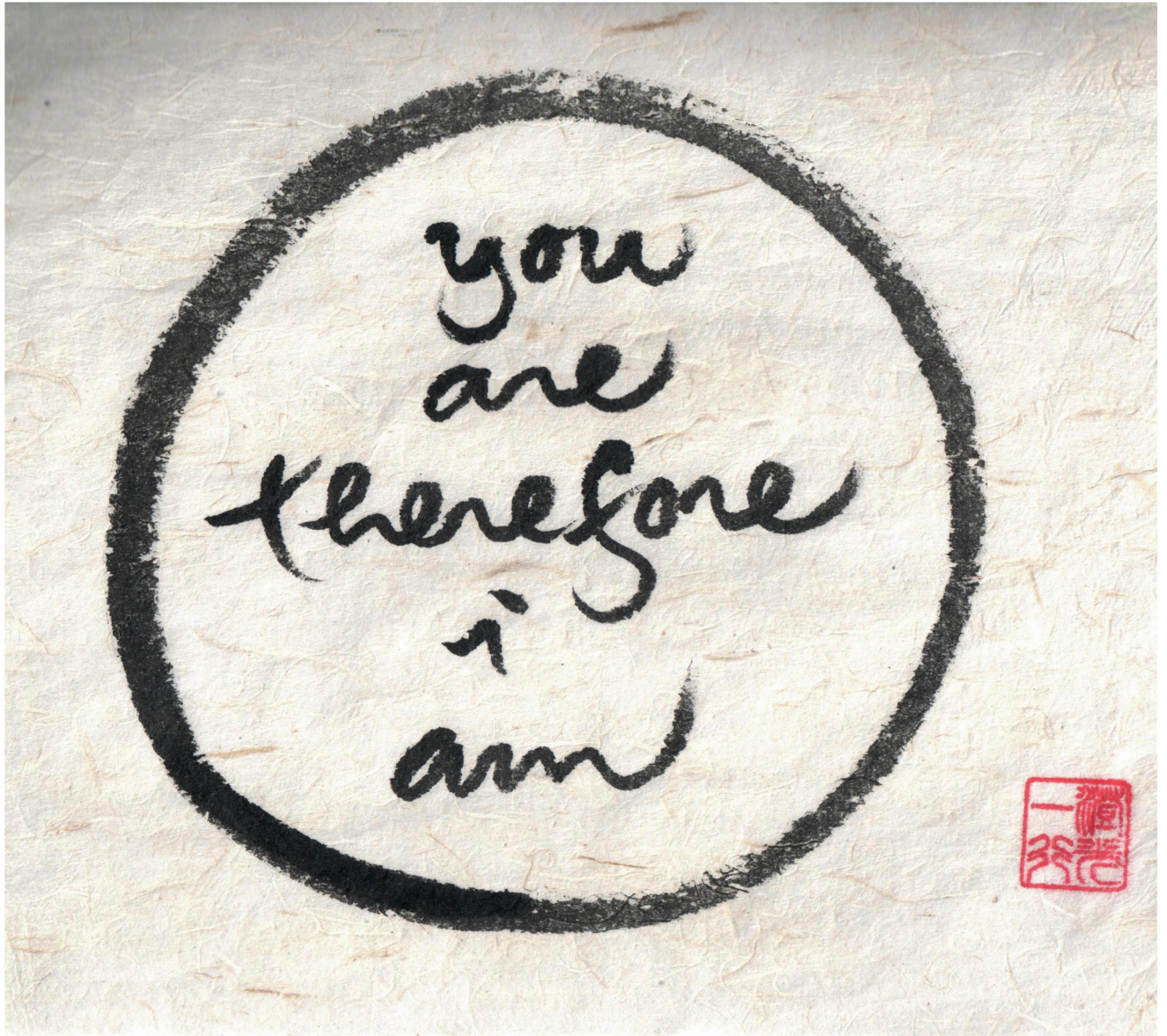


# SEEDS OF PEACE

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**Peace and Sustainability**

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Research.

