi and, more generally, as being responsible for the keeping and promoting of Buddhist traditions in Burma. By the mid-1990s, the ruling generals positioned themselves as promoting Buddhist sites and made roles for themselves in Buddhist ceremonies. Their efforts drew attention from local observers who sought to adjust to the generals' new roles, but also in international media circles.

Burma's military regime ruled like the old royal system, as a kind of counterpart to absolute kingship, and their "kingly" performance followed in a long tradition of Burmese leaders who, whatever their legal status, used folk beliefs to bolster their popularity and their legitimacy among the people. The military government strengthened their support from the mid-1990s for Buddhist traditions, perhaps partly in reaction to their earlier hardline tactics. Suu Kyi's imprisonment, with her NLD colleagues,

encouraged a turn to tradition to which the SPDC were forced to respond.

Since 1997, top SLORC-SPDC generals acted, spoke and appeared publicly in ways reminiscent of Burmese kings. The program focused on keeping law and order as well as a new reverence for Buddhist traditions. Promoting Buddhism helped the generals respond to the political rhetoric of the elected opposition while asserting their legitimacy as Burmese monarchs. The military government of the early 21st century showed a similar type of devotion to Buddhist traditions as U Nu had sought in 1961-2. The same reasons that prompted the unauthorized military intervention then are being adopted by the military to legitimize their rule.

Houtman further linked the Buddhist activities of NLD and the military rulers in Myanmar by tying military leaders to the meditation practice of *samatha* or concentration meditation which was designed to enhance one's ability to control the world, and NLD members to *vipassanā* or insight meditation, which is believed to take a more direct path to enlightenment by focusing less on controlling others than on developing and accepting a right view of the inherent impermanence and selflessness of human existence. Houtman's characterization of the clash between competing forms of meditation may have been useful for describing the 1990s (but mostly of a few elites in the military and the NLD), but it also remains an important effort to include different indigenous Burmese Buddhist notions of authority in analysis, and also led to similar research afterwards.

In 2007, monastic public involvement in politics returned in a big way during the large demonstrations of the so-called "Saffron Revolution." Thousands of monks marched in cities across the country, chanting the *mettā* (lovingkindness) *sutta*, and some refused to accept offerings from the military government. Some scholars have argued that by taking this private religious ritual into the public sphere, "the monks created a sacred space" in the social world and "thus laid claim to the city as a space ruled by the Buddha's law" (Zöllner, 2009, 72). Doing so elevated them above the political authority of the time. In chanting the *mettā sutta*, the protesting monks also chose an appropriate method of public action to their role as part of the premier religious order in Burma, which thereby protected them from charges of acting "politically." Even though they had criticized the military government for its negligence toward the population – and thus causing suffering – and for its violent actions toward monks, the *mettā* chant underscored how the *sangha* stood for a moral authority oriented toward the well-being of the whole community.

Aware of earlier debates on democracy in Burma, some monks who took part in the 2007 demonstrations stressed that their actions which focused on ideas of democracy did not mean that democracy would endanger traditional Burmese culture and argued that the idea of democracy was not a Western import. An author in an underground journal that circulated in the country prior to the 2007 protests stated that, "Without exception, democracy includes people's dignity, people's worth, and purity

of mind/spirit, things that are all included under the teachings of the Buddha" (Hti La Aung, 2007, 40; cited in Walton, 2016). Another noted that the Buddha's teachings already contain the essence of democracy: "Democracy is not something that only just appeared. The Buddha had already preached about it twenty-five hundred years ago. In the Buddha's teachings, he thoroughly discussed human rights. ... The Buddha's doctrine is in accordance with democracy" (Sanda Shin, 2009, 16; cited in Walton, 2016).

In the transition that Myanmar has undergone since 2007, monks and monastic organizations have actively been involved in many aspects of the sociopolitical processes. They have sought to organize themselves in relationship to a changing state and society, that was aligned with the ideas of political change grounded in electoral politics and democracy. After the military crackdown on the 2007 demonstrations, a new military junta-drafted constitution – still in effect today – aimed to start a new era of "discipline – flourishing genuine multiparty democracy." They put the constitution to a referendum in May 2008, which was approved despite wide criticism and boycotts. The vote took place even though the devastating cyclone Nargis had struck Myanmar just before the scheduled vote, killing 138,000 people and displacing more than 2.5 million people. The resulting controversial constitution lays out a hybrid governing system. The military is given control over the ministries of Defense, Border Affairs, and Home Affairs, as well as being guaranteed 25% of

all seats in the parliament and regional assemblies. All changes to major parts of the constitution require 75% approval and approval by a national referendum. The military Commander-in-chief has power over the President. This effectively gives the military veto power over any policy it does not like as well as the license to make changes in the country's power structure. Elections held in 2010 were also widely boycotted, and aside from some by-elections in 2012, full open elections only took place for the first time in late 2015. These developments have produced a new hybrid civilian-military government that has been ruling since April 2016, but has also invigorated civil society, and produced a cultural and economic openness to the rest of the world. This dynamic, with a political system created by the military to preserve their power, Myanmar has changed and will change in unknown and novel ways, where democracy and the Buddhist *sangha* have complex and evolving roles.

New Dynamics of Buddhism and Politics in Myanmar

Myanmar has been undergoing dramatic political and social upheavals while trying to modernize and to engage the world since 2010 (Jones, 2014). Because of the close connections between the state, lay society, and the *sangha*, changes in one arena affect the others, and tensions in one arena often appear in the others. Myanmar's "democratic transition," as it has been called, has produced patterns of social insecurity which have upset religious groups and sacred institutions, as well as disturbing the society that supports them. Although the government has permitted greater

freedom of expression and allowed for more political debate, episodes of religious-based conflict and intercommunal violence have erupted between the internally divided Buddhist and Muslim communities.[3] This has led the government, with support and under pressure from NGOs and media organizations, to limit forms of speech that incited violence and created social division, including several outspoken monks, monastic organizations, and writers.

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[3] Many reports in the mass media since the recent political transition began in 2010 underscore two extremist Buddhist groups – the Ma Ba Tha and the 969 Movement – as representative of Burmese political thought and ideology whose actions focus on anti-Muslim violence. Ma Ba Tha abbreviates the name of a Buddhist group whose English name is "Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion." Since 2012, intercommunal ethnoreligious violence has been in the headlines of major international media, especially reports of violence directed by Buddhist extremist groups against the Muslim Rohingya people living in Rakhine state. Two episodes have drawn most attention, one in 2012 and a larger one in 2017. In 2012, riots broke out in the western state of Rakhine, with hundreds being killed and 140,000 have been forced to leave their homes, and scores of Muslim owned homes and businesses have been burned down or destroyed. Similar anti-Muslim violence has occurred elsewhere in Myanmar, including the burning of Muslim owned homes and businesses. Such activities by Buddhist extremist groups include anti-Muslim propaganda, boycotts against Muslim businesses and false criticism of religions they do not like (such as criticism of other faiths and forms of Buddhism that do not agree with their extremist actions). In 2017, the forced displacement of Rohingya from Rakhine State exploded after a dozen police were killed, resulting in the Army forcing more than 750,000 to leave their homes to makeshift camps in neighboring Bangladesh.

The violent aspects of Myanmar's changes seen in religious life have captured the attention of international media and their publics. The photos, films and stories of horrible moments of ethnoreligious intolerance and cruelty in the media and reports mainly focus on the intolerance and violence directed toward Muslims, especially the Rohingya who had lived in Rakhine State, by some groups of Buddhist monks in Myanmar. But these headlines capture only aspects of a complex story of change, and by just focusing on those events, it is difficult to understand the larger significance of the changes occurring in Myanmar. During these national transformations, the *sangha* in Myanmar is looking to renegotiate its relations to both the state and to lay society, at a time when the priorities of all three are changing. These transformations have led to uncertainties about the future which some religious figures and groups feel threaten their identities without suggesting alternatives.

The renegotiation process occurring now in Myanmar is ongoing and incomplete, but it is not new. In order to understand the current renegotiations of the *sangha*'s relations to the state and to lay society in Myanmar, it is important to see them as part of a longer and deeper historical process and to link them to earlier periods of similar types of change in Myanmar. Shifts in state-*sangha* relations during times of sociopolitical transition have occurred before, so it is useful to explore earlier episodes of change in order to contextualize the current events that have ap peared in the news. As Michael Gravers (2015, 2) has recently put

it "In Burma, the sacralization of power appears in times of social crisis and uncertain political transition. Burma's society, politics, and economy are all in rapid transition." The current transition and its accompanying renegotiations are certainly one of these times of uneasy transformation.

The specific ways that these renegotiations have been worked out in the *sangha* and in society are part of new ways of imagining the endangered existence of once stable ways of living and being. Since these dangers seem fundamental – centering on developing new forms of identity and survival – they are often discussed in basic and existential ways, as matters of absolute urgency. This makes it easy for leaders of *sangha* groups in Myanmar who feel endangered due to changes to tie their concerns to matters of life and death, and even to legitimize violent behaviors – those that appear in the media.[4] But they are responses to the uncertainties that are part of larger transformations which have unclear sources and are leading to unknown ends.

Since 2010, monks and monastic organizations have actively been involved in many aspects of the sociopolitical processes of Myanmar's transition, seeking to organize themselves in relationship to a changing state and society, that was aligned with the ideas of political change grounded in electoral politics

[4] Stanley Tambiah (1996) has shown how ethnoreligious mob riots are often politically organized and sometimes linked to political phenomenon like elections.

and democracy. Monks have helped to negotiate the meaning of democracy in Myanmar at a time of its democratization, as well as to develop new relationships to lay society, to other monks, and to transnational society in a time of economic and cultural opening to the world. The research has shown that in times of sociopolitical transition, both in Myanmar's past and in the present, a diverse and complex *sangha* body has been integral to negotiating political change for Myanmar society. As a result, the *sangha* has evolved a range of new ways to relate to the emerging sociopolitical order. At present, in the last quarter of 2018, just a bit more than two years after the coming to power of a new democratically elected government, *sangha*-state relations remain diverse and complex works-in-progress, evolving both new modes of organization, connections to local lay society, diverse connections to the world outside Myanmar, and innovative ways to work with other monks, leaders, and laity.

