



The Journal of
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Buddhist Universities
(J I A B U)



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**The Journal
of
the International Association of
Buddhist Universities
(JIABU)**

2012



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Forward

You are finally holding the 3rd Volume of the Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities. We are well aware of the delays that have brought out this issue in an untimely fashion. We can blame the devastating floods that swamped Thailand in 2011, and other reasons, but alas – it is here and we are focused on this matter, a cause for celebration, for some.

We know that our journal may be distinct from other academic journals in the Buddhist world, but our aims are significantly different. We are very committed to issuing a journal of the highest academic quality, but this also depends on the submissions received – sometimes we must accept some articles by emerging scholars, in order to assist in their academic development. Their insights or perspectives are fresh, and we should consider these articles as just as valid as anyone else. We may also give preference to scholars within our association of universities, but again, sometimes the articles are not forthcoming, so we manage with the materials we have. We could no longer delay the product that we must provide to our association members.

It is with this issue, as well with the previous two issues, that our academic tradition will develop, and produce scholarship of higher standards, but the Buddhist world, primarily using English as a second language, takes some time to develop. We highly encourage our scholars from around Asia, and elsewhere to begin to take the work of the IABU more seriously, and of course we welcome all to participate in our endeavors.

Finally, we would like to thank the members of the extended IABU Executive Council and Managing Secretariat for their hard work and dedication through seeing and guiding this journal to its completed stage.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. B. Pundit". The letters are cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'P' being significantly larger and more prominent than the others.

Most Venerable Professor Dr. Phra Brahmapandit
Chairman, International Association of Buddhist Universities

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Editorial Message

Welcome to the 3rd Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities. This volume is long overdue, for too many or numerous reasons, none of which should be recollected. It's here now, and we are excited to see it finally in print.

The IABU has been functioning for several years now, bringing Buddhist universities together on a larger academic platform, through the many successful academic conferences that we hold at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, the gracious host for the office for the IABU Secretariat. Nearly annually, we organize academic conferences in which around seventy academics presenting their research or academic articles on Buddhism are brought to the public and attending students. Each conference has about four subthemes in which, generally each paper is given about fifteen minutes of presentation-time, followed by about five minutes for some brief comments. Our papers in this journal have been contributed by several professors, all of which attend and present in our academic conferences, and it is well within our hopes that each paper can find a home in the hearts of someone, perhaps some young researcher, who can take up the knowledge or wisdom in the paper and create a larger or better text – maybe be a reference or serve as a catalyst for a thesis or a dissertation project.

The International Association of Buddhist Universities is committed to improve the academic scholarship of Buddhist Studies scholars. We have well-established scholars in our network, as well as younger, aspiring scholars working equally as hard to bring aspects of Buddhism to the interested reader.

Professor Kwee brings the knowledge of Indonesia to our attention. The IABU has many universities from Indonesia in our association, and such an article shares the wisdom of this ancient Buddhist chain of islands. Professor Abeynayake's paper is the Keynote Speech delivered to our 2nd IABU Academic Conference on Buddhist Philosophy & Praxis, which discusses a dilemma with the four noble truths. Dr. Peoples contributes an article here on

a possible relationship between a philosophical-school and a group of people that the Buddha met. Both Jana Igunma and Professor Mahanta discuss a popular Jataka story, from different perspectives. Dr. Peoples contributes a second piece, a fresh article on a recent controversial figure who possesses an interesting critical-perspective on Buddhism. Finally, Professor Lee contributes an article on the peace work done in the United States by the Tzu Chi organization. Please enjoy these contributions to the emerging realm of Buddhist academia.

Please take the time to read these articles, and we hope to bring out additional issues in a more timely manner. We also will strive to bring out higher-quality material in the future. Our goal is to continually improve our young association.

The 2012 IABU Editorial Team



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The Borobudur: A Psychology of Loving-kindness Carved in Stone

Maurits G.T. Kwee^{1,2}



Abstract

This essay discusses the meaning of The Borobudur from a psychological perspective which unfolds while virtually and actually touring this majestic *stupa*-like pyramidal construction. The Borobudur dates from about the year 800 and is located between two twin volcanoes on Java-island. Its significance is testified by the immense building itself which conveys Javanese Buddhism as revealed by its premier interpreter: Dharmarakshita Suvarnadvipa. It is surmised that the lava-stone “Mahayana wonder” served as

¹ G.T. Maurits Kwee, PhD (Em. Hon. Professor and Clinical Psychologist), Faculty Member and Thesis Adviser of the Taos Institute (USA) – Tilburg University (Netherlands) PhD-Program and Founder of the Institute for Relational Buddhism, Netherlands. E: mauritskwee@gmail.com; W: www.taosinstitute.net/maurits-gt-kwee-phd1 and www.relationalbuddhism.org; t: @relationalbuddh; F: @Relational Buddhism. Personal note: Born on the island of Java, I was exposed to Javanese Buddhism in my childhood through my great-grandmother’s *Samadhi*, a meditation state characterized by a firm focus and absorption. I studied it later in life, and found it so intriguing that I would like to share some of my accumulated understanding of it here. Further, I acknowledge and give a heartfelt thanks to Ruth Tiffany Naylor for being a sparring partner toward finalizing this article.

² If one picture is worth 10.000 words, this article cannot replace the pictorial power-point show of c.300 slides (as e.g. presented at the 4th International Conference of the Sri Lanka Association of Buddhist Studies, December 10-12, 2010).



a ceremonial place where the Sailendra kings were crowned as *Bodhisattvas* and also, as it does today, a place of pilgrimage for devotion to glorify Buddhism. Definitely, it was and still is an educational center, an “open university” , and a royal gift to the people. Ascension of The Borobudur can be instrumental in realizing an awakening in one lifetime. Ascending it up to the pinnacle is said to extinguish craving (*Nirvana*) and to awaken motivation (*absolute bodhicitta*). Descending back to the secular world (*relative bodhicitta*) is said to liberate from the cycle of psychological malaise (*Samsara*) as one learns to absorb, embody, and exude loving-kindness in mindful speech. The *Gandavyuha Sutra* is carved on The Borobudur’s upper reliefs and apex, exhorting pilgrims to the realization that the formless world is an “empty bubble”. This is a practice-oriented view which goes beyond the *Abhidharma* philosophy in that it depicts a psychology of “Relational Buddhism” wherein meaning and happiness are derived from *interpersonal* care in *intrapersonal* balance against a backdrop of formless emptiness. These depictions accentuate the “linguaging” dimension of the Body/Speech/Mind triad of Karma, and in this sense they embrace a postmodern social constructionist vista of the Buddhist message, illuminating the emptiness of “Transcendental Truths” and elucidating “Relational-Interbeing-in-Between-Non-Selves”. The Borobudur conveys a deep and lasting relational harmony which is achievable through imbibing the interpersonal value and quality of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness itself is rendered as full of empathic compassion, sympathetic joy, and relational equanimity. This essay also highlights recent social psychological studies which corroborate some of the essence of The Borobudur’s spirit. In effect, a fact-finding field trip to The Borobudur might boil down to accomplishing “aha” uphill, emptiness at the top, and “haha” downhill, which rounds off the seeker’s quest full circle.

Introduction

Javanese Buddhism is relatively unknown by Buddhists around the world because it has been relatively extinct for some 10 centuries. Some villages in remote areas have remained Buddhist since the Mahayana heydays on Java island until now (Kustiani, 2010; pers. comm.). Its spirit may live on as long as The Borobudur,



the biggest Buddhist structure to date, remains a UNESCO protected heritage. Surfing on the wave of a global upsurge of interest in Buddhism, there is increasing attention by “newborn” Buddhists for The Borobudur heritage. However, many Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike question what this *mandala*-based pyramid in *stupa*-like form is actually all about.³ This brings us to the enigma on the function of this mysterious construction which, although engineered in a *stupa* form, does not contain any relics. Based on the literature and my own research *in situ*, I surmise that The Borobudur was not only a ceremonial site for the dynasty’s crowning, but was also a dynasty’s gift to the people as an “open university” in the framework of a royal action on the rulers’ wholesome Body/Speech/Mind Karma.

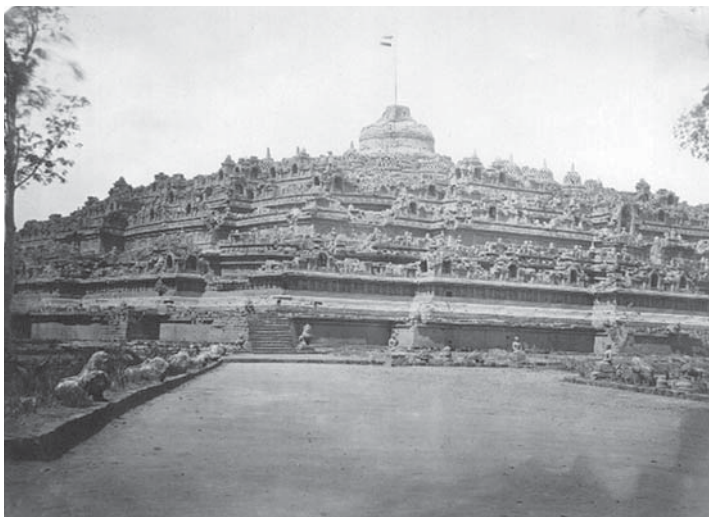
The Borobudur, a huge Mahayana Buddhist building of circa 55.000 cubic meters, with a base of 15.129m² (123x123m) and a height of now 34.5m (originally: 42m) which is located near Magelang in Central Java, stems from about the year 800 and was erected between two twin volcanoes: mounts Sundoro and Sumbing in the North-West and mounts Merbabu and Merapi in the North-East. To be exact, on its 10 floors the lava-stone structure has a tower, 72 *stupas* (domes of more than 3m in height), 504 Buddha-statues in lotus sitting posture (conspicuously, no reclining or standing statues), and 1460 story-telling bas relief panels. The name “Borobudur” is seemingly derived from the Sanskrit “vihara”, meaning sanctuary and pronounced in Javanese as “biara” or “boro” located on the hill: “bidur” or “budur”; thus “borobudur” and its function has been traditionally designated by the local people as the “Mountain of the Bodhisattva’s 10 Developmental Phases”. These phases correspond with the 10 floors of The Borobudur which correspond to the “10 perfections” of the *Bodhisattva* (Buddha-to-be) as narrated in the *Avatamsaka* or *Flower Garland Sutra* (Cleary, 1993) which is about “Indra’s Jewel Net”, a splendid infinite cosmos comprising endless universes mutually reflecting endless universes. Climbing the floor means acquiring the Bodhisattva qualities toward Buddhahood in one lifetime by working through the relational

³ A *mandala* is geometrical sacred form consisting of circles and squares and a *stupa* is usually a dome- or mound-like structure containing a relic (Wayman, 1981). The first two floors (the foot, hidden for constructional purposes) represent the sphere of lust (*kamadathu*), the next four floors, square platforms, represent the sphere of form (*rupadathu*), and the last four floors, three circular platforms plus the main dome, represent the sphere of the formless (*arupadathu*).

scenarios of balancing: 1. generosity, 2. righteousness, 3. forbearance, 4. endeavor, 5. meditation, 6. wisdom, 7. skillfulness, 8. equilibrium, 9. education, and 10. awakening. In effect, it emerges that the major function of The Borobudur is both to metaphorically accommodate and physically illustrate the last (39th) book of the *Flower Garland Sutra*, called the *Supreme Crown Sutra*. Thus, this crown is displayed by the 7m, highest dome, of The Borobudur, so that it seems that the story of the *Supreme Crown Sutra* is cast there in stone to educate visitors in emptiness and loving-kindness, qualities to be experienced while ascending and descending the construction.

An overview

Magnificent parts of the building, panels, statues, and domes have been robbed, damaged or partly damaged by vandals rather than by nature's violence. It was probably abandoned and forgotten around the time of Mt. Merapi's 11th century volcanic eruptions and remained covered until 1814. After local inhabitants pointed it out to Sir Thomas Raffles during the short British rule of Java (1811-1816), The Borobudur was freed from a jungle strangle in 45 days by 200 men. Relevant missing parts of The Borobudur are conserved in a museum in Leiden, Netherlands and in Thailand. In 1896 the Dutch colonial government bestowed King Chulalongkorn eight train wagon loads of the finest panels and statues (Davisakd Puaksom, 2007).



In the first photograph of The Borobudur, taken in 1873 by Isidore van Kinsbergen⁴, the andesite structure of more than two million volcanic blocks, accommodates not only a tower, domes, and statues, although this is not as clearly visible, but it also has nine circumambulating corridors of more than 5km long. These corridors are flanked on the left-hand and right-hand side by bas reliefs which are each one meter in height and two meters in width.⁵ Roughly half of the approximately 3000 panels refer to five Buddhist books, while the other half is meant as embellishment (Soekmono, 1976). At the time of The Borobudur's construction, reading all Buddhist scriptures would have taken more than a lifetime, if one in fact could read. It would in any case have been an impossible task as there was no book-printing.⁶

Depicting enchanting scenes The Borobudur is a practical guide teaching how to nurture the psychological qualities present in and growing out of loving-kindness. They are derived from books considered relevant in Javanese Buddhism: (1) *Karmavibhanga Sutra* (on the working of *kama*/lust and Karma), (2) *Jataka Stories* (on the Buddha's lives as a *Bodhisattva*), (3) *Avadana Stories* (on renowned Buddhists' noteworthy deeds), (4) *Lalitavistara Sutra* (on the unfolding narrative of Siddharta's life until awakening), and (5) the *Gandavyuha Sutra*, alluded to above. The first four books are preludes which lead to the last book via a Mahayana "gimmick" : instead of discoursing, the Buddha tells the story of Sudhana. At the end of the *Lalitavistara* the Buddha set the "wheel of teaching" in motion (cf. *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) by narrating a young man's journey which could be anybody's inner quest. Sudhana is a wealthy young prince who, like the Tathagata, was satiated by material luxuries and so looked for inner wealth and the meaning of life. Sudhana is an allegorical name which means "Good Wealth". As a descendent of a noble family, Good Wealth started a quest of "kingliness without and sageliness within" . This ended up in the pinnacle of the Buddhist experience: emptiness, to be filled and overflow by the nectar of loving-kindness. Apparently, this kind

⁴ Copyrights of the three photographs in this essay are expired.

⁵ This allows *parikrama* devotional circumambulating meditation around the centre of the *mandala* which symbolizes the mythical Mt. Meru.

⁶ Mahayana scriptures plus the associated ancient commentaries are about 50 times the Bible in length, being approximately 62.000 pages.

of seeking by affluent young men is an archetypical pattern in the Buddhist lore throughout Asia during those days.

Story-telling is in line with the narrative tradition of Asia and evidently these stories were so appealing that they were considered worthy of being carved in stone. The panels which are dedicated to the *Supreme Crown Sutra* start as from the fourth floor. Because circa one-thirds (460) of all the narrative panels (1460) are dedicated to the last book, it leaves no doubt that this was considered to be the most relevant by the constructors and principals, the ruling kings and queens, who aspired to being adorned as *Bodhisattvas*. Thus it seems that we are actually looking at a huge comic book of Buddhist educational stories in the open air, an open university.

Reflecting on Body/Speech/Mind

The earlier mentioned five books on psychological stages are pictorially depicted on successive panels each reflecting enchanting scenes displaying: (1) lust/pleasure and intentional (inter)action (*kama* and Karma), (2) the Buddha's previous lives as a *Bodhisattva*, (3) noteworthy deeds of renowned Buddhists, (4) Siddharta Gautama's life until he attained Buddhahood (*bodhi*/awakening), and finally (5) Good Wealth's travels traversing the karmic domains of Body/Speech/Mind (*kaya/vak/citta*) toward *bodhi* and beyond. Recommended and guided by "Wisdom" who possesses inner wealth (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Manjushri) Good Wealth started his pilgrimage of meaningful meetings during which he was "counseled" by 52⁷ other teachers/guru-friends (*kalyanamitra*; 20 of them are female). They include *bhikshus*, kings, queens, princesses, rich people, mendicants, intellectuals, boys, girls, doctors, householders, laywomen, sailors, prostitutes, and so on, and notably "Loving-kindness" (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Maitreya) and "Virtue" (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Samantabhadra).

Each of the carved books suits the student's developmental phase. Thus, the first two books are apt for an elementary level, the third and fourth book for an intermediate level, and the last book, leading up to the summit, for an advanced level. This division

⁷ In the Mahayana spirit of expediting awakening, this number could be allegorical to the 52 weeks of a year.



corresponds with the three realms of the two lowest floors of body (craving/*kamadhatu*), the five middle floors of speech (form/*rupadhatu*), and the three upper floors of mind represented by domes (symbolizing wisdom, loving-kindness, and virtue) wherein one finds sitting Buddha-statues (formless/*arupadhatu*). The Borobudur is “crowned” by a single huge dome. This threefold arrangement can be traced back to the Buddha’s teaching on Karma which is basic to the practice of Buddhism which aims at ending suffering. The origin of unwholesome Karma is threefold: greed (covering fear of losing and grief of the lost), hatred (covering aggression and depression), and ignorance (on how the mind works, the illusion of self, and the delusion of god/s). Karma manifests itself as the intentional/relational action emerging from Dependent Origination and impacting interpersonal relationships. It is a causality hypothesis in need of verification/falsification by oneself and which refers to cause and effect in the domains of Body/Speech/Mind (*Kamma Nidana Sutta*).⁸ As Karma’s effect and cause start, affect, and end in Body/Speech/Mind, The Borobudur reflects this tripartite scheme. Note that the Buddha’s tripartite root metaphor of Body/Speech/Mind transcends Descartes’ dual mind-body artifact. The inclusion of speech is a reminder that Buddhism strives at lifting the fictive boundaries created by self-illusions and soul-delusions to working toward attaining the reality of non-self and non-individuality through the practice of loving-kindness.

Thus, Good Wealth learned to meditate in 52 various ways to aim the highest goal. This goal is depicted by his entering the “Tower of Infinite Light”, Vairocana Buddha’s abode of ultimate “emptiness”, which contains Indra’s Jewel Net. However, he could only step into it accompanied by Loving-kindness, his guide or “admission ticket” so to say. Admission to the apex can only be earned through a long and winding road of transforming Body/Speech/Mind Karma which we nowadays would call “psychotherapy”. Psychotherapy by Karma Transformation modifies karmic relational

⁸ These happen to be the subjects of study in 21st century “biopsychosocial” clinical science and practice (Engel, 1977). The body, particularly the connection between brain and behaviour, is the subject matter of neuropsychology. The connection of unwholesome perception/thought/feeling/interaction and behaviour is accentuated in clinical psychology, while the connection of speech and interpersonal behaviour is attended to in social psychology and its exponent: Social Construction.

intention and karmic interpersonal action.⁹ In psychological terms, he attained a state free from clinging to illusions of self, free from grasping to delusions of god(s), and free from craving greed and hatred. To this end, ignorance of how the mind works, which is the root cause of suffering due to inner poverty, needs to be alleviated. Thus, Good Wealth went through a process leading to “full emptiness”. Before he met his last guru-friend, he met Wisdom again which is a meeting symbolizing a “full circle”: he arrived at where he began. The wisdom and inner wealth he was painstakingly seeking had always been there, right from the beginning of his journey; thus he searched for his horse he was already sitting on). Finally, he met Virtue, who taught him that inner wealth is only meaningful if shared with and benefits others. So, Good Wealth made a vow to disseminate the 10 Bodhisattva qualities as listed above (*Bhadracari*) and commenced a journey downhill, back home.

Today, the student who ascends The Borobudur in the footsteps of Good Wealth learns to meditate via the pictorial instructions on the way up. According to the *Supreme Crown Sutra* insight into “the empty” is not a goal in itself but a reset point and springboard to improve the practice of the social meditations which promulgates the pro-social values/qualities of loving-kindness, empathic compassion, shared joy, and relational equanimity in “the mundane world of the market place”. Once “liberating emptiness” is understood, one starts on a humane mission to fulfill “*antara-atman/antaratman*” a concept found in Javanese Buddhism (Brandes, 1913)¹⁰, which means “in-between-selves” or rather “non-selves” and which is equivalent to what Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) has called “Interbeing” and what I have called “Relational Interbeing”, alluding to Gergen’s (2009a) “Relational Being”.

⁹ See, the my conference paper from: http://www.undv.org/vesak2012/book/buddhist_psychotherapy.pdf

¹⁰ It is noteworthy to mention that a Mahayana variant of Buddhism entered Sumatra and Java as from the early 5th century, while Brahmanism was already there for two centuries. Despite contrary speculation, there is no evidence that Theravada Buddhism had a strong presence on these islands. Furthermore, it is plausible that Mahayana came from ancient India (Kalinga and Bengal) and Cambodia, via the trade route to Sumatra and Java. A prince/guru from Kashmir, Gunavarman (367-431), was recorded in Chinese annals to have stayed and spread Buddhism on Sumatra and Java, perhaps for two decades, until 424 when he started a mission to China on imperial invitation (Zürcher, 1972).

Vairocana Tower is the delightful abode of meditative insights into the meaning of the “formless” (*dharmadhatu* or *arupadhatu*), that is, in the (un)becoming of things in “Dependent Origination”, in their ubiquitous and pervasive emptiness (cf. *Mahasunnata Sutta*), and in the non-obstructive-interpenetrating-interconnectedness of the human race (cf. *Ariya-pariyesana Sutta*). The very essence of these texts repudiates the self and soul which implies a message of non-individuality, i.e. there are no selves, only provisional selves in interrelatedness. This latter message is readily translatable into Social Construction, a postmodern offshoot of mainstream social psychology, whose collaborative practice is poignantly captured by Gergen in his adage “I am linked therefore I am”¹¹, an answer to Descartes’: “I think, therefore I am”. In effect, *to act* means *to inter-act* and *to be* means *to be related* and *to inter-be*. The implication of these inspirational ideas is that they confluence in Relational Interbeing (Kwee, 1990, 2010, 2012abcde, and Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006).



¹¹ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_J._Gergen

Royal context and location

Located on the Kedu plain, The Borobudur is aligned with three other relatively smaller shrines (*candis*, a term which refers to any Indonesian ancient construction). These *candis* were constructed on the same plain in one straight line to the East of The Borobudur. As tradition has it, they were connected by a road in the old days. Candi Ngawen is the furthest away from The Borobudur (8km), the next is Candi Mendut (3km), and the closest is Candi Pawon (2km). Candi Ngawen, whose existence was noted in the year 824, consists of five small shrines, a number which might well allude to the Mahayana “cosmology of five”, listed below. As two of them have four guarding lion-shapes, it might be surmised that this rather destroyed little complex (there is only one damaged *candi* left) was a ceremonial gate to enter the “educational tour” up to The Borobudur’s top. It seems that the Ngawen shrines may have also functioned as a testimony of gratefulness to the donors as evidenced by their images being displayed on the walls (Moens, 1951).

Candi Mendut, which probably already existed in circa 750 as a Brahmin shrine, contains three huge statues. In the middle, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is seated in a western way on a chair with hands in the setting-the-wheel-of-teaching *mudra* (posture). He is flanked on his right hand by the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara (Compassion) and on his left hand the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Vajrapani (Joy/Power). These figureheads augur five cosmic (*dhyani*) Buddhas as described in an ancient Javanese Mahayana text (*tantra*), the *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan Mantrayana*¹², which was written in Q&A form and was meant to inaugurate the neophyte. It renders The Borobudur’s wisdom. The latest authority it cites is the champion of Buddhist logic and reason Dignaga (c.480-540, a student of the great Yogacara epistemologist Vasubandhu; c.320-380), who discerned that

¹² This Javanese title refers to the “dedication of” (*Sang* or *semba*) “the unseen/formless” (*Hyang* or *hilang*) “as in the *Mahayanistic Mantrayana*”; Brandes (1913) listed other Javanese Buddhist works: the *Sutasoma*, *Vighnotsava*, *Kunjarakarna*, and *Buddhapamutus*, which do not differ from pre-tantric Mahayana as known in India. Neither The Borobudur, nor the *Kamahayanikan* conveys the tantric use of “sexual images” for meditation suggesting that Javanese Buddhism stems from an early Vajrayana period, which in India was in c.600-700. This view is corroborated by Osto (2009) who rather speaks of “proto-tantra” than “pre-tantra” to designate the *Gandhavyuha Sutra*.

inference and perception are two different processes and that perception is pure sensation (Eliot, 1921).¹³

Candi Pawon, in the village Bajranalan, is a stop on the way to The Borobudur, as indicated by the Javanese meaning of the word *pawon*, meaning *kitchen*. This function explains why there is only one square chamber inside which is void, or rather devoid of cooking equipment, and contains a square (washing) basin in the centre. The rectangular small windows were necessary for ventilation when preparing food. It is plausible that it was well used during ceremonies, royal or otherwise, and during any procession. The name of the village, Bajranalan, derives from the word *bajra*, a corruption of the word *vajra* meaning thunder, diamond, or adamantite, like in Vajrayana, a vehicle of Buddhism practiced in the Himalayas, which applies a ritualistic “five pronged teaching tool of wisdom” (known for its use by the 8th century guru Padmasambhava to conquer the non-Buddhist deities of Tibet). The second part of the village’s word, *analan*, means *flame* or *passion for wisdom*. Unlike in Tibet, the *vajra* was known but not particularly emphasized on the Indonesian archipelago. The walls of *candi* Pawon are decorated by the main *Bodhisattva*-gurus depicted later on The Borobudur: the guide Wisdom (Manjushri) and the acting teachers, Loving-kindness (Maitreya), and Virtue (Samantabhadra). Other decorations refer to males and females dressed as human *Bodhisattvas*, most probably members the royalty known to have built The Borobudur.

The Borobudur was financed by the Sailendra dynasty (c.750-832). The Sailendras were indigenous Javanese rulers. Their name is derived from “mountain” (*caila*) and “king” (*Indra*). The Sailendras, who were Buddhists, co-existed peacefully with the Sanjayas of Mataram, who adhered to Brahmanism and whose King, Panangkaran (reigned in c.746-784), apparently authorized the building (under his aegis) of Buddhist sanctuaries, *candis*, and sculptures on the Kedu plain “in honor of Tara”, revered in

¹³ Dignaga was the before last of the great Buddhist thinkers. No reference was made to the last great Buddhist thinker, the 7th century epistemologist/cognitivist Dharmakirti (c.600-660), who wrote extensively on valid/non-valid (*de facto*: rational/irrational) cognitions. This seems to imply that Javanese Buddhism and The Borobudur did not tap from this late development.

Brahmanism as well as in Buddhism.¹⁴ Apparently due to one Bengali Buddhist teacher, highly venerated by Panangkaran, there was a constructing spree around 800 resulting in more than a dozen Buddhist *candis* in Central Java. The Sailendras were rice cultivators as well as seafaring merchants who shared their thalassocratic power with the Srivijaya dynasty from Sumatra. Together they dominated the maritime spice route between China and India, and traded and raided the Malay Peninsula, Cambodia, and SW-Kalimantan. Their ties in matrimony and in Buddhism with the Srivijayas are evidenced by for instance the similarity of their diadems as in Mendut, Pawon, and Palembang on Sumatra Island. The Borobudur construction was finished under the reign of the Sailendra King Samaratunga, who reigned over Java until circa 832 as well as over Sumatra as a Srivijaya King (c.792-835), because he was married to a Srivijaya princess: Dewi Tara. The Borobudur was probably used for his coronation ceremony as a *Bodhisattva* and later for celebrating his daughter's marriage to Rakai Pikatan, a Crown Prince from a neighbouring Brahmin Sanjaya Kingdom. Eventually Samaratunga's son-in-law toppled his father-in-law and later defeated his brother-in-law the Sailendra Prince Balaputra (c.856). Balaputra was forced to retreat to Sumatra where he succeeded his father as a Srivijaya king in Palembang. As a Buddhist Balaputra had a monastery built in the renowned Buddhist University town of Nalanda. The Srivijaya Buddhist dynasty of Sumatra thrived as a great maritime and colonizing power up until the 14th century (Soekmono, 1973).

Javanese Buddhism

The construction workers of the majestic *candi* Borobudur, which is held together like Lego-blocks, was in the beginning spearheaded by the master-mind architect Gunadharma. Despite his Sanskrit name, he was probably a Javanese indigenous genius. There are many much older *candis* around built in the same peculiar style, so that the architectural skills, even if once imported from India, inevitably have become Javanese by the time The Borobudur was

¹⁴ While the Brahmin Tara represents a deity (wisdom star), the Buddhist Tara is a cosmic *Bodhisattva* who is a transformation of Avalokiteshvara's tears of compassion. Avalokiteshvara is able to hear the cries of everybody who suffers and may appear in the five cosmic colours representing a variety of virtues and actions leading to liberation.

built. Assuming it was built between c.770-840 three to four generations of constructors must have worked on the construction after Gunadharma.¹⁵

The following question lingers on: “why was The Borobudur constructed in *stupa* form if there were no human remains whatsoever?” Small spaces have been found at the center on two levels reserved for boxes wherein noble metals, treasured seeds, and precious stones were kept, which in the Mahayana lore symbolize Body/Speech/Mind respectively. In a center-base pit, there was a box with metals and over the pit, in a small room with a crowned statue in a stone superstructure; there was a second box with seeds. These “symbolic relics” had most probably been used during a Sailendra *Bodhisattva* coronation, whereby ritually the gems of loving-kindness descended from Vairocana’s Tower into the boxes imbuing *Bodhisattva*-hood. Considering the royal history, this function was likely used once. Following this, the Buddhist-Brahmin syncretism probably warranted the educational use of The Borobudur until its demise in the 11th century. Whatever function The Borobudur might have served, central to its function is the teaching it reveals, which can be denoted as Javanese Mahayana Buddhism. The earlier mentioned principal text on Javanese Buddhism, “the devotion of the formless according to the Mantrayana of Mahayana”, explains that Shakyamuni transforms into Loving-kindness (Vairocana Buddha of the Centre), Avalokiteshvara transforms into Compassion (Amitabha Buddha of the West) and into Benevolence (Amoghasiddhi Buddha of the North), and Vajrapani transforms into Joy (Akshobhya Buddha of the East) and into Equanimity (Ratnasambhava Buddha of the South). This implies that the education is toward the cultivation of these five human values or personality qualities which are supposed to bring about lasting happiness: *Loving-kindness*, *Compassion*, *Joy*, *Equanimity*, and *Benevolence*. The Mahayana pantheon originated not only these psychological states and traits, but also generated an extended cosmology of five, like Buddhas, *Bodhisattvas*, elements, colors, senses, hallowed syllables or *mantras*¹⁶, *skandhas* (psycho-

¹⁵ According to experts, The Borobudur influenced Angkor Wat, built 300 years later; also one might want to bear in mind that The Borobudur was erected 300 years before the European cathedrals were built.

¹⁶ Evidently, *mantras* are of great importance in a Mahayana variety called Mantrayana which emphasizes the use of *mantras* during meditation; the sacred sound of Java is “aah”.

logical modalities of Body/Speech/Mind, sensation-perception, cognition, conation, emotion, and interaction), and so forth.

There are several peculiarities in Javanese Buddhism when it is compared to the Mahayana denominations known in the literature. One peculiarity is that the self-originating and self-emanating primordial principle of the Adhi-Buddha¹⁷ or Nondual-Advaya is said to bring forth the three conquerors (*jinās*) of the three poisons: greed (conquered by Avalokiteshvara/compassion), hatred (by Vajrapani/joy-power), and ignorance (by Shakyamuni/loving-kindness). These three bodies (*trikaya*)¹⁸ originate the five *dhyani* Buddhas. Secondly, in addition to the types of selves in Mahayana, there are five types of self in Javanese Buddhism. These are: self/*atman*, low-self/*cetanatman*, higher-self/*paratman*, fluid-self/*niratman*, and between-selves/*antaratman*. Particularly, the Sanskrit terms *antara*, which might mean “in the middle” or “between”, in relation to *atman*, which means “self”, are emphasized. Thus, the concept of “in-between-selves” is accrued, which directly points at Relational Interbeing. Another peculiarity is that one can find here the typical Javanese mix of Buddhism and Brahmanism which might already have been originated in India: out of Vairocana springs to the Zenith the creating force Brahma and to the Nadir the annihilating force Shiva, and to the center on the same level as Vairocana we meet Vishnu, the maintaining force. This is in line with the Brahmin idea that Shakyamuni is a reincarnation of Vishnu. In this syncretistic way Buddhism and Brahmanism existed side-by-side on the island of Java for many centuries and eventually became fused into a fused Buddhist-Brahmin system as from the 11th century. Most probably this fusion was a defensive reaction to the Islamic conquest of the island which took place gradually and incessantly, without blood-shed, but which gained momentum as from circa 1200. This resulted in that in circa 1515 the Javanese Brahmin-Buddhist upper class fled to Bali where the syncretistic faith survives to this day (Brandes, 1913).

¹⁷ To adhere to Indonesian constitution that warrants freedom of religion, present-day Buddhists in Indonesia, among whom indigenous adherents who for centuries (or maybe for about a millennium) live in several Buddhist villages on Java, elevate the Adhi-Buddha as their creator-god.

¹⁸ *Kamahayanikan's trikaya* is reflected in the Body/Speech/Mind triad: body-craving (*dharmakaya*), speech-form (*samboghakaya*), and mind-formless (*nirmanakaya*).

Dharmarakshita Suvarnavdipa

Any discussion of Javanese Buddhism is incomplete without going into its practice as disseminated by a widely celebrated 10/11th century eminent prince/guru: Dharmarakshita Suvarnavdipa (an ancient name which means Dharmarakshita “from Sumatra Island”). Related to the Srivijaya dynasty, he was as much Javanese as Sumatranese, and considering his *bodhicitta* and Karma teaching, he must have had The Borobudur that is much about the teaching of *bodhicitta* (awakened motivation) as his intellectual mainstay. In his younger years Dharmarakshita was a student/scholar at Odantapuri in Bihar, India.¹⁹ He was known for his writing on “heartfelt *bodhicitta*” and on “Karma which works like a boomerang”. Dharmarakshita (1981) designed the healing meditation of loving-kindness and compassion by “*terima*” (receiving) and “*kasih*” (offering), known in Tibetan as *tonglen* and which is the contemplative congenial/gluing practice of *antaratman*. This technique, a component of an extensive, seven point mind training toward karmic whole someness, is nowadays practiced daily world-wide along with Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama.

Dharmarakshita is revered up until today in Tibet, where he is called Serlingpa, as the teacher of Dipankara Shrijnana, a Bengali prince/guru who is known as Atisha in Tibet (c.980-1054). After studying with renowned Indian teachers, Atisha was eventually advised to go to the most outstanding teacher of his time in Palembang, where he arrived after a journey of a year. There he studied with Dharmarakshita and allegedly Atisha must also have visited The Borobudur, the concrete center of the *bodhicitta* teaching he was learning. At the end of a 12 year of stay with his renowned teacher (c.1012-1024), Atisha was encouraged to go to the “land of snows”, which he eventually did in 1039. In Tibet, Atisha became a key figure in four out of the five Tibetan schools, so that Dharmarakshita’s teachings and reputation not only survived, but continued to thrive for eleven centuries and play a pivotal role up to this day. Leaving the archipelago, Dharmarakshita gave Atisha scripts containing

¹⁹ Odantapuri is the second oldest Buddhist educational centre (as from the 7th century) neighbouring the famous Nalanda on the Indian subcontinent. It could accommodate 1000 students among whom many Tibetan scholars. Many Vajrayana texts were composed there. Unfortunately it was destroyed by Muslim invaders in c.1193.

the revered teaching on *bodhicitta* with the cardinal message that *bodhicitta* should come from the innermost depth of the heart.