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Buddha images presented by Dharmachari Lokamitra from India, and Metta Development Foundation, Burma, to Sulak Sivaraksa on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

## Editorial Notes

Sulak Sivaraksa has dedicated nearly 30 years of his life - besides his activism and writing - as the editor of *Seeds of Peace*, which he initiated in 1985. Almost 100 issues of this journal have been published, covering a wide range of social, political, cultural and environmental concerns, and highlighting good practices from around the world. Many articles published in *Seeds of Peace* have explored core problems and values of many countries, and at regional and global levels, but especially Siam. He was almost jailed after publishing a critical article on lese majeste, which illustrated clearly his moral courage. Therefore, this year, we celebrated Ajarn Sulak's 80th birthday with the theme of 'A Man Who Plants Wisdom'. Many of his friends from around the world have sent emails confirming this fact.

Ajarn Sulak has asked me to take over the editorial role of this journal from this issue onward. It is a challenge for me to take this role, which is not my field of strength, and besides, I will always have to live up to the comparison of the previous editor, Sulak! But I took this role as a learning process for me. I am not a professional editor but am willing to learn. Please bear with me and help by giving any suggestions and contributions for the improvement of this journal, so that it may play a role in planting wisdom in society.

I have accepted, and will take with me the words of Auguste Rodin, which Sulak quoted in his message to the new editor of the *Pajarayasara Magazine*:

*The hard fact of the Creative life:*

*Nobody can advise you and help you, nobody. There's only one way to proceed. Go inside yourself. Explore the reason that compels you to write; test whether it stretches its roots into the deepest part of your heart, admit to yourself whether you would have to die, if the opportunity to write were upheld from you. Above all, ask yourself at your most silent hour of night, must I write?*

Rodin to RMR

## Congratulations



Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo was awarded honorary doctorate degrees from Thammasat University's Faculty of Liberal Arts on 12 December 2012 and from Prince of Songkla University's Faculty of Liberal Arts on 25 December 2012. He has been an outstanding Buddhist nonviolent activist for more than three decades and is on the advisory board of INEB.

## Sulak Sivaraksa's 80th Birthday Ordination Ceremony



On 15 March 2013, Raja Dhammapala, a member of INEB's advisory committee, was ordained at Wat Thong Noppakun in Bangkok to celebrate Ajarn Sulak's 80th birthday and wish him a long and healthy life. In all, two Sri Lankans and one Thai were ordained to make merits for Sulak as well as themselves.



## THE ENGAGED BUDDHISM OF SULAK SIVARAKSA

Matto Pistono,



*photo by Hannah Sommer*

*Note: Sulak Sivaraksa turns 80 years of age on March 27, 2013*

Sulak reinterprets the five classic Buddhist precepts for the modern day. Individuals may not be killing outright, but they must examine how their actions might support wars, racial conflict, or the breeding of animals for human consumption. Considering the second precept of abstaining from stealing, Sulak questions the moral implications of capitalism. Stopping exploitation of women is a natural extension of the third precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct. And vowing to abstain from false speech would naturally bring into question how mass media and education promote a biased view of the world. Finally, the fifth precept to avoid intoxicants deals with international peace and justice because, "the Third World farmers grow heroin, coca, coffee, and tobacco because the economic system makes it impossible for them to support themselves growing rice and vegetables."

Prominent Buddhist writer and activist, Sulak Sivaraksa, changed his clothes to appear like other locals bartering and selling wares along the northern Thailand border. He pulled his hat low as he knew his face had been broadcast the previous three nights on national TV as a fugitive. Slipping a large bribe to a riverboat man to avoid the Thai border security check-post, Sulak made it across the Mekong River to Laos in a small canoe, undetected. In August 1991, he was a wanted man, on the run.

An arrest warrant had been issued for Sulak following a speech at Thammasat University entitled “The Regression of Democracy in Siam.” In response, he took refuge inside the German embassy in Bangkok. Police cars awaited Sulak outside the embassy gates, and plain-clothed officers were posted near his home where his worried wife stayed with their three children. After a two-week standoff at the embassy, Sulak indicated he would give himself up to the police to face strict charges of *lèse majesté* which bans criticism of the King, royal family, and the Thai military and brings with it a minimum 15-year prison sentence.

Instead of surrendering to police the next morning, Sulak made a surreptitious dash out an alleyway gate, ducked into a car and headed for the Thai-Lao border. Taking back roads and sleeping in safe houses and the jungle, Sulak listened to radio broadcasts calling him a rat and a criminal.