In this still evolving situation, both the new government and the diverse *sangha* are still developing in contemporary Myanmar. Below I present reflections on the different perspectives on these developments, based on interviews and visits with 16 different monks and monastic organizations in May 2016.[5] These reflections suggest how Buddhist movements in the

[5] In May 2016, I went on a research trip to Myanmar assisted by Dr. Soe Myint. On the trip we made 16 different calls to monks and monastic organizations around Mandalay and Yangon and met with more than 50 different monks or important laymen during those visits.

colonial period and today have reshaped not only the lived experiences and opportunities for Burmese people, but also the conceptual landscape within which Burmese people understand themselves, their actions, their futures and their pasts. Although the forms, natures, and qualities of the current and future state-*sangha*-society nexus remain unclear, it will remain important to defining the new Myanmar, just as earlier negotiations helped to define Burma in the late colonial era.

This process of negotiation – seen in our interviews with a wide variety of individual monks and monks in monastic organizations – are helping to define the meanings of the terms "Myanmar," "nation," "democracy," "Buddhism," "religion," and the relationships among them for the people in Myanmar today. These negotiations have also led current shapes of Myanmar Buddhism and its new government to align themselves with common priorities and norms. A noticeable sign of these changes is the comeuppance of dominant aspects of Myanmar Buddhism in the global media since 2012 – the anti-Muslim monk U Wirathu and the Ma Ba Tha organization. They both seem to have become weaker since the new democratically elected government came to power in April 2016, and especially since July, when the government began asserting itself, supported by Myanmar's Supreme *Sangha* Council and the legal and court system. Since that time, a new set of more inclusive norms and monastic voices have become more normal and audible in the monastic community and across Myanmar.

To get some sense of how the *sangha* in Myanmar has been part of the sociopolitical reforms undertaken there since 2010, I have used various media sources, research analyses, databases, as well as observations and interviews conducted in Myanmar. Prior to going to Myanmar in May 2016, I collected more than 150 news articles form online news sources both in and outside of Myanmar and more than two dozen videos via YouTube of *sangha* activities in Myanmar since 2010. My research assistant was able to acquire from Myanmar more than twenty monastic publications issued by leading groups from leading monastic organizations in Yangon and Mandalay that were published during the summer of 2015 and up to the November elections. These materials provided a basis for understanding some of the ways that the *sangha* and the state in Myanmar related to one another, and suggested a strong relationship had been established between the military regime and the strident Ma Ba Tha organization that had formed in mid-2013.

The core part of the research project involved making 16 different calls to monks and monastic organizations around Mandalay and Yangon in May 2016, and meeting with more than 50 different monks or important laypeople during those visits. The monks and monastic organizations were selected to show a range of monastic voices and monastic organizations that were important in the contemporary religious landscape in Myanmar. I visited a range of monks, foundations and monastic organizations – from those involved in lay education and health care to the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee or State Buddhist Council (*Maha Nayaka*,

abbreviated as *Maha Na*) in charge of monastic life in Myanmar to key monastic education and training organization to various vocal individual monks and powerful groups like Ma Ba Tha that claim preserve the *sangha* and protect Myanmar. We were fortunate to be able to interview and record each of the individual monks or monastic groups or organizations that we met.

Among the discussions we had with monks were those in the *Maha Na* in Yangon and the State Priyatti Sasana University in charge of monastic education in Mandalay, a few government officials and academics, as well as several monastic foundations focused on socially-oriented charity work like hospitals, schools, and interfaith organizations. Aside with meeting with Ma Ba Tha leaders at their headquarters, we spoke with a wide range of monks individually, ranging from the revered Sitagu Sayadaw and the infamous U Wirathu, Ashin Thawbita, Sayadaw U Dhammapala, Shwenyawa Sayadaw, Ashin Ariya Wun Tha Bhiwun Sa, known as Myawaddy Sayadaw from Mandalay, among several others.

After the visits to the monks, temples, and monastic organizations, the impression is of wide diversity of views on politics and degrees and types of involvement in politics, but universal agreement that giving sermons and providing concrete beneficial services were key aspects of monk's work to the public. Another key type of service for the public was supporting laypeople through their moral education in Buddhism, especially to the Buddhist

schools set up on Sundays in different formal or informal settings, which some monks stress a lot at their local schools or monasteries, and which hybrid organizations like the Ma Ba Tha [renamed the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation since being banned in June 2017] promote around the country. There are also larger and more formal organizations concerned with maintaining quality standards for monks, whether by national Buddhist educational institutes, or by the State Buddhist Council or *Maha Nayaka*. Although meditation and study of scriptures were considered important, not all stressed them equally.

The State Buddhist Council or *Maha Nayaka* in Myanmar

The State Buddhist Council is a government-appointed body of high-ranking Buddhist monks that oversees and regulates the *sangha* in Myanmar. It formally began in 1980 and took shape over the next few years as part of Ne Win's efforts to reform and purify Buddhism. It is now led by 47 senior monks based in Yangon who nominally head the Buddhist *sangha* in Myanmar, which likely has between 300,000 and 500,000 monks, perhaps 15% of whom have taken vows for life. Because many of the members of this council are senior monks approved by the government, the council and its actions are often seen as both doing the government's bidding. Since many of the senior monks are elderly, they are also often seen to be unaware of key concerns of Buddhists and monks. And, because they receive titles and respect from high-ranking lay figures, many laypeople worry that these top monks are excessively controlled by wealthy people or government power.

The *Maha Na* remained influential until disputes arose in 2003 and 2004 about whether to support Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or not. The dispute shows the politicization of some monks, and it ended in ministerial intervention to exert greater control over the committee. After this, the *Maha Na* lost much of its legitimacy.

Against these fears, many in the *Maha Na* see their main interest as protecting the image of Buddhism in the country among both monks and laypeople, but many still see it as an arm of the government, definitely of the former military governments but also of the democratically elected NLD-led government. This means that both in the past and now, it is a conservative group, one that is constrained and pressured by whoever is in power. As such, it has generally been guided more by the intention to keep a stable status quo in Buddhism rather than to support either authoritarianism or democracy.

Most monks in Myanmar only know the *Maha Na* as a regulator acting at a distance by setting policy for monastic life. Many of its key actions only come into play when problems like disputes over monastic property or inappropriate monastic activities arise. Beyond this type of work, most local monks, abbots, and monasteries scarcely know about the different strata of action by Maha Na powers. In short, the central Maha Na appear to many monks as outsider interference into monks' activities, with implicit government support.

Given this situation, debates about the appropriate role of th

Maha Na are many. Some monks, laypeople, or government officials would like to see it play a stronger role in regulating monks' behavior or to keep the *sangha* "pure." Yet even among those who hope that the Maha Na will purify Buddhism in the country, many monks see their purification work as uneven, incomplete, and sometimes even unjust. Some such views may be self-serving, though, since monks often believe that *other* monks should be disciplined and held to the *vinaya* (rules of monastic conduct) more strictly, while they may view Maha Na attempts to impose punishments or criticisms tied to regulation on them as unfair meddling.

Because of these tensions, many monks seem to prefer a monastic authority that is not only more independent of the government, but also better able to defend monastic interests and Buddhism more generally. Promoting Buddhism could mean different things to different monks, but it may include engaging the government and more active encouraging, managing and supporting activities to strengthen the religion, such as efforts at *parahita* (social work) and *thathana pyu* (showing support by building religious edifices, Buddhist education, or providing monks with material support).

But the Maha Na worries about its actions and their effects on the monastic community at large, too. As such, they may feel a need to limit their actions, in vague and unspoken ways, so as to not intrude too much on how much monks can and should be involved in worldly affairs, including in politics. Senior Maha Na monks

might also worry about how their organization's dependences on government make it harder to limit monks from certain behaviors. But they are also part of a modern monastic bureaucracy that works slowly, and although the *vinaya* guiding them aims to guide the conduct of all monks, rulings may affect senior and respectable monks more than others.

The Maha Na has taken actions against monks. In February 2012, the Maha Na evicted Shwenyawa Sayadaw abbot of the Sadhu Pariyatti Monastery for his alleged disobedience, giving a sermon at the Mandalay office of the National League for Democracy in the previous September, calling for the release of political prisoners and the end of ongoing civil wars. In March of 2017, the Maha Na banned the monk U Wirathu from preaching for a year.

Between 2016 and 2018, the Maha Na has issued several rulings and orders related to the notorious Ma Ba Tha group and several monks tied to that group, and Ma Ba Tha's leaders and associated monks willingly signed onto them. It is through this lens that we can understand its recent actions to separate itself from the negative press associated with Ma Ba Tha.

Maha Na is also constrained in several ways from acting more directly against groups like Ma Ba Tha. First, it must be very careful at taking actions that could be portrayed as causing a schism in the monkhood, since this was strictly forbidden by the Buddha. More importantly (and problematically), Maha Na

simply does not have the popular support to overtly challenge Ma Ba Tha in a way that would threaten its continued existence.

Ma Ba Tha still has wide appeal and its leading figures are near-universally beloved monks like U Tiloka Biwuntha, known as the Insein Ywama Sayadaw, who commands much more respect among the population than most Maha Na monks.

In late February 2018, Minister of Religious Affairs and Culture, U Aung Ko, asked the Maha Na to more strongly enforce the disciplining of monks who speak or behave in ways that disgrace the religion. On 25 February 2018, another monk named Ashin Issariya (famous for his role in organizing the 2007 "Saffron Revolution," better known by his pen name "King Zero") sought to meet the press to ask the government and Maha Na to discipline U Wirathu for disrespecting Buddhism, but some "nationalist monks" disrupted the attempt. The next day U Aung Ko said that the government was not able to act against these monks because of a lack of consensus within society on the proper political role of monks.