As a scholar Dharmarakshita reviewed the literature on *bodhicitta* and made it easy to understand by his clear-cut interpretation of the writings of illustrious predecessors, from the Buddha to Shantideva (an 8th century Nalanda scholar in Nagarjuna's tradition, champion of bodhisattvahood, *raison d'être* of The Borobudur). In fact the main theme of The Borobudur is *bodhicitta* which is the intrinsic motivation to awaken toward Nirvana when ascending The Borobudur in order to benefit all beings trapped in the cycle of suffering (*Samsara*). Logically, this benefitting is particularly done during the descent of The Borobudur. The person whose activities are motivated by heartfelt *bodhicitta* is called a *Bodhisattva* whose path is conveyed/depicted on the 10 floors of The Borobudur. As depicted on the outer wall of Pawon, the *Bodhisattva's* *bodhicitta* is linked to Manjushri (who represents wisdom by carrying a sword to root out craving, grasping, and clinging), to Maitreya (who represents loving-kindness which is conditioned by compassion and joy), and to Virtue/Samantabhadra (who formulates the vow of the 10 perfections). In effect, the awakened mind of *bodhicitta* comprises the union of compassion and wisdom, which can be discovered and experienced whilst ascending and descending the sanctuary on the mountain.

Ascending The Borobudur, *bodhicitta* is “absolute”; that is, the *Bodhisattva* strives at attaining Nirvana, the extinction of craving, and the highest of wisdom: emptiness (*sunyata*) as elucidated in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* (“Perfection of Wisdom *Sutra*” or its shortened versions: the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*), which was commented on by Nagarjuna in the 2nd century. Descending The Borobudur, *bodhicitta* is “relative”; that is, the *Bodhisattva*, who has realized *antaratman*, “loving-kindness in-between-selves”, works at saving all beings who suffer due to existence itself (birth, aging, illness, and death), due to the poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance on how the mind works, and due to separation from loved ones, union with unloved ones, and social failure. This suffering is by nature psychological and throughout relational/interpersonal in its emanation and manifestation. The combination of relative and

absolute *bodhicitta* is the Middle Way which helps balancing the individual in the context of the social, displayed on one of The Borobudur panels as rafting oneself and others to the other shore. Dharmarakshita emphasized *bodhicitta* that is felt from the bottom of one's heart which will result in a non-manipulative/non-egotistic helping by visualizing the people to be saved as one's mother: her care in the past is gratefully reciprocated. This is in line with the 10 *Bodhisattva* vows as depicted on the highest panel walls. Traditionally, this boils down to practicing the cherished "Four Social Meditations" the pursuit of which is to immeasurably multiply kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. These are four divine qualities of experiencing as denoted by its name, the *Brahmaviharas* (where the "gods" dwell), which make the *Bodhisattva* feel "divine". Feeling divine or godly is very different from being or becoming a god: after all Buddhism is non-theistic.

Karma as relationally intended action

Dharmarakshita (10/11th century; 1981) innovated not only the social contemplation of "*terima* and *kasih*"²⁰, but also dealt with interpersonal or "relational Karma". His poetic work "*The sharp-blade wheel hitting the enemy's heart*", explains how Karma plays out in interpersonal life as cause and effect. When we crave for, and grasp to and cling on conventional I/me/mine-self/soul, we fail to see the ultimate empty non-self, which seeing requires *bodhicitta*: heartfelt motivation, steadfast resolve, and self-commitment. As the only enemy is within us, the wheel of sharp weapons will sooner or later return full circle upon us.²¹ The teaching's core metaphor refers to Manjushri's razor-sharp sword used to cut off the root of craving in a heart that breeds greed and hatred toward others. By proliferating interactive feelings and thoughts of enmity and being ignorant about the working of "relational mind" and Karma, one is one's own enemy. In effect, what is thrown out in greed or hatred, for example, dumping emotional garbage on the other person, will cut oneself by the other's reciprocating action or by one's own mindless way of life. This "boomerang effect" is caused by emitting

²⁰ Log on to www.taosinstitute.net/manuscripts-for-downloading

²¹ For the full English text, log on to www.bodhicitta.net/The%20Wheel%20of%20Sharp%20Weapons.htm ; this teaching is kept alive by e.g. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama: http://dharma-gates.org/html/dalai_lama.html.

unwholesome action, so that the advice is to be mindful of Maitreya's loving-kindness and Avalokiteshvara's empathic compassion in order to prevent and abolish the inflammation and escalation of interpersonal pain and suffering, and to instead powerfully install Vajrapani's reciprocal joy, in order to eventually dwell in happiness. To be sure, The Borobudur is on Karma: cause and effect as emerging out of and as manifesting qua outcome in Body/Speech/Mind which are embedded in a network of relationships. Thus social psychology is quite relevant.

Social psychology aims at explaining how thought, feeling and behavior are influenced, directly or indirectly, by people within their culture. Research can be quantitative in the laboratory or qualitative as collaborative field action and is typically focused on attitudes, social influence, social cognition, and social affect (like greed and hatred). The stance taken here is that the results of quantitative and qualitative studies complement each other. However, rather than viewing language as a mirror of reality, the quantitative project, the present stance views language as qualitative tool through which communities socially construct reality. Adhering to the idea that what something "is" depends on one's approach and to which social group one belongs, reality is constructed in collaborative practice through ongoing dialogues, comparisons, negotiations, agreements, and so on. Although this "togetherness" premise is simple and straightforward, its impact is far-reaching. It requires re-thinking of virtually everything that has been taken for granted. If reality is a social construction, then nothing can be real in, by, and of itself (including Buddhism and Social Construction itself). This reasoning corresponds with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation leading to the insight on the non-existence of inherent existence or self-nature of things (*svabhava*), which is represented in the *summum bonum* of The Borobudur, the pinnacle of Buddhist wisdom: the baffling emptiness experience of Vairocana's Tower. Working on decreasing suffering and increasing happiness amidst existential adversity is not a matter of earning merit for an individual ticket to a paradise in the beyond but is about the Dependent Origination of reality, on making "here/now" wholesome choices and engaging in karmic intentional interactivity.

Such a view of emptiness is in accord with the social psychology of Social Construction as championed by Gergen (2009b) who offers a radical picture of the mind and the human condition which surprisingly coincides with the Buddhist vision as displayed by The Borobudur. The mind is “intermind”, not located inside the skin behind the eyeballs within the skull in-between the ears, but arising in Dependent Origination²² in-between people. Both views appreciate the experience of Relational Interbeing as depicted in the root metaphor of Indra’s Jewel Net which renders how people are interrelated and interconnected as gems at each crossing of the net mirroring each other in infinite mutual interpenetrations and merging subject and object in non-duality. This is a 4th century Mahayana practice of the Yogacara denomination that is based on the “Buddha Womb *Sutras*” which emphasize a *Brahmavihara* filling in of the emptiness expounded in the “Perfection of Wisdom *Sutras*” which could mistakenly leave many adherents in a *horror vacuum*.

Relational Buddhism

“Relational Buddhism”, the central viewpoint from which the *suttas* and *sutras* are interpreted here, is grounded in the axiom that *there is nothing that can be perceived or thought of, conceived and imagined which is not socially constructed*. Relational Buddhism is an amalgam of the practices of Social Construction and Buddhism which share the basic idea that “we can’t share brain, but we can’t but share mind”. It centers round the meta-composite term Relational Interbeing, a concept which denotes “loving-kindness-in-between-non-selves” and which is an advanced state of being that understands the wisdom of emptiness and the futility of “Transcendental/Eternal Truths”. Derived from the awareness that human beings are interconnected this state suggests that the real, the reasonable, and the good are enshrined in socio-cultural processes. All that we know is embedded, not in the bounded mind of the individual, but in-between communal cultures. Mind conceived as inter-mind is an intersection of multiple

²² Dependent Origination is the Buddha’s causality hypothesis that describes the arising and ceasing of Karma triggered by craving and traversing through Body/Speech/Mind craving (by sensing/feeling, thinking, conating, emoting, and interacting), resulting in grasping and clinging (cf. *Paticca-samuppada Vibangha Sutta*).

relationships. Before we were born, the socio-cultural was. Thus, individual minds are socialized through participation in the culture one lives by, not the other way around. Thus, from this social constructional perspective the private mind inside the skull full of hidden meanings is not as intimate as one traditionally might assume.

Relational Buddhism proposes that meaning and meaningfulness do not exist in a solipsistic manner but in an acculturated way through a process of co-action. Apparently, what is considered to be separate in the private mind (perception, thought, and affect) arises in interrelationships and is meaningless outside the context of collaborative practice. In effect, although carried out privately, self-talk is only intelligible, even for oneself, as *socialized* speech. The same applies to action: even dancing alone is a social performance. In the same vein one might consider the five hand postures (*mudras*) of “meditation”, “fear-not”, “generosity”, “grounding”, and “teaching” as displayed by the 504 *dhyani* Buddhas of The Borobudur as making the relational, which inhere in these qualities, explicit in their depiction. As The Borobudur is traversed, one questions the affective states inside the individual heads and bodies and one asks what can be done to overcome greed and hatred. Having located the origin of meaning in interpersonal exchange, one discovers that emotions are not solely bodily reactions belonging to the private domain but instead are components of the relational. This implies a shift in experiencing “my” act of kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity into “our” activity for the betterment of us all. The understanding and transformation of greed and hatred is enlarged when the view from a “natural given” of these affective states is translated into scenarios of interpersonal interaction. Sudhana’s quest, which comprises meetings with 52 guru-friends, is basically a narrative of such transformative relationships and of dialogues which deliver.

Speech is the third Buddhist assignment in the “8-Fold Balancing Practice”, a practice that walks the talk toward balanced views, intentions, *speech*, actions, living, effort, awareness, and attention. Taking into consideration the striking correspondence of Social Construction and Buddhism, the rendering of Relational

Buddhism is obvious and close to home. By discarding transcendentalism and eternalism, Relational Buddhism is not a belief system whatsoever, but an invitation to dialogue ways of understanding which coincides with the Buddha's charter of free inquiry expounded in the *Kalama Sutta*.

The spirit of free inquiry

Relational Buddhism includes evidence-based psychological research which informs practice. Interestingly, some of the concepts, values and qualities highlighted on The Borobudur's panels are recently the subject of social psychological research. Illustrative is that "intentional activity" was re-discovered in "Positive Psychology" (Lyubomirsky, 2008), apparently without being aware of the Buddhist meaning of Karma. Evidence was found that sustainable happiness is determined by a genetic set-point (50%), circumstantial factors (10%), and intentional activity (40%) (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Human beings are equipped by an idiosyncratic genetic set-point like for weight or length, which is hardly modifiable. People with high set-points will find it easier to be happy; people with low set-points will have to work harder to achieve or maintain happiness under similar conditions. Happy people do not just sit around being happy but make things happen. This activity spins off a by-product which is happiness over and above the genetic set range and life circumstances. Long-term overall circumstances include demographic data (age, health, education, money, country, religion, and marital status).



Two studies have been conducted specifically on loving-kindness. The first study (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008) was a longitudinal field experiment with working adults (n=139) randomly assigned to either a wait-list control condition or to begin a one week, one hour per day meditation of loving-kindness meditation which is meant to cultivate warmth and caring for self and others. Evidently, this meditation practice had a gradual and cumulative positive effect on people's experiencing of positive emotions. This resulted in building on a wide range of personal resources (e.g. increased mindfulness and awareness, stronger sense of purpose in life, increased positive relations with other people, and decreased illness symptoms). These increments predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depression scores. A second study on loving-kindness examined whether the fundamental human motive of social connection could be engendered toward strangers in a controlled laboratory setting (Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross 2008). A few minutes of self-engendered loving-kindness increased feelings of social connectivity/positivity toward unknown people. These studies show that brief practice of an easily implemented meditation

is helpful for increasing positive social affect and for decreasing irrational feelings of isolation.

A number of recent studies touch upon the human interdependence and unconditional happiness aspects of the Buddhist experience. In one study (Jaremka, Gabriel, & Cavallo, 2010) compelling evidence was found that people's best and worst moments occur within relationships. It is the interaction with other people and the fulfillment of social connection rather than the individual accomplishment, the award, or the completion of a task, which mark life's ups and downs. People feel best in sharing success and feel worst when failing in the presence of others. Evidently, social networks shape lives and lifestyles, whether obesity or smoking. Moreover: happiness is contagious. Another study (Christakis & Fowler, 2009) reported that each happy friend increases the likelihood of happiness by 9% and each unhappy friend decreases it by 7%. Finally, Nobel Prize winner Kahneman and Deaton (2010) analyzed Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index (GHWBI) data of 450,000 US residents and discovered that money buys happiness only to a certain degree. Happiness and unhappiness refer to experiencing joy, fascination, anxiety, sadness, anger, stress, worry, and affection. In effect, more money does not necessarily buy more happiness, but less money is associated with emotional suffering. The happiness threshold in 2008 was \$75,000, \$3500 more than the median household income. Above this, income no longer improves one's ability to do what matters most to happiness, that is, spend time with people one likes, avoid pain and disease, and enjoy leisure.

In closing

The Buddhist way of life as modeled by the Buddha's life story and as delineated in The Borobudur's allegory of Good Wealth, provides us with an archetypical template illustrating that leading an affluent life might pave the way to entering a quest for life's meaning. Living in relative comfort, or even perhaps in "princely" circumstances, middle class people all over the world are in principle all Sudhanas who are ready to seek and learn what life is about, and to start on a profound inner journey of discovering

wisdom. Travelling The Borobudur might be helpful for Buddhists, and indeed for any other interested person irrespective of background, to comprehensively find what they seek, as the record shows in this article. It has been a long journey of *bodhicitta* up and down The Borobudur, from ascending in the awe of accumulating wonderful “aha”-insights, reaching a reset point of emptiness, and descending in the contentment of “haha”-joyfulness. *Bodhicitta*, a specialty of Javanese Buddhism, provides a springboard to leap onto Relational Buddhism via discovering postmodern Social Construction and social psychological research. In effect, this is an attempt to narrow a gap of the Buddhist approach to the wisdom of human experience lasting some 1200 years. To date emptiness may still be considered to be profound wisdom, a reset point and starting block to disseminate loving-kindness from within the heart. As yet no-one in the world can claim to have a monopoly on Absolute Truth for humanity, this includes Buddhism.

Adhering to the message of The Borobudur, Relational Buddhism submits that the wisdom of sustainable happiness amidst adversity is largely an *intrapersonal* equilibrating experience of relationship and an epiphenomenon of harmonious *interpersonal* interactivity. Buddhist wisdom, savvy, and sagacity necessitate us to adhere to the relational scenarios of being genuinely kind, compassionate, and joyful in a mutually balanced togetherness. To this end, mindfulness of speech, which includes mindful listening and collaborative practice, is highly recommended. In effect, this is realizing amicability “in-between-non-selves” in the pursuit of gluing peaceful relationships. Individuals do not exist independently from one another, but rely on interconnectedness and interdependence for their very survival.

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Noble Truths versus Dependent Origination

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The controversy regarding the central teaching of the Buddha seems to have not yet been solved with a consensus of opinion. The modern scholars of Buddhist Studies are also divided on this matter. Karunaratne, being one among them, points out Childers, Reischauer, Copleston, Mrs. Rhys Davids, Law, Ayyaswamy, Tucci, Hamilton, Stcherbatsky and Murti were of the opinion that the central teaching of the Buddha is the Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppāda).²⁴ I would like to add Kalupahana, who has made an illuminating study of the Buddhist Theory of Causality²⁵, to this category. Among those who are supposed to have maintained the position that the Noble Truths (cattāri ariyasaccāni) are the central teaching of the Buddha, without paying any attention to Dependent

²³ This paper was presented as the Keynote Speech to the 2nd International Association of Buddhist Universities Conference on Buddhist Philosophy & Praxis, on 1 June 2012. It is reproduced here, for a wider audience.

²⁴ Kaunaratne, W.S., *The Theory of Causality in Buddhism*, Deepani Printers, Sri Lanka, 1988, foot note 1, p. 63

²⁵ Kalupahana, D.J., *Causality, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Honolulu, 1975

Origination, are Grimm²⁶ and Rahula.²⁷ Story and Gunaratna too belong to this category.²⁸ Nyanatiloka's observation in this regard is worth citing here: "The Four Noble Truths are the briefest synthesis of the entire teachings of Buddhism, since all those manifold doctrines of the three-fold Canon are, without any exception, included therein. They are: the Truth of Suffering, of the Origin of Suffering, of the Extinction of Suffering, and of the Eightfold Path leading to the Extinction of Suffering".²⁹ My aim in this paper is to show that this controversy has been going on from the early days of Buddhism up to now, supremacy has been moving from one teaching to the other from time to time.

The position in the Vinaya and the Suttas

When we gather the information available in the Vinaya and the discourses we find, on the one hand, that the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination enjoy equal status. The Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Pitaka, in its supplementary remarks to the first sermon of the Buddha, informs us that the hermit Siddhārtha became enlightened through the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.³⁰ The Majjhimanikāya holds the view that He became enlightened through the acquisition of the knowledge of the twelve-fold Dependent Origination.³¹ Both the Vinaya and the discourses state that the truth of Causality as well as of the Noble Truths is difficult to comprehend.³² While the Vinaya asserts that faring on in life is due to the ignorance of Noble Truths³³, the discourses assign it to the ignorance of the causal law.³⁴

There are references, on the other hand, in the discourses to indicate that Dependent Origination seems to have held a superior position over the Noble Truths. Dependent Origination, not the Noble

²⁶ Grimm, George, *The Doctrine of Buddhism*, Delhi, 1973

²⁷ Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*, Bedford, 1967

²⁸ Story, Francis, *The Four Noble Truths*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, Wheel Publications, Nos. 34/35 & Gunaratna, V.F., *The Significance of the Four Noble Truths*, Wheel Publications, Kandy, Sri Lanka, No. 133

²⁹ Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, BPS, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1980

³⁰ Vinaya (=V) I, 11

³¹ Majjhimanikāya (=MN) I, 167-8

³² V.I, 4-5; MN.I, 167

³³ V.I, 11

³⁴ Dīghanikāya (=DN) II, 55; Sanyuttanikāya (=SN) II, 92

Truths, is equated with the Dhamma.³⁵ In many discourses, the Four Noble Truths are identified as *sāmuikkansikā dhammadesanā*, the culminating point of the Buddha's graduated sermon.³⁶ The Buddha prefaces it with *dānakathā* (exposition of giving), *sīlakathā* (exposition of virtue), *saggakathā* (exposition of heavenly worlds), *kāmānam ādinavan* (disadvantage of sensual pleasures), and *nekkhamme ānisansam* (advantage of refraining from sensual pleasures). The *sāmuikkansika dhammadesanā* indicates the brief sermon with all these ingredients ending with an exposition of the Four Noble Truths. This is not in any way an identification of the Noble Truths with the Dhamma. In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* and in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, Dependent Origination is placed at a position hierarchically higher.³⁷ The *Mahānidāna Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* eulogizes Dependent Origination as the greatest foundation through which enormous results can be achieved.³⁸ In the *Samyuttanikāya* it is compared with the ancient path which the Buddha has rediscovered.³⁹ The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Sacca Samyutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* repeatedly reiterate that the previous Buddhas too became enlightened through Dependent Origination.⁴⁰

Both the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination are treated giving a more or less similar space in the *nikāya* literature. Very specifically the theme of the *Nidānavagga Samyutta* is the Dependent Origination while that in the *Sacca Samyutta* is the Four Noble Truths. According to my acquaintance of the discourses, the references to the Noble Truths are more than those to the Dependent Origination in the *Nikāya* literature. However, the importance attached to Dependent Origination in the *Mahāpadāna* and *Mahānidāna Suttas* of the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Sammādiṭṭhi* and *Ariyapariyesana Suttas* of the *Majjhimanikāya* has a more weight than the treatment of the Noble Truths has in the *Nikāyas*.

³⁵ MN. I, 190-1; II, 32

³⁶ V.I, 16, 18; II, 156; DN. I, 110; MN. I, 380; *Anguttaranikāya* II, 186; IV, 197

³⁷ DN. I, 97; MN. I, 165-167

³⁸ DN. II, 45ff

³⁹ SN. II, 6

⁴⁰ DN. II, 26ff

The position in Abhidhamma

In the texts of the Abhidhammapitaka, the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination do not play a major role. The Noble Truths are confined only to the Saccavibhanga of the Vibhanga⁴¹, the second book of the Abhidhammapitaka, Saccapaññatti of the Puggalapaññatti⁴², the fourth book of the Abhidhammapitaka and Saccakathā of the Kathāvatthu⁴³, the fifth book of the Abhidhammapitaka. Dependent Origination is dealt with only in the Paccaya-vibhanga of the Vibhanga⁴⁴ and in the Paticcasamuppādakathā of the Kathāvatthu.⁴⁵ In other words, the Abhidhammapitaka does not extensively deal with the two subjects of Noble Truths and Dependent Origination as the Suttas do.

In the Saccavibhanga, the Noble Truths are dealt with under three headings: Sutta-explanation, Abhidhamma-explanation and Catechetical-explanation. The Sutta-explanation is nothing but a summary of the teachings found in the discourses. As Nyanatiloka points out, the Abhidhamma-explanation has two formal differences from the Sutta-explanation:

1. The Truths are called here throughout “the Four Truths” not “Noble Truths”.
2. Their explanation starts with the second truth.⁴⁶

The Catechetical-explanation, among other things, states that Noble Truths can be divided into two as mundane and supra-mundane, truths of suffering and cause of suffering forming the mundane category and the remaining two truths the supra-mundane category. The Saccavibhanga deviates from the approach adopted in the discourses adding an ethical explanation to the truths. The Saccapaññatti of the Puggalapaññatti is confined to the mere mention of the Four Noble Truths. The Saccakathā of the Kathāvatthu has a short exposition on rejection the view that the Pubbaseliyas had to the effect that the Four Noble Truths are not conditioned.

⁴¹ Vibhanga (=Vbh), 99-112

⁴² Pugganapaññatti, 2

⁴³ Kathāvatthu (=Katha), 322

⁴⁴ Vbh., 158-192

⁴⁵ Katha., 319

⁴⁶ Nyanatiloka, Guide through the Abhidhammapitaka, 3rd Edition, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1971, p. 30

The Vibhanga has a more detailed explanation on Dependent Origination than on the Noble Truths. It is interesting to note that the Vibhanga has understood Dependent Origination as *paccayākāra*, the mode of dependency. It is discussed in the Vibhanga under two headings: Sutta-explanation and Abhidhamma-explanation. There is no catechetical-explanation of Dependent Origination in the Vibhanga. However, the exposition of Dependent Origination in the Vibhanga has various information not found in the discourses. Its relation to the Buddhist theory of Kamma and the Ābhidhammic analysis of consciousness as given in the Dhammasangani, the first book of Abhidhammapitaka, are the new features of the Paccayākāravibhanga which seems to represent the precursor of the Paṭṭhāna, the last book of the Abhidhammapitaka. The Paṭṭhāna of the Kathāvatthu is again a short exposition where the point of view of the Pubbaseliyas and Mahisāsakas to the effect that Dependent Origination was unconditioned is rejected by the Theravādins.

The new turn that Dependent Origination took in the Vibhanga culminated in the Paṭṭhāna. Even though the Paṭṭhāna does not have a direct discussion on the twelve-fold Dependent Origination, what permeated the entire text is the theory that was first formulated in the discourses in the name of Dependent Origination. Nyanatiloka points out: “This gigantic and most important work of the Abhidhammapitaka deals with the conditionality and dependent nature of all the many fold corporeal and mental phenomena of existence, which in their combinations are known by the conventional names of “I”, “person”, “world”, etc., but which in the ultimate sense are only just this passing phenomena, nothing more. Hence, this work provides a most complete and detailed elucidation of the Paṭṭhāna, or Dependent Origination, though here the phenomena, are not arranged according to the twelve links of the Paṭṭhāna”.⁴⁷

The position assigned to the Paṭṭhāna and thereby to Dependent Origination among the Theravāda Canonical texts and the Buddhist teachings is well emphasized in the following account of the Atthasālinī, the commentary on the Dhammasangani: “Not even on a single day during the interval of twenty-one days were rays emitted from the Buddha’s body. During the fourth week

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.114

He sat in a jewel house in the north-west direction. The jewel house here does not mean a house made of the seven jewels but the place where He contemplated the Seven Books. And while He contemplated the contents of Dhammasaṅgānī, His body did not emit rays; and similarly with the contemplation of the next five books. But when, coming to the great book, Paṭṭhāna, He began to contemplate the twenty-four universal causal relations of condition, of presentation, and so on, His omniscience certainly found its opportunity therein. For as the great fish Timiratipingala finds room only in great ocean so, the Buddha's omniscience truly finds room only in the Paṭṭhāna. Rays of six colors issued from the Buddha's body, as He was contemplating the subtle and abstruse law by His omniscience which had found such opportunity".⁴⁸

It is therefore quite obvious that Dependent Origination overtook the Noble Truths in the Abhidhammapaṭaṅka. This is, willingly or unwillingly, directly or indirectly, what has been accepted in the Theravāda tradition. The exalted position of the Abhidhamma in the Theravāda tradition seems to have raised Dependent Origination over the Noble Truths.

The position in the Paṭisambhidāmagga and the Visuddhimagga

The Paṭisambhidāmagga, one of the fifteen texts of Khuddakanikāya, the authorship of which is assigned to Ven. Sāriputta⁴⁹, has an exposition in its second chapter on the Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are analyzed here on the basis of 'thata' (objectivity), *avitatha* (necessity), *anaññatha* (invariability) and *lakkhaṇa* (characteristic). Again, as in the Vibhanga, the ethical considerations of Four Noble Truths are also taken into consideration. Finally, the term 'sacca' (truth) is defined to have three meanings as 'esanā' (search), *pariggaha* (seizing on) and *paṭivedha* (understanding). To elaborate the meaning of 'esanā', a brief explanation of the twelve-fold Dependent Origination is given. Accordingly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga links the Noble Truth with Dependent Origination.

⁴⁸ Atthasālinī, 13-14

⁴⁹ Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā I, 1, 9; III, 703

The Paṭisambhidāmagga discusses the Dependent Origination in its first chapter where seventy-three knowledges of the Buddha are identified. The title assigned to the knowledge of the Dependent Origination in the Paṭisambhidāmagga is Dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa. The Paṭisambhidāmagga is of vital importance for three reasons in the study of the Dependent Origination. Firstly, it explains how one factor gives rise to another of the twelve links. In other words, the relations that exist between any two factors are identified as nine-fold. They are *uppāda* (birth), *pavatta* (existence), *nimitta* (sign), *āyūhana* (pursuit), *saññoga* (combination), *paḷibodha* (impediment), *samudaya* (arising), *hetu* (cause) and *paccaya* (condition). These relations are not pointed out in the discourses. Secondly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga states that, though one factor gives rise to another, both should be understood as paṭiccasamuppanna, things that arise dependently. The understanding of this relationship between any two factors is called *dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇa*. Thirdly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga comes forward, for the first time, with the tritemporal interpretation of the Dependent Origination. Accordingly, the Dependent Origination has four summaries (*sankhepa*), three times (*tayo addhā*), twenty modes (*vīsati ākārā*) and three junctions (*tisandhi*). This is what the Visuddhimagga has taken over for further analysis.

It was the Ven. Buddhaghosa who elevated Dependent Origination to its apex level. The most extensive treatment which excels with depth and profundity in the classical Pāli literature on Dependent Origination is the Paññābhūminidessa of his Visuddhimagga. The title that Buddhaghosa has selected suggests that Dependent Origination is the ground of intuitive wisdom. He has combined the expositions in the Vibhanga, Paṭṭhāna and Paṭisambhidāmagga together developing the chapter on Dependent Origination of the Visuddhimagga to a masterpiece interspersing the vast information preserved in the tradition and his analytical knowledge of the Pāli Canon and ancillary literature. Before he embarks on his exposition, Buddhaghosa confesses as follows “Being desirous now of expounding the teaching of conditionality I am like one submerged in the ocean, unable to find a foothold. But there are two consideration that instill hope and confidence in me, namely the fact that the Buddha’s teaching is adorned with

a variety of modes of exposition and the fact that the tradition of the ancient teachers is available in unbroken continuity for the purpose of reference and consultation. Because of these two considerations I have courageously taken the difficult task of elucidating the teaching on Paṭīcasamuppāda”.⁵⁰

The Paññābhūminiddeśa is the seventeenth chapter of the Visuddhimagga. The sixteenth chapter, the Indriyasaccaniddeśa deals with the topics of faculties (indriya) and Noble Truths (sacca). This shows that Buddhaghosa begins his exploration of the Dependent Origination with a full understanding of the role that the Noble Truths play in Buddhist Philosophy. In explaining and analyzing the Noble Truths, it seems, Buddhaghosa did not face any problem or difficulty. Therefore, his confession regarding the inability in the case of Dependent Origination shows how deep and difficult was the causal theory of Buddhism in relation to the Noble Truths.

As mentioned before, the Paṭṭhāna marks the highest position of the development of the Buddhist theory of causality in the Pāli Canon. The analysis of causal co-relations in the Paṭṭhāna is theoretically based on Dependent Origination quite often discussed in the discourses. It was stated above that the relationship between any two factors of the twelve-fold formula was never paid attention to in the discourses. The first attempt in this regard was done in the Paṭisambhidāmagga. Seeing that it was not satisfactory, Buddhaghosa investigated into the relationships that exist between any two factors of the twelve-fold formula by applying the Paṭṭhāna methodology. Buddhaghosa there revealed whether the relationship between any two factors is cause and effect, antecedent and subsequent, logical, temporal or psychological. This is the greatest contribution of Buddhaghosa to the Buddhist Philosophy. Karunaratne observes: “The Paṭṭhāna of the Abhidhamma deals with conditions and relations in remorseless detail and runs to hundreds of pages recording and registering all manner of subtle and minute bearing of one Dhamma over another. The ethical interest that marks the discussion of Paṭīcasamuppāda is altogether absent in this voluminous work. Although, there is a historical and causal connection between this theory of the *paccayas* and the formula of

⁵⁰ Visuddhimagga, 522-523

the paṭiccasamuppāda yet the two emerged in two different backgrounds. While the formula dominated the Nikāyas, the theory of the *paccayas* came to dominate the Abhidhamma; and the two were considered separately until the time of Buddhaghosa. Thus we see that it was Buddhaghosa who for the first time in the history of Theravāda Buddhism brought the two forms of the causal doctrine in its exposition in the Visuddhimagga.⁵¹

It is not out of place, I think, to write a brief comment on Karunaratne's evaluation of Buddhaghosa's contribution to the doctrine of Dependent Origination. According to Karunaratne, it was Buddhaghosa who introduced the conception of paṭiccasamuppāda as the wheel of becoming (*bavacakkra*), the division of the paṭiccasamuppāda into three periods as past, present and future and the amalgamation of the theory of *paccayas* with the theory of paṭiccasamuppāda.⁵² Karunaratne is partly mistaken here, since the credit to the first two concepts, the wheel of becoming and tritemporal interpretation should go to the Paṭisambhidāmagga. As mentioned before, the twelve links of Dependent Origination are divided into three phases for the first time in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, on the basis of the cause and effect operative in the past, present and future. Accordingly, the past causes are '*avijjā, sankhāra, taṇhā, upādāna* and *bhava*'. Their present results are '*viññāṇa, nāmarūpa, āyatana, phassa* and *vedanā*'. The first five again operate as the present causes, the future results of which are the second five. In dividing twelve links as such, the Paṭisambhidāmagga uses the terms *purimabhava* (past existence), *idhūpapattibhava* (present existence) and *āyatim upapattibhava* (future existence). This shows that the concept of wheel of existence was known, at least at its germinal form, to the Paṭisambhidāmagga. Therefore, Karunaratne is correct only when he states that Buddhaghosa is the first person who amalgamated the theory of *paccayas* with the theory of paṭiccasamuppāda.

⁵¹ Karunaratne, p. 42

⁵² Karunaratne, p. 82

The position in the Nettippakarāṇa

Historically, the Nettippakarāṇa is anterior to the Visuddhimagga. Since the exposition of Dependent Origination in the Visuddhimagga seems to have been a continuation of that in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, I have placed these two texts together. Otherwise, our attention should be drawn to the Nettippakarāṇa before the Visuddhimagga.

It is well known that Netti is the first serious attempt in the Theravāda tradition to interpret the Dhamma by applying an organized methodology. It has introduced sixteen modes (*hārā*) in analyzing the phrasing and five guidelines (*ṇayā*) in analyzing the meanings of the Pāli Canon. Our attention is paid here to the modes in which the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination are dealt with. The first of the sixteen modes of the Netti is *desanā*. *Desanā*, the collective term which embraces all the teachings of the Buddha, is taken here to indicate the Four Noble Truths. The Netti asks: “What does this teaching of the Dhamma teach?” The Netti itself answers: “The Four Truths: suffering, origin, cessation and the path. Disappointment and fruit are suffering, gratification is origin, escape is cessation, means and injunction are the path.” These are the Four Truths according to the teaching mode.⁵³ The Four Noble Truths seem to be the essence of the Buddha’s teaching according to the *desanāhāra* in the Netti. However, the Netti enumerates the Four Noble Truths as only one of the sixteen modes necessary to understand the entire Buddhist Philosophy. It is quite obvious that the Netti too considers Dependent Origination plays a greater role in the teaching of the Buddha, since at least six modes refer to it as the central concept of Buddhism. They are: *yuttihāra* (mode of conveying), *padatṭhānahāra* (mode of footing), *lakkhaṇahāra* (mode of characteristics), *āvattahāra* (mode of conversion), *parikkhārahāra* (mode of requisites) and *samāropanahāra* (mode of coordination). Among them, the most important is the mode of conveying.

The mode of conveying discusses how a statement of Dhamma is justified as authoritative. The Netti draws our attention here to the teaching of Four Great Authorities (*cattāro mahāpadesā*)

⁵³ Netti (=N.), 8

emphasized by the Buddha at least at two places in the Pāli Canon.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the authority and the authenticity of a statement attributed to the Buddha Himself, the community of monks, some members of the Sangha in a particular area or to an educated monk should be taken as the word of the Buddha only when it can be placed beside the Sutta and compares with the Vinaya. It is out of place here to go into the details and controversies that the Theravāda tradition has maintained to ascertain the meanings of the words Sutta and Vinaya in the context of Four Great Authority. What is important here to our discussion is that the Netti has introduced a new dimension to the criteria as *dhammatā*, the essential nature of the phenomena. The Netti defines the Sutta in this context as Four Noble Truths, Vinaya as the discipline of lust, hatred and delusion and *dhammatā* as Dependent Origination.⁵⁵ The importance of Dependent Origination was thus felt to change the criteria that the Buddha Himself has suggested to check the authenticity of the proper statement of the Dhamma.