After he made it across the Mekong to Laos, Sulak was on his own with only a few hundred baht and a package of saltine crackers in his satchel. He was scared, but as he rode a rickety bus on his way to a friendly Laotian diplomat’s home he meditated upon his breath to calm his mind. After two days in hiding, Sulak boarded an Aeroflot flight, using the boarding pass of a student en route to Russia to study. He eventually arrived in Stockholm where he called his wife, knowing the police had tapped his home telephone, and told her he was safe, but did not know how

long he would be in exile.

Throughout the Buddhist world there are practitioners whose spiritual path is one and the same with their work in politics. Indeed two of the most prominent global Buddhist leaders are the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, monks who are known for their life-long promotion of social justice and compassion in action. And recently, Aung Sang Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest by the military junta and her election to parliament has placed this Burmese Buddhist at the center of the world political stage.

Political strife in Tibet, Vietnam and Burma has pushed the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Aung Sang Suu Kyi into greater roles and responsibility than they otherwise might have had. And like these socially engaged Buddhists, Sulak Sivaraksa’s political activism, community organizing, and work for marginalized people manifests from his Buddhist practice.

For his activism, writings, and speeches, Sulak has been exiled from Thailand on two occasions (1976-77 and 1991-94), jailed four times, and been accused repeatedly of defaming the Thai monarchy, but he has always won acquittals. Nobody has successfully silenced Sulak.

For the last 35 years, Sulak has traveled the world lecturing, writing, mentoring, participating in inter-religious dialogues, and founding organizations such as the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, with his friends the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the late Maha Gosananda as its patrons. All the while, he has published his own and others’ books and articles; Sulak has more than 100 books in Thai and English in his name.

Sulak’s worldwide prominence as a socially engaged Buddhist and advocate for the oppressed, and his national celebrity as a thorn-in-the-side of successive Thai governments and the monarchy, is an unlikely role because he was raised in a prosperous



aristocratic family. From childhood, he was steeped in conservative royalism-believing the king to be infallible, and taught to be highly skeptical of progressive monks or promoters of democracy. His two years as a monk at a temple under royal patronage in the early 1940s reinforced the notion of the supreme benevolence of the monarchy and ruling elite. His parents sent him to study in Bangkok's prestigious Anglican and Catholic schools, and in the 1950s Sulak earned degrees in law and philosophy in England. Sulak was on the fast track to a senior government post or the comfortable life as an affluent Sino-Thai businessman.

But Sulak chose a different path than accumulating money or political clout. Judith Simmer-Brown has written, "Each of these paths held the power and prestige that were his birthright. Sulak made an unusual choice. He stepped outside the walls of his palace, he looked carefully, intimately, at the suffering, exploitation, and aggression that pervaded the world. And Sulak made a decision not to return to the palace of conventional power and prestige."

Sulak returned to Thailand in the early 1960s after five years of study in England. During his time abroad, the military had come to dominate nearly all aspects of government, academic and public life in Thailand. He found the intellectual landscape barren. Even though there were fledgling social reform movements, martial law reigned in Thailand throughout the 1960s. Backed by the United States, military generals used communism as a label to purge all forms of political dissent. Hundreds of artists, writers, journalists and editors were jailed without trial on the charge of being communist. "The dictatorship had created darkness," Sulak has written.

Still, in the 1960s, Sulak was a defender of the monarchy, an elitist, and one who believed that he knew what was best for Thai society. In 1963, Sulak founded and edited the

*Social Science Review* a journal that quickly became the most influential intellectual outlet in the country. The *Review* was instrumental in awakening student awareness that eventually led to the overthrow of the military regime in 1973.

A transformative meeting with the progressive Thai Prince Sitthiporn happened while Sulak was editor of the *Review*. During one of their meetings, the prince said, "Sulak, yes, this country needs an intellectual magazine. But don't let it become intellectual masturbation."

When Sulak asserted that he was helping his countrymen with his writings, recounting the intellectual history of Siam, the prince responded, "Do you know anything about farmers? They suffer and you know nothing about it!"