So the *Maha Na* has an important administrative role in Myanmar with respect to monks, but it mostly aims to keep things as much as possible as they are rather than seek change. Lacking strong public support, its authority rests mostly in the government under which it operates. As such, it is best seen as a quasi-government agency, one limited from acting on its own and pressured by the reigning government. It is mostly guided by the goal of protecting

the image of Buddhism in Myanmar and trying to maintain unity among the diverse monastic community – or at least not to produce divisions in the *sangha*.

The Dynamics of *Ma Ba Tha*

A prominent feature of Burmese Buddhist politics since 2010 has been the rise of monk-led Buddhist nationalism. This is most often seen in international media as based on anti-Muslim rhetoric and discourse against the Rohingya people, and has resulted in riots and violence across the country. These views have been seen as stemming from government or military efforts, but they may be better seen as responses to the existential insecurity experienced in a time of rapid economic and social changes since Myanmar began its reforms in 2010 (Walton et al., 2015). As pointed out by Schissler et al. (2017), anti-Muslim sentiments seem widespread in Buddhist Myanmar, and have been articulated in public by Buddhist monks connected to a cluster of interrelated Buddhist protectionist movements, with the 969, and the *Ma Ba Tha* as those that are best known.

Some of these nationalist Buddhist organizations were favored by the previous president of Myanmar, U Thein Sein, his government and the military. Support for them grew with the current wave of Buddhist nationalist activity that began in 2012 under the banner of the so-called "969 Movement," a loose network of monks and laypeople that wanted to promote Buddhism and start boycotts against Muslim-owned businesses. This prompted outbreaks of communal strife between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine

State in 2012, with the nationalist groups claiming that the country's Buddhist foundations were under assault and needed to be protected. They expressed fears that the Muslim population was growing faster than the Buddhist one and that Myanmar needed to work against fundamentalist influence. They saw the Rohingya issue as one of state sovereignty and sought state support for their concerns.

The 969 group and *Ma Ba Tha* gained momentum as the government's program of gradual political reform took shape. These changes started in 2010, with the first general elections in two decades, and led to a transfer of power to a quasi-civilian government on March 30, 2011. These new Buddhist groups arose in an atmosphere of anti-Muslim sentiment that arose in this time of uncertainty. The new tense atmosphere after 2010 was also shaped by both global Islamophobic discourses and by increasing competition between Buddhists and Muslims over the limited amounts of economic development aid – spoils that are growing in Myanmar's opening market economy.

The 969 Movement was a loose network of monks and lay Buddhists that began mobilizing in 2012 and gradually gained prominence and notoriety in early 2013. The '969' is an old numerological shorthand for Myanmar's Buddhists, referring to lists in the Pāli scriptures of the nine great qualities of the Buddha, the six great qualities of the Buddha's *dhamma* (teachings), and the nine great qualities of the *sangha* (monastic community). A group of monks in Myanmar's Mon State officially used the

modern symbol of the movement in October 2012, adding the flag of the *sāsana* (Buddhist religion) and the pillars of Asoka, the third-century (BCE) ruler seen by many Buddhists as having paradigmatically spread the *dhamma* through peaceful conquest. The 969 Movement spread widely when linked to a 'Buy Buddhist' campaign of boycotting Muslim-owned businesses, endorsed by the firebrand monk U Wirathu in a February 2013 sermon that urged Burmese Buddhists to carry out every daily task in their lives with a 'nationalist perspective' (*a-myo-tha a-myin*). After this, 969 stickers became common, along with books, pamphlets and DVDs of monastic sermons all marketed with the same logo.

The 969 movement was a decentralized network of activists, but the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion (*Ma Ba Tha*) that followed was more formally organized. *Ma Ba Tha,* founded in June 2013, led more specialized campaigns but only became significant after the founding of an Upper Myanmar branch in January 2014. *Ma Ba Tha's* name shows how many Burmese Buddhists see religious, ethnic, and racial identities as key components of national identity. *Ma Ba Tha* may have formed as a response to a ban placed on political uses of the 969 symbol by the *Maha Na*, but it quickly developed a separate identity from 969, partnering with political parties, organizing massive protests, and developing and championing a set of laws that proponents claim are designed to protect the Burmese nation and religion.

Ma Ba Tha sought to promote the Buddhist religion by establishing a network of Buddhist "Sunday schools," as well as by organizing

large protests and by allying with political parties to push for the passage of controversial laws that sought to restrict religious conversion and interfaith marriage. These groups spread nationalist and anti-Muslim ideas through books, journals, and pamphlets as well as through the preaching of prominent monks.

Key monks and channels tied to *Ma Ba Tha* have supported the expulsion of the Rohingya several times. This type of expulsion parallels anti-Indian and anti-Muslim riots that have recurred since the 1930s. Policies of successive military governments have also repressed non-Buddhist religious practice, especially in ethnic minority regions. At their peak from 2012 to the elections in November 2015, nationalist groups, especially *Ma Ba Tha*, were led by prominent Buddhist monks across the country. They organized activities and talks to encourage followers to boycott Muslim businesses and spread anti-Muslim hate speech. This sparked a series of deadly communal clashes between Buddhists and Muslims from 2012 to 2014. As a result, the image of compassionate Buddhism, in which much of the country believes, was distorted internationally as a religion that favored bigotry and violence.

As of mid-2014, four separate organizations were organizing *dhamma* schools across Myanmar: The Dhamma School Foundation, *Ma Ba Tha*, Hitadara, and Dhamma Yaungchi (Su Myat Aung, 2014, 3). These groups reach large numbers of students: The Dhamma School Foundation claims to have 1,800 schools

that teach 200,000 students, Hitadara has 450 schools that teach 60,000 children, and *Ma Ba Tha* measures the curriculum books sold, with 230,000 (*ibid.*). This shows the educational reach and the strength of religious organizations in Myanmar today.

An indicator of change in the *sangha*'s relations to the state during this time of transition between 2015 and 2018 is the apparent climax and eclipse – or dissolution into a more decentralized grassroots organization – of the Ma Ba Tha organization's public face and power. Ahead of the 2015 elections, *Ma Ba Tha* monks portrayed Buddhism as threatened by Myanmar's Muslim minority and said the military supporting political party, United State and Development Party or USDP, should continue to run the country in order to protect Buddhism. But the failures of the election in asserting a people's-led authority of the NLD-based government has helped to diminish the strength of *Ma Ba Tha* since June 2016.

Before the 2015 election, the previous government of the military-backed USDP focused less on issues like education, healthcare and democracy and more on nationalistic rhetoric and hostility against Muslims. The USDP lacked the political credibility of the NLD, and therefore tried to give tactical support to the *Ma Ba Tha* monks and their exploitation of pre-existing underlying distrust between religious groups in Myanmar from 2013 onward. After the elections, strong incentives for political actors to support *Ma Ba Tha* disappeared. In addition, since the NLD won

an overwhelming election victory, it has been able to consolidate its position as the ruling government based on a wide support of the majority of people in Myanmar and has less to fear. While *Ma Ba Tha* enjoyed support among Myanmar's ethnic Bamar majority in 2013 and 2014, it seems to have declined significantly as it became evident that central *Ma Ba Tha* leaders were attempting to thwart the NLD and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi. During this shift in the country's political center of gravity, a wider range from in the monastic order that had been suppressed during the decades of military rule began to speak up and make their views known, both publicly and within the *sangha* organizations.

In the lead-up to the election in November of 2015, the general media and the opposition NLD party seemed concerned with possible disruptions of the elections. *Ma Ba Tha* overtly campaigned and promoted for the military-aligned NSDP in the elections, just as many individual monks promoted the NLD. Some prominent *Ma Ba Tha* monks supported the ruling USDP in the November 2015 elections as USDP candidates (and candidates from many other smaller parties) made 'protection of race and religion' a key component of their platforms. After the USDP's defeat, *Ma Ba Tha* was quick to turn against the USDP government in June 2015 when it threatened nationwide protests against a set of five high-rise projects near Yangon's famous Shwedagon Pagoda (Kyaw Phyo Tha, 2015). Spokespeople for the group have also insisted that they remain politically independent and that they simply support those parties and individuals that

support Buddhism (*ibid.*). The less formalized links between groups could be a product of the general popular disapproval of monastic political engagement displayed by most Buddhists in Myanmar but is also likely due to the particular relationships between the political and religious spheres. The NLD's victory showed the support not just of the majority of the voting public in Myanmar but also the approval of what appears to be a large majority of Myanmar's monks (who are not allowed to vote in political elections in the country). In campaigning for the USDP, *Ma Ba Tha* showed how badly it underestimated the national mood for change.

Ma Ba Tha returned to the news in June 2015, when members and supporters regrouped to celebrate its third anniversary at a two-day event at a monastery in Yangon's Insein Township. *Ma Ba Tha* said 5,000 people and about 2,900 monks attended the event on June 4 and 5, 2016 (but many reported lower numbers). Discussions at the anniversary event, which brought together the leaders of *Ma Ba Tha* groups from all around the country, were mainly about the group's achievements, especially issues like religious conversions and interfaith marriage, targets of the four race and religion laws. Some speakers vowed to defend "nationalism" for future generations and warned the NLD not to make any changes to the four "race and religion laws." The rhetoric that had often focused on patriotism and anti-Islam had largely shifted to highlighting the group's new-found emphasis on peace, complete with a sign depicting the third anniversary of

the "peace organization of *Ma Ba Tha*." Its chairman announced: "*Ma Ba Tha* was formed for the sake of unity and peace and I want Myanmar and the whole world to know that. After the arising of *Ma Ba Tha*, there are no more racial and religious conflicts anymore" (Mratt Kyaw Thu, 2016).