In this regard Bond observes: “The Netti’s treatment of this passage is itself an interesting piece of interpretation, for it has subtly shifted the intent of the Four Mahāpadesa. As we have seen, in its original contexts, the Four Mahāpadesas seem to have been a formula for evaluating the authenticity of sayings attributed to the Buddha. In the Netti, however, there is no mention of declaring a passage to be the word of the Buddha when it is shown to be in accord with Sutta and Vinaya, the whole point of the formula originally. The Netti does not employ the formula to establish the authenticity or authority of the teachings, but has rephrased the basic rule of the Mahāpadesa Sutta and adopted it as the criterion for acceptable interpretations. By defining Sutta, Vinaya and *dhammatā* in this way the Netti establishes an outline of the Dhamma to serve as the norm for correct interpretation.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ DN. II, 123ff; AN. II, 167f

⁵⁵ N., 21, 22

⁵⁶ Bond, George D., The Word of the Buddha, Gunasena, Sri Lanka, 1982, p. 81

Conclusion

A careful scrutiny of the available data in the Pāli literature reveals that the Noble Truths represent the Buddha's understanding of reality of man and his environment while Dependent Origination represents the way through which He understood the reality. In other words, the Noble Truths have an epistemological significance while the Dependent Origination has a theoretical and methodological significance. This dual significance of the Dependent Origination is implied in the discourses too. The first sermon of the Buddha as accepted by the Vinaya tradition is coupled with records that the hermit Siddhartha became enlightened through the Middle Path that he followed rejecting the two extremes of sense indulgence and self-mortification.⁵⁷ Since, these two extremes are social applications of the theoretical foundations of nihilism and eternalism respectively, it is logical to believe that the Middle Path too has a theoretical foundation. It is nothing but Dependent Origination because its intrinsic characteristic is avoiding extremes. The hermit Siddhartha discovered the Middle Path through the dialectic thinking inherent in Dependent Origination. This is amply proved by the Buddha's revelation in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta. He directly and unhesitatingly divulges that He became enlightened with the understanding of the twelve-fold formula of Dependent Origination.⁵⁸

As mentioned before, the Mahāpadāna Sutta and Saccasamyutta repeatedly say that the previous Buddhas too became enlightened with the penetrative knowledge of the factors of Dependent Origination. In this regard there is an important discourse in the Samyuttanikāya.⁵⁹ As one of the suttas reveal, the problem that the hermit Siddhartha faced was the non-availability of a path to cross over this world overwhelmed by birth, decay, death, arising and ceasing. He was pondering over the way out. Accordingly, He examined the cause that would give rise to decay and death. In this investigation He found that as long as the birth exists, decay and death too exist. He realized the decay and death come to being due to birth. In this way the hermit Siddhartha proceeded along the dependent-theory of origination with

⁵⁷ V. I, 10

⁵⁸ MN. I, 165-167

⁵⁹ SN. II, 104-105



the understanding that finally it leads to enlightenment. As this particular discourse further reveals: the way to the understanding of Four Noble Truths is Dependent Origination. The Buddha has further said that He made use of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path for the realization of arising and ceasing of each cause and effect of Dependent Origination.

Buddhaghosa's elevation of Dependent Origination seems to have generally seeped into the entire commentarial literature. The *Jātakanidāna*, the earliest complete biography of the Buddha in Pāli tradition, deviating from the consensus of opinion of the discourses, informs us that the hermit Siddhartha became enlightened with the attainment of the retro-cognitive knowledge in the first watch, clairvoyance in the second watch, the knowledge of Dependent Origination in the third watch and all-knowing knowledge in the morning watch⁶⁰ of the night of enlightenment. There are two points of vital importance here. First is that all important knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses, which is unique in the process of enlightenment, according to the Canonical discourses, is replaced with the knowledge of Dependent Origination and omniscience, not known to the discourses. The second is that the commentator seems to have found a link between the knowledge of Dependent Origination and omniscience. The causal order was also known as *dhammadhātu*, the element of *dhamma*⁶¹, which is thoroughly comprehended by the Buddha. The person who has the *dhammadhātu* has the ability and competency to gather information inaccessible to others.⁶² Therefore, it would have been considered as an essential requirement of the all-knowing knowledge.

The conclusion that can be arrived at in the light of the facts mentioned above is that the Theravāda tradition, though reluctantly and silently, has given in to the supremacy of Dependent Origination over all other teachings of early Buddhism. This can be one of the side effects of the development of *Abhidhamma* in Theravāda tradition.

⁶⁰ *Jātaka* I, 75-75

⁶¹ *MN.* I, 396

⁶² *DN.* II, 9-10

Possible Relationship between Kalām and the Kalama Sutta

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Introduction:

Many people within the realm of Buddhist Studies are familiar with the Kalama Sutta and its functionality [also known by the alternative title: the Kesaputta Sutta], found in the Anguttara-Nikaya.⁶⁴ Many people in Buddhist Studies do not know that this discourse is not an isolated teaching given to the people of a village – it is replicated in other locations⁶⁵, and is

⁶³ This article is about creating possibilities. I cannot be certain (as if anyone could?), if these people that the Buddha met were Jewish. I am not necessarily focusing on their Jewishness, rather the interest here is the Buddha’s philosophical approach that parallels wisdom from those monotheists. Islam was not “invented” at the time of these circumstances. I’m not certain what languages these people at that time spoke, and while I operate on these assumptions, the claims are not permanent, and these ideas can be adaptable – who can be so sure? They may be Jews from various periods of their diasporas and operate in different languages – or kept some of their traditions. If this point is dwelled on for too long, there will be no article, so we proceed – under the aspiration that this uncertainty is comprehended.

⁶⁴ F. L. Woodward: *The Book of the Gradual Sayings – Anguttara Nikaya Vol. I* (London: Pali Text Society, 1973), pp. 170-175

⁶⁵ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (translators): *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima-Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications 1995), pp. 775-785 – in the Cankī Sutta, and pp. 827-838 – in the Devadaha Sutta

given to a small group of monks and a householder.⁶⁶ Kalām is familiar to anyone studying Islamic philosophy. Kalām and the Kalama Sutta? Are the similarities too obvious or just some mere coincidental spelling? This article will explore this situation freely, from different perspectives.⁶⁷

Literature Review - What is Kalām?

Kalām is an Arabic and Hebrew word, meaning: “speaking” – used in relation to theological conversations – discursive theology.⁶⁸ *Mutakallim* is the term to describe a scholar of *kalām*; and, the system of *Kalām* could easily be described as any utterances from God. Harry Austryn Wolfson’s “The Philosophy of the Kalām” was the main source available for considerations. All material referenced in this section comes from this book, and only page numbers will be mentioned in parentheses.⁶⁹ Wolfson cannot trace the origin of the exact word: ‘*kalām*’ – although he gives a Greek and Arabic translation (p. 1-2) or interpretation, this leaves more to be desired in terms of my study, here. In Arabic the term suggests: speech or word; and in Greek, the term is determined to be the familiar logos: word, reason or argument (p. 1). The word also implies an element of faith; to explain faith, intellectual expressions needed examined.

⁶⁶ For the monks, the advice is found in the Samyutta-Nikaya, see: Bhikkhu Bodhi [ed. and trns.]: The Connected Discourses of the Buddha – A New Translation of the Samyutta-Nikāya Vol.I (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), pp. 609-611. For the householder, Bhaddiya the Licchavī, see: F. L. Woodward: The Book of the Gradual Sayings – Anguttara Nikaya Vol. II (London: Pali Text Society, 1973), pp. 200-204.

⁶⁷ Cautionary Note: The purpose of this article is not to examine that discourse – rather, the purpose here is to illuminate a perceived commonality between two words. Many academics site this “Kalama” discourse as a sort of justification for anarchy against doctrines perceived as dogmatic. The discourse has been exploited, as if it is the tool for sanctioned-skepticism for Buddhists, or liberational-ideas away from traditional Buddhist positions – using a Buddhist teaching against Buddhist doctrine. Another aspect of the discourse could be its functionality for inter-religious dialogue; or, rather, when missionaries are trying to convert someone to this other religion – the discourse provides the tools to see through the doctrines. While scholars can appreciate the value of the material, its usage should not be applied wrongly. This article, however, discusses other aspects of the discourse – which would likely cause additional controversy: The Buddha had a conversation with Jews. This article will attempt to reconstruct this possible scenario.

⁶⁸ See: Nuh Ha Mim Keller: Kalam and Islam - <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/kalam.htm>

⁶⁹ Harry Austryn Wolfson: The Philosophy of the Kalam (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976)

Kalām⁷⁰ often seems to discover attributes or humanize characteristics of God. The early groups of Muslim philosophers borrowed ideas from the Greeks: “Blending the methods of the philosophers with the methods of the Kalām, they formed of the blend, a special branch of science. They named that science Kalām, and this either because the principle problem which they discussed and battled over was the problem of God’s speech (al-kalām) and therefore the entire range of problems discussed by them was called by the name of that particular problem.... the discipline of *manṭiḳ* [logic], for *manṭiḳ* and *kalām* are synonymous Arabic terms [both of them, like the Greek logos, meaning ‘speech’]... methods of the Kalām were... not told.” (p. 10) An example of performing kalām: if a verse in the Noble Qur’an mentions the hand of God, kalām would tell us that this is the “power of God”, and God’s face is his presence or existence, and the Throne of God is determined to be the dominion or realm of control. (p, 23). Certainly this is akin to the wisdom of Solomon. Some earlier or traditional schools of Islamic thought could determine that such illustrations were *bida*, and perhaps akin to heresy (p. 10). Using analogies was common and derived from religious data or the likeness between things (p. 30). “People [rose] in defense of the articles of faith by the use of intellectual proofs in order to repulse the innovations.” (p. 32)

In the Pāli language of Theravada Buddhism there are a few words that express a similar linguistic connection: the Arabic ‘*al-aḳl*’ becomes – *kalām*. Additionally consider that the Pāli term: ‘*ākāra*’ [a state, condition, attribute, mode or reason] – respectfully.⁷¹ Even the word for being entangled is similar, if one is confused by intellectual or linguistic-possibilities: *ākula*. The words could easily linguistically-morph into each other as a loan-word, given the various possibilities in languages. I should express the language-morphing possibility through the example of the Thai language [perhaps also influenced by Pāli-Sanskrit languages], which can seldom distinguish between “r” and “l” sounds. Then there is

⁷⁰ For an interesting on-line lecture, see: <http://vimeo.com/8664450> - entitled, Knowing God: Reason, Revelation and Intuition, by the SOAS Islamic Society – viewed on 11 June 2010. The claim in the lecture is that Kalam is not philosophy or theology, but based from rationality. The speaker claims it is dialectic-theology: having a rational basis for the cosmological reality – for which the theology is based, it is not scriptural theology.

⁷¹ Rhys Davids: Pali-English Dictionary (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1921) – see relevant entries and definitions. Online version, .pdf file version, pp. 193-194

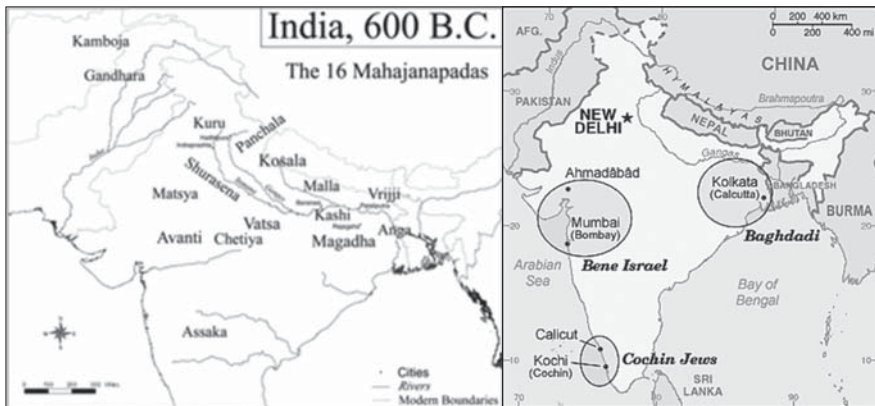
the manner of the two terms: *ma'nā* in Arabic and *mano* in Pāli – the two terms respectfully mean: attribute or thing within Arabic; and mind or thought in Pāli. An attribute or a thought about something can certainly be a manner or characteristic of the thing being examined. The word “kalām” also figures in a Buddhist text.⁷² *Rasm* in Arabic is an impression; and in Pāli, *rasmi* is a ‘ray’ – again, another similar connection, as a ray of sunlight may leave a lasting impression upon the viewer, or a ray could be something perceived in meditation leading towards some insight. As the ancient people spread their cultural ideas, these expressions became nearly common or synonymous, as we have them today. Further, there is references to the Dualists [Persian Zoroastrians and Indian Naturalists, in the text (pp. 66-68)]: “The Indian doctrines were not so unknown to the Arabs as one ordinarily seems to think. Several authors and notably, some... leaders had pretty accurate notions of it.” (p. 67)

Primary works on Kalām began, although these came later than the Buddha, by Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā (died in 748), Harūn al-Rashīd (living from 786-809, respectfully) and later by Ibn Sa’d (died in 845), who was influenced by Ibn Ḳutaybah (living from 828-889). Then, proper academic words, later formed – these works dealing specifically with the study of Kalām originate from two Muslim scholars: Shahrastānī and Ibn Ḥaldūn (living from: 1086-1153 and 1332-1406, respectfully) and a Jewish scholar, Maimonides (living from 1135-1204, respectfully) (pp. 2 & 4). This illustrates that the proper study of Kalām is perhaps almost one-thousand three-hundred years old, and has undergone many refinements, and the fact that these authors lived after the Buddha and the established writings is dually noted, but obviously ideas can be present in the society prior to the capability to write something down.

⁷² W.H.D. Rouse [translator]: The Jātaka – Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, Vol. IV (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2005), p. 212 - Jataka 491: Mahā-Mora-Jātaka - IV.335 - (suvanṇapaṭṭaṅṣāra--mañjūsāyaṅṭhapetvākālamakāsi...) – the translation, available pertains to, or to paraphrase: a father told a son that there is a place where a golden-peacock is found... but no one found it, and the king commissioned the whole story to be written on a golden plate... a later king arose and read what was written on the golden-plate. We can see in the phrase that the Father’s word and writing is figurative in the phrasing.

The Buddha and the Jews:

The maps below are interesting in several respects.⁷³ First, perhaps five different groups or waves of Jews arrived into India; those groups coming after the advent of Buddhism must be ignored, therefore there is only one group that possibly established itself in India during the lifetime of the Buddha: the Cochin Jews certainly, and perhaps there could have been contact from Bene Israel before official records were kept. Certainly, speculation could suggest that some adventurous, independent merchant-Jews could have meandered up the Ganges, and found their way into the Kosala Kingdom around the time of the Buddha – or Bene Israel settlers could have ventured overland into the Kosala region. Evidently, we cannot be certain, but this article suggests the remote possibility. Here is a map of the Kosala region⁷⁴ and again, the lands where early Jews settled:



From a website:

At different times Jews arrived and settled in south India... the first forefathers of the Cochini Jews arrived in India during the King Solomon's period [about five hundred years before the time of the Buddha]. King Solomon had commercial business with a kingdom probably existing in the present state of Kerala in south India. Other version claims that the Cochini Jews are from the Lost Tribes. Another version claims that

⁷³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Jews --accessed on 08 June 2010

⁷⁴ http://wpcontent.answers.com/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/ff/Ancient_india.png/300px-Ancient_india.png --accessed on 08 June 2010

*the Cochini Jews arrived in India after they were exiled from Land of Israel by Nebuchadnezzar... The Keralans take pride in the fact that the kingdoms of Kerala were world famous and merchants from around the world frequently visited Kerala, since the times of King Solomon and later on Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Chinese and others. Among the merchants, also arrived in Kerala many Jewish merchants and some of them settled in Kerala... The existence of the Jewish community in south India was known to other Jewish communities outside India and some other Jewish merchants also arrived in India. The Jewish merchants were influential community in their state and outside their state and were main reason for the prosperity in their kingdom.*⁷⁵

There is also the connection between the Ethiopian empires and the Yemeni empires, where the ancient sea-routes provided valuable materials for the kingdoms' interests in trade into each other's kingdoms and elsewhere.⁷⁶ There was vibrant trade between Yemen and India.⁷⁷ This period of interest would be the Sabaean Empire⁷⁸, where it is also stated that the Romans⁷⁹ knew of the location to get a better trade route into India.⁸⁰ A journal article asserts that Indians were sailing for more than 5000 years.⁸¹

⁷⁵ <http://adaniel.tripod.com/cochin.htm> --accessed on 08 June 2010; further referenced: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cochin_Jews

⁷⁶ See: <http://nationalyemen.com/2012/11/11/india-and-yemen-a-long-history-of-exchange/> - accessed on 27 November 2012

⁷⁷ See the Smithsonian Institute's galleries: <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/yemen/launch.htm> - accessed on 27 November 2012; <http://www.cs.nmsu.edu/~fmohamed/ancient-ye.html> - accessed on 27 November 2012;

⁷⁸ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_history_of_Yemen - accessed on 27 November 2012

⁷⁹ See: The British Association for South Asian Studies, and their text: Migration, Trade and Peoples, edited by Roberta Tomber, Lucy Blue, and Shinu Abraham (London: British Academy), online at: <http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org/site/files/Part%201-%20Indian%20Ocean.pdf> - accessed on 27 November 2012. The text mentions that there are ships depicted in the art of the Ajanta caves, so it is likely that there was external contact well-prior to the illustrations.

⁸⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Islamic_Arabia - accessed on 27 November 2012

⁸¹ See: http://www.swahiliweb.net/ziff_journal_3_files/ziff2006-05.pdf - the article entitled: Antiquity of Sailing Ships of the Indian Ocean: Evidence from Ancient Indian Art, by Dr. Alok Tripathi, Ziff Journal, 2006 – mentioning the Harappans and their ship-art.

Further there is this:

Some of the Bene Israel claim descent from the “lost” ten tribes of Israel. According to Biblical history, these ten tribes, which formed the Kingdom of Israel, were exiled from their capital, Samaria, by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser and subsequent kings from the year 722 BCE on. Others among the Bene Israel believe that their ancestors escaped by sea from Israel in the year 175 BCE, during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (prior to the events that led to the festival of Chanukkah).⁸²

Including:

Jewish people - Sephardi, Paradesi, and Cochin Jews - who had settled in Kerala during the Babylonian exile.⁸³

And there is this:

The oldest of the Indian Jewish communities is in Malabar coast. Traders from Judea arrived in the city of Muzirus, in what is now Kerala, in 562 BC. Most Jews, however, came as exiles from Israel in the year 70 C.E. after the destruction of the Second Temple. ...Excavations carried out at Pattanam in 2008 provided evidence that the maritime trade between Kerala and the Mediterranean ports existed back in 500 BC or earlier. It is possible that some of those traders who arrived from the west, including Jews, remained in Kerala.⁸⁴

Then there is this – related to the Port at Pattanam:

These three seasons produced the largest number of Mediterranean amphora fragments excavated outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire⁸⁵...was once the flourishing port known to the Romans as Muziris and sung in praise by the Tamil Sangam poets as Muciri.

⁸² <http://www.bh.org.il/database-article.aspx?48701> – Website for the Beit Hatfutsot: Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora --accessed on 08 June 2010

⁸³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knanaya> --accessed on 08 June 2010 – these people are said to be from the Kingdom of Judah.

⁸⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Malabar_Nasrani

⁸⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pattanam>; <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/05/29/stories/2010052960400400.htm> ;

<http://beta.thehindu.com/arts/history-and-culture/article244338.ece?homepage=true>

Professor Nathan Katz writes in his book:

There was trade between King Solomon's Palestine (992-952 B.C.) and the Malabar coast. The Biblical name for India was 'Odhu' [Hodu]. Teak, ivory, spice, and peacocks were exported to Palestine. This established a linkage between India and Israel long before the birth of the Cochin Community, grafting the entire history of the community onto yet earlier traditions and making the splendor of Solomon's reign the taproot of glory for the Jewish princes of Shingly.⁸⁶ ...Archeological evidence from Northwest India indicates trade between the prehistoric Indus Valley Civilizations of India and Sumer between the twenty-fifth and nineteenth centuries B.C.E.⁸⁷ ...[E]vidence in the Book of Exodus of trade between ancient Israel and India, direct or indirect, in no less than four Hebrew words of Indic origin, the terms for cinnamon, emerald, sapphire⁸⁸, and topaz. The Buddhist Baveru Jataka also refers to the ancient trade between India and Babylon, Baveru in Sanskrit. The text cites, 'Indian merchants who took periodic voyages to the land of Baveru.' Similarly, in the Kevaddhu Sutta, a sacred text that tradition holds was spoken by the Buddha himself during the sixth-century B.C.E., and that was first written down during the first century B.C.E., 'we read of how long ago merchants sailed far out of sight of the coast, taking short sightings birds, which were released from time to time, in order that they might guide the mariners to land.' Not only is this verse reminiscent of the Noah story, but these Buddhist texts indicate a much earlier use of Indian Ocean sea lanes than is commonly believed.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Nathan Katz: *Who are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 13

⁸⁷ Nathan Katz: *Who are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 20

⁸⁸ Another instance of scholarly recognition of these ideas, can be read on the seventh page of the article, found here: <http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/amharic/holybooks/arkofthecovenant.pdf> - accessed on 27 November 2012

⁸⁹ Nathan Katz: *Who are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 27 – and confirmed the reference, for the Baveru Jataka story - <http://ignca.nic.in/jatak056.htm> --website for the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts; and for the Kevaddhu Sutta: Maurice Walshe: *The Long Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Digha-Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 175-180 or <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.11.0.than.html#fn-2> Furthermore: Nathan Katz has written that the Mahosadha Jataka, which I cannot trace in my complete PTS edition, is the same

Above are several references to King Solomon, and perhaps there is something to interpret from any available “biblical wisdom”, from what is written about him in the First Book of Kings? Chapter Two of First Kings, in the third verse, details some interesting information: “And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses [*Leviticus?* – *because Leviticus 26:46 states: “These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses”*], that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.” We can think that the phrase concerning judgments is a form of interpretation that is very interesting for this brief study. Judgments certainly are a form of interpretation, or sensible determination after considering a variety of aspects of information – trying to discover the truth of the situation, and proclaim the verdict of the circumstance. 1 Kings 2:3, is a verse from David, to his son Solomon upon his ascension to the throne; another later verse from God, echoes this desire to close out a dream (1 Kings 3:14); and again is replicated to close out a supplication and a blessing to the congregation of Israel (1 Kings 8:58). A warning against this (1 Kings 9:6-7) would end the covenant God made with Israel. This verse illustrates also the reflection upon previous texts, through the mentioning of maintaining the Laws of Moses. In a dream, King Solomon asks of God, to: “Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this, thy so great a people?” (1 Kings 3:9). King Solomon was considered very wise: “And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.” (1 Kings 4:34) King Solomon had cedar trees taken from Lebanon, brought into his kingdom by

story as found in 1 Kings 3:16-28 – and it does seem likely because of the parallels found in the Maha-Ummagga Jataka #546, section 5, but here the story is about a baby that was stolen, not a baby that was crushed under the weight of one of the women – both feature the revelation of the compassionate mother. See: E.B. Cowell: *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Rebirths*, Vol. VI (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2005), p. 163. Nathan Katz presents this in: Perry Schmidt-Leukel [ed.] *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions* (Germany: EOS, 2008), pp.267-293. Nathan Katz claims it is impossible to state who borrowed from who, but since King Solomon lived before the Buddha, it would be more evident that the Fully Enlightened Buddha borrowed the story. All the additional cross-references and rechecking have suggested that the story is really found as Jataka #546, or the Mahā-Ummagga Jātaka.

sea – this verse (1 Kings 5:9) illustrates the sea-trade certainly was existent and active. King Solomon made the desire known: “That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else.” (1 Kings 8:60) King Solomon had his own Navy docked at the Red Sea (1 Kings 9:26). The Queen of Sheba (Ethiopia) heard of his fame and sought after him to prove this with very difficult questions – but, King Solomon loved many other women of nationalities other than his own (1 Kings 11:1) – having 700 wives, 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). King Solomon also received the Navy of Tharshish (1 Kings 10:22), which is said to be some place in India (although there are good arguments for other locations), because of receiving gold and silver, ivory (Africa/Asia), apes (Africa) and peacocks (from India, the national bird); or more likely, these could just be a collection of the finest things from various nations with access to the seas. All the acts and demonstrations of the wisdom of Solomon are said to be written in the book of the acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), and also Proverbs may have some phrases of interest.

The Book of The Proverbs, opens as such: “To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice and judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise and their dark sayings. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:2-7) “...For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof.” (Proverbs 1:29-30) “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser, teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:9-10)

Prior to King Solomon, aspects of wisdom that was available for him to learn, would have included Exodus 23:13 – “And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect...” Then, in a late discovery, Buddhist scholars learn that the Kharosthi script has

a distinct reliance or borrowing from the Aramaic – suggesting that writing could have been learned from the “Jews”. To learn more of this: “An analysis of the script form shows a clear dependency on the Aramaic alphabet but with extensive modifications to support the sounds found in the Indic languages. One model is that the Aramaic script arrived with the Achaemenid conquest of the region of northwest India in 500 BCE, and evolved over the next 200+ years to reach its final form by the 3rd Century BCE where it appears in some of the Edicts of Ashoka found in northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, notably Pakistan and Afghanistan. ...[an] entire set of manuscripts are dated to the 1st Century CE making them the oldest Buddhist manuscripts yet discovered.”⁹⁰

Review of Buddhist Suttas:

There are at least five discourses, as mentioned above, that pertain to the same set of material. It may be beneficial to chart the material to best see the commonalities or differences:

Original Five Criteria [OFC] merged with Kalama Sutta Criteria [KSC]:					
<i>Possible arrangements:</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith (embraces Kalama Sutta’s: <i>Report and Tradition</i>) • Personal preference (embraces: <i>Seeming possibilities, and Appearance</i>) • Oral Tradition (embraces: <i>Hearsay and An Idea of Our Teacher</i>) • Reasoned Reflection (embraces: <i>Authority of Texts, and Inference</i>) • Acceptance after pondering (embraces: <i>Logic and Agreement with a Considered and Approved Theory</i>) 					
Criteria:	Bhaddhiya Sutta [KSC]	Kalama Sutta [KSC]	Cankī Sutta [OFC]	Kosambi Sutta [OFC]	Devadaha Sutta [OFC]
Participants:	The Buddha and Bhaddiya the Licchavī	The Kalamas and the Buddha	Young Brahmin Kāpaṭhika and the Buddha	Venerables: Musīla, Saviṭṭha, Nārada, and Ānanda	Buddha to the monks, referring to the Jains.
Messenger:	The Buddha	The Buddha	The Buddha	Saviṭṭha to Musīla and Nārada	The Buddha
Where:	Vesālī’s Peaked-Roof House in the Great Forest	Kesaputta Village	God’s Grove of Opasāda	Kosambi’s Ghosita Park	Sakyan village of Devadaha

There are also some criteria that Al-Ghazali demonstrates: the knowledge of basic tenets of faith – a personal theology, determined to be influential; then there is a second, as a discursive ideology – as rational arguments to defeat heretics who would confuse people about the tenets of faith, determined to be valid and obligatory, but only to the extent needed; then finally is speculative

⁹⁰ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/kharosthi - accessed on 22 November 2010 – and to further support this, other websites were examined, on the same day, to verify: www.ancientscripts.com/kharosthi.html; http://ebmp.org – the homepage for the Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project.

theology, which is reasoning about principles of God, man, and being – to discover by deduction and inference the way things really are – and this is impossible for kalām to do.⁹¹ Keller later writes that kalām has three main tasks: define the contents of faith, show that it contradicts neither logic nor experience, and provide the grounds to be personally convinced of it.⁹² The Kalama Sutta, or the discourse of the Buddha being reflected on, pertaining to interesting assertions of logic is perhaps around two-thousand five-hundred years old.

One may recall the wisdom found in the Kalama Sutta, that Buddhadasa and other Thai philosophers decide to invoke regularly; Buddhadasa has said: “...in Buddhism there is no dogmatic system, there is no pressure to believe without the right to examine and decide for oneself. This is the greatest special quality of Buddhism which keeps its practitioners from being the intellectual slaves of anyone... Intellectual and spiritual freedom is best. ...Parents should teach and train their children to know how to understand the words and instructions they receive, to see how reasonable the words are and what kind of results will come from them. When parents teach or tell their children anything, the children should understand and see the benefits or practicing what they are told.”⁹³ If a child does not understand something, youths should question adults. The purpose of the Kalama Sutta is to remind the person as a listener/reader to have wisdom before one has confidence or faith in a teaching. The Kalama Sutta is rarely placed in its proper context, added here to invoke ‘authority’⁹⁴:

⁹¹ Nuh Ha Mim Keller: Kalam and Islam - <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/kalam.htm> - this paragraph above is largely phrases taken from Keller, without quotation marks.

⁹² Nuh Ha Mim Keller: Kalam and Islam - <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/kalam.htm> - further, on the second criteria – it is interesting to read: “Members of world faiths may be expected to question their religious beliefs for coherence, logicity, applicability and adequacy... one does not have to hang up one’s mind to enter Islam.”

⁹³ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Keys to Natural Truth* (Bangkok: Mental Health Publishing 1999), p. 5-6

⁹⁴ Phra Prayudh Payutto: *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn University Press, 2000), p. 274-275; F. L. Woodward: *The Book of the Gradual Sayings – Anguttara-Nikāya*, Vol. I (London: Pāli Text Society, 1970), p. 170-175

- Do not be led by report
- Do not be led by tradition
- Do not be led by hearsay
- Do not be led by the authority of the texts
- Do not be led by mere logic
- Do not be led by interference
- Do not be led by considering appearances
- Do not be led by the agreement with a considered and approved theory
- Do not be led by seeming possibilities
- Do not be led by the idea: ‘This is our Teacher’

Certain scholars like to cease the ‘message’ here, as authority to dispute Buddhist doctrine, never furthering to suggest why, for our individual selves, because, if:

- These things are unprofitable
- These things are blameworthy
- These things are censured by the intelligent

These things when performed and undertaken conduce to loss and sorrow

...Then indeed ‘we should’ reject them. This is the advice. The advice is not to disregard the teachings of the Buddha, based on what is inside the authoritative scriptures. Revisionists attempt to illustrate this, through deceptive logic. Some people use the line about texts to suggest that this is a later addition to the Tipitaka, because Buddhism did not have written texts, but perhaps this is again referring to Jewish scrolls. This does not seem like something that can be considered gradually as found above in the Islamic and Buddhist forms of gradual training.

This takes some swift intellectualization to consider. This precedes Buddhadasa’s statement by a few decades: “Only people who are overtly stupid will be unable to benefit from this advice... the ten examples ...are a surefire defense against intellectual dependence or not being one’s own person: that is, neglecting one’s own intelligence and wisdom in dealing with what one hears and listens to, what is called in Dhamma language ‘*paratoghosa*’ (sound

of others⁹⁵). When listening to anything, one should give it careful attention and full scrutiny. If there is reason to believe what has been heard and it results in the genuine quenching of suffering, then one finally may believe it one-hundred percent.”⁹⁶ What is interesting is Buddhadasa recognizes those who act as repeating-parrots with paratoghosa [is there a root-word/linguistic link?]. This lesson teaches those who heed this advice, not to become the intellectual slave of others, even at the highest levels.⁹⁷ It is interesting that the Kalamas were not ‘intellectual slaves’ but were asking the Buddha which teacher they should believe, because there are a multitude issuing various doctrines – the Buddha taught the Kalamas a set of tools to use in determining acceptable doctrines. Thus the summary of the KesaputtaSutta, becomes: Is what one is stating: rooted in greed, hatred or delusion – if so, it must be rejected. This analytical ability, on determining whether or not something is conducive to wholesomeness, is only ‘partial’ knowledge, only a portion of the *abhiññā* the Buddha possessed. The term, ‘*Asavakkhayanana*’, must have some weight inclusive to the above definition, which goes largely unexplained, by Phorn Ratanasuwan.⁹⁸ Thus, the Dictionary provides ‘*Asavakkhayanana*’ as being the knowledge of the destruction or exhaustion of all mental intoxicants⁹⁹ in several similar manners. It is through the hearing of another’s doctrine that one is able to recall, practice/apply for one’s self, and then determine if success results. Every discourse of refutation of other’s [non-Buddhist] doctrine results in conversion [either as lay-disciple or as a bhikkhu], or death.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ As included into the two sources/conditions for the arising of correct views, Phra Prayudh Payutto: Dictionary of Buddhism (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn University Press, 2000), states: paratoghosa – another’s utterance, inducement by others, hearing or learning from others – p. 80

⁹⁶ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Keys to Natural Truth (Bangkok: Mental Health Publishing 1999), p. 5 – from a 1988 speech

⁹⁷ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Keys to Natural Truth (Bangkok: Mental Health Publishing 1999), p. 8

⁹⁸ Phorn Ratanasuwan: Abhiññā – Supra-mundane, Psychic Powers of the Buddha (Bangkok: Home of Psychic Research, Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University), p. 382-384 – suggests to deal with in another volume.

⁹⁹ Phra Prayudh Payutto: Dictionary of Buddhism (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn University Press, 2000), p. 119 – as on-third of the Threefold Knowledges, the other two: reminiscence of past lives and knowledge of decease and rebirth of beings; p. 235 – as the final sixth of the relevant Abhiññā discussed in this section; p. 280-282, as one of Ten Powers of the Perfect One – one of the Buddha’s or Arahant’s powers.

¹⁰⁰ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi: The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha:

Shahrastānī writes in one of his works: most of their anthropomorphisms were borrowed from the Jews, for anthropomorphism is characteristic of them [...or at least amongst the Karaites]. (p. 68) Anthropomorphism is such a serious offense to Muslims, that al-Ghazālī was said to have stated: “ Be an out-and-out Jew, or else play not with the Torah...” (p. 104)

The northwestern part of the world when the Buddha was living...



There is a term in Arabic: *fiḵh* – which is interpreted to mean: “the divine laws that govern the action of all duty-bound Muslims” (p. 8) and, “the root of all the traditional sciences... the subject matter of each of these sciences, the problems which they deal with, and the methods of demonstration which they use in solving those problems... all originate in man by reason of his being a thinking human being.” (p. 5) A portion of a chapter of Deuteronomy reads:

A New Translation of the Majjhima-Nikāya (Boston: Wisdom Publications 1995), p. 492: Since the NiganthaNataputta (leader of the Jain’s) was unable to bear the loss/conversion of one of his chief supporters to the Buddha [the magic to convert others, another attribute!], hot blood, then and there gushed from his mouth; and page 1257: A heavy sorrow arose in [NiganthaNataputta] because of the loss of his lay supporter, and this produced a bodily disorder that resulted in the vomiting of hot blood. After vomiting hot blood, few beings can continue to live. Thus they brought him to Pāvā [of the Mallas? – the Buddha died with ‘them’ as well, a chedi/stupa erected containing relicts of the Buddha] and shortly after [the Jain] passed away.

“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest though forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons...” (Deuteronomy 4:5-9). This is taken to mean that there is not much innovation allowed in maintaining the traditions suggested by the Most High God – maintaining these codes is considered wisdom. One is wise to operate under these impositions; one is wise to tend only to oneself, and to teach one’s youth.

Innovations or deviations from revelation can be considered forbidden, or *bida* [further, in Pāli: *pāpa* means: sinful, or something bad. A derivative word is: *pāpita* – meaning: one who has done wrong. In Thai, the word: “*pit*” means wrong, and it is easy to assume that the Arabic term *bida* is linguistically related.] Related to *Kalām*, Wolfson further writes that the term *Kalām* came to mean: “argumentation formed from the intellect.” (p. 5). These intellectual-interpretations could only occur after passages from the Qur’an and Sunnah/Hadiths were consulted – *Kalām* originates from post-scriptural analysis.