This encounter inspired Sulak from simply thinking about benefitting his brethren into actually doing something. It was his call to action. Sulak saw clearly how his arrogant, top-down approach was fundamentally flawed. He began to visit rural villages, temples, and the terraced rice fields to understand the actual conditions of the people. The farmers and workers he met taught Sulak a profound lesson, and one he reiterates to this day; that to address a suffering situation be it poverty, war, or environmental disaster one must go and be with the suffering itself, with the people who are affected.

During this time, Sulak opened the first alternative bookstore in Thailand called Suksit Siam (suksit means intellectual). Suksit Siam became a hub for cultural, Buddhist, and educational activities in Bangkok that promoted social reform and democracy, much to the distrustful eye of the military generals. Sulak also led gatherings and workshops in the Coffee House Council adjacent to the bookshop. Several leaders of the 1973 student uprising were part of Sulak's circle and the political philosophy of many leaders of today's political movements

(known as the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts) was honed at the workshops.

Sulak's transformation from an intellectual elite into a grassroots campaigner for social justice in the 1970s was shaped by what he learned from rural people, farmers, and students. He came to the firm belief that all aspects of society—including Buddhism, the monarchy, and government—must be open to criticism and debate.

At the time, and still today, such criticism in Thailand is grounds for imprisonment. It was against the backdrop of social and political unrest of the 1970s in Thailand, including the country being affected greatly by the war in Vietnam and the fall of Laos and Cambodia to communist control, that Sulak began his Buddhist activism. He launched dozens of foundations, charities, non-governmental organizations, and activist groups throughout the 1970-80s, which formed the bases upon which Thailand's

robust network of non-governmental organizations currently exists. Sulak generated tangible results though his work on rural and urban community development, provided political voice to the poor and displaced, and he effectively challenged environmentally destructive pipelines and dams in northern Thailand.

The foundation for Sulak's activism is within the teachings of the Buddha. In *A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*, Sulak writes, "Buddhist practice inevitably entails a concern with social and political matters, and these receive a large share of attention in the teaching of the Buddha as it is represented in the Pali Canon. To attempt to understand Buddhism apart from its social dimension is mistaken."

He argues that Buddhists need to practice the Dharma in a manner that is relevant to today's socio-political context. Sulak is not advocating a new understanding of



*with Aung San Suu Kyi, photograph by  
Somboon Chungprampree*



*photograph by Bhanuwat Jittivuthikarn*



Buddhism but rather how individuals apply the Buddha's teachings to modern socio-economic and political dilemmas. Sulak has been greatly inspired in this regard by his discussions and work with Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, and the two most progressive and influential Thai monks of the 20th century, Arjan Buddhadasa and Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto. "Buddhism with a small "b" is what Sulak came to call this approach towards Buddhist practice.

.....

## Buddhism with a small "b"

In Sulak's most widely read book, *Seeds of Peace*, he presents small "b" Buddhism. He begins with the individual; encouraging practitioners to develop their character based upon the Buddha's teachings of mindfulness, tolerance, and interconnectedness. He

believes this will naturally lead to the deeper understanding of how one's spiritual progress is related directly to the degree we work to relieve suffering within society. Progress along one's spiritual path and social reform, then, are inextricably linked, in Sulak's vision.

Coupled with the inner practice of small "b" Buddhism, that is, cultivating mindfulness, tolerance, and a deep realization of interconnectedness, Sulak also reinterprets the classic five precepts for the modern day, extending them beyond the individual to society at large. For example, regarding the first precept to abstain from harm, Sulak challenges the individual to understand that while they might not be killing outright, they must examine how their own actions might support wars, racial conflicts, or the breeding of animals for human consumption. Considering the second precept of abstaining from stealing, Sulak questions the moral implications of capitalism, and of the depletion of natural



*Sulak, Maha Ghosananda, and the Dalai Lama  
photograph by Phra Sangkhom Thanapanyo Khunsiri*

resources. Stopping global structures of male dominance and the exploitation of women is a natural extension of one's third precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct. And vowing to abstain from false speech would naturally bring into question how mass media and mainstream education promotes a prejudiced and biased view of the world. Finally, Sulak believes the fifth precept to avoid intoxicants deals with nothing short of international peace and justice because, "the Third World farmers grow heroin, coca, coffee, and tobacco because the economic system makes it impossible for them to support themselves growing rice and vegetables."