Most leaders spoke of popular misunderstanding over the activities of *Ma Ba Tha* monks. Many people were uncomfortable about what the monks were doing and believed that *Ma Ba Tha's* tactics needed to be less confronting, they said. One of the group's founding members, U Parmaukkha (known as the Magway Sayadaw), also announced his resignation from the group a few days after the anniversary event, at which he was conspicuous by his absence. Known as a core member like U Wirathu, U Parmaukkha's resignation came after differences over the group's political activities. He reported to Radio Free Asia that "I decided to quit *Ma Ba Tha* because I didn't like it when *Ma Ba Tha* was making speeches in many towns to vote for a certain party during the election campaign period. I want *Ma Ba Tha* to stand free from party politics. Now people are looking down on us because they say we are working for the USDP. I am resigning from *Ma Ba Tha* because it don't agree with their attitudes" (*ibid.*)

This did not stop *Ma Ba Tha* from supporting a set of four controversial "Protection of Race and Religion Laws" linked to race and religion that were passed by the previous military

government in the Fall of 2015. The four laws – The Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Act, The Population Control Law, The Monogamy Law, and the Religious Conversion Law – were first proposed by *Ma Ba Tha* and made into law by the previous military-dominated government. One of the laws, that strictly limits religious intermarriage, originated in mid-2013 (before the formation of *Ma Ba Tha*) and was followed by drafts of three other laws dealing with monogamy, religious conversion, and population control. A sympathetic party at the time introduced drafts of each of these bills, followed by a monk-led nationwide signature campaign (Irrawaddy, 2013). The bills at first languished in the Parliament. However, after the formation of *Ma Ba* Tha's Upper Myanmar chapter in early 2014, the group could apply pressure to the government which, along with the endorsement of senior monks from the State Sangha *Maha Nayaka* Committee (Aung Kyaw Min), resulted in the President reintroducing the bills and sending them to appropriate ministries to be redrafted (Eleven News, 2014). The bills were passed into law in several stages throughout 2015 (Solomon, 2015).

The bills have not been without opposition, however. On multiple occasions coalitions of civil society organizations as well as some prominent individuals have publicly condemned them as being religiously discriminatory, in violation of women's rights and the freedom of religion, and in contravention of international treaties to which Myanmar is a signatory and even to Myanmar's own constitution. The first concerted public opposition from

civil society groups came with a public statement in May 2014; in response U Wirathu called them 'traitors on national affairs' and attempted to undermine them by linking them with foreign organizations (Nyein Nyein, 2014). After having been publicly demonized by a monk, some of the civil society activists even received death threats (Yen Snaing, 2014). Once the laws went up for parliamentary debate in early 2015, the groups again renewed their public criticism, warning that the laws, if passed, could 'destroy the stability' of Burmese society (Radio Free Asia, 2015). But they did pass and the four laws have been condemned domestically and internationally for discriminating against women and religious minorities.

After the elected NLD government took power in April 2016, Buddhist nationalist movements in Myanmar has had several turning points. It has slowly and unevenly tried to limit the influence of this group and some of its more outspoken monks. One blow from the new government came in July 2016. Ma Ba Tha, as the State Buddhist *Sangha* declared, was not properly formed and therefore illegitimate. Activities by *Ma Ba Tha* thereafter went more to ground and online. With hundreds of its sub-chapters and hundreds of thousands of its followers across the country, the organization became more active, focusing both on humanitarian work and on strengthening Buddhist practice. Online demonizing rhetoric about Islam terrorism and the Rohingya ratcheted up on Facebook, enflaming and raising fears among their followers.

Amid the changes in Myanmar's sociopolitical transition, contemporary Buddhist monks and movements show considerable interests in negotiating correct relationships between the state, public political discourse and the role of religion. Some groups, like *Ma Ba Tha*, argue that the state is a means to carry out projects to protect Buddhism from outside threats, especially by using law to enable or restrict. Other monks or groups, like the Pann Pyo Lett School or the Thabarwa Monastery, seem to encourage an equally active role for Buddhist institutions in the promotion of national identity, national development and cultural preservation with less explicitly xenophobic goals. International agents, such as Western ambassadors or NGOs in Myanmar, have actively endorsed some of the development projects and the Buddhist interpretations of particular monks and monastic factions, even as they sought, during disputes about government relations to religion, to cal for the separation of religion and politics.

In late June and early July 2016, two mosques were destroyed in Myanmar – one in Bago, east of Yangon, and one in the Kachin state. The Muslim communities supporting them sought the protection of the local police, and a few days later a few men said to be responsible for the torching of the mosque in Kachin were arrested. Likewise, early in July 2016, U Gambira, a leader of the All-Burma Monks' Alliance who had been arrested when he entered Myanmar from Thailand in January 2016, was pardoned and released from prison.

Tensions between *Ma Ba Tha* and the newly elected government had been rising since the NLD assumed power in April 2016, as the movement tried to pressure the NLD during its attempts to resolve the Rakhine crisis. Then, on July 3, the NLD's Yangon Region Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein, while on a trip to Singapore, said "We don't need the *Ma Ba Tha*." This led to *Ma Ba Tha* promising a large protest, before eventually backing out of that threat. This was the start of a series of events that seem to mark a turning point in the government's relationship to *Ma Ba Tha,* and after that time NLD members and senior monks have all begun to criticize and pressure Ma Ba Tha. In mid-July, the State Sangha *Maha Nayaka* Committee distanced itself from *Ma Ba Tha*, saying it had never officially endorsed the movement and that it was operating outside of *sangha* rules and regulations. In the same week, a key *Ma Ba Tha* leader, U Wirathu, was sued for defamation by a Yangon charity over highly insulting remarks he made against UN Human Rights Rapporteur for Myanmar, Yanghee Lee. This has been accompanied by increasing numbers of individual monks not only to distance themselves from *Ma Ba Tha,* but to outright criticize the organization, its positions and rhetoric and some of its leaders.

Since the *Maha Na's* ban on *Ma Ba Tha,* relations between the NLD government and nationalists worsened. Monks once tied to *Ma Ba Tha* accused the ruling party of failing to promote and protect Buddhism generally, while favoring the human rights of other groups, especially Muslims. They demanded the resignation

of the country's Religious and Cultural Affairs minister – someone who remains in that position to this day.

The ban on *Ma Ba Tha* and its responses in 2016 were followed in 2017 by further government-led actions. The Muslim lawyer and NLS ally, U Ko Ni was assassinated in late January 2017. Two months later, in March 2017, the State Sangha Council or *Maha Nayaka* banned the ultranationalist monk, U Wirathu from delivering sermons for a year for having "repeatedly delivered hate speech against religions to cause communal strife and hinder efforts to uphold the rule of law» and for taking sides with political parties to inflame tensions. To counter this ban, he turned to Facebook to deliver his views to a growing digital community of eager followers. On May 10, police arrested seven people, including two monks, tied to *Ma Ba Tha,* for having incited violence in Yangon. Then, most dramatically, in May 2017, the State Buddhist Council banned *Ma Ba Tha* from operating under its current name and ordered that their signboards be taken down across the country by early July, which *Ma Ba Tha* leaders agreed to. They promptly officially renamed the *Ma Ba Tha* organization as the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation. This was followed by an August 5 crackdown on sit-ins by nationalist monks in Yangon and Mandalay and an arrest of the prominent nationalist abbot, Parmaukkha in early November 2017.

Despite the *Maha Na's* decrees on *Ma Ba Tha* – now the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation – there is rising anti-nationalism

sentiment among liberal-minded Myanmar people, and the organization is still active and popular, especially at the grass-root levels, where it has refocused on providing humanitarian relief for Buddhists and on Buddhist education efforts. A leading monk of the organization, Ashin Sopaka, noted that the name change was made to avoid confrontation with the State Sangha. "Only the name has changed. The rest is the same," he told *Myanmar Udan Weekly*, a publication run by nationalists.

Ma Ba Tha has also been limited as a wider range of monastic voices have spoken up critically of the organization. But *Ma Ba Tha* has not disappeared and it could reassert itself unless larger issues tied to Buddhism in Myanmar society are addressed. These crucial issues include how the wider monastic community and government respond to two concerns that many see as key challenges to Myanmar society today. First is the feeling among many that Buddhist practice and Buddhist values are on the decline: many people do not go to the temple as often, neglect their duties of giving alms to monks, and do not live up to the moral standards of Buddhist practice. Monastic organizations worry about the numbers and the quality of the monks. A second concern is that, while many may see Buddhism as in decline, some people also feel that Islam is on the offensive and slowly taking over the religious domain along with the moral and spiritual compass that is commonly viewed as central to Burmese culture and an important set or resources to turn to in order to deal with the real and dramatic changes going on in Myanmar.

Although evidence from the national census dismissing any increase in the number of Muslims is clear, there is still a popular belief that Muslim culture is aiding in the decay of Buddhism and Burmese culture. During the ongoing phase of enormous economic and social change, it is likely that these perceptions will continue. The Buddhist nationalist movement will persist, but it should increasingly be confronted by political and religious counterforces that are gaining strength.

In August 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, the Muslim militant group denounced by the government as terrorists, launched a series of attacks in northern Rakhine state and killed at least nine soldiers. The military saw them as a threat to national security and interests and counterattacked. This atmosphere of distrust and unease in Myanmar led the Buddhist nationalists to side with the army during the sweeping crackdown, destruction and forced expulsion of the Rohingya people in Rahkine state from September. The nationalists sided with the military, both taking the attacks seriously. By September 2017, some leading Buddhist monks from Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation flew to Rakhine State, where they donated 200 million kyat (more than $140,000 US) to the army chief, Snr-Gen Min Aung Hlaing, to be given to security forces in the area and displaced people and used for the rehabilitation process. In October 2017, U Wirathu and his followers went under state security escort to the affected area in northern Rakhine to distribute donations. In the same month, one of the country's

most prominent Buddhist monks, Sitagu Sayadaw, said during a sermon delivered to army officers at a garrison town in Karen State, that he wanted to see unity among the government, the military, the *sangha* and the people for the good of the country. The sermon was heartily welcomed by the nationalists. Then they organized pro-army rallies in Mandalay, Yangon, and in the Karen and Mon States in late November 2017.