The Noble Qur’an has another term, found at 25:33, as translated: “And no example or similitude do they bring (to oppose or find fault in you or in this Qur’an), but We reveal to you the Truth, against that similitude or example, and the better explanation thereof.”¹⁰¹ The term “*tafsīr*”, is the word up for consideration – defined as meaning: “interpretation”. If the earlier verses are considered before 25:33, we can read that from 25:29 onward, speaking of a non-Muslim: “29. He indeed led me astray from

¹⁰¹ Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali & Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan: Translation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur’an in the English Language (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’an, 1420 AH), p. 482

the Reminder (this Qur'an) after it had come to me. And Shaitan (Satan) is to man, ever a deserter in the hour of need. [Tafsīr Al-Qurtubi] 30. And the Messenger (Muhammad, peace be upon him), will say: 'O my Lord! Verily, my people deserted this Qur'an (neither listened to it, nor acted on its laws and teachings). 31. This have We made for every Prophet an enemy among the Mujrimun (disbelievers, polytheists, criminals). But Sufficient is your Lord as a Guide and Helper. 32. And those who disbelieve say: 'Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him all at once?' Thus (it is sent down in parts), that We may strengthen your heart thereby. And We have revealed it to you gradually in stages. (It was revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, [over] 23 years.)"

Ayats 29-33 are interesting for the context of Kalām – the words of Allah. We have people being led away from Allah's advice by the forces of distraction – going away from Allah's advice and regulations; and despite the various unfriendly-forces, Allah's advice should always be enough. There is always a course of gradual guidance, in order that one can grow stronger in faith towards having more confidence in Allah. If stated differently, but within the same context – further interpreted: people are led away from Allah's advice, easily by evil-minded people, however one's heart is strengthened by these repeated and gradually revealed proofs from Allah. Allah alone is sufficient, and will guide someone needing assistance. To parallel the above verses – in a different training-system: Buddhism also has a recognized gradual path: through laws or regulations (sila), and teachings of meditation and words towards the further development of wisdom (samadhi and paññā). There is no rapid development in these systems, as Islam and Buddhism take time to learn.

There are different words in Arabic that denote "interpretation"; maybe the most common are: ta'wīl and tafsīr. Ta'wīl would illustrate a return to the beginning – or the suggestion would be towards the earliest words which dispense of the traditional renderings; but tafsīr replaced this – based on hadith, rather than personal opinion or expertise. There is a lot of debate over the proper definition of these terms, but to further illustrate, for the purposes here, Jews also used these terms. When Islam spread, many of these new converts

did not know Arabic, so interpretation was a natural development in the spread of Islam; and actually this can be said with the developments of any religion moving into previously unknown areas. Any act of a prophet, explaining the words of God, can be seen as tafsīr. If someone is reading the Qur'an in Arabic, the meanings are quite clear, but in translations, every word is interpretation. There are numerous references towards clear proof, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc. – for anyone to comprehend. These verses, for instance: 58:5, 34:5, 3:7 – all suggest that there are clear and unclear verses to the minds of humans, and despite their curiosities and attempts to rationalize hidden and unhidden meanings of what was said – of course the final authority alone, is Allah.

The great Muslim scholar-philosopher Al-Ghazali (died in 1111), suggested: that there are the practical issues that are easier to comprehend inside the Qur'an, and then there are verses that take a deeper level of cognition to comprehend. He further suggested that kalām is faulted because the exponents based their arguments on unquestioned propositions from opponents and were compelled to admit to these by reliance on authority or by the consensus of the community. Further, none of the early sages of Islam needed to use philosophy – and what is left to consume for students of the Kalām school are utterances of “unintelligible and incoherent phrases.” (p. 42)

Kalām was also responsible for the formulation of four common beliefs amongst Judaism, Christianity and Islam: “the beliefs of the creation of the world and the existence, unity and incorporeality of God.” (p. 45) The Jewish scholar Maimonides was largely responsible for the formation of this criteria. Wolfson additionally states that only Greek and Syrian languages and not Latin were available to the Muslim-Arabic scholars, and that post-Nicene Council works were rarely referenced (p. 51). It was the work of Heretical Christian Scholars working mainly in Arabic, unconsciously deviated from orthodox positions, and: “began to accommodate their doctrine of the Trinity to the Muslim doctrine of attributes.” This could have been a factor in the extinction of the Kalām philosophical schools. (p. 81)

Conclusion:

The nature of this article is not to detail some profound philosophy – other people have done that; rather this was more of a light-historical presentation of similarities and creating possibilities for demonstrating religious tolerance and the coexistence of different systems. In the first section of this article tried to illustrate for Buddhist readers: Jews have been in India since before the foundation of Buddhism, and it may be greater than likely that the Enlightened One, encountered such people during his 45 years of ministry to the people of the Land of Rose Apples. There is even biblical and a lot of archeological evidence of these ancient encounters during the reign of King Solomon, whose mighty-navy went beyond the Red Sea. While the Kalām “system” as a proper ideological method or philosophy is younger than the days of the Buddha, it is evident from biblical evidence that methods of textual-interpretation existed before the time of the Buddha. All of the judgments and interpretations that exist in the Torah and other Jewish texts were available to the communities in diaspora, and it must be remembered that these empires that held Jews in their exile, were neighboring nations to ancient India, like the areas now known as Ethiopia and Yemen. King Solomon prayed for and was rumored far and wide to possess great wisdom and understanding – interpreting the divine words he received. This similar methods of interpretation existed in Buddhism, and it was the Buddha who reinforced the criteria of interpretation amongst the people he visited, and some of these people were learned in an unformalized kalam-system.

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A Buddhist Monk's Journeys to Heaven and Hell

Jana Igunma
British Library¹⁰²



Phra Malai, the Buddhist saint known for his legendary travels to heaven and hell, has long figured prominently in Thai religious treatises, works of art, and rituals – particularly those associated with the afterlife. The story is one of the most popular subjects of nineteenth-century illustrated Thai manuscripts. The earliest examples of these Thai manuscripts date to the late eighteenth century, though it is assumed that the story is much older, being based on a Pali text from Sri Lanka. Phra Malai is mentioned in a Burmese inscription from the thirteenth century, and anonymous Northern Thai versions of the story may go back to the sixteenth century. In nineteenth-century Thailand, it became a very popular chanting text for weddings and funerals.

¹⁰² The Thai manuscripts which are the subject of this article have been digitized with the support of the Royal Thai Government to celebrate the Auspicious Occasion of the 80th Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, 5th December 2007. The digitized manuscripts are made available online at the library's Digital Manuscripts viewer www.bl.uk/manuscripts.

Monks reciting the story would often embellish and dramatize their tellings, contrary to the behavioral rules for monks which were introduced during the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century monks were banned from performing Phra Malai recitations. As a result, former monks who had left the Sangha often delivered the popular performances, dressed up as monks for the occasion, unconstrained by the rules of proper behavior for the real monks.

The story of Phra Malai

Phra Malai is the legend of a Buddhist monk of the Theravada tradition, who was said to have attained supernatural powers through his accumulated merit and meditation. According to the legend, he visits heaven and hell and afterwards describes to the lay people and fellow monks what he has seen. By his visit to hell, he bestows mercy on the creatures in hell and temporarily brings relief to their sufferings. They implore him to warn their relatives on earth of the horrors of hell and how they may escape it through making merit, meditation and following the Buddhist precepts.

Back on earth, he receives an offering of eight lotus flowers from a woodcutter, which he promises to take along to heaven and to offer at the Chulamani Chedi, a heavenly stupa containing a relic of the Buddha. In heaven, Phra Malai engages in discourse with Indra, the green faced king of the gods. Eventually, he meets and speaks with the Buddha-to-come, Maitreya, who teaches him about the future of the humans on earth.

It was through tellings of Phra Malai stories that the karmic effects of human actions were taught to the faithful at funerals and other merit-making occasions on behalf of the deceased. It was also through these verbal and visual narratives that Maitreya's message of hope for a better rebirth and for attaining nirvana was conveyed. According to the Buddha Maitreya, attendance of a Vessantara Jataka performance counts as a virtue that increases chances of a better rebirth. For this reason, the story of Phra Malai is often combined with the Vessantara Jataka or The Ten Birth Tales within one manuscript.

Phra Malai manuscripts usually contain the following illustrated scenes: Devas (heavenly beings) and Buddhist monks

at the beginning of the text, monks attended by laymen, scenes of the hells showing punishments, the picking and offering of the lotus flowers, Chulamani Chedi and the talk with Indra and Buddha Maitreya, heavenly beings floating in the air, scenes of the future with people fighting contrasted by people meditating and others plucking gold and gems from wish trees.

Although the subject of hell is mentioned in the Pali canon (for example, Nimi Jataka, Lohakumbhi Jataka, Samkicca Jataka, Devaduta Sutta, Balapanditta Sutta, Peta-vatthu etc.) it is believed that the legend of Phra Malai helped to shape the picture of hell in Thai society.

The Thai manuscript tradition

Thai folding manuscripts are usually made from the bark of the Khoi tree (*Streblus asper*, or *Trophis aspera*). The bark was stripped from the tree, soaked in water and then beaten with wooden mallets until the bark separated into fibers. The fibers were dried on a flat surface until they gained the consistency of cardboard. After trimming the edges to 60 cm in length, the paper was folded accordion-like to form a book of about 12 cm width. The paper is of a dull cream-buff color, and the writing was done with black China ink and a bamboo pen. The front and back covers are mostly lacquered, sometimes with gilt decorations.

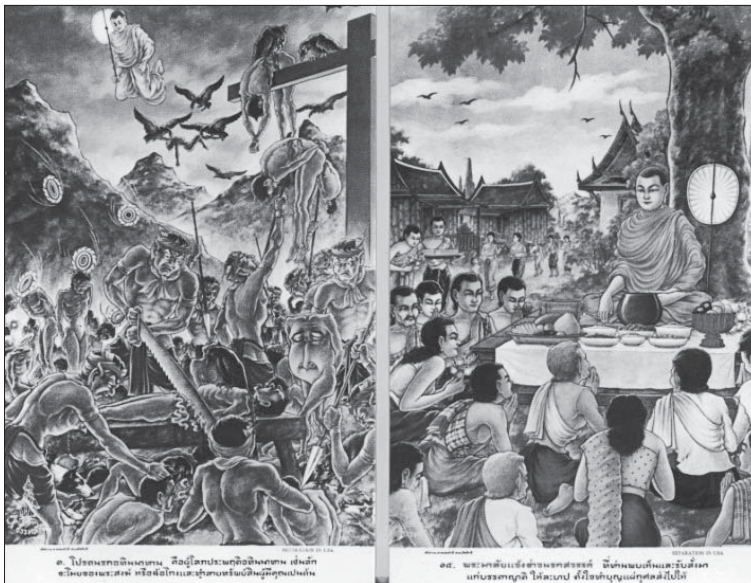
Traditional Thai manuscript painters had only a limited range of colors made from available natural materials. Red and yellow ochre, as well as white were obtained from local minerals. Black was produced from lampblack, carbon or crushed charcoal. Greens and blues were mostly produced from vegetable matter (for example *Indigofera*). Only by the eighteenth century was malachite imported from China to produce a bright green color. Gold was also used lavishly. Natural pigments were mixed with the sap of a tree to improve adhesion to the paper.

The production of illustrated folding books ranks as one of Thailand's greatest cultural achievements. They were produced for a range of different purposes in Buddhist monasteries and at the royal and local courts. First of all, such books served as teaching material and handbooks for Buddhist monks and novices. Canonical

Buddhist literature, prayers (sutras) and moral teachings were also read to the lay people during religious ceremonies. The production of folding books – and even sponsoring their production - was regarded as a great act of merit making. Therefore, folding books quite often are a kind of “Festschrift” or presentation volume in honor of a deceased person.

The dating of these manuscripts is done through analysis of the calligraphy, style of painting (during the 19th century, western techniques of painting such as the use of perspective gained popularity), and the use of colors. The depiction of foliage and clouds also offers insight. Sometimes the manuscripts contain a colophon that gives a date and occasion as well as names of donors for the production of the manuscript.

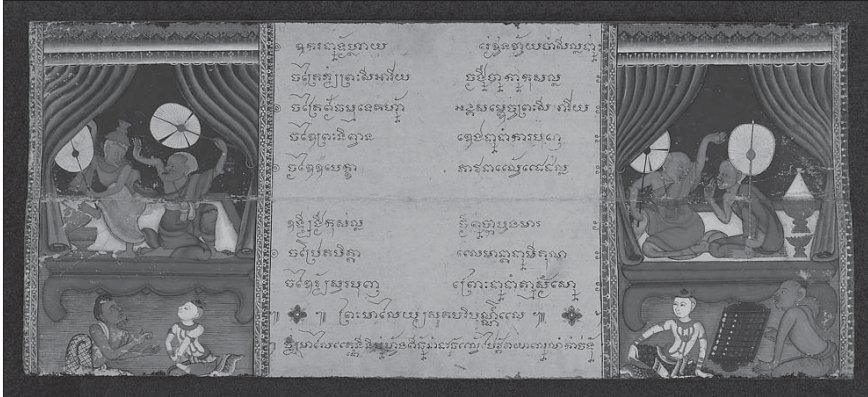
The manuscript tradition began to die out in Thailand with the spread of printing presses in the second half of the 19th century. However, the story of Phra Malai has lost none of its popularity in Thailand and recitations of the legend are regularly carried out during funeral ceremonies at Buddhist monasteries throughout the country. The legend also has been reprinted repeatedly in books, on post cards and on posters in recent decades.



© British Library Shelfmark ORB.30/6309: Two postcards from a series of fourteen depicting the story of Phra Malai, ca 1970.

The legend of Phra Malai in Thai manuscripts at the British Library:

Scenes from a Phra Malai performance



© British Library Shelfmark Or.14838, folio 86: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with sixteen paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Abhidhamma scriptures) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1849 in a colophon in Thai script at the end of the text.

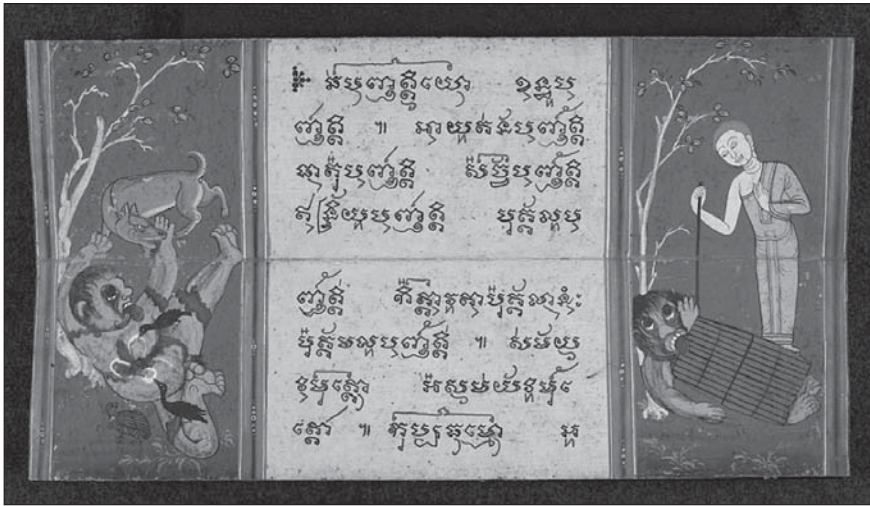
The virtuoso painting style in this manuscript is the work of a fine artist, but he is not mentioned in the colophon which lists the names of the donors. They are a mother and her two children, and it is stated that they paid for the making of the manuscript as well as for fabric to wrap it in, and a lacquered and gilt chest in which to keep it. The total cost was eight *tamlung* two *baht* one *fuang* (which is equal to 1.141 lb of silver). The realistic style, with details rendered with the sharpest accuracy, reflects influence from abroad, perhaps Indian or European. This type of realistic representation was not a traditional element of Thai painting.

The satirical scene of pretend monks, reciting the Phra Malai text when ordained monks were forbidden to do so, and with lay people seated below them (including both noblemen and commoners) clapping hands and playing a board game, reflects very well the real practice of Phra Malai performances during the 19th

century. The delicate characterization of the figures, the coloring, shading, and quality of detail, are all exceptional in Thai painting of this period. The high level of sophistication is surprising at a time when most artists were adhering to traditional norms.

The date given, 2392 in the Buddhist era, the Year of the Monkey, is equivalent to 1849 AD, at the end of the reign of King Rama III.

Phra Malai visits the hell of thieves



© British Library Shelfmark Or.13703, folio 10: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) made from Mulberry paper containing twenty paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Pali canon), written in Khmer (Khom) script in black ink with red tone marks for use in recitation.

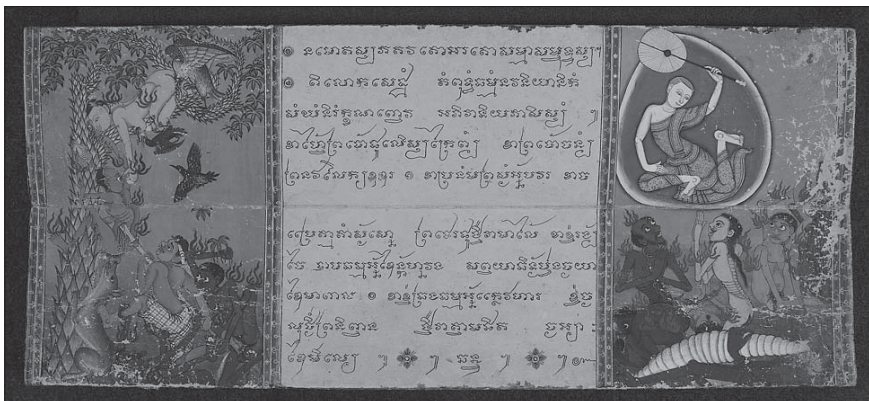
Although providing no information on when it was made, this striking manuscript has the main characteristics of early nineteenth century Thai painting with dark background colors, large scale of figures, and distinctive draughtsmanship with firm yet still relatively fluid lines. The monk Phra Malai here has similarities with the features of a Thai standing Buddha figure.

The illustrations show Phra Malai's visit to the hell of thieves. It is believed that the soul of a deceased person will first of all meet Yama, the Lord of Justice, who presides over the Buddhist hells.

Yama will decide about the reincarnation of that person according to their *karma*, which is the result of their actions of body, speech and mind during their previous existence. Those who have offended the Buddhist laws will have to reside in one of the Buddhist hells for a definite length of time until their *karma* has exhausted its cumulate effect before they can be reborn on earth or, eventually, in heaven.

The inhabitants of this hell have to endure painful punishments, which include having their extremities bitten or chopped off their bodies, their intestines pulled out by wild birds, being nailed at tree trunks, being restrained and pierced with spears. Phra Malai brings comfort to the sufferers of this hell and promises to teach their relatives to follow the Buddhist precepts. The small turtle, which is often used as a lucky charm by business people in Thailand, possibly symbolizes greed which leads to offences like fraud, deceit, and theft.

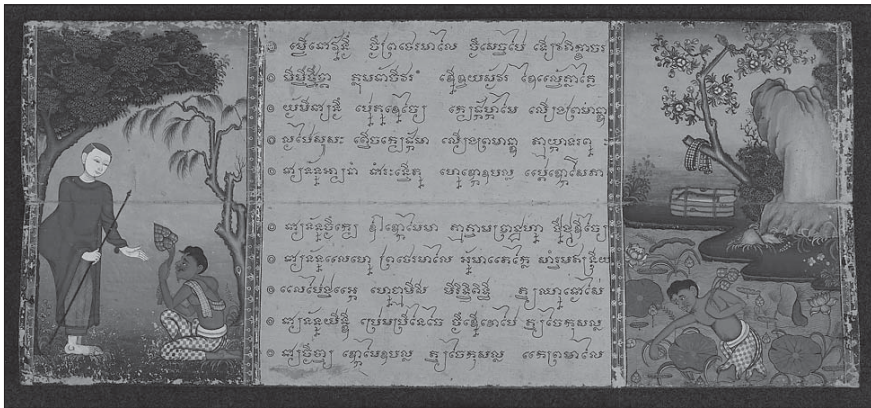
Phra Malai visits the hell of adulterers



© British Library Shelfmark Or.14838, folio 9: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut kloi*) with sixteen paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Abhidhamma scriptures) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1849 in a colophon in Thai script at the end of the text.

The paintings on this folio show unusual bright colored hell scenes, each with a sky-blue background. Phra Malai is floating in a huge red aureole above the heads of the inhabitants of the hell of adulterers. It is believed that giant worms eat up their innards, wild animals bite them, and hell guards with spears chase them up *kapok* trees, which have a height of about 10 miles. The trees have flaming thorns as sharp as knives made of steel. The sufferers in this hell can be seen begging Phra Malai to teach their relatives in the human realm, Jambudipa, about their fate and to tell them to make merit on their behalf. A certain Indian or European influence is being reflected in the realistic style of painting, which was not a traditional element of Thai painting and emerged only during the nineteenth century.

Phra Malai receives a lotus offering

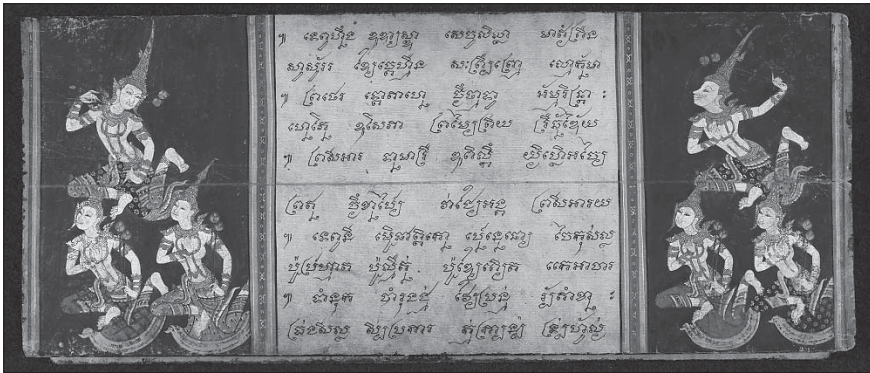


© British Library Shelfmark Or.14838, folio 29: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with sixteen paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Abhidhamma scriptures) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1849 in a colophon in Thai script at the end of the text.

These two paintings show one of the most popular scenes from the legend of Phra Malai. A poor woodcutter picks lotus flowers in a pond and presents them to Phra Malai to carry to heaven as an offering to be laid down at Chulamani Chedi, the heavenly stupa.

The lotus pond is richly embellished with rocks, flowers, bushes and a tree. The woodcutter's *pakama* (a shoulder or head cloth) is hanging on the tree, whereas his knife and wood can be seen orderly arranged under the tree. The flowering tree with a bird and the rock could both derive from Chinese painting style. However, they had become typical features of the Thai painting style during the nineteenth century. The left-hand scene, where the bouquet is presented to the monk, is a calm and peaceful one with trees and flowers on a bright background.

Phra Malai visits the heavens



© British Library Shelfmark Or.14115, folio 40: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with 22 paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Pali canon) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink.

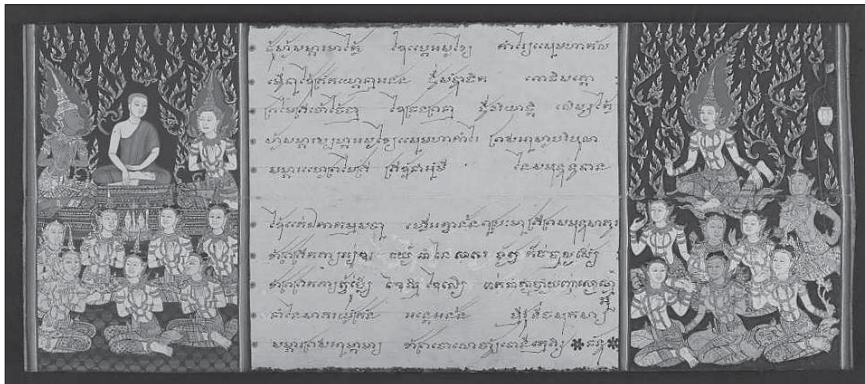
The illustrations in this folding book are carefully and finely painted and are works of great artistic merit. The paintings stand in the tradition of early nineteenth century painting, but the cursive writing style bears more the characteristics of a style that was used during the second half of the nineteenth century. The scenes in heaven are standard ones in Phra Malai manuscripts, but rendered here on dramatic black grounds richly set with golden decorations.

On the folio shown here the denizens of heaven are floating in the air, the upper ones being male *devas* and below them their female counterparts. Each of them carries a pair of pink lotus flowers,

symbolizing purity. The pink lotus is regarded as the supreme lotus and is attributed to the historical Buddha. *Devas* are believed to inhabit the Buddhist heavens, however, they are not immortal nor omnipotent or perfect. They live for very long but finite periods of time, ranging from thousands to millions of years. When they pass away, they are reborn as some other sort of being, perhaps a different type of *deva*, perhaps as a human or something beyond comprehension. Their existence is a result of their *karma* as much as this is the case with humans.

The typical Thai headgear and dresses - which occur not only in manuscript and mural painting, but also in classical theatre performances – have been painted with outstanding accuracy in these illustrations.

Phra Malai meets Indra and Buddha Maitreya



© British Library Shelfmark Or.6630, folio 56: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with fourteen paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Abhidhamma scriptures) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1868 in a colophon in Thai script at the end of the text.

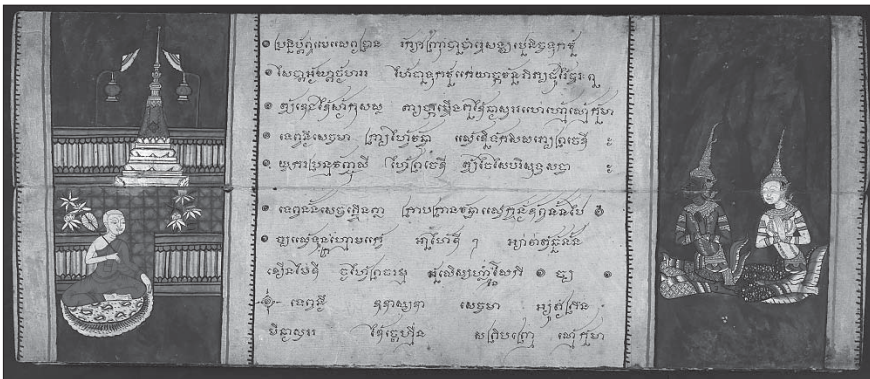
This manuscript was produced in the year when King Rama V ascended the throne. The elaborate painting style in all fourteen illustrations is outstanding. The artist, a superb craftsman of lines and colors, used the background space for densely painted and

delicately detailed patterns which remind of the decorations on Thai Benjarong porcelain.

The script in this manuscript is more cursive in style than usual in this type of manuscript. Some letters in the text render letters from the modern Thai alphabet more than letters from the Khmer alphabet.

On the left, Phra Malai is seated on a plinth in heaven conversing with the green-colored god Indra and Maitreya, the future Buddha who came down from the Tusita heaven to meet the monk. Two rows of heavenly beings fan out below the three main figures in an inventive, bold pattern which is rarely seen in manuscripts. On the right side, Buddha Maitreya is floating above other devas before a bright blue background. The elaborate structure of the paintings and the rich coloring are unusual, though highly effective.

Phra Malai offers the lotus at the Chulamani Chedi



© British Library Shelfmark Or.16353, folio 91: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with ten paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Abhidhamma scriptures) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Colophon at the end of the text in Thai script.

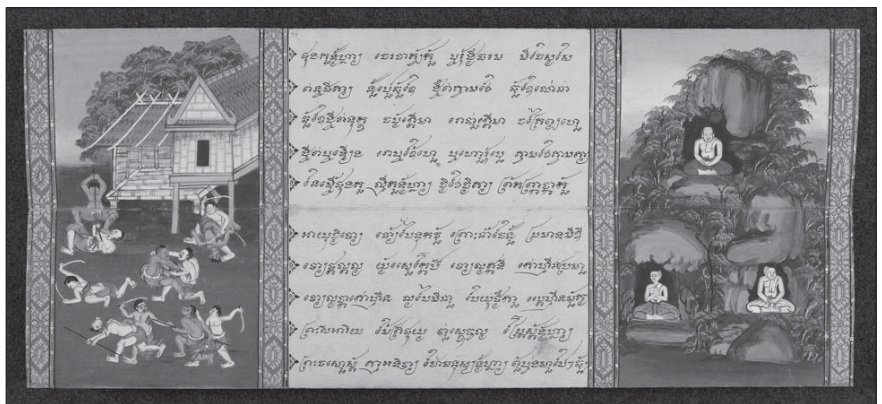
Written in thin Khmer script, this manuscript can probably be attributed to the second half of the nineteenth century, although the paintings resemble more the style of the early Bangkok era. It could as well be a copy of an earlier manuscript. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, a practice of nearly exact copying of Phra Malai manuscripts emerged. According to the colophon, the manuscript was produced on occasion of a funeral to help the deceased reach a state of Nirvana.

Illustration on the left side shows Phra Malai offering a poor woodcutter's lotus flowers at the stupa known as Chulamani Chedi. The stupa is believed to be situated in the Tavatimsa heaven. It is surrounded by a blue glazed wall, and the floor it stands on is covered with brown tiles. Left and right of the stupa green Chinese-style lanterns hang on rods. In older manuscripts, the rods usually hold Buddhist banners. The base of the stupa could be white marble, the green centerpiece could be made of jade, and the top is gilt. Altogether the compound reminds the viewer of the Buddhist temples built in Bangkok during the reign of King Rama V.

Phra Malai sits on a carpet at the entrance to the chedi, carrying his fan. The lotus flowers in front of the chedi have a rather unusual shape in this painting.

The illustration on the right side shows Indra together with a female deva sitting down in prayer.

Phra Malai learns about the future of the human world



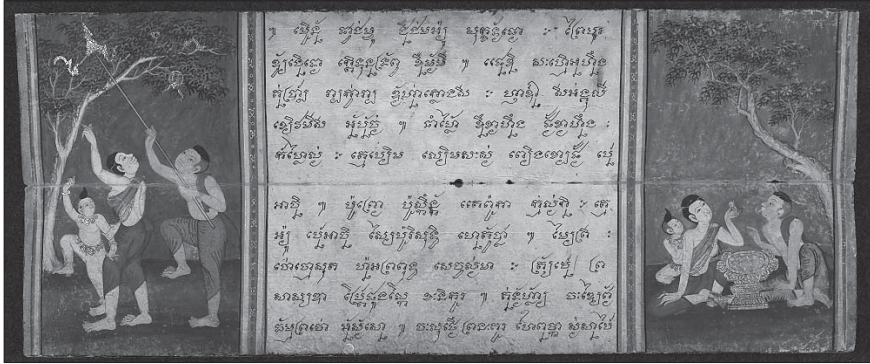
© British Library Shelfmark Or.16100, folio 78: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with seventeen paired illustrations showing The Ten Birth Tales and Phra Malai. The text is in Pali language and in Thai, written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1894 in a colophon in Thai script on the first page.

Bequeathed to the British Library in 2004 from Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection, this lavishly illustrated manuscript is distinct in its realistic painting style which shows the Western influence of the nineteenth century. Although it was produced towards the end of the Thai manuscript tradition, it is an outstanding example. The paintings are all very detailed with a refined color sense. The text is cursive written in a fine hand.

In addition to the illustrations resembling scenes from The Ten Birth Tales and Phra Malai, this manuscript contains two large paintings. One shows a monk's funeral on two folios, whereas the other stretches over five folios depicting Mount Meru.

According to the legend, the future Buddha Maitreya informed Phra Malai during his visit to the heavens about the future of the human world. It is said that Buddhism would deteriorate after Buddha's teachings had been on earth for five thousand years. Violence, incest, chaos and war would bring mankind to extinction. Only a few wise people would be able to hide in caves, sitting in meditation and prayer until the Buddha Maitreya is reborn in the human realm.

Phra Malai learns about the wish trees of the future



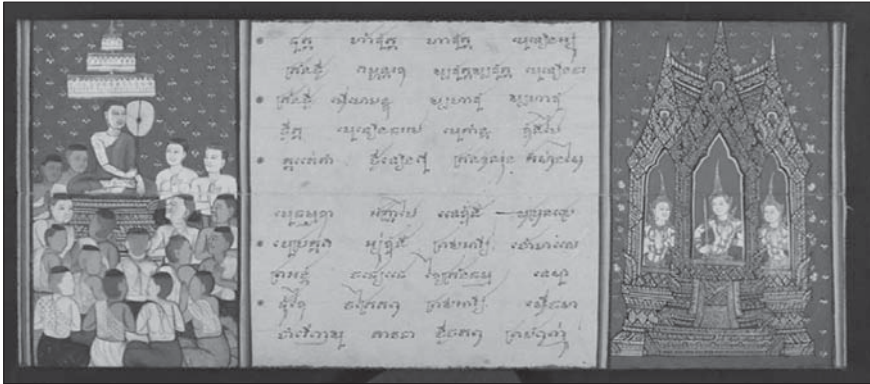
© British Library Shelfmark Or.14115, folio 75: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with 22 paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Pali canon) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink.

These two paintings illustrate what Phra Malai learned from the future Buddha Maitreya about the wish trees which would grow when he is reborn into the human world. At that time, all humans who had followed the Buddhist way of life, who attended recitations of the Vessanara Jataka and made merit in their former lives would be reborn as well. The earth would flourish with vegetation, villages and towns would be thickly populated with healthy and handsome people. Huge wish trees would grow on earth to provide humans with goods and valuables.

The lively, realistic style of painting suggests that the manuscript is from the second half of the nineteenth century, probably more towards the end of the century. This is supported by the slightly cursive script of the text.

The illustrations show a family plucking valuables from a wish tree on the left side, whereas on the right they enjoy food from a golden tray. Their outfit and hairstyles were typical for commoners during the nineteenth century.

Phra Malai teaches lay people about his journeys to heaven and hell



© British Library Shelfmark Or.6630, folio 71: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with fourteen paired illustrations. The text is in Pali language (extracts from the Abhidhamma scriptures) and in Thai (Phra Malai), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1868 in a colophon in Thai script at the end of the text.

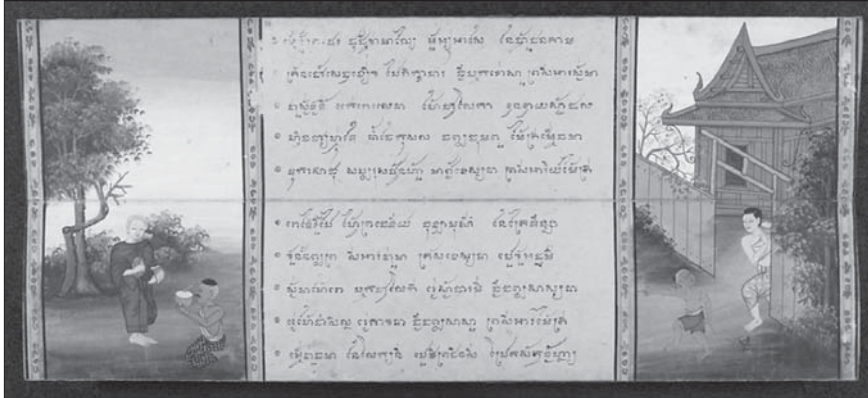
These two paintings from this finely illustrated manuscript depict the scenes of the monk Phra Malai telling his story to lay people, and of Buddha Maitreya in a heavenly pavilion with two attendants (*deva*). The scenes are set on a blue background with a floral wallpaper design which was very popular in Thai manuscript painting during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

On the left side, Phra Malai sits on a pedestal with a three-tiered white-and-gilt umbrella above his head. He is surrounded by female and male lay people attentively listening to the story of his journeys. The faces of some figures in this illustration remain unfinished, which provides us with insights into the methods of making this kind of miniature painting.

The pavilion in the illustration on the right side has similarities with the heavenly pavilions that are often depicted in illustrated Thai Buddhist cosmologies known as Traiphum (*The Three Worlds*). The very detailed depiction of the architecture of the building

together with the three figures sitting inside it make this illustration an outstanding example of Thai manuscript painting.