While Sulak is known for his fiery speeches, he strikes a more analytical tone when he writes about this re-interpretation of the five precepts. "I do not attempt to answer these questions. I just want to raise them for us to contemplate."

For Sulak's 21st century articulation of the Buddha's teachings, the Dalai Lama has written, "I believe Sulak and I share a conviction that if we are to solve human problems, economic and technological development must be accompanied by an inner spiritual growth. And if we succeed in fulfilling both these goals, we will surely create a happier and more peaceful world."

Sulak's writings and activism for four decades in Thailand and around the world have led to his twice being nominated for the Noble Peace Prize (1993, 1994), and to receiving the Right Livelihood Award in 1995 "for his vision, activism and spiritual commitment in the quest for a development process that is rooted in democracy, justice and cultural integrity." In 2011, Sulak was honored with the Niwano Peace Prize.

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## Kalyanamitta – Spiritual friendship

Woven through all of Sulak's work is the spirit of kalyanamitta—a Pali term connoting spiritual friendship. Sulak's spiritual friendships have long been on display at his traditional teak home in the middle of Bangkok—itsself a protest against the ills of rampant urbanization—where for many decades he has hosted an endless stream of students, activists, politicians and refugees from around the world. Sitting in the palm-leaf courtyard with bamboo chairs and mats circling him, Sulak is the center of activity; planning, envisioning, dreaming and executing his vision while fostering an open forum for appraising, criticizing, and analyzing each other's spiritual path. Sulak counts Quakers and Protestants as some of his dearest kalyanamitta.

In the *Upaddha Sutta*, the Buddha is said to have responded to Ananda when the disciple asked the master if spiritual friendship was half of the holy life. "Half of the holy life? Don't say that, Ananda," the Buddha responded. "Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and comrades, he can be expected to develop and pursue the noble eightfold path."

Sulak summarizes his modern day interpretation of kalyanamitta in *Buddhism and Development*, as "a Good Friend would be one's 'other voice' of conscience, to put one on the proper path of development so that one would not escape from society nor would one want to improve society in order to claim it as one's own achievement."

Sulak recalls when he once saw a photograph of the Dalai Lama holding a bottle of Coca-Cola. On their next meeting in India, Sulak felt obliged in the spirit of kalyanamitta to tell the Tibetan leader about the suffering and environmental harm that is associated with a single can of the beverage.



Sulak has also felt compelled in recent years to question his friend Thich Nhat Hanh about charging money to attend teachings by the Vietnamese monk, and suggesting that the Plum Village retreat center in France might only attract the rich and not be available to poor people. Thich Nhat Hanh assured Sulak that there is never a charge for his Dharma talks, and that nobody is excluded. Sulak also suggested to Thich Nhat Hanh that he is disconnected from those outside his inner circle, and, that there might be too many layers between the monk and his disciples, “that there is only a monologue and no dialogue with your students.”

“A good friend tells you what you don’t want to hear. We don’t have to agree but I want to express my concern,” Sulak told Thich Nhat Hanh last year in Bangkok.

“You see, it is so difficult even to meet with you,” Sulak said. “You are surrounded by so many people, like guards; and you don’t even know...Perhaps those people around you won’t criticize or tell you these types of things, but I will because we are friends for so many years.”

Thich Nhat Hanh’s reply, perhaps his own soft-spoken critique of Sulak, was that Sulak should be better equipped with all the information before openly criticizing him, or anyone else. Indeed the two elder Buddhist activists’ kalyanamitta goes back decades to when they collaborated to smuggle rice into Vietnam in the early 1970s, to Sulak staying in Thich Nhat Hanh’s small apartment in Paris in 1976 when they were both in exile, to Sulak first publishing a meditation manual for activists which would later become the monk’s best selling book, *Miracle of Mindfulness*. Sulak’s daily meditation practice is indebted to Thich Nhat Hanh’s personal instructions. Thich Nhat Hanh has said of his friend, “Sulak Sivaraksa is a bodhisattva who devotes all of his energies to helping others.”