On June 7, 2018, Facebook closed the account of the nationalist Buddhist *Ma Ba Tha* organization, along with the personal accounts of two extremist monks blamed for inciting hatred toward the Muslim Rohingya.

When seen together, as of August 2018, more than two years after the new government took office, diverse responses, tensions, patience, and public debates arose on monks being able to vote, as well as their involvement with promoting or criticizing laws. State efforts to weaken the Ma Ba Tha organization, and various decrees by the State Buddhist Council or *Maha Na* since mid-2016, have led to its lying low and to its rebranding as the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation in mid-2017. But there are also an expansion of the range and scope of tolerant monastic voices, and challenges to government efforts to ally itself with international sociopolitical norms that would enforce tolerant views. These changes point toward a reorientation that differs from what it was in 2010, although no clear or firm crystallization of new state-*sangha* relations have emerged. Instead, both the monks and

the government agencies are still experimenting and developing both the terms and the nature of their relationships in Myanmar as the environment and the atmosphere of the state, the *sangha* and the society and economy evolve.

Some Burmese Buddhists justify their nationalist activity by claiming to defend the Buddhist religion [*sāsana*]. While defending the *sāsana* is central to the monastic vocation (and perhaps a responsibility for any Buddhist), claiming that the ends justify the means has led to much violence in the past (Walton and Hayward, 2014). Despite Buddhists being a large majority in Myanmar, their global minority status has engendered a "siege mentality" (similar to that of Buddhists in Sri Lanka), in which they envision themselves as the last line of defense preventing the total disappearance of the religion (Kyaw San Wai, 2014). By framing their actions as a necessary response to the imminent threat of Islam's expansion into the Buddhist community, nationalist leaders have claimed that any action can be justified (even if seemingly in violation of other core Buddhist principles) if undertaken in defense of the religion.

Groups like Ma Ba Tha and 969 and its new incarnation as the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation claim their actions are needed to defend the Buddhist religion. This claim makes it hard for Buddhists in Myanmar to criticize or oppose them (Walton and Hayward, *ibid.*). There is huge social pressure to support or acquiesce to their arguments, especially when these arguments

are made by monks. Not only do laypeople find it hard to disagree with monks, but many monks themselves feel reluctant to offer their arguments, because of the Buddha's injunction against monks creating divisions in the *sangha*. The nationalist argument is strengthened more by the fact that Ma Ba Tha is tied to both anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence; many people see the group as a pro-Buddhist organization that aims to strengthen the religious and moral practice of Burmese Buddhists. Monks have argued that this type of activity is not only allowed, but that it is their obligation, thereby effectively veiling the Buddhist nationalist movement with the covering of religious and moral legitimacy.

Conclusion

Buddhism has always been entangled with the state in Burma. Buddhism has never been unified in Myanmar and political ideas and processes in Burma have long been enmeshed in Buddhist ideas, goals, monks and institutions. Precolonial Burmese Buddhist political ideas competed and overlapped with one another in the past, and this competition and overlap continue today as Myanmar undergoes its democratic transition. Moreover, political processes have always engaged Buddhist beliefs and practices of both the Burman majority and those outside it. Following the approaches used by Hurd (2015), Cesari (2016), and Walton (2017), it is clear that Buddhism and politics in Myanmar are always interconnected. They need to be contextualized, localized, and historicized more, just as ideas and practices of democracy need to be situated in a Myanmar context.

Critically examining normative conceptions of Buddhism and democracy held by both Burmese and foreign scholars remain important tasks. This can best be done by analyzing them in context.

Burmese Buddhists have creatively interpreted religious concepts and practices, from their ethical norms to their moral cosmology, showing how Buddhism is compatible with a wide range of political and economic ideologies. And this influence persists in Myanmar's political arena even without explicit use of Buddhist terms or rhetoric. Burma's Buddhist moral cosmology is relevant for politics since monks claim to be guardians of the religion. During Myanmar's exciting, but uncertain, democratic transition, Theravāda Buddhist resources will remain key for the public to make sense of and to assess politics. Knowing something of these dynamics will also be key to understanding Myanmar politics. Since 2012, monks have both helped strengthen Buddhist views of democracy as a type of moral political practice, and also sought to limit democracy in some ways to protect Buddhism and defend the Burmese nation, even by promoting specific laws and political priorities.

The entanglement of Buddhism and politics is not new. In colonial Burma of the early 1900s, many Buddhists interpreted the many changes they experienced as the loss of the Buddha's teachings in the world. They organized various movements aiming to preserve Buddhism that affected social forms and contributed to anti-colonial nationalist politics. The current situation in Myanmar resembles some aspects of the developments from a

century ago. As the country undergoes great social, political and economic upheaval, many Burmese are uneasy at the prospect of destabilizing change and worried that something stable is disappearing, and there are new movements with widespread support that aim to protect Buddhism, the Buddha's teachings and Burmese culture. In times of change efforts to preserve Buddhism arise. Part of this includes a language, a set of concerns and a style of thinking about who and what is a threat to Buddhism (Muslims, political parties, foreign NGOs, lifestyle changes) which has produced a sense of identity for many in Myanmar.

Since 2007, changes in Myanmar have been as remarkable as they have been contested, fraught, and tenuous. Democratization has not gone as many have expected or at least hoped. Economic growth has been uneven and sporadic across the country and its diverse population. Social tensions have worsened and erupted into widescale violence that some have called clear cases of "human rights abuses" and "genocide." The Buddhist *sangha* has been part of these sociopolitical changes, reflecting and sometimes enhancing the uncertainties of these transitions, but also promoting a variety of options toward the future for both the society and for political leaders. Some Buddhists have seemed more focused on hate and violence than compassion, peace and democracy, and this has surprised many outsiders. Other Buddhist voices – often quieter and less noticed – have called for interfaith and intercommunal work at building bonds of trust, and the promotion of more inclusive forms of democracy.

For more than a decade, Myanmar has experimented in the political and the religious arenas in ways that have sometimes fostered worries and uncertainty. While some earlier writings have stressed a presumed shift from military authoritarianism to a robust, fully formed democracy in Myanmar, recent scholars have produced more nuanced and richer types of analysis that see politics and religion as part of multifaceted and complex socioeconomic changes that occur in a global context. Buddhist monks, like political leaders, institutions, and interest groups in Myanmar, can now access a large and flexible set of resources ideas and practices, both those from Myanmar's traditions and those from outside, and both physically and digitally present. But lacking a single interpretive authority, source or goal, these monks, leaders, interest groups, and institutions have created a wide range of different interpretative models and policies that embody divergent concerns and point toward different goals. Being aware of such diversity, and their dynamics, allows us to see the fuller and more complex workings of Buddhism and politics in the opening of Myanmar to change and to the wider world.

But looking for parallels between those two movements in Burma and Myanmar will not uncover a common essence of Buddhist discourse or Burmese nationalism, but rather to allow us to see how each moment has constructed and reconstructed key modes of thinking like Myanmar/Burma, Buddhism and religion and processes like religious practice and democratization. By examining how these ways of thinking are fluid, contested

and able to affect how people organize themselves, we see a *politics of democratization and Buddhism in Myanmar.*

This essay sought to address how the *sangha* in Myanmar has responded to the sociopolitical reforms undertaken in that country since 2010. Using historical sources and printed materials, and a series of 16 interviews and visits with a range of monks at monastic organizations in Myanmar in 2016, just months after the new government came to power, it was not yet possible to answer to this question. Even now, in mid-2018, diversity and uncertainty reigns, and the renegotiations between the *sangha* and the government have both hit major hurdles that have made it difficult to fully resolve tense relations. What is clear is that the highly diverse and active monastic community in Myanmar and the new Myanmar government are still renegotiating their relations and doing so with renewed global attention.

These renegotiations between monks and politics are occurring on several fronts. First, monks and state actors are still developing an understanding of what democracy is all about in the new state and the ways that monks can and should relate to a society that is still tied up with different ideas of democratization. Second, the renegotiation involves developing new understandings of how the two sources of authority in Myanmar can and should interact with their lay supporters in communities that have local roots, but are also expanded into wider networks through improved transportation and communication systems such as phones and

internet groups. Increasingly since 2012, government actors and monks have been developing new relations to one another and to their publics through online platforms and networks, with Facebook being the most dominant. Finally, the *sangha* and the state are developing new ways to frame and to connect to governments, individuals, groups, and organizations beyond Myanmar.

This multidimensional renegotiation is part of a large political and religious reorientation taking place in Myanmar, where political and religious actors are testing the waters of the country's new political realities, and trying to build up a more diverse set of political and religious positions and voices. Three key aspects of this reorientation relate to a rebranding of *Ma Ba Tha* as it is challenged from the government and *Maha Na*, and rebuilding support from below in Myanmar society, an expansion of the range and quality of monastic voices who are willing and able to speak up in favour of tolerance and peace, and a new hybrid government which is slowly and unevenly seeking to see how laws and norms in Myanmar may be coordinated with international norms. This has been challenging and often ineffective, as the Rohingya expulsion crisis that has been occurring since 2017 has clearly shown. Buddhist nationalism has been banned but it has changed without disappearing. The military still is a dominant force in the governance of Myanmar and democratic structures and processes are still weak. Although these early changes are tenuous and uncertain, have met with resistance and are by no

means guaranteed to persist, they seem to signal an openness to a wider range of actors in Myanmar, but are still not able to accommodate to the global norms as many had hoped just a few years ago.

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Justice in the *Tipitaka*

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to study concepts of "justice" and "social justice" in Pali *Tipitaka*, Theravada's essential texts, under two main directions: (1) a study of the concept "moral justice" that appears in the teachings on the law of *karma* and rebirth to find out whether it can be a basis of "social justice"; (2) an inquiry into the concept "social justice" from Buddhist teachings on society and state in the *Suttas*, and the *Vinayas*, which formally govern the monastery (the *sangha*).