Phra Malai receives offerings from the lay people



© British Library Shelfmark Or.16101, folio 89: Illustrations from a Thai folding book manuscript (*samut khoi*) with seventeen paired illustrations and gilt and lacquered covers. The text is in Pali language and in Thai (Phra Malai and Ten Birth Tales), written in thin Khmer (Khom) script in black ink. Dated to 1894 in a colophon in Thai script at the beginning of the text.

The illustrations in this folding book depict scenes from the Ten Birth Tales and the legend of Phra Malai. They are finely painted in decent colours, and those concerning the Ten Birth Tales are lavishly adorned with gilt. Most of the illustrations are set before the background of a realistically composed landscape with trees, bushes, rocks, meadows, hills, rivers, and even village scenery.

The illustrations on the left side of folio 89 depict Phra Malai on his morning alms round receiving food offerings from a layman who kneels before the monk. The man is dressed like a Thai commoner during the nineteenth century and wears a moustache of the kind that became very popular during the reign of King Rama V. He offers a bowl of rice to the monk, a practice that remains an important part of life in Thailand to date.

The painting on the right side shows a young child with a spin top and a female commoner rushing out of their compound. Behind the fence, one can see a traditional Thai-style wooden house, which, quite unusually, stands of the ground instead on wooden pillars.

Under growing European influence towards the end of the nineteenth century, scenes from life became an end in themselves, and with the western painting style came trends towards realism in the rendering of figures and settings, and finally of three-point perspective in space and landscape. Altogether, the adoption of these elements from the west (together with the introduction of the printing press) had a largely negative effect on Thai manuscript painting, which practically came to an end in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

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Narratology in the Isan Mahachat Sung-sermon

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Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University¹⁰³



Abstract

The sermon text can be regarded as a literary text comprising unique thematic content, meticulously selected diction and distinct compositional form. The core essence of the Vessantara Jataka, known as Mahachat Sermon, and as used in the laeh or sung-sermon form, lies in revealing the selfless character of the bodhisattva – the epitome of compassion, charity and self-sacrifice. This sermon is deployed by practitioner monks as a tool for stimulating the mind of lay devotees to listen to the story with devotional attentiveness and then apply its moral values in day to day life. In order to delineate the story well and render the narration effective, practitioner monks in Northeast Thailand (Isan) have played a major role in devising different techniques, such as the use of various figures of speech, versification, rhythm, and last but not the least, different narratological techniques. In this paper we focus particularly on the narratological aspects of the Isan Mahachat

¹⁰³ This paper was presented at the XVI Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (IABS) hosted by the Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Taiwan on 20-25 June 2011.

Sung-sermon. A representation in art, literature or any other discipline is narrative when its theme unfolds as a chain of episodic events, revolving around a core action which progresses both spatially and temporally. In Isan, monks who have a high range voice train themselves to delineate the entire story of the Vessantara Jataka (in 13 sections) in a unique recital style infused with distinct rhythms. The episodic narration of the story is done in such a way that enables the reader or listener to discover the whole from its parts and vice versa. As performer-narrators, sung-sermon practitioner monks follow the story along each of the thirteen sections known as kantha that totals to one thousand verses or katha expanding over time and space. From our close textual and thematic analysis of the text Phimpha Laeh Mahachat 13 Kantha (Samnuan Isan) composed by the well-known sung-sermon practitioner monk, Ven. Phrakhru Sutasarapimol (Phramaha Phimpha Dhammadino) it has been found that nine distinctive narratological strategies viz., interiorization, cyclicalization, serialization, elasticization of time, spatialization, fantasization, stylization, improvisation, and contextualization are used in the rendition of the entire story. All these strategic devices are restored to by most sung-sermon practitioner monks in order to render vitality, verdicality, conceptual clarity both to the content of the story as well as the actual act of narrativity. In this paper we examine each of these devices by citing examples from the original text in English translations. There is no doubt that all the narratological strategies that are used have a reinforcing effect on the narration of the story. Providing emphasis, freshness of expression, vividness and conceptual clarity, the use of narratological strategies has rendered great vitality to the story and has positively affected the proliferation, preservation and continuation of the vibrant tradition of the Mahachat sung-sermon in Isan as a whole.

Introduction

The sermon text can be regarded as a literary text that comprises of distinct compositional form, meticulously selected diction and unique thematic content. The core essence of

the Vessantara Jataka¹⁰⁴, known as Mahachat Sermon and used in *thetlaeh*¹⁰⁵ or sung sermon form, lies in revealing the selfless character of the bodhisattva – the epitome of compassion, charity and self-sacrifice. This sermon is deployed by practitioner monks as a tool for stimulating the mind of lay devotees to listen to the story with devotional attentiveness and then apply its moral values in day to day life. In order to delineate the story well and render the narration effective, practitioner monks have played a major role in devising different techniques, such as the use of various figures of speech¹⁰⁶, versification, rhythm, and last but not the least, the art of narrativity. In this paper we focus particularly on narrativity.

A representation in art, literature or any other discipline is narrative when its theme unfolds as a chain of episodic events, revolving around a core action which progresses both spatially and temporally. In the Mahachat sermon, **the core action is centered upon Prince Vessantara**, the Bodhisattva's perfection of the meritorious act of charity or *dana* which began with his generous act of donating the rain-giving white elephant to the drought-stricken denizens of the city of Kalinga, an act that outraged his own subjects and resulted in his banishment from the kingdom by his father, King Sanjaya. His exile expedited the next phase of generous acts that unrolled initially with whole-hearted donation of all his earthly and palatial belongings to suppliants from every stratum of society and eventually culminated

¹⁰⁴ Of the 547 Buddhist stories (Jatakas) illustrating the previous lives of the Buddha, the Vessantara Jataka known as Mahachat in Thai (meaning Great Birth) is the most popular in Thailand and has long since been delineated in both poetry and pictorial arts.

¹⁰⁵ *The Laeh* is a form of applied sermon in which some sort of rhythm is used during actual delivering of the sermon and so in English we have named it 'sung-sermon' in order to distinguish it from other sermons that are delivered in a plain manner without infusion of any rhythm. *The Laeh* or sung-sermon can be classified into two categories – *The Mahachat* and Story-based sermon. The delivery of *The Mahachat* is restricted to the fourth lunar month, whereas, other story-based sung sermons can be delivered at any time throughout the year. Details of the origin of *The Laeh* can be found in the research monograph "A critical study of the Buddhist Sung-sermon from Isan" by the present writer.

¹⁰⁶ Figures of speech both of the *tropes* type i.e. related to general meaning of words such as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, paradox, proverb, didactic interpolation, irony, symbol, imagery, foreshadowing, satire, and pathos and *schemes* type i.e. related to form or shape such as alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, and onomatopoeia are profusely used in the Mahachat Sermon text. See "An Analysis of figures of speech in the Isan Mahachat Sermon", by Dipti Mahanta in the conference volume of LSCAC, Mahasarakham University, 2010.

with the giving away of his two little beloved children to the glutton Brahmin Jujaka and his wife to the deity Indra, disguised as a human.

This particular Jataka tale which represents the penultimate birth of the Buddha as the Bodhisattva, before being finally born as Gotama Buddha, is extremely popular in Thailand. In Isan, or Northeast Thailand monks who have a high range voice train themselves to delineate the entire story (in 13 sections) in a unique recital style infused with distinct rhythms. As performer-narrators, sung-sermon practitioner monks follow the story along each of the thirteen sections known as *kaan* that totals to one thousand verses or *kaatha (Gāthā)* expanding over time and space. The composition of Vessantara Jātaka as appeared in *The Mahachat* is as follows:

Kaan	Romanized Title	Translation	Number of verses
1	<i>Thotsaphorn</i>	Ten Blessings	19
2	<i>Himaphaan</i>	Himalayan Forest	134
3	<i>Thaanaakan</i>	Charity/Donations	209
4	<i>Vannaphravet</i>	Entrance into the forest	57
5	<i>Chuchok</i>	Chuchok, the Brahmin	79
6	<i>Julaphon</i>	Sparse Forest	35
7	<i>Mahaaphorn</i>	Thick Forest	80
8	<i>Kumaan</i>	The Royal Children	101
9	<i>Matsi</i>	Masti, Vessantorn's wife	90
10	<i>Sakkabap</i>	Indra's Words	43
11	<i>Mahaaraat</i>	The Great King	69
12	<i>Chaukrasat</i>	The Six Royals	36
13	<i>Nakhonakan</i>	Return to the Kingdom	48
Total number of verses			1,000

The episodic narration of the story is done in such a way that enables the reader or listener to discover the whole from its parts and vice versa. In this paper we discuss in brief the main distinctive features of sung-sermon narratology that comprises of the following strategies¹⁰⁷:

1. Interiorization
2. Cyclicalization
3. Serialization
4. Elasticization of time
5. Spatialization
6. Fantasization
7. Stylization
8. Improvisation
9. Contextualization

The nine categories can be grouped into three classes – formal method, content rendition and creative infusion. Interiorization, cyclicalization and serialization falls under the rubric of formal method; elasticization of time and spatialization lie in the group of content rendition and fantasization, stylization, improvisation, and contextualization fall into the category of creative infusion. All these devices are restored to by most sung-sermon practitioner monks in order to render vitality, veridicality, conceptual clarity both to the content of the story as well as the actual act of narrativity. What follows is a brief discussion of each of these categories.

Interiorization:

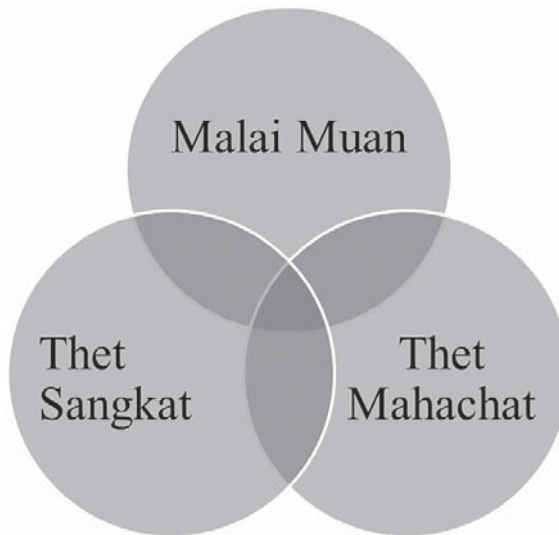
In narratology, interiorization is a special technique or process by which a dialectical relationship between different strands of narration is affected between the surface features of a text and its internal essence¹⁰⁸. During an actual sung-sermon session practitioner monks, both explicitly and implicitly, draw the listeners' attention to the fact that within the story of Vessantara is the incipient story of the Buddha as an enlightened being, and within that is the story of Buddhahood in every person, and so on and so forth,

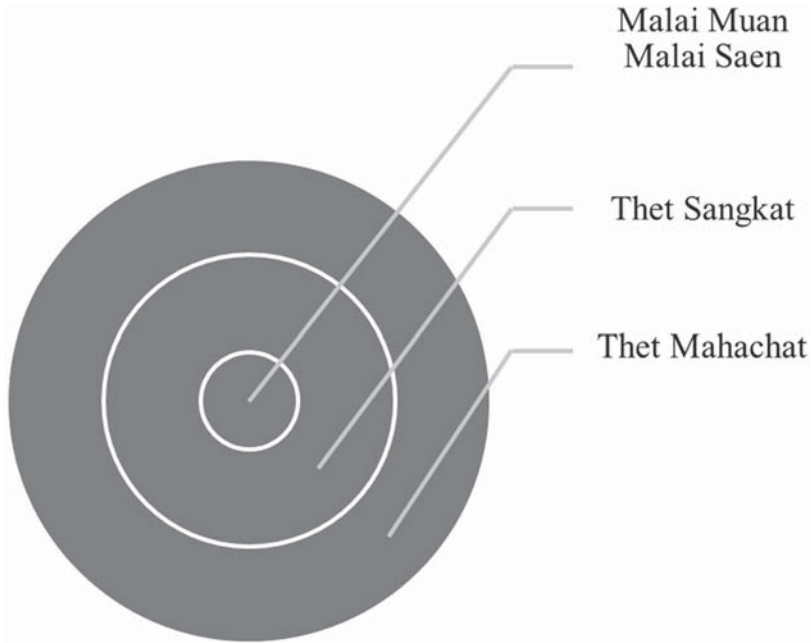
¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of some of these categories in relation to Indian Narratology see K. Ayyappa Paniker's *Indian Narratology* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Lt., 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.12.

an apparently endless process of interiorization. The moral lessons that are to be learnt and internalized from the story get reinforced through this process of interiorization. It also sets the trajectory on a logical footing as to the benefits to be derived from the attentive apprehension of the story.

The entire ThetMahachat ceremony in Isan comprises of the actual narration of three sermons – *Thet Malai Muan* – *Malai Saen*, *Thet Sungkat*, and *Thet Mahachat*. The interconnection of the three sermons brings to light the significance of the narratological aspect of interiorization – the element of story within a story. The interconnection can be well understood when diagrammatically represented with three concentric circles or kaleidoscopic representation of one circle within the other.





Malai Muan – Malai Saen sermon is delivered on the first day i.e. the Mahachat Congregation Day (*Wan Ruam*). This particular sermon depicts the story of the arahant monk, Phra Malai, who having sojourned into the two realms of heaven and hell arrives in the terrestrial world to narrate his experience to the commoner. As the legend goes, during his visit to the celestial abode of deities Phra Malai met the future Buddha, Phra Ariya Mettaiya, who gave him the divine message that any devotee intended upon listening to all the 13 sections of the *Thet Mahachat* on a single day will accumulate great merits that would lead to prospective birth during the time of the future Buddha. Phra Malai brings this celestial message of Ariya Mettaiya to the worldly realm and through the narration of the extraordinary encounter between the future Buddha and Phra Malai, practitioner monks strategically insert the element of faith in the act of listening.

While it is very clear that through the juxtaposition of the sermon of *Malai Muan-Malai Saen*, practitioner monks prepare the ground for instilling faith in the listeners, the delivery of the *Thet Sangkat* on the following day i.e. the Mahachat Sermon Delivery Day (*Wan Thet Mahachat*) helps reinforce the historical reference

point of this faith. Through the *Thet Sangkat*, which is the narration of the biography of the historical Buddha, practitioner monks prepare the ground for logical connection and validation of their sermonizing the story of the Bodhisattva Vessantara in the present era. Phra Malai's message sets the context for the future, *Thet Sangkat* sets the contextual co-relation to the past and finally through the *Mahachat* sermon listeners are inspired to direct their focus on the present moment by taking the glorious example of the Bodhisattva into day to day life through the actual act-of-doing i.e. practicing *dana*.

Apparently there is a logical connection in the three sermonic stages and the narratological aspect is strongly grounded on the dialectical relationship between the act of sermonizing and the actual act of comprehending the embedded meaning/message by the lay devotees. If we expunge the *Thet Sangkat*, the narration of *Thet Mahachat* loses its historicity in its entire phenomenal dimension – the fact that realization of Buddhahood and the origination of Buddhism in general and the *Mahachat* sermon in particular came into origin through a historical figure, Gotama Buddha. But mere acceptance of historicity of the fact in itself is not enough; cultivation of faith is equally important and indeed indispensable to reach one's goal of attaining buddhahood or supreme perfection. Thus the message of Phra Malai has come to bear an inevitable contextual as well as inter-textual relationship to the *Mahachat* sermon as a whole. The arahant monk acts as an intermediary between the Enlightened founder in his future form¹⁰⁹ and countless of his yet to be enlightened devotees in

¹⁰⁹ The historical Buddha is a figure from the past, so there is never any indication that Phra Malai had ever met the Buddha. In fact, such an assumption would be contradictory to the doctrinal teachings on nibbana. The historical Buddha already freed himself from the cycle of birth and death by entering the state of nibbana and even if Phra Malai would have ever wished to meet the Buddha, he would never have had the chance. Suppose he had met, it would be denying the nibbanic achievement of the historical Buddha. But meeting the future Buddha in his celestial abode and bringing the timeless message to the earthly realm, albeit appears too mystical/mythical for skeptics, bears no doctrinal conflict; rather it adds logical progression and sets the tune for the entire setting of the *Mahachat* Sermon. Drawing inspiration from the life of the historical Buddha one looks forward in time to the future Buddha with great hope. But this hope is not utopian, on the other hand, it is rooted in the present life action – attentive listening to the 13 sections of *Mahachat* in a single sitting. Whether a lay devotee would succeed in taking a human form during the future Buddha's time is something that cannot be justifiably verified, but the immediate relevance of Phra Malai's message is that it points towards the present moment of

the earthly realm. Phra Malai's intermediary role in the context of the story/narration in a way also highlights the role of practitioner monks seated on elevated preaching chairs and narrating the sermon in the present day context. Just as Phra Malai is significant in communicating the heavenly message to both monks and lay devotees, practitioner monks play the intermediary role of taking the same message to the commoner. The Arahant monk's role justifies the spiritual leadership role of practitioner monks. Had it not been the case, then lay devotees could have easily replaced practitioner monks in narrating the Vessantara Jataka. But this switching of role has never taken place in the entire history of narration of the Mahachat Sermon.

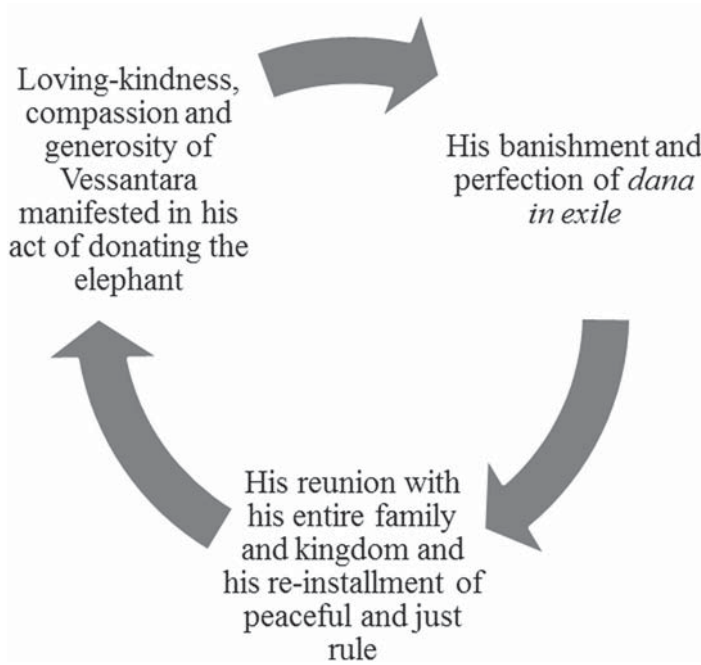
Having instilled faith in the historicity of the whole phenomenon there emerges the realization that prospective future birth during the time of Ariya Mettaiya is a worthy goal that is achievable through the perfection of generosity. Thus there is an organic connection between and amongst the three sermons linked in this way – faith → historicity → practice. But this linking does not strictly follow a linear pattern. In the context of internalization there may be variations among individuals. While the ceremony gets kicked off with the narration of the Malai Muan – Malai Saen followed by Thet Sangkat and finally the Mahachat sermon the process of understanding may follow one's own paradigmatic scheme. While there is no instance of Malai Muan – Malai Saen being preceded by the narration of *Thet Sangkat*, the latter in its second position in sequential order (the reference to the historical Buddha) acts as an adhesive element between faith and call for generosity (a form of moral duty). In other words, the interconnectivity of the three sermons always remains intact and the ultimate emphasis is on gradual progression from faith-building to the acceptance of historicity and finally to the actual involvement in the process of acquiring perfection in merit-making through acts of generosity. That is why, the time devoted to the narration of Thet Mahachat (the story of Vessantara) is the longest among the three sermons although sequentially it comes at the end.

perfecting generosity and so the hope that the message generates in the hearts of lay Buddhists is an action-oriented reasonable hope. In short, this hope captures the entire message of Buddhist pragmatism – living and focusing in the present moment.

Cyclicalization

Cyclicalization is a regular feature of the Mahachat sermon. Whether cyclical narration is primarily an aspect of Buddhist belief or philosophical outlook on life and existence¹¹⁰, for the sung-sermon narrators it has become a handy device for stringing together the one thousand verses of the 13 episodic sections in a particular narrative formula with a fluid notion of forward and backward movement. The placement of the single story of the life of the Bodhisattva in a chain of episodes starting from his giving away of the auspicious elephant, his banishment, his renunciant life and perfection of *dana* while dwelling in the forest, the royal reunion and his final return to the kingdom to rule in peace and with justice cyclically represents the virtuous action of charity and generosity and the resultant benefit that one can accrue for oneself and the community as a whole. The point at which the virtuous action begins extends temporally to merge again at the same meritorious point just like in a cyclical order. In actual rendition of the story, practitioner monks never sidestep this cyclical order of narration. Not only in the Thet Mahachat, cyclicalization as a regular feature also bound the Thet Sangkat and the Malai Muan – Malai Saen. The cyclical order of the entire story/event in the life of Vessantara and the practitioner monks' roundabout narration of it focuses the kammic truth of a wholesome action leading to wholesome results. In the context of the story, although good and generous act of Vessantara initially triggered sorrow and lamentation, it eventually ended up in both individual and communal welfare. The story upholds the timeless Buddhist belief that energy inherent in a wholesome kammic action cannot get destroyed and annihilated even under the effect of unwholesome external events and actions of others. For instance, the complaints of the citizens led to Vessantara's banishment, but this negative event opened up the entire path for great future achievements. Similarly, the presence of the negative elements of endless greed in Chuchok (*Jujaka*) did not ruin Vessantara's family but expedited the process of family reunion and reconciliation of a would-be regent and his once faulted subjects.

¹¹⁰ The Theory of Dependent Origination or *Paticcasamupada* cyclically denotes the process of birth, decay and death with its origin in ignorance (*avijja*).



Serialization

Serialization implies the structural format of the Mahachat sermon in 13 sections which lay preference for an apparently series of episodes on an equal par to a unified, single-strand, streamlined course of events, centering around the Bodhisattva's life and whatever happened to him on his way to fulfillment of the perfection of *dana*. Although on a single sitting the entire story in all its 13 sections is narrated, there is room for enough episodic looseness that allows for variation in tone and style. There are episodes like the Masti section, Chuchok and Nakhon sections that are generally highlighted contributing to the depiction of the internal richness of human experience adumbrated in this long narrative. The apparent looseness results from the serial nature of the work, which makes certain parts of it collapsible as and when needed, and provides an openness to the text. Although no new item or episode can be added or inserted, just as any old item or episode cannot be removed or eliminated totally, there is great adaptability due to the feature of serialization in narrativity.

The Masti section is usually highlighted due to the element of pathos in it and since most lay listeners of the Mahachat Sermon are usually female devotees, practitioner monks elongate the narration to whatever extent possible. Sung-sermon practitioner monks exploit pathos to a considerably great degree especially in rendering the scene in which Masti tirelessly seeks after her two beloved children: Kanha and Chali. Designed to evoke the feelings of tenderness, pity and sympathetic sorrow from the audience, the scene that depicts pathetic universal situation of a mother's sorrowful longing for her lost children are meticulously rendered:

Masti so tired	and hapless
Sad and distressed	she cried hopelessly
When the evening set in	darkness loomed all over
The three animals disappeared	making the way for her to go
In her hurry she tripped	on a stone and tumbled
In her mind she thought	of only her two children
They had waited	for her for so long
She walked just thinking of them	sometimes in hurrying steps
When the sun set	she arrived home
“ Two little gems	mother has come where are you”
She wondered about her children	where they could be
Every evening she goes to fetch them	from their playing ground
Right and left	in every direction she looked
Whichever way she turned	nothing but emptiness
Tired and lonely	the heart throbbing
When she reached the fence	she left her fruit basket there
Then looked around	but it was all empty and quiet
“Do not be kidding at me	don't hide from me, dear children”

She tried to seek	and call them
Walking to and fro	she sought for them everywhere
Sad and depressed	not even a shadow could be traced
Could the children be kidding	away from her in hiding? ¹¹¹

Elasticization of time

Within the conceptual framework of the narrative there exist fluidity or elasticization of time. Narrative time in Mahachat sung-sermon is more psychological in character than logical. Narration, by definition, implies selection, elaboration, condensation, and this process is manifested in the treatment of time. For example, although sung-sermon practitioner monks cover the entire story in one sitting, they do not always focus on each section of the story equally, some sections are simply presented in a condensed form whereas some sections especially the ones through which didactic interpolations can be reflected directly are elongated. For instance, in the first section which opens up the story of the future Bodhisattva, sung-sermon monks emphasize elaborately on the theme of accumulation of merits through charitable acts of generosity. Similarly, in the section on Chuchok, they elaborate another moral theme – the folly of uncontrolled greed by vividly depicting Chuchok’s indulgence in a celebratory orgy that resulted in a self-humiliating death. Since the narrative consists of a sequence of events, duration of time is certainly of significance, but not perhaps its actual placement. Didactic interpolations interspersed throughout the Mahachat sermon text direct the listeners to universal truths with an emphasis on realization of these truths and practicing along the moral path. Sung-sermon practitioner monks would devote enough time in the course of delivering the sermon to clarify and repetitiously stress them so as to inspire and encourage the laity to put into real practice in life. The repeated words and phrases in the original Isan version are maintained in our translation below:

¹¹¹ Phrakhrū Sutasarapimol, *Phimpha Laeh Mahāchat 13 Kantha Isaan version พิมพ์ภาพเล่มมหาชาติ ๑๓ กัณฑ์ตำนานอิสาน*, (Khonkaen: Klangnanatham Company Ltd, 2549), Sec. IX. lines 23-45, pp. 82-83.

All listeners, brethren dear	father and mother reflect upon this
Consider deeply about charity	all generous deeds you have done
Did you gain mental benefits	I welcome you to introspect it from them
Have your meritorious acts made you happy	smile and happy always
Observe it see it	when you donate and distribute
Your mind becomes delightful	beget felicity through and through
Whenever you donate	it is a great benefit
Meritorious action is reckoned thus	welcome you to continue the effort
Accumulate merit gradually	little by little it will increase
When you die this shall be your asset	gain great merits
Everyone has to die	nobody can live forever
All beings in the vast world	none can escape from death
But when you transmigrate	to another realm
Everything would depend on your action	good and bad all depends on your action solely
Whoever has done good deeds	has goodness accumulated
When dead these actions will lead to heaven	ascend to heaven and reside there
Whoever has done evil deeds	these actions will let you
Fall into hell	full of suffering and lamentation
All virtuous people	men and women engage in generous action

Accumulate morality and generosity	the reward you gain is certain
Accrue good deeds there would be no suffering	the world will extol in your praise
Welcome you all do good	people will admire you
Deviate from all evil actions	it will reduce your value
Make you devoid of value in yourself	only good and evil exist in this world
All other animals	like herds of cattle
And herds	of elephants
All decay and decompose	but their skin tusks bones
Still have some value	can be sold and bought
When people die all's over	just cremate the body
Nothing remains	that could be sold or bought
Like the poetry that has taught	Thai poet has ever composed
I leave this to you all laity	for you to consider and reflect upon –
“Bull, oxen, buffalo, elephant	that are old and unworthy of any work
Their tusks, horns	still bear importance and value in body
But when humans die	the whole body is valueless
Only good and evil actions persist	to adorn the world.”
The entire human populace	when dead and decomposed
Goodness and evil still exist	permanent in essence
Offer this message to each of you	read and investigate this poetic truth ¹¹²

¹¹² Phrakhrū Sutasarapimol, *Phimpha Laeh Mahāchat 13 Kantha Isaan Version* Sec. I. lines 80-118, pp. 8-10.

Spatialization

In the IsanMahachat narrative, spatiality plays an overriding role to temporality, since the narrative formula of opening the tale is more specific about place, leaving the exact time imprecise. This is quite obvious in the conventional opening of the Mahachat sermon, which opens up with the depiction of the scene of Phusati, the celestial consort of Indra and the would-be mother of the Bodhisattva, descending from her heavenly abode to the worldly realm of mortals upon receiving the ten divine blessings. Spatialization that makes for a freer handling of the time factor helps bring coherence to the narration of the entire story. Progress in the course of narration of events along a rigid straight line is not demanded because of a less rigid notion of time. The scene becomes more crucial in the unfolding of the plot than time. While the space factor gets added importance, the temporal dimension is often underplayed. The downgrading of the time factor is in keeping with the features of narratology like interiorization and cyclicalization.

Fantasization

Fantasization is a privileged enterprise in the Isan Mahachat narrative. The plasticity of the imagination has encouraged the dominance of fantasy in the Isan narrative mould. Fantasy is a way of rendering even the unpleasant reality of the outside world in a colorful way with a touch of humor so that the listeners do not develop repugnance to the situation or the human agent embodying unpleasantness. This is obvious in the case of the glutton Chuchok whose character reveals obsession with greed and avarice and its accompanying miseries. The process of fantasization helps trigger the imagination of the listeners so that they can literally step into the story and enjoy it without any feeling of boredom or anxiety. Fantasy becomes an interface that the listener's imagination shares with that of the practitioner monk. The grammar of communication of the highlighted sections of the story is heavily weighted in favor of fancy and fantasy. All things impossible in the everyday rational world of so-called reality are made possible: for example rain-giving elephant, the intervention of supramundane power including celestial beings such as angels and deities.

Fantasization is given a free play in the actual narration of the vivid scenes that depict the nightmare that Masti experienced on the night before the day she lost her beloved children and her physical and mental fatigue when she tirelessly looked for her missing children. The practitioner monk-author invokes sensory details to draw the listeners' attention. The art of fantasization help listeners visualize what is being described and drawn them more deeply into a story:

Seven months ago	in the pavilion happily resided the queen
That night was the beginning	the ominous dream presaging
Sleepless and fidgeted	worried until fatigued
As the dawn crept in	so eerie a dream she dreamt
What was it	she knew no way to solve it
Dreamt of a man	who brandished a sword strong and sharp
Wearing the red China rose	on his ears, his sinewy muscles all raised
So dreadfully terrific was it all	as if the sinful evil nearing
She begged for her life	but cared he not the least
Severed her two hands off instead	with blood splattering all over ¹¹³
Feeble in body and hungry	as though got a cramp and swooned
She looked around the rows of trees	with a heart so weak and fragile
Walked to the deep	wide wild jungle
Stepped towards the fruits	the place where she ever sojourned
Erstwhile laden with ripen fruits	verdure and prolific

¹¹³ Phrakhrū Sutasarapimol, *Phimpha Laeh Mahāchat 13 Kantha Isaan Version* Sec.VIII. lines 6-16, p. 68.

Rai, a traditional form of Isan verse. It is probable that this original rhythm has branched off with subtle variations at different localities throughout the northeastern region. Today, a practitioner monk may master any one of the following three styles or all three depending on the locale, individual choice, ability and training. i) *Thamnong Lomphad Phrao* a rhythm that resembles the drifting of coconut palm fronds in the breeze. It is a slow kind of rhythm requiring alternate strong and weak or mild voice modulation similar to the effect of wind on coconut palm fronds. This rhythm is typical of Ubon Racthathani province. ii) *Thamnong Chang Thiem Mae* a rhythm that resembles the movement of the elephant calf along the side of its mother. In this rhythm, the voice is alternately pressed and released but without complete release; sung at alternately high and low pitch but without producing the sound “eei-eei”. This rhythm is typical of Khonkaen and Chaiyaphum. iii) *Thamnong Kaa Taen Kona* rhythm that resembles the movement of a crow along lumps of clay. In this rhythm the voice is rendered as slow and fast alternately similar to a crow’s to and fro jumping, flying off, and landing movement around lumps of mud in the paddy field. This rhythm is typical of Roi-et province. Since it originated in Suwanaphum district, this rhythm is also known as Suwanaphum rhythm.¹¹⁶

Improvisation

Improvisation is a liberating factor that plays a major role in the Mahachat sermon narration. In the process of improvisation, common everyday spoken words and phrases that are reinforcing because of their frequency of usage are brought into play with ease and flexibility to render immediacy and familiarity to the content. All narrations follow certain pre-established codes, raising certain kinds of expectations in the reader, spectator or listener, conditioning him to move on expected lines. The narrator cultivates the special skills required for satisfying those very expectations, otherwise he will be found wanting. There is extraordinary improvisation in the Masti section to arouse pathos in the listeners in regards to a dire situation as when a mother loses her beloved children. Through improvisation practitioner monks also highlight such other issues as gender

¹¹⁶ For details about the different types of rhythm (in Thai) see Jaruwat Thammawat, *Characteristics of Isan Literature* (Mahasarakham: Srinakharinvirot University, 2521).

conflict, feminine emotionality, insecurity and subjugation – issues to which most female listeners can easily respond. Improvisation is thus used as another creative means supportive of content rendition that enables the monks to go beyond the limitations imposed by the code of stylization. It helps to provide elements of newness as well as contextualization. From our analysis we have found that improvisation is greatly manifested through the element of verbal irony.

Verbal irony is when the narrator or a character says the opposite of what he actually means. Verbal irony helps accent the true feeling for/against the situation. For example, Vessantara trusted and loved his wife Masti and so deliberately avoided disclosing the bitter truth of giving away the children as slaves to the greedy Brahmin. He feared that since she was already tired in the evening from the day's routine task of collecting fruits from the forest for her children, the sad news would mentally devastate her and so on her face he blamed and bitterly cursed her as being intentionally late in returning to the hermitage that evening. The readers/listeners are already informed in the course of narration of Matsi's plight in the forest – of how three ferocious animals obstructed her way and her struggle and longing to be back home to feed her hungry children. Through the use of verbal irony (as expressed in the acerbic words of the Bodhisattva) sung-sermon practitioner monks depict Matsi's pathetic situation in resemblance to the life of an ordinary woman faced with irrational and humiliating rebuff and spousal reprimand while trying to fulfill the role of a dutiful wife and mother. Since it is easy to react and respond to familiar situations, most female listeners can instantly internalize the suffering of Masti as a mother, a wife and a woman at the hands of patriarchy, confronting feminine subjugation and victimization within the institution of marriage. Consequently, there arises the feeling of great sympathy for her in the hearts of the listeners:

People say that women	have many an artfulness to lure and deceit
They do and	utter many wiles
If we know what they are up to	showers of praises be gotten
Today you did venture	to the forest

Sought no friend	to accompany
Who will agree with you	when you are in the forest?
You have forgotten your children	and involved in promiscuous acts
If I were the king	as before
I would have slit your throat	to cause you die
But now have come to build up	merits and practice meditation
So I do forgive you	it's the first time for you to deviate
Next time do not cry	do not pretend
You pretend to shed tears bringing forth saliva in your mouth	as doth the ancient word presaged
You refer to the kids	who else but you yourself do know
I know not about them	don't you ever ask me
You are shameless	full of pretention and wiles
That's the feminine desultory way	sinuous wiles at various levels
You related to many	least sincere with any
You have played a deceitful game	flirting and deceiving many
Don't tell a lie that you are ill	and ask for chicken soup
No pain no sickness	who can help you
If I seek you another spouse	anew
Your sickness will dissipate	you will ask for no medicine ¹¹⁷

two features of stylization and improvisation are closely interlocked. Practitioner monks have closely entwined the twin features of stylization and improvisation. Stylization is discipline, but total stylization without any improvisation can be very stifling, unoriginal and most uncreative. Similarly, improvisation is freedom, but total

¹¹⁷ Op. cit. Sec. IX. lines 57-79, pp. 82-83.

improvisation devoid of any solid foundation on stylization might be chaotic and unproductive. The sung-sermon practitioner monks seem to maintain an even balance between these two opposing pulls. Any stylized version of Vessantara Jataka presents the essential details of the entire story in all thirteen sections; whereas, the extensions of meanings and the interpolation of didactic messages are evidence of improvisation during actual rendition of the story as when delivered in the form of sung-sermon. Without the practitioner monks' wise application of the twin function of both stylization and improvisation, the story of Vessantara Jataka would have lost its original appeal and would never have been so widely known among lay devotees.