Sulak reserves his most pointed criticism for his fellow Buddhists and

decries extravagant rituals and those concerned with titles and shallow ceremony. He warns against institutionalized elements of Buddhism that offer little spirituality but rather perpetuate patriarchal hierarchies, myth, superstition, and insincere rituals—what Sulak calls Buddhism with a capital “B”. Whether it is government-backed clergy or simply large Buddhist organizations, Sulak sees the seeds of chauvinism, prejudice, and nationalism being sown when the Buddhist teachings are used by individuals and groups to advance a politically-motivated agenda.

Sulak’s version of kalyanamitta offers, and inspires, loyalty among those with whom he works; though Sulak’s closest colleagues are not spared his sharp appraisals. Roshi Joan Halifax has written, “Sulak is a lion. His great roar awakens the social activist to their real vocation.” However, on numerous occasions, that roar has been too much and those within Sulak’s inner circle have parted ways. “I support Sulak in his work; but will do so from afar. I would never work for him,” is a refrain of numerous prominent Buddhist activists in Thailand.

Sulak admits he has a sizeable ego, and encourages his kalyanamitta to point it out if he is not walking his talk. Sulak hears regularly from these friends about his limitations—his temper, impatience, high-handedness, and fondness for red wine. Even those who are quick to point out Sulak’s apparent failings admit that he can criticize himself just as quickly as he points out shortcomings in others.

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## Sulak’s vision for renewing society in the 21st century

Sulak’s activism has transformed in the last decade. In previous years he often focused on defined issues or country-specific problems. Now he struggles against

globalization and what he sees as structural violence. Structural violence, Sulak writes in his most recent books, *The Wisdom of Sustainability*, is the “systematic ways [that] a society’s resources are distributed unequally and unfairly, preventing people from meeting their basic needs.”

To understand how these structures of suffering are perpetuated, Sulak returns to the fundamental Buddhist teaching which asserts every individual has within them seeds of greed, hatred, and delusion the three poisons. These three poisons are at the root of our suffering. Through the practice of meditation and contemplation, the poisons can be rooted out completely and transformed into generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. While this is the classic Buddhist presentation, Sulak extends these from the individual to world, socio-economic system and asserts that the three poisons are used immorally by the rich and powerful.

Sulak explains that personal greed manifests in society as the insatiable desire for accumulation, an ever expanding “possessiveness” in other words, capitalism, consumerism and natural resources extraction that ignores the limits of the environment. Secondly, he sees individuals’ seeds of hatred manifest in the world as militarism. Thirdly, Sulak’s harshest critique is reserved for what he sees as the peddlers of delusion-advertisers and the mainstream media-which he argues promotes useless products and unwholesome ideas which lead people away from a meaningful life of contentedness and towards poverty and a sense of separation.

Some have called Sulak’s provocative and scathing critiques of capitalism and the media prophetic while others think he is an aging idealist. Still, when global economics is seen as the only future, Sulak explains, the market place replaces traditional morals and ethics; refusing to accept this rationale is taken as a sign of weakness, naivety, and inferiority. Sulak disagrees that the world

today is at the highest mark of human development, because this often unspoken sentiment prevents the peoples of the world from pursuing other aspirations and from thinking about alternative ways to improve or maintain their livelihood and traditions.

Now eighty years old, when Sulak speaks about globalization, one senses a profound sadness for his home country, and for the world.

“The diverse ways of life worldwide increasingly dance to the same tune of consumer culture, which insists that ultimate happiness can be achieved by the never-ending consumption of goods and services,” Sulak says. “This oppressive environment is like a tightening noose that will squeeze the life out of meaningful freedom, democracy, and human rights.”

“I only play a small part because ultimately people have to empower themselves. Perhaps I can help them by reminding...I don’t have the ability or networking to destroy consumerism globalization, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, or the International Monetary Fund. But if these things don’t change to serve the people, they will destroy themselves. They have no

*photograph by Matteo Pistono*





moral legitimacy but only greed to drive them, and this will be their downfall. Meanwhile, I hope that the small people, with alternatives, can survive.

Walking cane in hand and donning traditional Siamese dress, in Sulak's continuous worldwide travels, he encourages people, especially the young who are indoctrinated by capitalist triumphalism and consumerism, to look at the lives of the spiritual leaders and saints in their own tradition for guidance.