The study indicates that Buddhism accepts two conceptions of justice, i.e. universal and social. The former, based on the Buddha's teachings on *karma*, states that a moral law exists and governs the realization of sequences of behavior in proportion to their deeds. This law functions dynamically and causally beyond human's understandings. Descriptive orientation and theoretical complexity of the teachings impedes its explanatory and evaluative application to social relations. The latter, founded on the Buddha's

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sociopolitical teachings, focuses on immediate life situations. Believing that individual and society, as well as citizens and state-power structure, are interrelated; and that "All humans desire a good life that is made possible in a just society," Buddhism employs human basic features as main criteria for an arrangement of systems to distribute goods and wrongs. The study proposes that justice rooted in sociopolitical context leading itself to application to general society is more applicable and beneficial than justice defined by the law of *karma*.

Keywords: social justice, moral justice, karma

Introduction

As this article is a development of the research paper titled "Justice in the Tipitaka" as part of the Thai Humanities Forum Project supported by the Thailand Research Fund in 2007, the article follows the structure of the paper and is divided into four parts: (1) background, significance, objective and methodology of the research regarding the concept of justice in Buddhism; (2) a summary of the research findings; (3) the Buddhist perspective of justice; and (4) Suggestions that may be useful for future research in Buddhism and society.[2]

Background, Significance, Objective and Methodology of the Research

Justice is one of society's basic values, which binds the society together. It is a moral and political word claimed by philosophers to have a universal significance and an important role in political and social theories. Although presently regarded as less significant than human rights, justice is part of every legal system, which encompasses the public life. It is a social and political concept in

[2] As this article is a development of the research paper titled "Justice in the Tipitaka" as part of the Thai Humanities Forum Project supported by the Thailand Research Fund (from March 15, 2005 to June 14, 2007), I would like to thank the Thailand Research Fund and Professor Suwanna Satha-Anand, Head of the Thai Humanities Forum Project. Part of this article (Chapter 4) is published in the *Journal of Buddhist Studies Chulalongkorn University*,17/2, May- August 2010: 36-95. The entire article has not been published in any academic journal.

the sense that if we were alone, the question whether our action is just would be meaningless, but it becomes meaningful when we interact with each other, from a single person up to the levels of the community, society, nation or international relations (Promta, 1995). Justice becomes an important factor when we talk about the legitimacy to govern, or when we use it to oppose a government that we believe illegitimate. States would use justice in order to legitimize their rights to govern, and citizens would use it to claim their rights to oppose or deny states' authorities. In this respect, justice becomes the basic requirement in order to prove an authority's legitimacy. Apart from this, it is also used to demonstrate the highest ideals regarding forms of social relationships in idealized societies such as Plato's Republic and the communist state and society (Campell, 2001).

Some argue that justice is a public and political virtue, only related to actions and goals of the state or agents of the state, public activities, laws and policies, outside the private sphere, and unrelated to the economy and the family. I find this view somewhat incorrect because within the family, groups of friends, societies, volunteers, the court and the government, we often find justice and injustice. The issue of justice may not be the most important objective in these institutions and some may regard it as relevant only in the public sphere. However, feminist scholars argue for the importance of justice in the private sphere, for example, in relationships within the family and between men and women.

Some hold the view that justice is an absolute command, something that is intrinsically right and unrelated to its consequences. It is a norm without an exception. A value that neither deviates nor connected to any interests. This view affirms that justice must be fully received before any other goals or values. Justice is the most important virtue and higher than any other virtues. However, others view justice as one among many virtues. In some circumstances, such as those outside of politics and law, justice should be given a less prominent status in order to allow for other values or virtues, such as freedom and loyalty, to come to the fore. Some also hold that justice is related to the distribution of interests or due compensations more than equality (Campell, 2001).

Justice is used as a concept to evaluate relationships between individuals, between individuals and states, and between states. It plays an important role in political ideologies. Different ideologies conceive justice differently. It is not only a legal, but also a moral concept behind ideologies or human social structures, and refers to universal principles, the natural law, or the formation of a society. It is seen as a political and social invention.

In recent years, there has been an increase in attempts to reinterpret the teachings of Buddhism in relations to new economic, political and social situations. As new situations arise, scholars of Buddhism find interpretations that are limited

to the scope of individualism, ones that only emphasize individual goodness, as not providing satisfactory adaptations to contemporary society, and provide sufficient alternatives to ideas already present in Western thoughts and cultures. Buddhist teachings have tendencies towards empiricist forms of epistemology, atheism and naturalism in providing answers to various issues without resorting to supernatural powers. Its views regarding righteousness, morality and social justice are regarded by some as more satisfactory than answers that appeal to an omnipotent God, which are regarded as less compatible with contemporary Western thoughts. The study of the Buddhist view of "justice" is therefore not only significant in the field of Buddhist Studies, but to the quest for the meaning of "just society." Buddhism may be able to provide alternative answers for those who are interested in questions regarding social justice and justice under a legal system, especially in the case of Thailand which has Buddhism as its cultural roots. In examining this question, this research hopes that Thai society will gain a significant "body of knowledge" for the development of the idea of social justice in the future.

The study and conclusions derived from this research aim to provide a starting point in the analysis of justice in the Pali *Tipitaka* and other Theravada Buddhist scriptures, and hope to stimulate further discussions and developments in the field. The two main points examined in this paper are: firstly, whether the concept of moral justice in the teachings of *karma* and rebirths can be used as basic principles of social justice; and secondly, to better understand the concept of Buddhist "social justice"

in the teachings regarding the state and society in the *Suttas*, and the *Vinaya* monastic rules. Its hypothesis is that the Buddhist teaching of *karma*, which demonstrates the concept of a universal "moral justice," cannot be used as a foundation of social justice. For not only *karmic* justice poses epistemological problems, it also does not provide any criteria to determine injustice. Other social and political thoughts in Buddhism must also be considered to further analyze this concept.

This paper analyzes important *suttas* in the Pali *Tipitaka*, *Atthakatha*, *Tika*, other important Buddhist scriptures, and contemporary scholarly works in the fields of philosophy of religion and social philosophy both in Thai and English, to provide an understanding of the basic thoughts of Buddhism. This is aimed at formulating the ideas of Buddhist "justice," "moral justice" and "social justice" and to provide further analyses of the related topics of social structures, the state, and roles of the state, focusing on two particular issues, namely, the justice of punishments, and the justice of social distribution of interests. In providing these summaries and analyses, the researcher also takes into account the social, cultural and historical contexts of Buddhism and its teachings. It is hoped that this research will add to the body of knowledge regarding the Buddhist perspectives of "justice" and "social justice" within the fields of social and political philosophy, and stimulates further discussions and research in the areas of Buddhist social philosophy and governance.

Research Summary

This paper argues that the concept of "moral justice" in the teachings of *karma* and rebirths cannot provide the foundations for social justice. This does not mean that Buddhism does not accept the idea of universal moral justice or *karmic* justice, but universal moral justice poses many philosophical problems when applied to the concept of social justice, as shall be shown as follows.

I. Universal justice

Buddhism holds that all things are interconnected and causally related to two ways: (1) things being the conditions for the arising of other things, i.e. the process of origination (*Samudayavara*), and (2) their cessations causing the cessations of other things, i.e. the process of cessation (*Nirodhavara*). This is the natural law that controls the process of all objects, matters, living beings, minds, actions (*karma*), etc. They are all subjected to the law of arising and cessation, but only the mental process and action (*karma*) are directly relevant to human beings. The mental process functions according to the law of '*Cittaniyama*', consisting of consciousness, perception, thought, and volition, which condition the character of the mind positively or negatively and in turn influence verbal and bodily actions. Human action and its consequence are governed by the law of *Kammaniyama* (*karma*). *Kammaniyama* determines the karmic result of each action. Thus, according to the Buddhist perspective, there are laws of causes

and effects that govern the whole universe. These laws control nature and human lives. As individuals, human beings interact with other human beings, animate and inanimate objects mentally, verbally and physically. The laws of causes and effects determine that they always take responsibility over their intended mental, verbal and bodily actions. Each action comes with an inevitable responsibility. Whoever causes *karma*, he/she shall bear its consequences (Phra Dhammapitaka [P. A. Payutto], 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Promta, 2000).

In the Buddhist perspective, the nature of all things proceeds in two directions: the way leading to suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering (supreme happiness or *Nibbana*). Human actions also proceed in these two directions. When human beings perform mental, verbal and bodily actions with the intention or motivation to cause suffering, these actions will result in their future suffering in the present or the future lives. On the contrary, mental, verbal and bodily actions performed with good intentions will result in future happiness and even the cessation of suffering. This Buddhist principle of action can be summed up as 'whoever performs good karma will receive good results and whoever performs evil karma will receive bad results.' It is a law that demonstrates the relationship between action and its natural consequence, a law that can neither be interfered with nor altered by any human or superhuman powers.

Buddhism emphasizes the intention behind each action and

considers intention as *karma*, or action that has a moral value. The mind or consciousness, which reflects a human being's identity and freewill, is the first factor that determines whether an action is good or evil. The second and third factors are the outward action that follows the initial intention and the immediate effect of that action. All of these factors determine the *karmic* results. When a *karmic* result will bear its fruit depends on others related factors. Because of the various minor factors that affect *karma* coming to its fruition (*Vipaka*), *karmic* results of actions are different in every situation (Phra Dhammapitaka [P. A. Payutto], 1995a; Na Rangsi, 2000).

With regard to justice, *karma* ensures that any action that arises from freewill will inevitably bear its consequence. One is directly responsible for one's past actions. They are the factors that determine one's present mental states, characters, life situations and social environments. Regardless of one's personal preference or awareness of its existence, *karma* will provide a result that is appropriate to its cause. It determines that every action that has a moral value leads to an inescapable responsibility in the form of situations and environments that one is involved in or encounters. These responsibilities are sometimes extended into other temporal dimensions, i.e. *karma*'s fruition in one's future lives and realms. In this sense, *karma* is related to the teaching of "rebirth," a concept employed to ensure universal justice. For if one does not reap the fruit of one's karma in this life, one will surely reap its fruit in one's future existence (Satha-Anand, 2002).