Contextualization

The actual historical context of the Vessantara tale was ancient India. Practitioner monks through their creative narration of the story have merged this insurmountable spatial and temporal gap and thus have played an important role in contextualizing the entire tale within the context of the socio-religious cultural setup of Isan society. While narrating the story they continually contextualize it by drawing the listeners' attention to the element of interiorization. Besides interiorization, practitioner monks have rendered contextualization possible through elasticization of time within the narrative frame. As mentioned beforehand narrative time in sung-sermon is more psychological in character than logical or historical. Through focal selection, elaboration and condensation of particular sections of the entire story the temporal distance is tactfully merged between the event when it is believed to have actually occurred (in the penultimate life of the Buddha) and the present moment when the event is being internalized by the listeners while the story is being narrated by practitioner monks. In other words, through the use of figurative language composer monks collapse historical moments and suggest affinities between the fictional present and the historical past.

Thus it can be concluded that in order to delineate the story effectively, sung-sermon monks have devised many different techniques of narratology that have positively affected

the proliferation, preservation and continuation of the tradition of this oral narrative form. These techniques have also helped to infuse great enjoyment, merry-making, spiritualism, subliminal bliss and solace to the process of listening to the sermon. It is almost obligatory for monks who take up the task of delivering the sung-sermon to prepare themselves very well about such things like – when and how to modulate their voice, when to interject new but relevant ideas, and how to make the session interesting with an occasional touch of humor to sustain the listeners’ attention. The delivery of the sermon is based on a listener-centered approach and so careful attention is paid to the listeners. As for instance, if a majority of the listeners are women, the monks would prefer to improvise and prolong the part of the story dealing with the female protagonist, Matsi to bring forth the ideals of feminine self-sacrifice, wifely obligation, motherly caring and concern. As a whole, this rhythmic sermon is a great form of oral narration that demands not just mechanical skill – a naturally good voice – but also creativity, spontaneity, psychological prowess, imagination, improvisation skills, rigorous practice and last but not the least, mindfulness so as not to deviate from the path of proper use of rhythm and abstinence from over-indulgence in voice modulation technique. It can be concluded that the application of all the narratological categories outlined here have a cumulative effect on the successful delivery of the sermon.

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Slavoj Žižek's Interpretation of 'Buddhism'

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Introduction:

While never personally knowing Slavoj Žižek¹¹⁹, and admiring some of his work, many of my associates within Buddhist Studies have become disturbed or are confused over his philosophical representation of Buddhism, and what he feels are important ideas for Buddhists. Therefore, this article examines some of his interpretations, and where or how I can, represent or correct any erroneous presentation.¹²⁰ It was in a recent video that he said: “In order to understand..., you already have to be...”¹²¹, so it is the hope of this Buddhist studies scholar to make some sense of Professor Žižek's lectures and publications pertaining strictly to

¹¹⁸ I'd like to thank Justin Whitaker for commenting on portions of this paper, useful for clarifying points in this paper. I couldn't answer all of his questions, or should not answer all of the questions, because some responses would diverge away from the intention of my work.

¹¹⁹ See, for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=SP6G7XqzK94&NR=1> – This lecture by Žižek features an introduction which claims that he has recently converted to Buddhism.

¹²⁰ Where there is an interruption of Žižek, for some point of clarification, those words are italicized.

¹²¹ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm_dR-XMSY – accessed on 5 December 2012

portions dealing with Buddhist material, because if an engagement was done into other aspects of his works, this would be a voluminous publication – and being a trained-Buddhist should allow me to do this. Containment, working only within Buddhist thematic ideas, was necessary and as a result full explanations may not be possible.

Reviewing Žižek:

Buddhism, for Žižek, may be some sort of idealism. He is a renown atheist, and hesitates into total emersion into some tradition, of course rooted in years of critical investigations.¹²² However: Prof. Žižek seems to have held a long-standing interest in Buddhism¹²³, which exceeds the span of my life, which should have enabled him to possess a deep comprehension of Buddhist doctrine at some profound level, void of any generalizations. In his book, *Less Than Nothing*, he stated: “Back in the hippie era of the 1960s, I remember reading a book by Alan Watts, the zen popularizer, in which he explained how, in the simple activity of love-making [*not something advocated in Theravada Buddhism, since this system was designed for world-renunciates and interested adherents remaining in the household life*], the whole cosmos resonates [*certainly this is false, as there is nothing on the moons of Jupiter or anything resident within the Kuiper Belt that cares about two animals fornicating on Earth- despite the romantic language of the poet issuing the phrase*], the two opposing cosmic [*human mind-constructed, earthly-devised*] principles, yin and yang, dancing [*and we bet, romantically?*] with each other – a message which no doubt boosted the confidence [*an unreal, false-condition*] of adolescents [*clearly delusional under the influence of raging hormones*] wanting sex [*clearly something over-rated and for those that actively participate in the endeavor it may become some mechanical operation, such as consensual masturbation, just using the body of the other person to get*

¹²² See for instance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=SP6G7XqzK94&NR=1>

¹²³ It seems from the massive body of works produced by him that he has a wide knowledge-base, for instance: <http://somethingcompletelydifferent.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/Žižeks-western-buddhism-redux/> - This website article determines that Buddhism and the movie franchise of Star Wars offer ideas that can replace Christianity, and herein, he also notes how Western Buddhism, through its Zen lineage, may still be linked to fascist elements – elements which are later discussed in his lecture found on Youtube about Buddhism and Global Capitalism.

the orgasm that is being sought between partners, as also some hypersexualized people could perhaps attest to – people learn to just please themselves, despite any intention to please the other; the ‘self’ is still the concern] as well as spiritual fulfillment.”¹²⁴ It’s widely known that presentations of Buddhism from such instructors [Žižek lists the antagonists as D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts] provide for an inadequate doctrinal comprehension – which incidentally serve as the basis for the general American’s comprehension or misunderstanding of Buddhism.¹²⁵ Yin and Yang are not even genuine Buddhist principles, but are Chinese philosophical concepts. Then, as throughout many of his publications, Žižek maintains his often-published theme: sexuality – something that really doesn’t belong in a discussion about Buddhism [*but to be fair, the professor is a psychoanalyst and not a scholar of Buddhism*], since exhibiting any form of sexuality is generally prohibited. In the context of Soviet Russia, Žižek writes: “...sexuality is inherently patho-logical, it contaminates cold, balanced logic with a particular pathos – sexual arousal is the disturbance associated with bourgeois corruption... numerous psycho-physiological ‘materialist’ researchers trying to demonstrate that sexual arousal is a pathological state. Such antifeminist outbursts are much closer to the truth than the aseptic tolerance of sexuality.”

In his 2001 publication, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?*, Professor Žižek suggests Buddhism may be operating on some antiquated principles. Although elsewhere, he said: “...religion is no longer fully integrated into and identified with a particular cultural life-form, but acquires autonomy, so that it can survive as the same religion in different cultures... [*and therefore can serve only*] two possible roles: therapeutic or critical.”¹²⁶ [*Recall the traditional Marxian perspective: religions serve only to satiate a population suffering or alienated from the conditions brought upon it by the oppressive governing-forces, regardless of it being the place of employment or the government.*] Returning to *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?*, this is less of an insult, but more

¹²⁴ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 739

¹²⁵ This is not just some idea created, but something that is gained from listening to his speeches available on Youtube and the biographical-data found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Watts - yet, he remains popular to general audiences.

¹²⁶ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 3

of an obvious or critical observation for the sake of clearer comprehension or steps towards the genuine truth. Attachment to some aspect of the Dhamma or even being an active meditator may serve as a therapeutic device [*escapism*] and Buddhist scholars are known to use what is taught to gain critical insights while inquiring into the deep nature of the scenario.

He states: "...Buddhism assert(s) the individual's ability to establish direct contact with the Absolute [*but there is no Absolute, in terms of some creation-deity, rather the highest-absolute concept for Buddhism is the principle of Nibbana*], bypassing [*although in another text he prefers to state that we must: "...maintain a proper distance – if we get too close to it, we get burned by the sun... Our attitude towards the Void is thus thoroughly ambivalent, marked by simultaneous attraction and repulsion."*¹²⁷] the hierarchical structure [*although we cannot be sure of what form of structure that Žižek is referring to*] of cosmos [*certainly something that humans have little interaction with, despite our efforts with satellites and space-craft, Moon and Mars landings, as so forth*] and society [*which is a principle formed by civilizations which is indeed structures, and Buddhism does actually bypass this structure through the renunciation principle*], Buddhism remains indebted to the pagan [*perhaps nothing but Brahmanism, but of course pagan here would be some non-Christian society, but it is actually a term from the Roman empire to define the people living out in the rural-countryside who have not aligned themselves to the militant*¹²⁸ *urbanized-ideology. The term now has some negative connotation.*] notion of the great Chain of Being [*there is no "Being" in terms a living/celestial-being, but rather the term emphasizes a condition of becoming, the aspiration towards some transformation into existence*]... we cannot escape the consequence of our past acts [*some, perhaps, but of course this pertains to some measurable amount of guilt, as some residual element in the consciousness of some individual*]; they [*unwholesome past actions*] trail behind us like shadows, and sooner or later they catch up with us: we have to pay the price [*retribution for the relevant volitional-kamma that one engaged with*]. That is the kernel of

¹²⁷ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 79

¹²⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism> - accessed on 28 November 2012

the properly pagan tragic vision of life [*he couldn't be accounting for every society and their varying beliefs that did not embrace Rome's version of Christianity*]: our very existence [*as composed of body and mind – body in the sense of elements and form; and mind in the sense of feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness*] is ultimately the proof of our sin [*existence or being born cannot equate to some sin*], something we should feel guilty about [*It would be absurd to feel guilt about being born. Who casted this condition upon humanity?*], something [*an unexplainable event, and perhaps here Žižek would be taking up that event-idea from Alain Badiou?*] that disturbs the cosmic [*conventional-Earthly*] balance [*when referencing astronomical details, we can determine the actual insignificance of human-beings*]; and we pay the price for it in our ultimate annihilation [*this can only be our death as individuals or our eradication as a species*]. ...this pagan notion involves [*in some form of coded language*] the short circuit [*abnormal connection of particle currents*], the overlap between the 'ontological' [*the study of something fundamental and whether or not that something can 'be' or 'become'*] and 'ethical' [*some moral philosophy that tries to determine wrong or correct/right behaviors or actions*] dimensions'...¹²⁹ Žižek, in his *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, unpacks his coded language: "A short circuit appears when there is a fault connection in the network – faulty, of course, from the standpoint of the network's smooth functioning. Is not the shock of short-circuiting, therefore, one of the best metaphors for a critical reading? ...take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it in a short-circuiting way, through the lens of a 'minor' author, text, or conceptual apparatus (minor, not in the sense of lesser-quality, but marginalized, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology, or dealing with a 'lower', less dignified topic). If the minor reference is well-chosen, such a procedure can lead to insights which completely shatter and undermine our common perceptions. This is what Marx, among others, did with philosophy and religion (short-circuiting philosophical speculation through the lens of political economy, that is to say, economic speculation)."¹³⁰ Žižek is trying to short-circuit

¹²⁹ Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 53

¹³⁰ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), no page number – the first page of the Series Forward & the Series Forward is echoed again in Slavoj Žižek: *The Parallax*

Buddhism. However there is some functionalistic purpose of this behavior: "...to revive a practice of reading which confronts a classic text, author, or notion with its own hidden presuppositions, and thus reveals its disavowed truth... to make him or her aware of another – disturbing – side of something he or she knew all the time."¹³¹

What more can I say on the issue? It may be useful and true to some extent that the ontological issue within Buddhism mandates the sense of an absence or voiding of self, which in response cultivates greater abilities to engage in what can be determined to be presented as a harmonious society in terms of the recognition of greater ethical and moral principles: the Buddhist Sangha can be a relative-example of this. By pushing aside the self-construct, people are better able to see the external challenges and develop better perspectives for managing these stressful situations. When a person works with the idea of "self", this deviates from the greater social concern: improving society, or being engaged with developing society in some harmonious manner.

A Theravada Buddhist cannot be so certain nor expect to establish contact with the absolute idea, how can anything be absolute when everything is subjected to impermanence? By 'establishing' someone might assume 'becoming'; by 'contact' someone might assume 'participation with sensuality'; and by the term 'absolute' someone might determine this to mean something akin to supreme-heavenly ideas – but what is closer to the reality that a Theravada Buddhist might face? The impending reality is that when our lives reach the point of termination – realistically: our bodies begin the process of decay, if left to natural processes, and the only conceivable way in which we could possibly interact with the cosmos would be if our star burst and we were reduced to cosmic ash and resultantly spread throughout the galaxy. However, some cultures have various means with handling a dead-person, and therefore not all bodies, embalmed or cremated, pass through all proper stages of natural decay. In Theravada Buddhism, we place dead bodies into the furnace, reducing the body to ash, and the relics

View (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. ix

¹³¹ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), no page number – the second page of the Series Forward

may be collected by the family when the process is complete. Heavenly ideas for Buddhists are just pleasant mental-realms. If there is “something”, these mental realms may be all that we have. Ashes into ashes, dust into dust – the cycle appears to be complete.

Prof. Žižek assumes that there is a hierarchical structure of the cosmos or society that would be bypassed, by the Buddhist. However: what if the term was not ‘bypassing’, rather closer to the truth is that someone is participating with the mundane or supramundane differently that what is expected from the common person. What if, because we are really human-animals, we are really not bypassing anything in this era of government regulation and the impossibility of living truly free lives – there is nothing to bypass or escape in our bounded condition. [*What truly placed us in this condition of servitude – something perhaps invalid if assumed that it is conditioned by our earthly-conventional birth?*] True, renunciation allows for the illusion of escape [*we may equally assert that we are under the illusion that we are in the condition of bondage*], but even then there is the condition of belonging into some association, however loose one group may be – there is still some sense of control and submission/restraint. It could be ‘bypassing’ in the sense that one is not dealing with the ‘established’ structure, but this is an established structure by those people who deal with a cosmological structure that assumes that there could be a supreme deity – and it is a fact that not all societies hold this position or ideal and to assume that the structure is universal, in the conventional sense of operating over the entire world, is ridiculous - in the sense that this isn’t even seen when someone is examining anything in astronomy. Prof. Žižek has even spoken of quantum-physics in many of his publications and appears to be well-read in the genre – so we can ascertain that he is speaking merely about the basic principles of these issues – rather he is speaking to some audience and for some purpose, and offers only specialized material for the sake of that dialogue. This appears to also serve as a watering down of the genre, and may even push aside material, as a swipe of disrespect in the eyes of specialists.

Žižek asserts that Buddhists remain indebted to some Great Chain of Being [*again, the self, as the only conceptualized-being is construed as having mere cellular and conditional form, and our*

determination is that we also call upon feelings, mental/volitional formations, perceptions and consciousness – and it may only be this that is structured as godlike] – and issues that this is a pagan [again, uncaredful terminology] notion – but if he is speaking in terms of pagan [this is the arrogance of the assumption that they are all under-educated heathens], he again is asserting that the universal structure is Christian [but a correction must be assumed to proclaim is as: Abrahamic, Brahman-Hinduistic, or Zoroastrianistic - and this is structurally-irrelevant to Buddhism, or from the processes from within which it evolved from: the context being the established Hindu-Brahman tradition. There was a huge split in the ancient tradition, when the Asuras and the Devas clashed. There were those who sided with the Asuras over the Devas; and there were those that sided with the Devas over the Asuras. The side that chose the Asuras – and their collection of ideas, became the Zoroastrians; and those who chose the Devas in the great battle were the precursors to the Brahmanistic tradition that eventually gave rise to the Buddhist system that still proclaims that devas are good celestial beings and asuras are demonic].

If the idea is taken that Buddhism did grow and develop in the urban atmosphere around the Ganges River and other adjacent cities, then the ideas of Buddhism could hardly be considered pagan – pagan is again a term removed from the existing cultural context that Buddhism was developed within and grew out of – for instance into Southeast Asia. Buddhists live and operating in their daily lives never concerned with some celestial-imaginary being [*Everyone should forgive those that still pay some homage to the shrines of the major Hindu deities – but there are those Buddhists who adhere to a purely-Buddhist doctrine void of superstitions. They don't make for interesting interviews.*]; and if Žižek was contained or content in the atheistic ideology that is professed in his speeches or works – he could be satiated, well enough, to know that through focusing on the development of individuals and society, then indeed both aspects of the lower forms of structure could indeed fulfill many of the aims illustrated in a Marxist discourse, from some micro-to-macro level of transformative possibilities.

Certainly within this Buddhist context: the issue of kamma is established, since he is asserting that our past deeds will tragically [*maybe only in the sense that certain things are unavoidable while living*] haunt us, as proof of some sin that we must feel guilty about. [*Many people are beginning to disregard this idea of kamma, as it is seen as some device created to prevent someone from attaining Nibbana in the present life – the present life in the sense that the Dhamma is for the wise to see here and now – not in a future rebirth.*] However, what if there is no stain of guilt? Someone may say that talking about the issue [*the sin*] is a demonstration of guilt, but for example: someone may not feel guilty for squashing cockroaches, and the idea of squashing a cockroach inside someone’s house can be rationalized as some deed of purification – or something done well. [*Anyone can see elsewhere, the resurrection of S.T. Suzuki’s story of the fault being upon the enemy-victim for running into the soldier’s plunging sword*] There are differing perspectives on the issue of guilt; but I haven’t read anything that suggests Žižek is trying to measure or qualify any sort of guilt.

Žižek continues: “Against this pagan horizon... [*Christianity suspends*] the burden of the past, to cut the ropes which tie us to our past deeds, to wipe the slate and begin again from zero [*when such a person decides to take the dead- ‘Jesus’ as his personal redeeming savior?*]. There is no supernatural magic involved here: this liberation simply means the separation between the ‘ontological’ and the ‘ethical’ dimensions: the Great Chain of Being can be broken on the ethical level; sins can not only be pardoned, but also retroactively erased with no traces left [*this also occurs when someone converts to Islam, and it must be stated that Buddhism cannot or does not, ‘unfortunately’ afford for this possibility. A Buddhist is personally, morally/ethically-responsible to work out one’s own future for the conventional-self. There is no salvation or hope by some redeemer or circumvention – the Buddhist (and everyone in our ‘reality’) must shoulder the burdens of the volitions, and only from making amends and from true forgiveness will satiation be plausible, but only conventionally amongst others. In the end we inevitably return to the ‘cosmos’ as chemicals/elementary-particles.*].

a New Beginning is possible.”¹³² So, what Žižek is saying, is that if someone has concerns of a self, and if there is any ethical concerns with a self and the eradication of stored unwholesome aspects of consciousness, or rather than using those inadequate words: guilt – guilt for having engaged into some unwholesome activity – someone or something emerged to take the burden off of the sinning-offender, however ridiculous that this appears. We could grant Žižek a small victory here, as even the Arahant Angulimāla was forced to endure his brutal-death, at the hands of a gang poised on revenging the previous deaths performed by Angulimāla – there was no redemption for him, even after becoming a world-renouncing Bhikkhu. The transition could be seen: the favored student of a Shiva-cult¹³³ becomes tasked with completing a final duty, sent out and becomes a murderer, then is engaged in some conscious battle in which he faces a defeat, then becomes a monk; and while being in the condition of a bhikkhu, he trains towards and attains arahantship – but still must face retribution from his previous crimes, while never harming anything while in that later-purified stage of his life. Buddhism demonstrates the realism of our lives, and is not caught up in an idealized fantasy.

In Žižek’s *Revolution at the Gates*, he spends a limited amount of time discussing a theory of reflection where only a consciousness observing the universe from the outside could see the universal-truth. This absolute [*God-like?*] perspective is inherent with the existence of things [*within the minds or processes of all beings?*]. There is no true objective reality, since what we know is just an imaginative distortion.¹³⁴ So there is only subjectivity [*that our mental activity is the only ‘proof’ that we have some sort of existence*].¹³⁵ Buddhism sees an ideology which determines that people and all things are ever-changing or impermanent; subjected to conditions of suffering; and that nothing we can determine will ultimately become something that is determined to be of some conceptualized momentarily existing subjective/conventional-self.

¹³² Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 53

¹³³ See: Richard F. Gombrich: *How Buddhism Begun – The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2002) – Who is *Āṅgulimāla?*, pp. 135-164

¹³⁴ Slavoj Žižek: *Revolution at the Gates* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 181

¹³⁵ Slavoj Žižek: *Revolution at the Gates* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 315

Žižek states: “...paganism [*although we are not sure of what sort Žižek is discussing, and Buddhism hopefully is not included within that monolithic-other, distinct from the Romanized traditions*]... legitimizes social hierarchy... by reference to a notion [*such a generalized term without some reference*] of the universe [*or rather civilization*] in which all differences [*perhaps he wishes to assert class, sex, race, or other labels created to distinguish amongst fellow humans*] are ultimately rendered worthless [*which is indeed a proper testament to these false-distinctions*], in which every determinate being ultimately disintegrates [*owing to the law of impermanence*] into the primordial [*existing from the original creation*] Abyss [*perhaps he is trying to say ‘nothing’, but the abyss for Žižek may be his determination that in Abrahamic traditions such as Christianity, the universe is broken into little pieces: “this is the intellectual abyss between Buddhism and Christianity; what for the Buddhist or Theosophists personality is the fall of man, for the Christian is the purpose of God, the whole point of his cosmic idea...”*¹³⁶ Restated: *humans are doomed because they have individualized character, but this is taken as the idealized nature for the newer tradition?*] out of which it emerged. [*The abyss of Brahmanism, the fractioning of the castes, the multitude of many deities – the complexities or confusion of what is what... Buddhism emerged from this stew of ideas.*]

Žižek does not mention: Buddhism came from or developed around Bodhigaya, around Benares, India. This was no backwoods-of-Nepal, primitive-ideology that was being espoused by the ‘Fully Enlightened One’. Serious sociological studies assert what Žižek cannot state: “The arguments relating the rise of Buddhism to urbanization and state formation can be classified under four headings, according as they bear upon the relevance of Buddhism: (1) to the value of merchants, (2) to the nature of city life, (3) to political organization in the urban-based centralized state, (4) to the shift from pastoral to agrarian culture which economically underpinned the rise of cities.”¹³⁷ If anything these real studies

¹³⁶ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 14 – but here, he is citing the work of Chesterton.

¹³⁷ Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett: *The Sociology of Early Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 15-16 – this chapter deals with asceticism versus the urban life.

illuminate the transitioning confusion from the Axial Age (the era when the great-prophets/teachers of the modern-day's religions were beginning their dispensations) and we have the relics of those ideas preserved in our literature.

Žižek continues: ...according to Buddhism, we can achieve liberation from our past deeds [*Do we ignore the story of Aṅgulimāla? Does this deny what he mentioned previously in Revolution at the Gates? There, he asserts our past deeds tragically haunt us.*], but this liberation is possible only through radical renunciation of what we perceive as reality [*later he suggests that reality is a play of appearances*¹³⁸ - *but the corrected assertion is that through comprehending that the Dhamma is for the here-and-now practitioner, this is the radicalization necessary for such a transformation to occur, and now Žižek will continue to tell us how:*], through liberating ourselves from the very impetus/thriving desire [*a mind-state*] that defines life [*repercussion: mind defines life?*] through extinguishing its spark and immersing ourselves in the primordial Void of Nirvana, in the formless One-All. [Žižek, himself, knows: "*Is not this ritual an 'empirical' proof that the Buddhist experience of the peace of nirvana is not the ultimate fact, that something has to be excluded in order for us to attain this peace, namely, the Other's gaze?*"¹³⁹ Of course, Žižek here is discussing the differences between Buddha statues and Christian saint-statues. The differences are: in Buddhist statues, the gaze is benevolently peaceful and letting things just be as they are; whereas for saints the gaze is aggressive-paranoiac and always on the lookout for some threat.¹⁴⁰ Žižek also affirms that it takes less energy to persist in something, and it takes more energy to dwell in nothing, so on principles of physics, there must be some distance.¹⁴¹ So, his position must have changed since writing: "*The real Evil is the supposedly innocent gaze which perceives in the world nothing*

¹³⁸ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 957

¹³⁹ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), pp. 20-21

¹⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 20

¹⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 93

but Evil... the real Evil is, of course, the gaze of the storyteller.¹⁴² He can see the compassionate gaze of equanimity from the Buddha, and now recognizes the wickedness within the eyes of Christian Saints – so what are the phenom-types comprehending: some are looking at the good in others, while the antagonist is fault-finding and damning others. This may be the fundamental nature of these people.]

There is no liberation in [conventional] life, since in this life and there is no other, we are always enslaved [*Didn't he just mention that we can liberate ourselves, but now says we are always enslaved? Though it is hard to believe that somehow we entered into bondage or submitted to some master, but even a Buddhist 'renunciate' must answer to higher authorizes in the Sangha, so even within Buddhism there is not total freedom. The solution is to move from the conventional to unconventional, or in another words: from the mundane to the supramundane*] to the craving that defines it: what we are now... is determined by our acts in our previous lives [*if the submission to the concept of kamma is taken up by the consciousness; but if we change our present actions, say towards the wholesome, and cultivate wholesome actions or wholesome aspects of consciousness, then through this new-found ethical-conversion perhaps we can expect positive-attainments as an affirmation of the unconventional-system*], and after our death [*our bodies decay into the natural elements or phases of liquid, elemental-solids and air/gases*], the consequences of our present life [*which no longer engages in wholesome or unwholesome actions - terminates the functionality of our bodies*] will determine the character [*not exactly sure since our life-processes terminate, and there could be no determination after electrical-energies cease, rather this could be some objective/subjective reasoning or rational. An assessment can be made into the mindstate of the recently deceased at the moment just-prior to the death of that person: a positive mind expects positive results, the negative mind expects negative results*] of our next reincarnation [*only if you believe this concept of kamma, which cannot be tested, and as a charge – may only be an act of ignorant-faith in which Buddhists believe and celebrate*]. In contrast to Buddhism, Christianity puts its wager

¹⁴² Slavoj Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 1989), p. 23

on the possibility of the radical Rupture [*philosophical/ideological*], of breaking the Great Chain of Being [*surely, he cannot be discussing either samsara or dependent origination so vaguely or indiscriminately as a merged conceptual process?*], already in this life, while we are still fully alive.”¹⁴³ Elsewhere, we can see a transformation in his thought, when he asserts: “Nirvana as the return to a pre-organic peace [*is he talking about the elementary-nature of our bodies?*] is a ‘false’ vacuum [*It cannot be said that there is nothing in a vacuum, if particles are moving in some direction due to some ‘pull’ – what is pulling the object away? See elsewhere, my comment on leaving a room and feeling the pressure move across someone’s face, as if entering into the Void/Nibbana – there would seemingly have to be some transfer/movement of energy to maintain a sort of balance, or there would be some instability: such as when that peace-in-Nibbana has now gained another into its conceptual-realm*], since it ‘costs more’ in terms of energy expenditure [*catching/finding food, consuming the nutriment, performing actions, burning calories – living life*] than the circular movement [*mentality*] of the drive.”¹⁴⁴ It appears that the effectiveness of Buddhism is in its arresting of the mind to perform wholesome rather than unwholesome deeds. However, it is Žižek, who includes: “...the self kills not, and the self is not killed, therefore, you ought not to grieve for any burned Jew... do what you were ordered to do... This means that Buddhist encompassing Compassion has to be opposed to Christian intolerant, violent love.”¹⁴⁵

Žižek spends many pages in *Less Than Nothing*, discussing aspects of Buddhism. In the book, Žižek asked an important question: “How did the fall into samsara, the Wheel of Life, occur?”¹⁴⁶ This is a very upsetting question for many Buddhists. Imagine your teacher drawing a circle on the front-board, and labeling it: ‘Samsara’, and then outside of it, drawing an arrow pointing into the circle; and then drawing a small circle near the tail of the arrow with the word:

¹⁴³ Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 54

¹⁴⁴ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 945

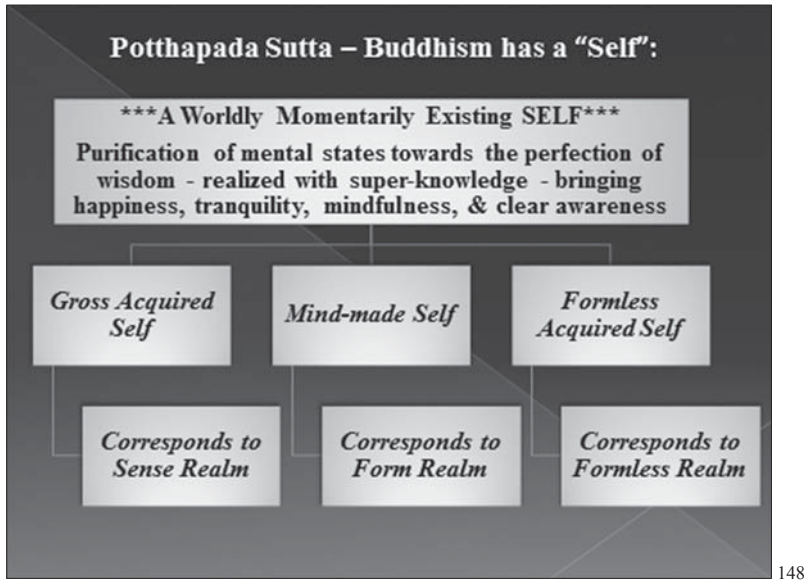
¹⁴⁵ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), pp. 32-33

¹⁴⁶ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 131

‘Us’. Who directed us into the cycle-of-suffering? It can’t be on the condition of some mythical-discourse (Aggañña Sutta), or by saying because we are born, age, suffer and die – that those conditions force us into some hellish-existence. Do we just agree and make daily life into misery? It could challenge what we think and know. Buddhism could parrot or replay that it is through our birth, from our mothers, that we fall into this cycle of suffering – while then, during the youngest years, the suffering is perhaps physical; when we begin to comprehend our minds later at later stages in our lives, we can learn that some of our problems are mental issues. We later become sick – enduring aspects of suffering; experience the changes occurring with aging; we get sicker and succumb to some illness perhaps, before death; and with death: our biological processes initially terminate. There may be some resultant growth of the fingernails and hair for a few days until total cell functions cease – but then bio-decay sets in, and we reintroduce our bodies and bacteria into the biosphere. We all know that we need to escape the round of suffering, but few of us know how. We can make our life much more than the misery we are told that is upon us.

He also asserts that Buddhist ontology is erroneous, since, if someone eliminates the illusion of a self, then that person can join the Void, a Void of Being that no one can adequately convey [*perhaps because it is not a physical location but is best described as a mental-realm or a state of mind – some heavenly-perception, except for that there is only nothingness as a void would be, but since you have attained towards it, you are now with Void – the Void has now been disturbed*]; and he stretches when he ponders if anyone can imagine a Buddhist claiming that the Void itself needs humans as the site [*yet there is no such location*] of its arrival.¹⁴⁷ The void might be best left alone, far from the taints of human-misconceptions. Could it be better to scrutinize one’s mind (where just about anything is possible) and body functions (within limits), rather than assume there is some existing-self?

¹⁴⁷ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 108



As demonstrated in the illustration above, there is a self that is discussed in Buddhism (*Digha Nikaya*), however, many people choose to only take the ideologically important non-self, and fail to discuss this conventional self, which resurrects its importance when discussing Buddhism functional for here-and-now principles. Buddhism does discuss ‘self’, and there are three forms, but they are conventional or worldly demonstrations, which assume a character temporarily. Buddhism should no longer discuss ontological matters and should now assume discussion towards conventions and praxis - social transformations which become new radical discourse for Buddhists.

It often appears that the Westerner’s attraction to Buddhism is from one of their many philosophical perspectives, and perhaps they have never asked the right questions while they were briefly researching Buddhism of whatever shade suiting their purpose. Žižek wishes to compare Christianity to Buddhism [*as he does in other books, and it is good that he brings such material to the reading-masses who might otherwise miss out from reading*

¹⁴⁸ My slide was taken from my lecture, created for the presentation of my paper, found inside this document: <http://www.icundv.com/vesak2011/book/symposium2010.pdf> - my paper for the 2010 United Nations Day of Vesak Conference, was entitled: “The Role We Play As Buddhist Educators for Global Recovery, pp. 124-150

something about Buddhism], rather, in this instance he chooses to discuss the major Buddhist sectarian-triads – in the case of Buddhism [and he is not trying to discuss the authenticity of any tradition, since that topic is better left for the specialist], here he discusses concepts:

- ◆ **Theravada:** as elitist and demanding, since it tries to adhere to the strict interpretations of the practico-ethical doctrines or attitudes, while also focusing on the eradication of the illusory-self, before helping others get out of suffering [*regressing into egoism, to erase the constraints of self,*] towards the striving of nibbana. He is saying that the concept of an arahant is egotistical, but this venture assists in eradicating perspectives of such a self.
- ◆ **Mahayana:** is a more inconsistent regressive system of ideas, yet is compassionate towards others and focuses on the Bodhisattva concept – or assisting with the elimination of the suffering within others – which seems to be a cognitive paradox with the concept of a self, and betrays the original intention of Buddhism, through the ignorance of the follower, and is only realized upon Enlightenment, and misunderstands the principle of nirvana.
- ◆ **Vajrayana:** [*has proto-Fascist tendencies*¹⁴⁹], as clearly regressive, involving the implementation of traditional ritualistic and dark/demonic magical forces or superstitious concepts. While much of this extraneous phenomena is not sanctioned, he claims they have pragmatic orientation, which do seem to help people along their ‘path’. The rituals are indifferent to any form of self-determination, totally against the original idea of what the Buddha prescribed, which can disturb the balance of nirvana). If the Bodhisattva attains enlightenment, and thus nirvana, why or how can this being return out of compassion (again, an emphasis on a self).

¹⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek: *The Parallax View* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 97

Entering nirvana/nibbana is not a higher meta-physical reality – but why is there a return to the mundane world? [*The cessation of defiling or unwholesome thoughts is well within every sane individual.*] Here is an extremely important quotation: “There is thus no need for Mahayana... [*Theravada*] is itself large enough to allow the enlightened one to help others achieve Enlightenment.” He continues to assert that the bodhisattva concept must have arose out of some sense of confusion over the idea of nirvana/nibbana – thereby, eventually overturning the original agnostic materialism. Žižek tries to summarize Vajrayana though some questions, pondering perhaps that truth does not alleviate our suffering and could indeed hurt. Peace may only be attainable by immersion into delusion [*Are we delusional when we pick up the ideology of Buddhism and train ourselves to emulate the attainments we find in the texts?*]. When Žižek states that people do things in the long run because they believe that the strategy will bring them happiness and pleasure, I cannot help but think that everyone following the system is being mentally-deceived or being voluntarily brain-washed – and this is not necessarily bad, but can yield very positive results. He leaves this section with an interesting line: “this negativity is not a problem but a solution, it is already in itself divine.”¹⁵⁰ Buddhism allows us to escape the fantasies inflicted upon us by social-life¹⁵¹ - and escaping these illusions rooted in fetishized self-ishness. Buddhists don’t seek to discover some “true” self, but accept that there is only an imposter-self, and move onward to more socially beneficial endeavors.