"I am from a Buddhist country, and the Buddha, like so many wise men of the past in other cultures, cultivated two important qualities that were the foundation for spiritual illumination-simplicity and humility."

"When we begin to develop simplicity in our life, and humility towards others and the environment, we begin to break free of that oppressive net. Perhaps more importantly, when we cultivate mindful-awareness alongside simplicity and humility, we can liberate ourselves completely from our own anger, greed, and delusion. Through this personal transformation, we begin to see the interconnectedness between each other and the environment around us. With this insight, we will begin to find the wisdom in

caring for each other, how not to abuse the earth's resources, and find respect for other cultures, traditions, and beliefs."

Can individuals make a difference? Are we to reject capitalism? How can we stop a war? Where do we start to dismantle structural violence and bring about a more equitable society?

Sulak begins to answer these questions by stressing individual responsibility and the cultivation of mindfulness through meditation. On this note, Sulak tends to be optimistic believing that individuals do have the possibility to alter humanity's current course.

"Restructuring political and economic institutions cannot, in themselves, bring about liberation. Personal transformation is the starting place. Peace can prevail in a society only when individuals in that society are at peace. When greed, hatred and ignorance govern our personal affairs, they will also be present in our society's institutions, preventing lasting social change. Real security depends on working on ourselves."

*Matteo Pistono is a writer, practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, and author of In the Shadow of the Buddha: Secret Journeys, Sacred Histories, and Spiritual Discovery in Tibet. Pistono's writings and photographs about Tibetan and Himalayan cultural, political and spiritual landscapes have appeared in the Washington Post, BBC's In-Pictures, Men's Journal, Kyoto Journal, and HIMAL South Asia. He is the founder of Nekorpa, a foundation working to protect sacred pilgrimage sites around the world, and he sits on the executive council of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, Rigpa Fellowship, and the Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture.*

<http://www.matteopistono.com/>

<http://nekorpa.org/>

*With the author, outside of Bangkok 2011*



Credit: <http://kyotojournal.org/the-journal/heart-work/the-engaged-buddhism-of-sulak-sivaraksa/>

# Booming Bhutan

## The Happiest Place on Earth?

John Berthelsen

30 January 2013 / *Foreign Affairs*

This article is the second installment of a five-part series examining the world's fastest-growing economies, according to the IMF World Economic Outlook.



*Buddhist monks walk past a power station in Thimphu. (Adnan Abidi / Courtesy Reuters)*

The tiny kingdom of Bhutan, wedged into a Himalayan crevice between India and China, has experienced unprecedented growth in GDP an estimated eight percent between 2011 and 2012 and a projected 12.5 percent between 2012 and 2013, which makes it the world's fourth fastest-growing economy. This growth spurt is almost entirely thanks to the sale of hydropower to India, which

accounted for 45 percent of the country's revenue and 20 percent of its GDP in 2011. Flush with cash, the government plans to build ten new hydropower plants by 2020, bringing its total up to 40.

Behind the impressive growth, however, are systemic problems. With a population of just over 700,000, Bhutan has one of the world's smallest

and least developed economies. Almost 70 percent of the country's wealth comes from development assistance grants from India, in addition to substantial aid from the United States and European countries. Apart from the hydropower industry, other economic sectors, including agriculture, are struggling. Bhutan must import much of its food because only 2.3 percent of the country is arable land. Although GDP growth is robust, the country's deficit has continued to grow and the inflation rate reached 13.5 percent late last year. Furthermore, credit growth, including loans to the private sector, has risen to the unhealthy rate of 26.2 percent, which could lead both to a high nonperforming loan rate and more inflation.

Bhutan is taking steps to correct its problems, and has won plaudits for doing so from the IMF. Furthermore, the government is undergoing impressive structural reforms. Over the past two decades, Bhutan has transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. In the mid-2000s, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, then king, transferred most of his power to a newly founded parliament and decreed that any king could be impeached by two-thirds vote of parliament. In 2006, the king abdicated power to his Oxford-educated son, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, who champions his father's democratic vision.