In conclusion, Buddhism accepts the idea of universal justice or justice as a universal law applied to the whole universe. It is variously termed as *karmic* justice, moral justice, or natural justice.

II. Problems Regarding *Karmic* Justice

In my analysis of the related philosophical and religious literatures, the following issues must be considered when attempting to explain the concepts of *karma*, rebirth and universal moral justice in relation to actual human experience.[3]

(1) The inner workings of karma are beyond human cognition. The law of *kammaniyama* is a mysterious system, beyond the understanding of ordinary human beings. Its incomprehensible nature makes it impossible for us to clearly explain moral situations that occur in the society. We can only hypothesize and put our faith in the *Tathagata*.

(2) The complexity of *karma* and *karmic* results: There are many types of *karma* and conditions that determine its timings, functions and graveness of its results. Even though the concept of rebirths may ensure future *karmic* fruition, it is impossible to determine exactly the specific time and place of each result. As our lives in *samsara* have no beginnings, we cannot use any ordinary methods in determining the cause of

[3] For more details on these issues, see Kaufman, Whitley R.P. (2005), Reichenback, Bruce R. (1990), Wright, S. Dale (1994) and Suwanna Satha-Anand (2002).

each specific happiness and suffering, and thus cannot evaluate its justice.

(3) Results of *karma* can be divided into two types: interior results and external results. Interior results are related to the mental conditions and characters of an individual. There is a clear relationship between this type of results and the moral conditions of an individual. However, that is not to say that moral and immoral individuals' ways of lives must always be outwardly different or make different impacts on the surrounding environment and the society. Exterior results, on the other hand, are related to the environment, time, outward appearance and moral characters of an individual. With regard to them, there seems to be no clear relationship between this type of results and moral actions. As external results are precarious and depend on other related social conditions, it is impossible to determine which aspects of an individual are *karmic* results and which aspects the results of other conditions and whether or not an individual has received *karmic* justice in a given situation. Some would argue that as there is no proof of such justice occurring, the universality of this aspect of *karma* must be regarded as nonexistent.

(4) The acceptance of human inequality: The guarantee of *karmic* justice through rebirth allows for an acceptance and view of human inequality as appropriate and just. As *karma* is seen as the result of individuals' past actions, social disparities are seen as normal, even though these disparities

may have been caused by other factors unrelated to moral actions such as social development and political structures. If one concedes that every situation is the result of past *karma*, one would tend to ignore social inequality and regard it as well-deserved.

(5) The individualism of *karma*: *Karma* together with rebirth are sometimes viewed as an individualistic process and exist more in other temporal dimensions than the present. This perception of *karma* as unrelated to its social dimensions causes one to view human suffering as individualistic. This leads to a tendency to isolate oneself from others' happiness and suffering, not to interfere with them. One tends to view one's duty as to cause good *karma* for oneself and others' dispositions as the result of past actions that cannot be altered: 'Human beings are heirs to their own *karma*, their past actions determine all their present circumstances.'

(6) The law of *karma* and its workings are consistent, mechanical and unbiased. It has no other purpose than to follow its own rules. If we always get what we deserve, then, we cannot ask others for any sympathy and compassion. For attempting to defy *karma* out of loving-kindness and compassion would also be attempting to defy the principle of universal moral justice. Acts of loving-kindness and compassion can, therefore, be restricted by this view of *karma* and the bringing about of social justice can be seen as defying *karma* and causing injustice.

(7) Adapting the teachings of *karma* to encompass its social dimensions: As human beings are born within a society, their social surroundings, communities and environments determine their choices, characters and social behaviors. The process of *karma* is, therefore, not limited to individual actions, but encompasses social conditions both past and present. When *karma* is viewed in this context, and linked to an interpretation of the teaching of Dependent Origination (*paticcasamuppada*), justice can be extended beyond the scope of an individual, and applied to present situations without necessarily resorting to future lives and realms. However, these concepts still pose problems in determining injustice in a situation, as every situation could be viewed by *karma* as equally just.

In conclusion, although universal justice and moral justice based on the teaching of *karma* are important concepts in Buddhism, applying these concepts to social phenomena to determine social and individual justice proves a complex procedure. For the workings of *karma* are complex, the consistency of its system inexplicable and beyond the capacity of ordinary human knowledge. It is a law that has descriptive, not normative, characteristics, and poses difficulties in evaluating and determining injustice.

Thus the teaching of *karma* poses problems in evaluating "justice" from the perspective of ordinary human understanding.

What Buddhist teaching should, then, be used instead? Which principle is to be used as a basis of justice, one that would enable it to rationally explain and evaluate human social relations? The second part of this research shall examine this issue.

III. Social Justice[4]

As *karma* has descriptive rather than normative characteristics, *karmic* moral justice cannot be used as a basis of social justice. However, one should not abandon the natural law of cause and effect altogether, for this law serves as a foundation of ethics, and the relationships between cause and effect of an action, in particular, can be used to determine the meaning of social justice.

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[4] Views summarized in this section are based on information from the Pali *Tipitaka*, *Jatakas* and the commentaries, together with interpretations of contemporary Thai scholars of Buddhism. Regarding Buddhist ethics, I rely on Phra Dhammapitaka's (P.A. Payutto, 1995b), Phra Ratchaworamuni's (Prayudh Payutto, 1985) and Somparn Promta's (2005) explanations of Buddhist truth and ethics. Regarding the issue of the state and the ideal ruler, I rely on an interpretation of various stories and teachings in the *Sutta Pitaka*, for example, *Agganna Sutta*, *Cakkavatti Sutta*, together with an interpretation of Mavis Fenn (1995), David R. Loy (2000) and Pricha Changkhwanyuen (1992 and 1999). Social justice is examined in relations to two kinds of state activities: 1. justice in a punishment and 2. justice in the distribution of social benefits. The first kind is an interpretation of the concept of punishment in the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the ideas of morality (*sila*) and unwholesome courses of action (*akusala-kamma-patha*). The second kind is an interpretation of *Kutadanta Sutta*, *Singalaka Sutta*, the *Jatakas*, and the views of Wira Somboon (1989 and 2002) and Abhichai Pantasen (2001). The conclusion to this section is based on the combination of these sources and perspectives.

Buddhism uses *karmic* cause and effect to evaluate an action. If the result of an action is in accordance with the principle of 'do good deeds and good things will happen, do bad deeds and bad things will happen,' then, Buddhism would consider it a just result and coherent with its cause. Justice, in this sense, is defined as 'proceeding in accordance with the natural law of cause and effect,' and as 'reaping the consequence (or benefits) appropriate to the action.'

In my opinion, the basis of a Buddhist social justice must provide clear explanations from the point of view of ordinary human beings with limited knowledge of the highest truths. The social and political teachings of Buddhism possess these criteria as they are based on empiricist epistemology, one that does not require the attainment of truths beyond the ordinary human capacity. These teachings are found in the *Agganna Sutta*, *Cakkavatti Sutta*, *Kutadanta Sutta*, the *Jatakas* and the *Vinaya*'s monastic practices.

In my analysis of Buddhist principles of social justice in the *Suttas* and the *Vinaya*, I have taken as a scope the issues of social structure, the state, and the roles of the state and society, and examined two particular activities, namely, punishment of wrongdoers and distribution of social (and economic) benefits. The following are my findings:

(1) Buddhism holds that societies originated and developed naturally without resorting to superhuman interventions. The

first humans did not differ in their social status, but over a period of time differences occurred as the result of their interactions with the surrounding environment. Physical differences resulted from differences in the consumption of natural resources. Human beings initially consumed resources for their basic requirements. But as bigger communities developed, out of greed, they began to consume more and more resources causing harm to the natural environment. In fear of not having enough, they distributed and established ownerships over them. Some people became discontent and caused harm to other human beings and their properties leading to social disharmony. People in these protosocieties, then, needed to appoint someone who would punish wrongdoers and award the righteous. They elected the most suitable people to assume these duties. The state and government were, then, established in order to fulfil this social need. Their establishments show the desire of people to live harmoniously in a society.

(2) According to Buddhism, there are three basic goals or values of human life: i) the present goals of acquiring possessions, developing friendships and maintaining one's life; ii) long-term goals of having a peace of mind, security, living in a harmonious society and acquiring knowledge; and iii) the highest goal of freedom from all kinds of suffering. Buddhism holds that every human being desires these goals. In order to achieve them, society must be able to provide each person

with their basic requirements. Moreover, its members must also refrain from harming each other and each other's properties. They must not harm each other with false speech and take advantage through falsehood and deceits. In sum, human beings must establish righteous kinds of relationships with one another. In order to do so, they must be able to maintain their basic "humanities" through non-greed, non-violence and having the right view. A state or a government that provides no guarantee of justice, especially with regard to the provision of basic requisites, would prevent this from happening and undermine other social relationships. The state, therefore, has a duty to ensure social justice by getting rid of various injustices and promote righteousness in the following ways:

(a) The prevention of violence and ensuring justice and security in the punishment of wrong-doers: When there is a violation of the basic human rights, the state must ensure justice by punishing wrongdoers justly and fairly. The state must provide the assurance to prevent future violations and must not allow the conditions for violence to occur.

(b) Human beings cannot live without the four requisites: The lack of these requisites results in the violations of rights such as violence, physical harm, and damages to properties. This may undermine other social relationships and even to the loss of the basic humanities of citizens.

> The state and the government must bring about social justice in their distribution of social (economic) benefits and ensure that all their citizens receive the four requisites equally.