Rather than quoting material for an extensive amount of time, the following is a paraphrase of what Žižek is saying on the next few pages¹⁵²: He thinks that that there is a great benefit in the linking of cognitive-sciences or approaches to the mind with Buddhist thought – and the idea is not to actualize philosophy but to rediscover ancient wisdom. Yet this ancient wisdom has been here, but people are still only beginning to come to learn of it, which is not a fault of the ancient-teachings, but is due to biases in the structure

¹⁵⁰ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), pp. 108-110

¹⁵¹ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 129

¹⁵² Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 205-208

or educational-schematics of non-Buddhist cultures. Buddhist-ideas are not brought out into common discourses within other cultures. I cannot research into why these cultures have avoided learning Buddhism, but it is almost laughable when someone is asserting something from their studies, when the Buddha and his later disciplines have been proclaiming the same thing for centuries, and these educated-people are only now discussing it through science and neglecting the earliest discussions; sciences are confirming many operational aspects of the Buddhist mind-construction. It is clear that the ancient Buddhists did not have full comprehension of body-organs and things like neurons and the transferring of chemicals. For instance, the ancient Buddhists didn't know about the physical eye.

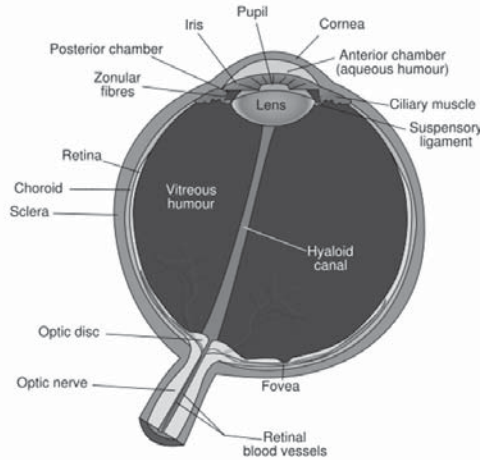
The ancient Buddhist 'eye' is different from the modern medical eye, the body-organ used to detect light in two dimensions. Eyes allow humans to see variances in levels of light and darkness, hues of colors, and depth-perception [two eyes viewing an object in 2D give the perception of 3D] – sensitive, of course, to the primary elements [*materiality*].¹⁵³ Eyes are positioned in the heads of species dependent on the living-style of the being [*most species have their eyes on the sides of their heads; however predators have their eyes in a more forward position*]. Humans do not possess the most advanced eye-system – the superior vision-gifted species belongs to the mantis-shrimp, with its hyper-spectral color vision [*ultra-violet and infrared*]. Each mantis-shrimp eye operates independently, enabling a variety of perspectives.¹⁵⁴

Modern medical-scientists think that the human eye just sees portions of space and time. The brain interprets this limited, two-dimensional information, and groups images from memory to perceive or represent the world as known. There is evidence of between 10 and 12 output channels from the eye to the brain, each carrying a different, stripped-down representation of the visual world. The images are then reconstructed to provide information. This suggests retina creates a stack of image-representations. Image representations are formed and cross-talk between layers of cells

¹⁵³ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli [trns]: Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 443 [XIV 38]

¹⁵⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantis_shrimp - accessed on 17 September 2008

in the retina occurs.¹⁵⁵ However, the Visuddhimagga suggests that the eye has seven layers¹⁵⁶ – these cannot be seen in the modern interpretation or understanding of the eye – and may be a conceptual-error that future Buddhists should never again replicate, which is why this refutation is necessary – to mention what should be corrected in Buddhist ‘wisdom’:



The Saṅgīti Sutta also recognizes other types of eyes: the divine eye, and the eye of wisdom [The *Mahaniddesa*¹⁵⁷ lists five: the first three mentioned here, plus the Buddha-eye and the All-Seeing Eye – as does the *Atthasālini*¹⁵⁸]. According to the Dhātu-Yamaka, the Divine Eye and the Eye of Wisdom are called “eye” but they are not called “eye-element.”¹⁵⁹ What is the Divine Eye [*dibba-cakkhu*]? The Visuddhimagga¹⁶⁰ spends a great deal of time on the detailed characteristics of this ¹⁵⁵ http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/03/28_wers1.html - accessed 17 September 2008 relating to the paper by Frank S. Werblin, professor of molecular and cell biology in the College of Letters & Science at UC Berkeley. Also see: <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/03/images/retinalmovie.mov>

¹⁵⁶ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli [trns]: Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 445 [XIV 48]

¹⁵⁷ P.A. Payutto: Dictionary of Buddhism (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, 2000), p. 190-191

¹⁵⁸ Pe Maung Tin: The Expositor – Atthasālini – Buddhaghosa’s Commentary on the Dhammasaṅgī, the First Book of the Abhidhamma-piṭaka (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1999), p. 402-407

¹⁵⁹ U Nārada Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw & Thein Nyun: Discourse on Elements – Dhātu-Kathā (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1999), p. xxi

¹⁶⁰ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli [trns]: Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 418-425 [XIII 72-101]

‘perceived’-eye power – largely being: the knowledge of passing away and reappearance of beings. With this power – the *directed or inclined mind* can determine the destination of beings after their death according to performed deeds. The *divine* [in the sense that it is similar to the eye of a deity] *eye* [in the sense of ‘seeing’] is a characteristic of those with abilities surpassing the normal human [as one watching beings]. The divine eye can be developed through methods such as the fire kasina and jhānas.¹⁶¹ For it is written: “...when visible objects that are not within the focus of the bhikkhu’s fleshy eye come into the focus of his eye of knowledge [synonym for divine eye] – that is to say... that the divine eye has arisen... not the preliminary-work consciousness.¹⁶² To recover: the divine eye is knowledge and intention [thus ‘mental’] to see beyond apparent obstacles. What is the Eye of Wisdom [paññā-cakkhu]? It might be best to quote a footnote in full: “The opening of the Dhamma-eye (dhamma-cakkhu) is a term for ‘entering the stream’ and thus being set irrevocably on the path. ...it is superior to the divine eye, which is a superior kind of clairvoyance, and below the wisdom-eye, which is the wisdom of the Arahant.”¹⁶³ Here, in the *Dīgha-Nikāya*, the wisdom-eye is a power of an Arahant. The *Visuddhimagga*¹⁶⁴ suggests that paññā here is: penetration into the **characteristics** of impermanence, suffering and non-self; and understanding and utilizing the eye to penetrate into its own states of essence; **functioning** to eradicate *ignorance* [the darkness of delusion], concealing the individual essence of states. This wisdom-eye **manifests** as non-delusion; and its **proximate cause** is concentration. So, we can see and affirm how modern sciences bring useful and valuable information into religious and public-discourses, and if religions or social-guidance philosophies don’t adapt to these new findings then they can no longer remain relevant.

¹⁶¹ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli [trns]: *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 423 [XIII 95]

¹⁶² Bhikkhu Ñānamoli [trns]: *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 425 [XIII 100]

¹⁶³ Maurice Walshe: *The Long Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Dīgha-Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 547-548

¹⁶⁴ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli [trns]: *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 437 [XIV 7]

Žižek goes on to mention that we have a notion of a self, but that when we search for this construction we encounter only, as he says: passing, elusive mental events, and suggests that this is just ethico-epistemology – or some mistake that humans have been making since we have learned to express ourselves through conventional language. The thing to do, as Žižek urges, is to get rid of the delusion of the notion of a self – but ponders if this is just some unavoidable conclusion. We can also ponder the uselessness of the ideas uselessly discussed through ontology – it appears that social works are more advantageous for society. He ponders onward, if the “I” is like the ultimate void, or the center of the vortex of mental events – while there is no ‘substantive positive identity’, it serves as a useful, but unrepresentable point of reference. He gathers that there must be some causal-coherence and integrity of some sort of self over time – and that this may be known as inaccessible subjectivity – or as if we are looking in the wrong place. He tries to conclude by mentioning that the transcendental horizons or the scientific domain can only phenomenalize scientific knowledge since we have limitations with our ability or approach to comprehend what is real.

Recently Prof. Žižek gave another lecture, available on Youtube¹⁶⁵, where he begins the by asserting: Buddhism is a very open-system, and that his remarks will only be to intentionally provoke the audience, and he even proclaims that it is in his nature to be evil.¹⁶⁶ Žižek says there are two features in today’s capitalist predicament: global capitalism and the role of silence – the later was never discussed in the video. He didn’t venture into some discussion over which versions of Buddhism would be the most authentic – as he might have done above: this is only crucial for specialists to ponder, though he discusses what he sees wrong with elements of Western-Buddhism, as a distinct brand from the traditional three-vehicles. He asserts that Western Buddhism

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkTUQYxEUjs&feature=endscreen&NR=1> – Slavoj Žižek: The Buddhist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism (2012) - accessed on 25 November 2012

¹⁶⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=iJCcLQHVT8c#! – Slavoj Žižek: Lacanian Theology and Buddhism, 2012 – accessed on 5 December 2012 and he also mentions that he likes to intentionally provoke people here, again – so obviously, it is indeed in his nature: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm_dR-XMSY – Slavoj Žižek: The Irony of Buddhism, 2012

presents itself as the remedy [*satiation/opium*] against the frantic dimensions of capitalism, allowing us to have inner-peace and enlightenment.¹⁶⁷ He says, without a reference, that about 80 percent of the top managers practice some sort of meditation. Our fragile existence, through Buddhist ontology, is fleeting, everything can fall apart – so managers are correct: to be fully engaged in the market, people get crazy – so someone needs the distance. Business need this ‘bullshit’ [*chances are most of these people engaged in Buddhist-concepts are not serious about the ethical-training that Buddhism provides, but are only interested in reducing their level of stress – not taking full advantage of the Buddhist-system*], to function better or more perfectly [*and we know that capitalistic-businesses are not completely interested in ethics, since their goal is maximizing profit*].

Žižek asserts that he takes Buddhism very seriously.¹⁶⁸ He appreciates the cognitive-breakthroughs that assist our comprehension of our brains.¹⁶⁹ Žižek then leads us into material pertaining to psychoanalysis, fitting territory, as he asserts: there is really nothing but resistance [*opposing the ‘self’*] to be analyzed¹⁷⁰, and is an unnecessary metaphor in place towards awareness and knowing. [*In another older text, he concludes: “...the final stage of the psychoanalytic process: ‘subjective-destitution’. What is at stake in this ‘destitution’ is precisely the fact that the subject no longer presupposes himself as subject; by accomplishing this, he annuls, so to speak, the effects of the act of formal conversion. In other words, he assumes not the existence but the non-existence of the big Other, he accepts the Real in its utter, meaningless idiocy;*

¹⁶⁷ Further see where this is additionally discussed: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php> - this website features Žižek’s own article, but focuses on the idea that Buddhism, for westerners, may just be some fetish-like replacement for their frustrations with capitalism. This is a sentiment that he echoes during this speech on Buddhism and Global Capitalism.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=SP6G7XqzK94&NR=1> – This lecture by Žižek features an introduction which claims that Žižek has recently converted to Buddhism. I think he said this jokingly.

¹⁶⁹ See for instance: <http://arcade.stanford.edu/Žižek-buddhism> - This website is suggesting, based on clicking on other links associated with the page, that there is another realm, the realm of psychoanalysis, which must include comprehension of Freud or Lacan [the works of both are unfamiliar to me], and this is an endeavor that I am not prepared to venture into, nor care to participate within [owing to their constant discussion of aspects of sexuality, which is not my preferred genre of research or concern].

¹⁷⁰ Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 130

he keeps open the gap between the Real and its symbolization. The price to be paid for this is that by the same act he also annuls himself as subject... the subject is subject only in so far as he presupposes himself as absolute through the movement of double reflection."¹⁷¹] Buddhists should balance between or comprehend one's levels of ignorance and wisdom. [*Between 'ignorance' and 'wisdom' may be layers of resistance that prohibit the acquisition of knowledge and its development towards wisdom.*] Speaking as a Buddhist, he states that there is great pain within one's mind during this shift: "...first, we isolate the thing that bothers us, the cause of our suffering; then we change not the object but ourselves [*this is all we can do, and thus the earlier illumination of brain-washing or indoctrination into propaganda*], the way we relate to what appears as the cause of our suffering."¹⁷² He asserts that this is often a violent experience of losing one's mindfulness, or viewpoints. He claims Buddhists are often facing involuntary injustices: "How could she do this to me? I don't deserve to be treated that way." [*Most recently, this could apply to the developments related to the expansion of the copper-mine near Monywa, Myanmar.*¹⁷³] So, after gaining insight into the fleeting illusion of the self, we can repair our damaged mindstate. [*If people, including monks protecting their temple-land, did not possess such a mind full of constructions like material-ownership of the land, they might not have protested against the development of the copper-mine, and would have moved on to another plot of land or gotten adequate compensation from the government to appease those with a troubled mind.*] If suffering is to be eliminated, is nibbana found in the middle-zone away from minimalistic or maximized perspectives?

¹⁷¹ Slavoj Žižek: *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Books, 1989), p. 263

¹⁷² Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 130

¹⁷³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20536992> - the answer is within the story: It is happening to you because the Chinese are a more powerful force, using the native Burmese Army against the Buddhists, so that its economic goals can be attained – the protests would serve to disrupt the acquisition of material, and this could be against some government agreement that was signed by the capitalistic enterprise. It is baffling how soldiers of one nation would turn against its own people over a foreign-nation's whim. See: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/20064> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20539455> - for more photographs. People can also see the response by a popular Nobel laureate: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/20145> - all sites accessed on 29 November 2012.

It's very evident that the neurosciences are being better received, and much of the discovered-functions run parallel with the assertions of Buddhism. The brain-sciences are examining the ego, and its illusion – but the problem is how to subjectify this – the everyday sense of a socialized agent. Buddhism does this well, through three attitudes: resign the self to get between the gap of scientific view and the everyday self as a materialistic free-agent; the second view is the Habermasian-position – the fully asserted duality as a non-naturalist aspect – not just a tolerated illusion but an illumination of transcendental scientific-reasoning; and then some reflection of our own naïve ideology: when an earthquake occurs it must be due to something related to the progression of a Buddha (or as lightning must be a message from a god). Žižek loves the idea that the debates with neurosciences with Buddhism have brought – and points to a scientific-experiment that there is really no free-will [*a body was hooked up with electrodes and was shocked when someone picked up the object that they were supposed to get, eventually there was no free-will; also there is another experiment involving no free-will: a person types on a key board, but the electrodes measure the ideas before the consciousness dictates*¹⁷⁴.] He continues to claim that there is no real freedom, that everything presupposes some other agents involved in our processes which may inhibit a decision.

Buddhism does seem to be the ideal mode for a reaction against capitalism and fits in with the ideas of modern-sciences. Buddhism is concerned with the problem of suffering - this is the principle condition: no living being wants to suffer. However a Freudian-Lacanian has a problem with the issue: we don't want to suffer; but for those in love, and in a love that ends tragically, there was so much suffering. With our passionate-engagements [*knowledge that we comprehend how love may end tragically but that we only have an aspiration that it should not fail*], we are ready to suffer [*and may actually be suffering or experiencing suffering*]. The source of suffering may be for the quest in things [*elemental amounts of greed, hatred, delusions*] that will never satisfy someone, and this is

¹⁷⁴ See for instance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ4nwTTmcgs> and to refute the ideas: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCM5BFU01YU> – where conscious free-will does not generate our motions – accessed on 29 November 2012.

the roots to suffering. Liberation from suffering is enlightenment or nibbana, and Buddhism is built for this attainment.¹⁷⁵ Morality is also enforced towards gradually training this liberation from suffering.

Žižek's attention is also drawn to the fact that Buddhism is not just meditation but is a way of life, and the nations of Southeast Asia are briefly mentioned: meditation in these nations rarely enter into daily dialogues – ignoring the rounds of specialists, it is only a fixed-point of reference to give you hope, like an aspiration to go to heaven or travel on a vacation. Žižek is surely disregarding the physical evidence: temples are everywhere in Thailand, monks are always written about in the newspapers, there is a vibrant amulet trade, there are TV/Radio programs full of Dhamma-programming – meditation in reality, in Thailand for example, permeates this culture where 'religion' is an official aspect of the national ideology. Perhaps, much to the dismay of Žižek, the common population here is highly involved with Buddhism.

Žižek then asks: how do we fight the enslavement of desires? [*In the materialistic-culture that dominates the nation, seemingly overpowering the nation, people are succumbing more and more to these consumeristic-desires.*] There are no higher-powers in Buddhism, ignore the later idea of kamma. Kamma is only imminent into the idea of our actions despite the transformation that the term has been given as a conceptual idea as a mechanism to control society through living in fear. Codependence is also a Stalinistic idea of dialectic-unity. So the idea of kamma is not some divine activity: our actions have consequences, so in this way this is a method for regulating our acts. Common sense [*although I was trained to*

¹⁷⁵ For instance, here: <http://lacan.com/symptom12/?p=186> - In: "Why the Idea and Why Communism?", Prof. Žižek states: "...for [in] Buddhism, we are all equal, in Nirvana." This seems to be a misconception. Why? It's my perspective of the general Theravada doctrine that there is no equality in the sense of someone's level of abilities. Sure we all have an ability to do something, but to the degree that someone may excel or fail is an individual mechanism. In terms of Nibbana, I could agree: for everyone, the criteria for the attainment of Nibbana, or rather what falls away for extinguishes for everyone should be the same to allow for attaining Nibbana – but there are many paths or directions [methods] for attaining nibbana, and these are not equal methods, and are dependent on some person's abilities. Each person has differing personality characteristics. Some method may not be within someone, but an alternate method may be sufficient towards that person's quest towards perfection.

not have the sense of the lower-minded echelon of the general population – we should always strive to have a greater level of intelligence, to have common-sense is an insult] is then a basic step of morality: body, speech and mind are the levels at which acts are performed.

The idea is to acquire dispassion towards objects of clinging – imagine this as a venture away from materialism. Now in terms of samsara, which breaks from the idea of kamma: you must step out from the continuous chain of actions and consequences. Stepping out is just like a change in someone’s attitude. An emerging problem is the ambiguity in the teachings itself: the guy who goes through this may be a bodhisatta – the one who wants to free all sentient beings, not just himself. In another text, Žižek discusses the principles of a bodhisatta philosophically: “Lacan has nothing to do with the mystical suspension of ties which bind us to ordinary reality, with attaining the bliss of radical indifference in which life or death and other worldly distinctions no longer matter, in which life or death and object, thought and act, fully coincide. To put it in mystical terms, the Lacanian act is, rather, the exact opposite of this ‘return to innocence’: original-sin itself, the abyssal disturbance of primeval Peace, the primordial ‘pathological’ Choice of unconditional attachment to some specific object - like falling in love with a specific person who, thereafter, matters to us more than anything else.”¹⁷⁶

Žižek additionally progresses into another matter: “In Buddhist terms, the Lacanian act is the exact structural obverse of Enlightenment, of attaining nirvana: the very gesture by means of which the Void is disturbed [*for instance: have you ever gone through the threshold of a closed door: when opened you can feel the rush of air move past your face – that feeling of progression or movement – you have transferred into the Void or you have become part of this void – and it must be said or considered in a non-materialistic sense; there is a distinct phase-transfer between these mental-realms*], and Difference (and with it, false appearance and suffering) emerges in the world. [*Our ‘entry’ into ‘nibbana’ has*

¹⁷⁶ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 22

interrupted or interfered with the 'voidness' of the Void... populated by another uninvited addition.] The act is this close to the gesture of [the] Bodhisattva who, having reached nirvana, out of compassion – that is, for the sake of the common Good – goes back to phenomenal reality in order to help all other living beings to achieve nirvana.”¹⁷⁷ When Žižek moves into the nature of gesture of the Bodhisattva, he says a bodhisattva ‘goes to back to phenomenal reality’ – and I am not certain this is the case unless he is referring to the Buddha, as a former bodhisattva, who died and then in the future life was born in this materialistic-world for the sake of helping us here towards bringing us into nibbana – as if giving future generations some hope that they too can [*apart from senselessly waiting centuries*] see the future-Buddha [*a completely different being from the last one, the Buddha Gotama*]. Žižek thinks that this delayed transfer of assistance is a false gesture, not genuine, and may be motivated by some ultimately unwholesome desire. Why the postponement?

Žižek determines: “...in order to arrive at the act proper, one should erase any reference to the Good, and do the act just for the sake of it. This reference to Bodhisattva also enables us to answer the big-question: if now we have to strive to break out of the vicious cycle of craving into the blissful peace of nirvana, how did nirvana “regress” into getting caught in the wheel of craving in the first place? [*This is another misconception that should not have been stated, since Nibbana by definition or design is completely outside of the wheel of craving: if there is any craving, once can be said to not be resident in Nibbana – perhaps of course if it is some conventional craving, like the necessity to go to the bathroom, and one must delay for some reason.*] The only consistent answer is: Bodhisattva repeats this primordial ‘evil’ gesture. The fall into Evil was accomplished by the original-Bodhisattva – in short: the ultimate source of Evil is compassion itself.”¹⁷⁸ [In some discussion with colleagues, we could not determine any textual reference for this statement, but we can see how from our genuine, pure intention, someone could determine that we are evil – in what was the best example: a father was asked by his young

¹⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), pp. 22-23

¹⁷⁸ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 23

son about how babies are made, and after the story by the father, the son still was in disbelief. The father thought some more, and decided if the son did not believe the words, what if the son saw the action: the father showed the son about 5-seconds of a porno-clip from the internet, to show only the act of penetration – and then the son understood. Later in the evening, the father told the mother of the boy what had happened earlier in the day, and the wife became irate towards her husband that he had shown something ‘bad’ to the son. The husband (father of the boy) had to defend himself for the action, determining that there was only wholesome intention and genuine instruction, due to the son’s question. In yet another example of Evil being rooted in Compassion: the act of ‘giving’ food, requisites, or small monetary donations to a bhikkhu or the temple was also determined to be ‘evil’. A person may give something compassionately to the Sangha, but it is rooted in the hopes that the gift will bring a greater-spiritual or kamma-reward, and it is said that the larger the gift the larger the reward will become. However, while we can see the development of evil in this matter, we are aware that the greatest gift according to the Buddha is the gift of education, a real miracle; and we know that in terms of offerings: thinking about loving-kindness for a fraction of a second is more valuable than giving almsfood to an arahant. None of these two acts: giving loving-kindness or instruction is a materialistic-offering, and these noble-mental ideals are more valuable than material items.

Žižek asserts that there is some ‘pleasure principle’ that governs our actions, and that we “misperceive the true nature of the Good” [*Really we might misperceive, if we look back to the origins of our traditions, when, say: the Zoroastrians or what existed prior to them might have asserted that the Asuras were benevolent beings, and the Devas were wicked; however, with the agricultural-society transferred into the urbanizing societies, the Devas were able to represent a new reality for some, thereby taking on greater characteristics. Asuras became good-beings for the Zoroastrians while Devas were the bastions of Evil; and for the Brahmanists, the Devas were the embodiment of Good, while the Asuras were the antagonistic element.*¹⁷⁹] – because we have:

¹⁷⁹ Karen Armstrong: The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious

“the paradox of [*truly*] wanting unhappiness’ of finding excessive suffering itself... [*why else would we fall in love knowing that our hearts will be destroyed when the relationship terminates?*], ...the Buddhist ethical horizon is therefore still that of the good ... Buddhism is a kind of negative of the ethics of Good [*Again: trace the development of the Asura/Deva appreciation – a certain amount of negative turns might eventually turn back into something positive – a double-turn. The realm or tribal-territory of the Asuras is considered a miserable place, a woeful plane, populated by miserable spirits, sometimes dwelling in villages living of the remains of discarded foods.*¹⁸⁰]: aware that every positive good is a lure [*an enticing trap?*], it fully assumes the Void as the only true Good. What it cannot do is to pass beyond nothing... [*Nibbana is supposed to be the ‘something beyond nothing’, in the sense that ‘nothingness’ is only the 30th Level of the Realms of Existence, the next real is the ‘Realm of Neither-Perception nor Non-Perception’ – and outside of this structure, again: outside of this structure, beyond it, is Nibbana.*¹⁸¹] tarrying with the negative... to a Something which gives body to the Nothing. [*‘Nothing’ is not-progressive enough for Buddhists.*] The Buddhist endeavor to get rid of the illusion of craving, of phenomenal reality, is in effect, the endeavor to get rid of the Real... the kernel of the Real... - our stubborn attachment to the illusion.”¹⁸² [*Everything that we comprehend is built on false-premises, and we should reeducate ourselves into the real nature of the examined-phenomena.*]

There are three notions of a bodhisatta, none of which are sourced as some list in Theravada Buddhism – so the idea may be without a legitimate reference: one that wants to be a Buddha as soon as possible, caring little for others, and only later helping them – like some sort of king; then there is the one who is more communist – yes, but together with others as if taking a boat with them to another location; and the final level is the greatest ethical act – enlightenment

Traditions (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), pp. 3-30

¹⁸⁰ Bhikkhu Bodhi: *Abhidhammattha Sangaha: A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000), pp. 190, 195

¹⁸¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi: *Abhidhammattha Sangaha: A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000), pp. 186-187 – of which there is little knowledge available about this realm.

¹⁸² Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 23

is postponed and attained but out of compassion would go back into the realm of suffering and give the priority to them – although more common-thought was that he would be like a sheppard and guide the herd first before then achieving the final-aim.

Theravada Buddhism though [*and he is on their side*]: it has nothing to do with spirituality, fully here in the realm of the world, but the attitude changes, as one is still socially active. Radical Buddhism [*which he could see as something derived from Theravada Buddhism, like some sort of engaged-Buddhism*] would isolate the cause of suffering and put blame on others: the eternal “why me?” question - stop blaming desires. What is extinguished is only a false view as seen as such – only the perspective of the observer seeing the same world through the illusory-perspective.

First you do morality to prepare yourself towards enlightenment. Buddhists are really honest: once fully enlightened weven what others see as an evil act can be rationalized as some enlightened-perspective since there is no kamma – but where was the compassion for others? He said that the Dalai Lama stated that if drinking alcohol helps someone then they can do it. Can drugs induce someone into Nibbana permanently – in a biochemical way? [Žižek asserts: “I take a pill, fuck-you, I’m there!”] The cultivation of virtue should be eminent, but there are others who disagree. Who then would want to suffer pointlessly in a cold mountain cave unnecessarily?

He discusses a view of Zen Buddhism and God, through two points: until all beings are brought together through infinite peace, therefore to bring into harmony – killing and war are necessary mentioning that this could be something that Hitler might have appreciated. The source of compassion wields the sword.¹⁸³ Žižek states that Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki [*maybe the most influential individual upon the American Zen-Buddhist system – Žižek is obviously not a fan of Suzuki, though he found some of his earliest writings useful.*¹⁸⁴] brought out this point: war is a necessary evil to

¹⁸³ This story is also mentioned in his book: Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 27

¹⁸⁴ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm_dR-XMSY: “Fuck Suzuki!”, at 1:21:48 – accessed on 5 December 2012

bring out the better good. When someone is still the agent of their acts, they feel responsible. If a person reaches nibbana, they would no longer experience oneself as the active agent of the act, just the impassive observer which meditates these crazy times. The enemy appears and makes himself the victim. The sword is a function of justice that also performs mercy. Getting rid of a false self, makes a person into a better warrior. Therefore, with proper distance, one can perform better.

He does not assert that enlightenment is a joke that enables militant-killers to function better, that was better left for Suzuki and the Japanese kamikazes – it is an authentic existential experience, a technique for stepping out of the kamma. To be a truly radical Buddhist you must accept the gaps. If the true point of compassion is to bring you to the dispassionate attitude for seeing the nature of things this must be done. The true test to see if someone is enlightened, would be for them to do something really horrible – with a distance. For example: Pol Pot was the example of the distance that he had with the people, although we cannot be so certain that he was truly enlightened. Žižek mentions: what Buddhists see as evil is the good things for Christians: Christian love is attachment for Buddhists; and Christianity is a religion of separation, not of harmony. All other religions want to unite the world.

In his text, *Living in the End Times*, Žižek asserts that Buddhism falls into some sort of trap: allowing violence to be inflicted through a non-violent attitude – through inner peace and distance. He states that the Buddha said that there will never be peace in the world, but that if we have infinite compassion, these are better steps. Sometimes, according to the Japanese Zen Buddhist source that he sites, killing and war are necessary.¹⁸⁵ He later states that there is no manipulative perversion of authentic compassionate insight: the total immersion into the self-less ‘now’ of instant enlightenment... in which discipline coincides with spontaneity – perfectly legitimizes one’s subordination to the militaristic social machine.¹⁸⁶ He asserts that the Buddhist stance on compassion is really the quality of indifference, and it is this quenching of

¹⁸⁵ Slavoj Žižek: *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 19

¹⁸⁶ Slavoj Žižek: *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 99

all passions which strive to establish differences.¹⁸⁷ Again, he uses the same story, with lesser analysis in his previous text¹⁸⁸, there asserting: the soldier is just the passive observer of one's own acts... [the] Buddha's gaze could well function as the support of the most ruthless killing machine – and people who have engaged in any kind of sport-fighting or violence know how to train the body and mind to perform under such circumstances, where the mind is quite removed from the action – the trained mechanics of killing may indeed be done with a passive mind.

Enlightenment is authentic but it comes after one is emerged in life. We are there like animals, but how do you create the space for nibbana - by requiring distance from being emerged in ordinary life? You cannot get into nibbana from natural life. You must fall from excessive attachment into a void, and from the void you can enter into nibbana. The Buddha wondered how to get them out of suffering? How did we fall in? - is another question. Was samsara a fact or how did we get caught in the illusion? As a pragmatic person, the Buddha was not concerned with metaphysics; or to understand that once you are in nibbana, you don't care; or the final idea there is a dark side of power where there is a higher domain of peace. So: what if something went wrong?

Conclusion:

If this conclusion may take on a personal tone: I feel that Žižek has a proper comprehension of Buddhism once everything he has discussed is considered. I'm not sure if he engages in meditation, in his private moments, but this could assist in presenting things more coherently. I think as much as he swipes at his nose and tugs on his t-shirts during public lectures, he probably cannot endure too many moments of uninterrupted stillness and silence. He has been interested to some extent with Buddhism for more than 40 years, and has written bits and pieces here and there in several of his texts about Buddhism. I feel that the common person – the non-Buddhist – reading his texts could trust the opinion or interpretation of Professor Žižek.

¹⁸⁷ Slavoj Žižek: *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 99

¹⁸⁸ Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 29

Some people within the field of Buddhist Studies are getting annoyed over the published material that propagates some inadequate doctrinal comprehension of the messages espoused by the Buddha. There are scholars or teachers with their partisan agenda, incorporating their Judeo-Christian ideals or Western ontological interpretations – all of which are generally later ideas used to illuminate their comprehension of the material already discussed by the Buddha. We already saw above how, D.T. Suzuki, Watts and his Chinese Yin-Yang idea was used, out of place, to comprehend Buddhist doctrines. It may be some useful idea for someone, but it is: not Buddhist, despite efforts to distort the imagery, again, towards fitting it into someone's agenda. These foreign ideas that are infiltrating Buddhist-thought may be unrecognizable by the non-specialist of Buddhism. Žižek may fall into this category, despite his years of reading and being involved in pop-culture; but then he is trying to bring this information into the Western-world, through his platform.

Žižek is correct to say that Buddhism is operating on ancient principles. Take my own refutation pertaining to the description or composition of the eye. Additionally, although I find the discussion pertaining to ontology as unproductive for a Buddhist to engage in, the discussion on kamma was interesting, because he suggests: who mandates that we have to even step inside the cycle of suffering? Žižek further mentions that there are distinctions between rural and urban ways of thinking – as if one is more sophisticated or superior over the other. In relation to kamma: if our deeds are tragically haunting us, as Žižek asserts, is this the pessimistic approach to kamma and are we resigned to some pre-destined fate even though as youths we were not mature enough to comprehend fate or our role with enabling ourselves to develop fully and productively towards nibbana? It is extremely difficult to accept, wholly, the entire conceptual doctrine of kamma, and therefore there must be a better solution or approach since a weakness is seen. I'm finding the here-and-now perspective or approach to Dhamma as something more manageable and appropriate to our modern circumstances – and it is this approach to Dhamma that I strongly advocate in my teachings.

Perhaps a radical recunciation of what we determine to be as “Buddhism”, will be the key to our liberation from our perception of reality. We should liberate ourselves and enter into the Great Void [*the concept of emptiness – having an empty-mind*] - Nibbana. In conventional life we are always enslaved and we had no voice about our position in Samsara – no option for participating – it is only now that we have matured that we have finally seen ways out – so we can begin to plot our escape if we change only our perspectives. What is being shown here is that the transformative ideas are only mental ideas. I am reminded by a song that I sing often to my children: “...emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds...” – and this was actually derived from a speech by the Honorable Marcus Garvey, who in a speech, stated: “...we are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind. Mind is your only ruler, sovereign. The man who is not able to develop and use his mind is bound to be the slave of the other man who uses his mind.”¹⁸⁹ Never fall into some trap; there is always an escape – anyone can attain liberation.

¹⁸⁹ <http://henriettavintondavis.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/redemption-song/> - accessed on 1 December 2012

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Tzu Chi Compassion Society's Peace Work in America

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“In Buddhism, there is a Bodhisattva who embodies the spirit of compassion. This Bodhisattva, named Avalokitesvara, is so full of love that she cannot bear for people to suffer. When she sees or hears people in distress or difficulty, she goes to them very quickly to offer aid and relief. Exercising wisdom and compassion, she not only helps them out of their material difficulties, but guides them with the Dharma so they may gain the insight to liberate themselves from their suffering and attain true happiness. Actually, all of us can be Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. Deep in our hearts, we have the same great compassion.”¹⁹⁰

The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation was founded in 1966 by Venerable Master Cheng Yen¹⁹¹ and thirty female followers. Today, it celebrates its forty-sixth anniversary, as one of the world’s largest non-profit relief and charitable organizations. Worldwide this lay Buddhist organization claims

¹⁹⁰ Ven. Cheng Yen: “Bringing Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva to Life”, 3 January 2011

¹⁹¹ Her name is also transliterated as Zhengyan. At the time of the founding of Tzu Chi Buddhist Compassion Relief, the only other charity organization in Taiwan was a Christian organization (see documentary film entitled *A Glimpse into the Heart of Master Cheng Yen: An Interview by Filmmaker Hsiao Chu-chen*).

more than ten million volunteers and supporters, with branches in fifty countries.¹⁹² Since its humble beginnings, Tzu Chi has provided relief work in over seventy countries, to people suffering from disasters such as the Southeast Asia tsunami, Myanmar cyclone, and earthquakes in Turkey, Pakistan, Sichuan China, Haiti and Chile.¹⁹³ Tzu Chi is intimately involved in providing social, educational, charitable, and medical relief to the underprivileged and underserved, throughout and beyond Taiwan, reaching the United States, the world, and even into the geo-politically sensitive Chinese mainland.¹⁹⁴ Tzu Chi's transnational structure grows larger and more intricate day-by-day, and its global mission of environmentalism, healthcare, education and culture, and disaster relief extends worldwide. San Dimas, California is home to Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation U.S.A.'s headquarter, established in 1984.¹⁹⁵ Since then, Tzu Chi U.S.A. maintains more than 80 offices and facilities in the U.S. with over 100,000 volunteers and donors working to make a difference in their local communities. In this article, I seek to examine the role of Tzu Chi U.S.A. in negotiating inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations, linguistic and cultural diversities, and the re-imagination of community boundaries, in and throughout American civil society, vis-à-vis its various relief efforts in the United States, and its implications abroad. I will argue that even though Tzu Chi's organizational structure is transnational in scope, its mission is "global" in ambition.