Social justice can only occur when a society respects its citizens' basic humanities and carry out its roles and duties appropriately. According to Buddhism, in order for a society to prosper, two basic conditions must be met: each citizen must be aware of his/her relationship with others and respect their humanities. In order to create a harmonious society, and to avoid conflicts, each citizen must respect one another and treat each other with loving-kindness. A society must also have basic inviolable norms or rules enacted by its citizens through its social institutions, i.e. the state and the government. These rules govern its social relationships and when they are violated, the violators must be punished accordingly. Although these rules are to be upheld and respected, Buddhism also allows for their amendments if the circumstances in which they were enacted change, and they no longer serve to maintain the basic humanities of individuals. The violation of just rules may result in the destruction of a society as a whole. To uphold the basic social norms and to prevent social discords, the restriction of loving-kindness with regard to the violators is sometimes necessary.

According to this analysis, "justice" is, then, defined as 'when a person receives the results (or benefits) appropriate to his/her status and actions.' The word "status" has two meanings: firstly,

one's status as a human being (individual status); and secondly, one's social status, which occurs after human beings come together to form a society. As an individual, everyone is equal is his/her status as a human being. Everyone has similar psychological needs of the basic requisites of life, personal security, possessions, and a desire to achieve his/her goals without being obstructed by others. But as a member of a society, each person differs in his/her status according to his/her occupation, role and social duty. These differences do not mark an individual as higher or lower in status, but according Buddhism, what determine them are the moral standard and virtues possessed by that individual.

When human beings come together in a society, their differing behaviors affect the outcome of that society. These behaviors are divided into two main types: firstly, negative behaviours that destroy social relationships and lead to the loss of a person's basic humanity; and secondly, positive behaviors that enhance good relationships and promote other social benefits (*Singalaka Sutta*). A person's social status is, therefore, linked to his/her moral or ethical behavior towards others; and his/her individual status as a human being is related to his/her individual moral and ethical standard. Buddhism sees these two statuses as having common basic characteristics. It also emphasizes the importance of the different ethical standards among individuals.

With regard to the distribution of interests or social benefits, the

maintenance and preservation of individuals' basic humanities serve as the foundations of their just and equal provisions. Taking into account the differences of individuals based on their status and actions, the provisions of the basic requisites to individuals must be done in accordance with their capacities to exercise their freedom in their professions and duties, and at the same time, it must not violate the basic social norms and undermine individuals' basic humanities. One can see the influence of *karmic* justice in this perspective.

Buddhist Perspective of "Justice"

According to this analysis, Buddhist perspective of "justice" may be summarized as follows.

Two levels of justice exist in Theravada Buddhism:

(1) Universal justice, which is synonymous with "moral justice" or justice in accordance with the natural law. This justice is linked to *karma*.

(2) Social justice, which means fairness with regard to: i) things that are beneficial to one's life in a society, and ii) in the distribution of social welfares. The term benefit here not only refers to material benefits, but also to opportunities to further oneself and to strive toward one's highest goals. This kind of justice is linked to social and political teachings and practices.

Universal justice arises from the natural law. It is a process that governs all things in the universe, including human relationships.

The law controls the appropriate outcomes of moral actions that arise from a person's freewill. It provides each action with a result in accordance with other related sets of causes and conditions. The law of moral justice or *karma* determines that good deeds bear good results and bad deeds bad results. Justice is here defined as the appropriateness and balance between the actions performed and the consequences received. *Karma* will provide justice consistently and without bias, regardless of the doer's awareness of it.

The distribution of results, whether in the form of punishments for wrongdoers or rewards for the righteous, occurs appropriately and in accordance with their causes and conditions. It is a mechanism whose goal is one of moral retribution. The doer does not have to be aware of it and usually can neither fully explain nor comprehend the cause of his/her reward or punishment. It is a justice that is beyond the cognition of ordinary human beings. Buddhism ensures that just responsibilities follow each and every action, each consequence is always appropriate to its cause. Even though *karmic* justice poses problems in explaining and clarifying everyday life situations, it can nevertheless provide a basis for social justice. I refer, in particular, to basic teaching that every norm and rules must be in accordance with or based on the natural law, a law that is morally correct and just, and those that contradict this natural law is most likely to cause harm to individuals and the society. Therefore, social laws, which aim to benefit individuals and the society, must be coherent with the

principles of causal relationships and human actions. They must be based on the universal *karmic* justice in accordance with the motto: 'when one performs good deeds, one receives good results (rewards) appropriate to one's action; and when one performs bad deeds, one receives bad results (punishments) appropriate to one's action'. This universal value must always be the basis of social justice.

Moreover, the social and political teachings in the *suttas* (e.g. *Agganna Sutta*, *Cakkavatti Sutta*, *Singalaka Sutta*, *Kutadanta Sutta*) and the practices in the *Vinaya* (*Mahavibhanga* 1-2, *Vinaya Pitaka*) provide important principles regarding human values that can be used as a basis of social justice. These texts hold that respect must be given to each person's basic values such as freedom of action and expression and the basic human rights (life and the four requisites), and to the highest social goals that enable individuals to live harmoniously in a society. Norms that take into account these basic human values and goals can be used to determine social justice and as the lowest requirements, they must not be violated. This concept is derived from the teachings of the five precepts and *Parajika Vinaya* rules, which are also regarded as inviolable basic norms for monks and nuns.

The first and most important economic and material benefits to be distributed are the basic necessities of life, i.e. the four requisites. Buddhism views these requisites as essential in the preservation of individuals' basic humanities. The lack of proper distribution

may result in the undermining of individuals' humanities, which may lead to the destruction of the basic humanities of the whole society and its citizens. Furthermore, Buddhism holds that economic benefits must be distributed in accordance with each individual's capacity (actions). This view is similar to the liberalist theory of justice, which also takes into account each person's capacity as a criterion. As each person is required to perform his/her roles and duties according to his/her status, and acquire material benefits and the four requisites essential for maintenance of correct relationships within a society, he/she must be given the freedom to lead his/her life and to spend and consume material wealth that he/she acquired through honest means. The distribution of economic benefits must take into account each person's freedom and capacity to carry out his/her professions. However, the acquisitions of material wealth must not be the result of unlawful actions and the society must ensure that there are no violations of individual's property rights in this process.

Does the idea of justice as described above contradict the concept of compassion? The impossibility of human intervention in the process of universal *karmic* justice disallows any kind of compassionate acts. Even the loving-kindness of the Buddha cannot wholly intervene its outcomes. This universal *karmic* justice, therefore, cannot be used to determine social phenomena, and being linked to the concept of rebirth, it cannot provide any stimulus to bring about a cause for social justice. For example,

in the case of the lack of four requisites, if Buddhism holds that this is the result of past *karma* rather than the existing social and political structures (e.g. an injustice caused by the state), one must accept this situation as fair and just, and in accordance with *karma*. On the other hand, from the point of view of the basic social and political factors of life, the injustice and other situations received by individuals are seen as related to the society they live in and not results of past *karma*. Individuals and the society, like all other natural phenomena, are causally dependent. Individuals' situations are causally related to their social conditions, and social conditions are causally related to individuals' actions. Society, therefore, must take responsibility for the injustice received by individuals. In particular, the state and the government chosen by the society must take direct responsibility for the situations that occur within their jurisdiction and must provide tools for the reorganization of social structures to aid the lives of those affected individuals. The society as a whole must show loving-kindness towards those who received injustice and ensure that basic social justice be given to them through the process of social, political and administrative reorganization. In this sense, if an act of loving-kindness improves the society and aids individuals' interests, for example, by providing them with the four requisites, it is not regarded as a violation of justice. But, in some cases, acts of loving-kindness and compassion must be restricted if those acts go against the basic principles of a good society. Therefore, the view of justice that takes into account its social and political

contexts embraces acts of loving-kindness, but the view of justice based on the teaching of *karma* denies them.

In my opinion, *karmic* justice helps one to understand that the correct basis for social justice must be one that is consistent, unbiased and applicable to all. Social justice cannot be explained or determined within the scope of *karma*, which is linked to the concept of rebirth. But when it is based on the Buddhist social and political teachings and the *sangha* practices in the *Vinaya*, it becomes much more applicable. Justice based on these teachings and practices, unlike *karmic* justice, does not pose complex epistemological problems. In a society that consists of differing views, justice that takes into account the basic humanities of individuals and the relationships between individuals and society should be the more applicable than *karmic* justice.

Suggestions

(1) Suggestions regarding application and policies: Living in good societies and communities help promote one's quality of life. Buddhist *karmic* justice teaches us that any principle governing a state or society must be in accordance with the universal truth, and not biased with regard to ethnicity, class or particular groups of people. Buddhist justice that takes into account its social and political contexts teaches us that the state must be aware of the basic human conditions (human rights) and other factors that aid the lives of individuals and the society. Providing enough basic requisites and laying down rules that overcome social obstacles help provide the

conditions for other higher values that one can strive to achieve.

(2) This research does not go into details regarding Buddhist punishment theories. Despite various studies on this subject, such as Somparn Promta (2005), their conclusions are still subject to debate. The study of punishments in the *Vinaya* monastic rules could provide further discussions on social practices and norms, just laws and the allocations of state's power. There are currently very few studies on the Buddhist understanding of the relationships of powers and their allocations in a social system, and the process of social justice. Those who are interested are encouraged to study these topics, which could provide an important addition to the discussion regarding implications of Buddhist social teachings.

(3) Regarding the philosophical debates on the concept of *karma*, there are currently many important issues being discussed in the field of philosophy of religion. From surveying various works in English, the topic of *karma* and its relationship to moral justice, in particular, is currently very widely discussed and much debated on. The topic of *karma* has been discussed quite freely and rationally by Western scholars, their views not being limited to the scope of a religious system. Many of the issues are not mentioned in this paper. Thai Buddhists are encouraged to join these debates and provide their own perspectives and solutions, which could be of much benefit to Buddhist Studies at the national and the international levels.

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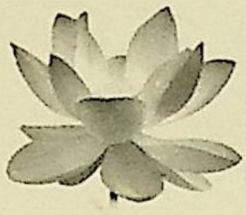

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