This article seeks to discuss how Tzu Chi's relief work crosses, transcends, and negotiates the boundaries of religious, linguistic, inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations, together with cultural and national identities. First, I will examine Tzu Chi's medical and general healthcare outreach in California, Hawai'i, and New York, in addition to its international bone marrow bank, which has provided an outlet for a relatively new ethnically Chinese immigrant Buddhist mission society to transplant itself onto

¹⁹² Refer to the Tzu Chi Foundation website, <http://www.us.tzuchi.org> (accessed July 2, 2012).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ André Laliberté, " 'Love Transcends Borders' or 'Blood is Thicker than Water'? The Charity work of the Tzu Chi Foundation in the People's Republic of China," *The European Journal of East Asian Studies* 2.2 (2003): 248

¹⁹⁵ The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation was established in 1984 as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization in California. The first office in the U.S. was established in Alhambra, CA.

American mainstream society. A discussion of Tzu Chi's educational and cultural outreach will follow, reflecting degrees of "acculturation," civic responsibilities, and inter-ethnic cooperation. Third, I will explore the national attention gained by Tzu Chi's outreach after the horrific terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, and the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, affecting the boundaries of international U.S.-Taiwan relations. While racial and ethnic tensions pierced America in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Tzu Chi's relief workers provided a platform for new dialogue of inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations between African-Americans and Asian-Americans in general, and Chinese-Americans in particular. Finally, I will argue that even though Tzu Chi's organizational structure is transnational in scale, its mission of peace work is "global" in ambition.

Tzu Chi's "Just Do It" Ethos

Tzu Chi has transplanted its "Just Do It" socially engaged Chinese Buddhist relief work onto the "new American religious landscape."¹⁹⁶ This interpretation of Buddhism reflects Ven. Cheng Yen's core belief that Buddhist teachings are not abstract theories, but rather, concrete and applicable principles that one may apply to one's daily life. Ven. Cheng Yen teaches, "In Tzu Chi, our practice is to enter into society with the spirit of selfless love that the Buddha teaches - the Four Immeasurable Minds of: loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity."¹⁹⁷ This principal is manifested in Tzu Chi's fourfold mission, which encompasses disaster relief, medical and general healthcare, education and culture, and environmentalism, together reflecting a global orientation.¹⁹⁸ *Compassion* coupled with *upaya* (expedient means), two central teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, guide its relief efforts to serve clients without regard to age, sex, race, ethnicity, class, or religious affiliation.¹⁹⁹ Although a religious institution, its primary goal is

¹⁹⁶ Diane Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Now Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

¹⁹⁷ Inner Practice for the Tzu Chi Path, <http://www.us.tzuchi.org> (accessed July 2, 2012).

¹⁹⁸ Tzu Chi's official ideological fourfold mission includes charity, medicine, culture, and education.

¹⁹⁹ Jonathan H. X. Lee, "Chinese Religions in North America," in *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies*, ed. James Miller (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 252-254.

not evangelical, but rather, encourages followers to emulate or to become living bodhisattvas who bring “compassion” into “action” to assist others in need. In the early nineteenth century, French sociologist Alex de Tocqueville observed and admired American society because of its voluntary associations and civic society,²⁰⁰ which continues to this day. Although, social service work is nothing new to Tzu Chi, its relief work in American society has impacted the role of religion in the public sphere and, further, it has comprehensively redefined notions of race and ethnicity, interfaith dialogue and practices, and by extension, has brought new attention to Buddhism and civic service, which legitimates Chinese Buddhism in particular, and Buddhism in general within American society.

Tzu Chi’s Medical and Healthcare Relief

“In this world, there are people who see life as a very valuable gift. They feel it to be as precious as a diamond because with it, they can make a contribution to the world and make life better for others. In their thinking, life is to be made use of, and they take care in using it wisely, with love for others.”²⁰¹

In November 1993, under the leadership of Ven. Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi U.S.A. established its medical outreach free clinic in Alhambra, California, providing Chinese and western medicine, in addition to dental care—that includes two mobile dental units—to the disadvantaged, underprivileged, and uninsured communities of Los Angeles proper. In May, 1997, Tzu Chi U.S.A. founded its second free clinic on Honolulu, Hawai’i, serving the economically disenfranchised indigenous populations of the islands, focusing on providing primary healthcare for school aged children, and free vaccinations. From its base in Honolulu, Tzu Chi extends its medical outreach to the outlying Pacific Islands (e.g. Samoa), just as the Alhambra branch extends its medical services to the migrant Mexican populations of California’s agricultural Central Valley.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: The Library of America, 2004). The core of Tocqueville’s idea contends that civil society is the sphere of intermediary organizations standing between the individual and the state.

²⁰¹ Ven. Cheng Yen: “Life, Like a Diamond,” 9 April 2010

²⁰² Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic, Hawaii is located at 100 North Beretania St., Suite 122, Honolulu, HI 96817.

In 1997, Tzu Chi's medical outreach was established in New York City. Tzu Chi's New York mobile free clinic travels around the New York area, delivering and providing basic healthcare to low income families, homeless residents, and the uninsured. Since its founding Tzu Chi's mobile clinic in New York has already served thousands of patients.²⁰³ In 2005, Tzu Chi established a community clinic in South El Monte, CA. Then, again, in 2010, the Tzu Chi Community Clinic at Wilmington, CA was established to offer affordable dental care and acupuncture therapy to the local community.

Ven. Cheng Yen's medical mission started while in Taiwan, whereupon she realized that the primary cause of people's suffering stems from the lack of adequate healthcare and inability to cultivate and sustain healthy living. It was one incident in particular, that motivated her to vow, to provide healthcare for the residents in the rural county of Hualien, in eastern Taiwan, wherein she witness a woman turned away from a hospital, after traveling several hours, because she was uninsured. Ven. Cheng Yen's vision has made its way to America, and the spirit of assisting the uninsured poor remains just as strong, all the while upholding Ven. Cheng Yen's position of non-partisanship and political dispassion. In Taiwan, Ven. Cheng Yen has taken a very steadfast apolitical non-partisan position, which secures and ensures her trust among the people. Therefore, any volunteer or follower who becomes politically active, or run for political office, or is employed by a political party is required to resign as a Tzu Chi worker. Furthermore, Ven. Cheng Yen does not permit the use of Tzu Chi's logo, or the likeness of her image in any political campaigns, be it implicit or explicit.²⁰⁴ Tzu Chi's apolitical stance plays itself out in America as well.

In America, various forms of financial resources are accessible through the local, state, and federal governments to support civic service groups, albeit minimal, however, Tzu Chi U.S.A. has refused to apply and or receive such government funding, exclusively relying

²⁰³ See the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation's website, www.tzuchimedicalfoundation.org (accessed July 2, 2012). Tzu Chi's free clinic medical mission outreach in other countries: Canada established in October, 1996; the Philippines in December, 2001; Brazil in 1996; Indonesia in 1995; Vietnam in 1998; Japan in 2001; and mainland China in 1999.

²⁰⁴ Guo Chengtian, "Taiwan de minzhu yu zongjiao," *Yazhou zhengjiao guanxi / Religion and Politics in Asia* (Taipei: Weibo Wenhua Chubanshe, 2003), 114.

on private fundraising and donations, fearing that their services to those most in need may be compromised due to limitations and restrictions which may accompany such funds. For instance, in California, as well as New York, Tzu Chi serves many new immigrant Americans, some legal, some not, hence, accepting government funding means they may have to restrict themselves from serving residents in need, which they compassionately refuse to do.²⁰⁵ Recent developments over immigration legislation present Tzu Chi U.S.A.'s medical relief with new challenges, namely the proposal for immigration reform which condemns both the immigrants as well as those who assist them.²⁰⁶ Will Tzu Chi U.S.A. be able to continue providing health care to new immigrants without proper documentation, or will they obey the discriminatory immigration law if it should become a reality?

Serving the new immigrant communities comes with linguistic challenges, for example, Compassion Relief's medical outreach in the Central Valley of California, serves mainly migrants farm workers who speak Mixtec (or Mixteca), rather than Spanish, although possessing a working knowledge of Spanish.²⁰⁷ Tzu Chi's volunteers, although primarily Taiwanese Americans, for whom Mandarin Chinese and or Taiwanese is their mother language, either start to learn Spanish themselves, or seek out volunteers who are capable of communicating in both Spanish and Chinese or English. At times, there is a domino relay translation among English, Chinese, and Spanish, if they are lucky enough to have two volunteers—one bilingual in Chinese and English, the other Spanish and English. Besides English, Mixtec, or Spanish speaking new immigrant Americans, Tzu Chi U.S.A. also serves diverse immigrant-Chinese communities for whom Cantonese is their primary language of communication.

Bilingual Tzu Chi volunteers are few and precious as they are at the forefront of assisting non-English speaking new Chinese Americans, be they Mandarin, Cantonese, or Taiwanese speakers.

²⁰⁵ Lee, "Chinese Religions in North America," 252-263.

²⁰⁶ See the article "Immigration fight looms in Senate" at the CNN website, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/03/28/immigration/index.html> (access July 2, 2012).

²⁰⁷ The Mixtec (or Mixteca) are indigenous people centered in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Some Mixtecan languages are called by names other than Mixtec, particularly Cuicatec (Cuicateco), and Triqui (or Trique).

Bilingual Tzu Chi volunteers assist patients in hospitals who do not have immediate family or friends to assist them upon entering the hospital as a result of an emergency or other medical complication. Unable to communicate with the healthcare staff, Tzu Chi volunteers are crucial to both the patients and medical personnel who treat them. Tzu Chi volunteers also visit patients, while hospitalized who have no family or friends, and if the situation deems it necessary, they will recite the Guanyin Sutra as a healing technique or to prepare them for the next stage of *samsara*.²⁰⁸

Ven. Cheng Yen created a bone marrow bank in Taiwan, in response to the plea of a young lady named Win Wen-Ling, who discovered she had leukemia while studying for her doctoral degree at Ohio State University.²⁰⁹ Unable to find a matching donor in the United States she returned to Taiwan, and upon realizing that Taiwan lacked any organized bone marrow registry, she wanted to establish one. In order to do so, she would need someone who people can trust, hence, she turned to Ven. Cheng Yen, to beseeched her support. After thoughtful deliberation, and ensured that donors themselves will not be harmed in the process, Ven. Cheng Yen publicly announced in 1994 her endorsement of a bone marrow bank in Taiwan, and encouraged volunteers and members to organize blood drives in their neighborhood throughout the island.

Within two years, Tzu Chi's Bone Marrow Bank became one of the major bone marrow bank in East Asia. Today, Tzu Chi's Bone Marrow Bank is connected to those of other countries, making it more efficient, and hence, crossing national, as well as, potential ethnic and racial boundaries.²¹⁰ Today, there are 354,549 donors registered with Tzu Chi; and nearly 3000 transplants have been performed.²¹¹ It is here, that notions of race and ethnicity potentially become dissolved. For instance, a German man, who had successfully

²⁰⁸ The reference to the Guanyin sutra is the chapter in the *Lotus Sutra* entitled "Guansiyin busa pumen-pin" (The Universal Gateway of the bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds). See *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 298-306.

²⁰⁹ Her Rey-Sheng, *Great Love as a Running Water: Witnessing of the Development of Marrow Transplantation* (Taipei: Jing Si Publications Company, 2006), 9.

²¹⁰ Tzu Chi's Bone Marrow registry is linked to the U.S. National Marrow Donor Program, Japan and Germany's Bone Marrow Banks.

²¹¹ See the Buddhist Tzu Chi Stem Cells Center web page, <http://tw.tzuchi.org/btccsc/english> (accessed July 2, 2012).

received a bone marrow donation from Tzu Chi, expressed his feelings of gratitude and desires to visit Taiwan, coupled with the fact that he never thought he shared the same blood with “Asians.”²¹² Consequently, people who receive benefit from Tzu Chi’s bone marrow registry are not limited to one ethnic group - the Chinese or Chinese Americans - although it was established to meet their needs, which has great implications for changes in America’s inter-ethnic and inter-racial dialogue, because racial ideologies may slowly be deconstructed at the level of flesh-and-bone. For example, non-Chinese recipients of successful bone marrow transplantation - as illustrated by the above example of the German man - may arrive at a new understanding of race and ethnicity when they discover that they had received bone marrow from a non-white donor, and vice versa.

Tzu Chi’s Educational Programs

*“In Tzu Chi, as we walk our path, we are also continuing to pave the path for others, so that they may join us on our journey. This is important because we should not only care about our own enlightenment, but should vow to help all living beings to enlightenment. Without wisdom and insight, it will be hard to continue with this.”*²¹³

Tzu Chi’s educational mission started after its disaster and medical relief programs were firmly in order. To this end, they have built elementary, junior high, and high schools throughout Taiwan, in addition to a university located in Hualien, which houses a graduate school of nursing. Tzu Chi has also established schools in the United States. Since 1996, Tzu Chi has established 20 Chinese schools across the United States. These schools emphasize humanitarianism and character building in their educational curriculum. Moreover, they offer Mandarin language and Chinese culture course. Founded in 1996, the Hawaii Tzu Chi Academy has become the largest local Chinese school in Honolulu. “Currently, there are 11 classes, with 100 students (ages between 4-15), 13 teachers, 10 staff members, and numerous volunteers who

²¹² Her, 93.

²¹³ Ven. Cheng Yen: “Inner Practice for the Tzu Chi Path,” September 2, 2010

serve as room mothers/sisters/brothers to assist the teachers and students in class, or as room fathers to direct traffic thus assuring safety on campus.”²¹⁴ Besides Tzu Chi schools, Tzu Chi U.S.A. established many other educational programs, such as “Everybody Read” in addition to a newly establish scholarship foundation to assist economically disadvantage high school students as they enter college.

Although “Everybody Read” is an educational program, it is simultaneously an implicit interfaith activity as well. Volunteers, from any and all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are all welcome to participate. They meet once a month at a local elementary school, providing reading lessons, storytelling, arts and crafts, and gifts for elementary school students in disadvantage inner-city public schools. The majority of “Everybody Read” volunteers are younger generation Taiwanese Americans, because they are bilingual in both English and Chinese, unlike their parents and grandparents, for whom English is not yet a primary language of communication. A self-described Catholic Latina Tzu Chi volunteer at “Everybody Read” reflects on her experiences and says:

I was made aware of Tzu Chi through a youth group friend who introduced me to the “Everybody Read” Tzu Chi staff. She learned of it through an online volunteer website. I’ve volunteered with the “Everybody Read” for about half a year before I moved away. I am a late teen Catholic (sorry, I’m not Buddhist or Daoist) who enjoys volunteering and experiencing new things. Even though my time conniving with them was short, I enjoyed every last minute. They were a pleasure to volunteer with, and have a positive attitude towards others. They are the nicest people I’ve met and they made me feel welcomed even though I wasn’t part of their religion. They are open for anyone who is searching for a little help. While volunteering they were very compassionate and patient towards the children, their patience made the kids enjoy them as much as I did.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ See the Hawaii Tzu Chi Academy (accessed July 2, 2012).

²¹⁵ Interview, March 8, 2006.

Our self-identified Catholic Latina's reflection highlights Tzu Chi's interfaith consciousness and inclusive approach to civic work in the American public sphere. Another example comes from a self-identified bilingual "Asian mother" who expressed:

I am an Asian mother who have volunteered with Tzu Chi approximately two years or so. The program I am currently actively participating is the "Everybody Read" program. I also join them during the year-end delivery of goods and gift cards to the needy, and have visited with patients in the "New Start Home" program. Some memorable experiences I have had while volunteering would be receiving a big hug from a small girl and hearing her say 'Thank you and I will miss you' after the "Everybody Read" program. I also witness how several needy families survive in cramped living spaces, watched patients in the "New Start Home" program cope with their limited ability to move. Tzu Chi is a great organization... It believes in the equality of all beings and the Buddha-nature potential in every person...

The motivation to volunteer expressed by the aforementioned ladies are common to all Tzu Chi's volunteers, however, the personal profile and linguistic abilities are markedly different because the majority of Tzu Chi volunteers are middle aged, and or semi-retired or retired Taiwanese/Chinese housewives and mothers for whom English is not a viable language of communication.²¹⁶

Besides educational programming such as "Everybody Read" Compassion Relief U.S.A. has been active in community fairs, both interfaith and secular. For instance, each year, the Santa Anita community holds a back-to-school fair and here, Tzu Chi provides new clothes, shoes, and school supplies for economically disadvantaged children, catching the attention of the local press and evening news.²¹⁷ Recently, Tzu Chi established a scholarship foundation to support economically disadvantage high school students throughout the U.S., moreover, they continue to sidestep

²¹⁶ Julia C. Huang and Robert P. Weller, "Merit and Mothering: Women and Social Welfare in Taiwanese Buddhism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.2 (May, 1998), 3.

²¹⁷ I first saw Tzu Chi on the Channel 4 evening news, participating in the Santa Anita community fair, during the summer of 2004.

restrictions, by making the eligibility requirements vague, hence, not restricting their scholarship to “legal residents” alone, as is state and federal financial aid.²¹⁸

Tzu Chi’s Cultural Outreach and Acculturation

*“With the spirit of Great Love, may our volunteers sow seeds of goodness in the wounded land. May all the seeds sprout and flourish and further give rise to countless other seeds of goodness.”*²¹⁹

Similar to other modern large scale transnational lay Buddhist groups,²²⁰ Tzu Chi makes full use of in-house publishing facilities, radio and television broadcasting, video and internet conferencing, and the use of the internet to maintain close contact with followers around the globe. Publications of books, magazines, and journals, for example, *Tzu Chi Shijie* 慈濟世界 (Tzu Chi World) or *Tzu Chi Quarterly – Buddhism in Action*, are available in simplified and or traditional Chinese, English, Spanish, Japanese, and German.²²¹ In 1995 Tzu Chi founded Da’ai 大愛, Great Love, television and radio, as a way to reach people worldwide, purifying TV culture, constantly reminding followers of their successes, and work that still needs to be done, in addition to hearing and seeing Ven. Cheng Yen’s daily *dharma* lessons, in which she transitions, smoothly, between Taiwanese and Mandarin.²²² Da’ai’s dramas are series of shows that are didactic, providing examples of individual heroism, filial piety,

²¹⁸ Tzu Chi Scholars 2012 application. Beside academic excellence and graduating high school senior requirements, they require demonstration of financial need, and intent to enroll in an accredited U.S. college full-time, with no mention of “legal” residency common to other scholarship programs in the U.S. See Tzu Chi Scholars 2012 web page (accessed July 2, 2012).

²¹⁹ Ven. Cheng Yen: “The Most Beautiful Scenes of Life,” 27 May 2010

²²⁰ Taiwan based Foguang Shan, Dharma Drum Mountain, etc.

²²¹ English books Published by Tzu Chi: Books on Ven. Cheng Yen’s teachings including the following examples: *Still Thoughts*, Volume One and Two, *Enveloping the World with Great Love*, *Great Love across the Taiwan Straits*, *The Thirty-Seven Principles of Enlightenment*, *People Have Twenty Difficulties*, *The Sutra of the Bodhisattva’ Eight Realizations*, *Overcoming the Ten Evil Forces*, *Three Ways to the Pure Land*, *The Master Tells Stories*, Volume One and Two, *Rebirth – Transformation in Tzu Chi*, *Inspiring Aphorisms—The Phrase that Benefits Me Most*. *Stille Gedanken*, the German translation of *Still Thoughts*, Volume One and Two are also available. In addition, Tzu Chi publishes a series of children’s books, for instance, *A Child’s Heart Reflects the Moon*, *The Little Monk Called “Amo”*, and so on.

²²² See Da Ai Television web page, <http://en.newdaai.tv/> (accessed July 2, 2012).

compassion, and humility, all the while reinforcing the importance of Tzu Chi's charity and relief work, and now, made available via the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), in the Bay Area, Los Angeles Area, New York Area, and Houston Area, and other cable networks around the world, in addition to live online video streaming. While conducting field research, one expatriate shared with me that she watches *Da'ai* every afternoon, after her morning recitations of sutras, commenting that one day, she would like to visit Tzu Chi's headquarter in Hualien, Taiwan.

Tzu Chi has been active, since it transplanted itself on American soil, assiduously endeavoring to be inclusive, although difficult because the majority of their staff and or volunteers are non-native English speakers, for whom, Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese are their primary or secondary languages. Even so, Tzu Chi takes care to serve their larger communities through their social services and energetic participation in American holidays, for instance, during Thanksgiving - they provide baskets of essential holiday goodies, during Christmas - gifts and foods, to local economically underprivileged residents, all the while, serving the diverse ethnically Chinese immigrant communities. Beyond cultural, medical, and educational outreach and programming, Tzu Chi is active in local interfaith community activities as well.

Tzu Chi takes every opportunity to be involved in interfaith activities and community meetings. They also welcome, open heartedly, request from other religious groups who need assistance to help their followers. For instance, if a Christian church refers someone who needs money, for rent or food, over to Tzu Chi, they do not hesitate in receiving and assisting them. Tzu Chi realizes that it is located in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious environment, in Taiwan and throughout the world, hence disregards religious affiliation in its outreach programs, because all people are capable of meeting with hard times, and in need of compassionate aid.

Tzu Chi's Disaster Relief

“ When we give with a heart of willingness and joy, when we overcome all problems to provide support and comfort to the suffering, a resonance of love will naturally be generated.”²²³

Tzu Chi's international outreach started in 1984 with overseas Taiwanese expatriates. From a humble beginning of 30 female followers, Tzu Chi now claims ten million members worldwide, with branches in 50 countries, and to date, has implemented rescue and relief work in over 70 countries. In the U.S. alone, there are more than 80 Tzu Chi branches / chapters, including several free health and dental clinics. Tzu Chi's global relief workers respond to victims of natural as well as human caused disasters in South and Southeast Asia following the December 26, 2004 earthquake and Tsunamis, in addition to Afghanistan, Iran, El Salvador, Haiti, and the U.S. Tzu Chi U.S.A. became a national player in relief work following the terrorist attack of 9/11, and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that shattered the Gulf coast.

While chaos and terror filled the minds and hearts of all Americans immediately after the terrorist attack of 9/11, Tzu Chi's New York office joined forces with the American Red Cross, at ground zero, to provide emergency medical aid. Tzu Chi's medical volunteers, Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA),²²⁴ quickly mobilized in the hours after the morning of 9/11 ready to assist the injured. Beyond the immediate large scale relief efforts, Tzu Chi also paid attention to the minor details of post-9/11 relief, for instance, providing food and water to rescue workers. Tzu Chi U.S.A. has committed itself to long term recovery efforts, continuing to financially assist working class families—factory and restaurant laborers—survive, day by day. Jarcy Zee documents Jackson Chen's relief work, immediately after the 9/11 attack, noting, “ That evening, he and the other Tzu Chi volunteers began their relief efforts by supplying more than two hundred sets of pillows and

²²³ Ven. Cheng Yen: “The Most Beautiful Scenes of Life,” 27 May 2010

²²⁴ TIMA was founded in 1996 by a group of healthcare professionals under the auspices of Tzu Chi, and relies solely on donations and funding raising activities. TIMA provides the highest possible quality healthcare to individuals around the world who are in need of medical attention at minimal or no cost to the patient. Currently, TIMA has 17 branch offices worldwide in 9 countries including: Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, United States, Paraguay, and Brazil.

blankets to stranded victims sleeping on bare cots set by the Red Cross in Weehawken, New Jersey.”²²⁵ Tzu Chi U.S.A. relief workers faced resistance in their efforts to contribute because “ the U.S. government and most other organizations did not know about Tzu Chi.”²²⁶ As such, Tzu Chi U.S.A. volunteers relied on the Red Cross and the Salvation Army who provided Tzu Chi U.S.A. relief workers access. To mitigate future problems in their relief effort, “On June 18, 2008, representatives from the American Red Cross and the Tzu Chi Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding at the Tzu Chi Humanities Center in Taipei. The two organizations will combine their respective strengths and cooperate in disaster relief operations, emergency preparedness and response, cross training, and other cooperation actions in the United States.”²²⁷

Hurricane Katrina was the sixth-strongest, costliest, and deadliest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded in U.S. history. The storm surge caused major damage along the coastlines of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, however, it was damage to the levees separating Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans, Louisiana that flooded roughly 80 percent of the historic city, subsequently causing gargantuan social and public disorder, leaving many people homeless, in addition to extensive injuries, and fatalities. The September 19, 2005 international edition of *Newsweek* conveys America’s racial and economic inequality depicting an African American baby with tears streaming down her cheeks, entitled “Poverty, Race, and Katrina: Lessons of A National Shame.”²²⁸ Then, Senator Barack Obama, bewailed, “I hope we realize that the people of New Orleans weren’t just abandoned during the hurricane... They were abandoned long ago – to murder and mayhem in the streets, to substandard schools, to dilapidated housing, to inadequate health care, to a pervasive sense of hopelessness.”²²⁹ Better yet, let us call to mind former First Lady Barbara P. Bush’s statement, “So many of the people in the arenas here, you know, were underprivileged anyway. So this is working very well for them,” referring to the crowded 10,000 plus strangers

²²⁵ Jarcy Zee, “9/11: An Indelible Memory”, Tzu Chi USA Journal (Fall 2011), 36.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ See the Tzu Chi Foundation website, www.us.tzuchi.org (accessed July 2, 2012).

²²⁸ *Newsweek*, international edition, September 19, 2005.

²²⁹ Jonathan Alter, “The Other America,” *Newsweek*, (September 19, 2005), 14.

cramped into the makeshift evacuation center.²³⁰ Not to mention Yahoo News' coverage, which described waterlogged whites as "carrying food" whereas blacks holding food were depicted as "looters."²³¹

Let us journey back to April 1992 when a mostly white jury acquitted four white police officers accused in the videotaped beating of African American motorist Rodney King, which instantaneously erupted into a massive inner-city riot whereupon thousands of young African American and Latino males²³² participated in what has often been characterized as a "race riot" in which racial and ethnic tensions turned from a "black v. white" issue, to one of inter-ethnic discontent involving African Americans and Korean Americans. During and after the riots, the cultural misunderstanding and inter-ethnic, inter-racial tensions between African Americans and Korean Americans were of principal concern for the rebuilding of Los Angeles. Post-Katrina offers new fertile ground for increase dialogue between African Americans and Asian Americans, many time viewed as modeled-minority citizens or as "honorary whites" who are sheltered, privileged, and secluded away in their upper-middle class communities. Tzu Chi workers were at the forefront of post-Katrina relief efforts, donating millions of dollars to families and taking into their own homes countless dislocated survivors. At one moment, Tzu Chi volunteers withdrew \$50,000 dollars from their own personal accounts to purchase gift-card and vouchers for families in need because banks were not open. In total, "Tzu Chi U.S.A. mobilized over 1,000 volunteers to distribute emergency cash worth 4.12 million dollars to 22,487 households, or over 58,553 people. A fundraising campaign was held in more than 30 countries to raise funds to assist the disaster survivors."²³³ Post-Katrina relief work provides fertile possibility for inter-ethnic and inter-racial solidarity between African Americans, white-Americans, and Asian Americans, as they come into contact with one another, and stereotypes give way to positive experiences, encounters, and memories.

²³⁰ Ibid, 16.

²³¹ Ibid, 20.

²³² Young white males from outside the district looted as well, but the media mainly showed African Americans and Latinos.

²³³ About Tzu Chi, see www.us.tzuchi.org (accessed July 2, 2012).

Tzu Chi U.S.A.: American or Global Civil Society?

“Only by transforming the hearts of humanity can our world be saved.”²³⁴

The new American religious landscape is multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic (racial), hence, American civil society is permeated with such complex characteristic as well. Economic disparity continues to grow and the growing split between the haves and have-nots continue to become more distinct. The high cost of healthcare places many Americans at risk. The possibility of equal access to higher education remains bleak for many American of color, as recent trends in freshmen admission among African Americans may demonstrate, or the perpetual low rate of college admissions or even high school graduation for Cambodian Americans, Lao Americans, and Hmong Americans; or the discriminatory new educational policy that separates native-English students from new immigrant American students from receiving a high school diploma or a certificate based on satisfactory performance on an existing examination. Supporters of this new policy in some school districts of California view it as fair and proper, rewarding students who worked hard and learned their basic three R’s (*reading, writing and arithmetic*). On the other hand, opponents see it as another racist policy to disenfranchise new immigrant Americans, ignoring their home language and socio-economic status.

Robert Bellah first coined the term “American civil religion,”²³⁵ albeit overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and Protestant, which has since been a topic of major discussions and critiques.²³⁶ According to Bellah, Americans embrace a common civil religion with certain fundamental beliefs, values, holidays, and rituals, parallel to, or independent of, their chosen religion. In *Beyond Belief*, although Bellah spoke of “religion” generically, contending that “religion” instead of disappearing is again moving into

²³⁴ Ven. Cheng Yen: “A Time of Crisis, A Time for Great Awakening”, 8 March 2011

²³⁵ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religions in America.”

²³⁶ Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*; *Gail Gehrig, American Civil Religion: An Assessment*; Cynthia Toolin, “American Civil Religion from 1789 to 1981: A Content Analysis of Presidential Inaugural Addresses”; and James Treat, ed., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, Vine Deloria, Jr. with an introduction by James Treat.

the center of our cultural preoccupations, to which I like to add, in the guise of “civil society.” Can we rightfully describe Tzu Chi’s socially engaged relief work as a new form of “American civil religion” *a la* Bellah? Will Tzu Chi U.S.A.’s efforts forge a new understanding of race and ethnicity, religious pluralism, and civil society in America, and will it influence how other religious groups, other ethnic-American community, or future new immigrant Americans transplant and “acculturate” themselves into American society and soil? Central to Tzu Chi U.S.A. growing its roots on American society, it must invest in a public relations campaign to increase become a visible part of American civil society.

The post-9/11 atmosphere in America makes their efforts more daunting as American national identity is considered by the majority to be threatened by competing ideologies and theologies of social order.²³⁷ Samuel Huntington argues, these diasporic cum transnational identities are the singular cause of a weakening American national identity.²³⁸ The xenophobic rhetoric in America post-9/11 is a tremendous challenge to Tzu Chi U.S.A.’s continued “civil society” work on American soil. Ironically, the most influential actor in the production and extension of modern globalization processes seems to be unable to negotiate its own byproduct - namely, the process that Michael Kearney calls the “peripheralization of the core.”²³⁹ Accordingly, diversity is seen as the gravest internal peril to American solidarity and identity. Therefore, we must ask: Is Tzu Chi U.S.A. an “internal peril” because it is Buddhist instead of Christian, “yellow” instead of “white”, “minority” instead of “majority”? Here, the transnational characteristics of Tzu Chi manifest itself clearly! Its membership is mainly composed of new-Taiwanese-American immigrants, majority female, and mostly localized in communities where Taiwanese Americans have settled. Although Tzu Chi shares the same fundamental goal as Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish civil/religious groups that dominated the American arena in the past, namely helping those in need and bettering the common good of American society. Tzu Chi’s social work is the “public face of

²³⁷ Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Michael Kearney, “The Local and the Global: the Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism.”

religion"! It is "public religion" in the public sphere. The critical question is: does Tzu Chi qualify as "American civil religion" or is it "something else"?

On a larger scale, we must ask: Is Tzu Chi's work part of a larger growing "global civil society" based on an emerging reality of global civil action and global inter-connectedness?²⁴⁰ Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier and Marlies Glasius proposed that "global civil society is about people, organizations, and the values and ideas they represent, but with the major difference that these are, at least in part, located in some transnational arena and not bound or limited by nation-states or local societies."²⁴¹ Furthermore, they suggest that global civil society encompass the meaning and practice of human equality in an increasingly unjust world, and provides individuals with means and alternatives to search and develop new forms of civic participation and involvement in a global world.²⁴² In this way, Tzu Chi U.S.A. is part of a larger emerging "global civil society" which bespeaks its mission of "global compassion" that is not limited by its transnational structure.

²⁴⁰ Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier and Marlies Glasius, "Global Civil Society in an Era of Regressive Globalization", 3.

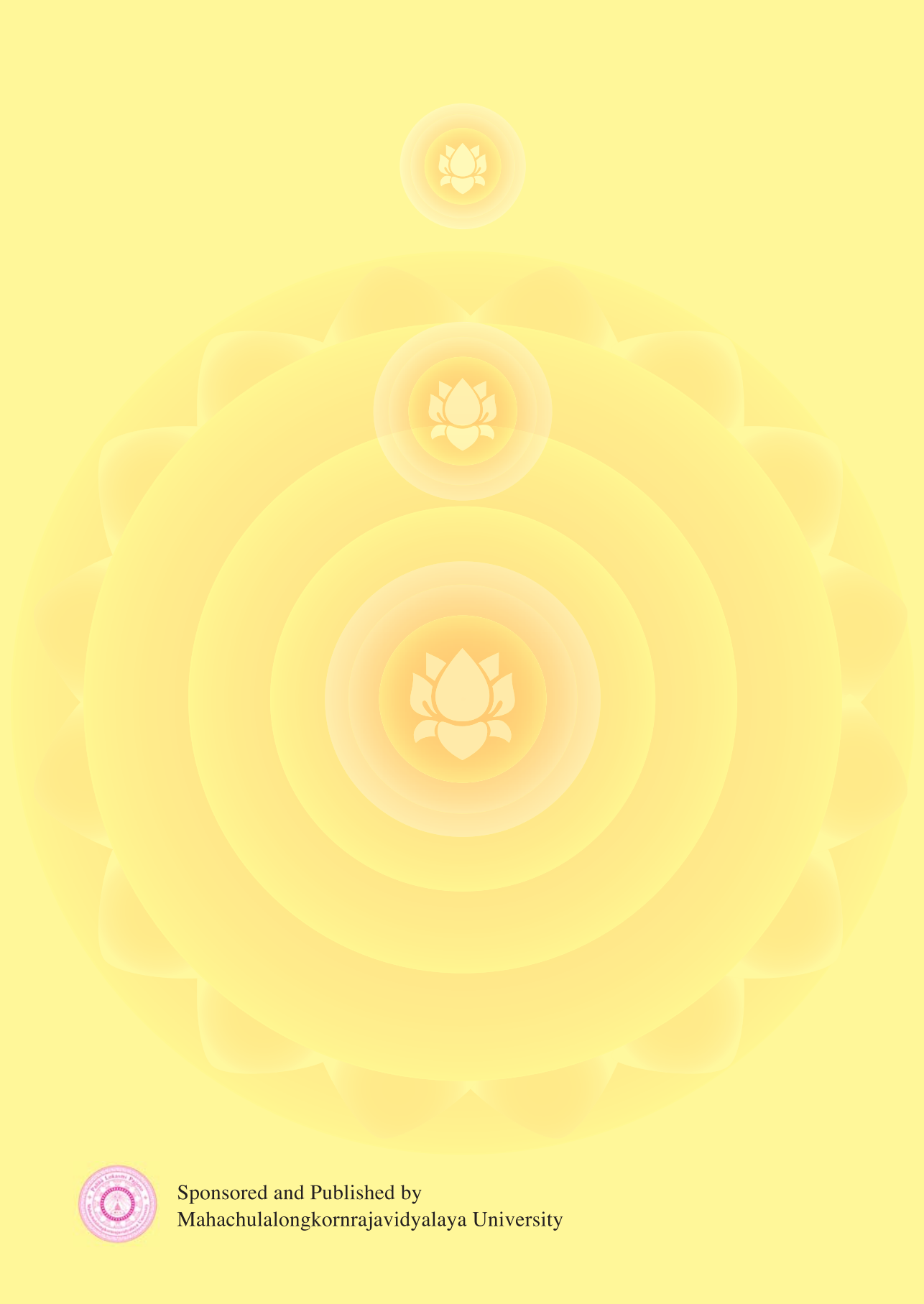
²⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

²⁴² Ibid.

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