To be sure, the political transition has been imperfect. The inexperienced bureaucracy has struggled to manage the booming economy, the parliament remains unsure of how to wield its new power, and the civil service seems lost without royal edicts. Peasants, many of whom still long for absolute rule, remain remarkably subservient, with the educated elites filling well-paid government posts. Karga Lama, a journalist who has covered Bhutan, wrote to me that he wonders whether "people at the grassroots [are] really enjoying and benefitting from the process of

democracy, or [if] the few people at the upper echelon of political structure [are] taking the cream." Indeed, 40 percent of the population are still subsistence farmers, crowded on the country's small portion of arable land. Seeking better opportunities, many young Bhutanese are moving to Thimpu, the capital, but few are finding gainful employment. Cheaply constructed commercial and residential buildings have been erected to house new inhabitants and the city is losing its unique architectural character. Traffic jams and petty crimes have also become more frequent. But Bhutan is adapting, slowly incorporating modern culture into a centuries-old feudal society.

A recent World Bank report shows that quality of life in Bhutan is improving. Infant mortality rates have declined, maternal mortality rates are falling, and literacy and enrollment rates are rising. In addition, the number of girls enrolled in primary school in Bhutan is greater than the number of boys, which is rare in Asian countries. Women, rather than men, inherit property in some areas of the country. With the support of domestic nongovernmental organizations, such as the National Commission for Women and Children and the Tarayana Foundation, the newly democratic government is implementing model educational, social, and environmental programs to help the country's poorest citizens.

Bhutan's GDP growth might have caught the IMF's attention, but internally, the government measures success by a different, all-encompassing standard. The Gross National Happiness index, established in 1972 by Jigme Singye Wangchuck, tracks progress using well-being indicators, such as mental and physical health, community vitality, culture, education, environmental diversity, living standards, and governance. Each of these indicators is further broken down: mental health, for example, considers psychological



distress, emotional balance, and spirituality. Community vitality includes factors such as family life, safety, trust, social support, and kinship.

By considering and balancing these diverse factors, the GNH framework ensures that economic pursuits will not bulldoze other priorities. For example, plans to harness a sizeable number of Bhutan's rivers might disturb some environmentalists, but the development of Bhutan's energy sector will take into account environmental concerns, as staked out in the GNH index. Only two dams will be built, with most plants generating power from free-flowing rivers, and the government is explicitly committed to producing green energy.

Meanwhile, the transition to democracy promises greater government accountability. The electorate is slowly accepting the end of the absolute monarchy that governed the country for centuries. Elected officials and government bureaucrats are gradually coming into their own as they attempt to modernize the country, while protecting its cultural heritage. The Department of Youth, Culture, and Sports has introduced cultural education into school curriculum and encourages families to engage in traditional activities such as visiting temples or practicing indigenous songs. Other initiatives include rigorous sports programs aimed at fostering pride in personal achievement and healthy competition. At the same time, the government is attempting to alleviate youth unemployment, especially by reaching out to American hospitals to secure contracts for transcribing medical audio files.

In an acknowledgment of its profound progress, Bhutan was invited to convene a high-level meeting on the GNH index during the UN General Assembly session in April 2012. Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigme Yoser Thinley led the discussions, which gave the small kingdom an outsized international profile and further solidified the Bhutanese government's

commitment to the framework. Also last year, the Earth Institute at Columbia University issued a World Happiness Report, commissioned by the United Nations, which ranks happiness, as measured by 11 different criteria, in 150 countries. On a scale of one to ten (ten being the happiest) Bhutan ranked at 6.05, higher than neighbors India, Nepal, China, and Bangladesh. In the foreword to the World Happiness Report, the economist Jeffrey Sachs wrote:

**The Bhutan case study tells the story of GNH in Bhutan, a story of exploration and progress since the King declared in 1972 the goal of happiness over the goal of wealth. Happiness became much more than a guidepost or inspiration; it became an organizing principle for governance and policy-making as well. The Gross National Happiness Index is the first of its kind in the world, a serious, thoughtful, and sustained attempt to measure happiness, and use those measurements to chart the course of public policy.**

Sachs ended the foreword by lauding "Bhutan's wonderful adventure, still unfolding while already inspiring others." It is not just Bhutan's GDP that is improving, in other words, the country's global importance and domestic happiness are on the rise as well.

.....

## GNH and Resurrection in Myanmar

Dendup Chopel

23 January 2013 / Kuensel

Bigger than France in size, Myanmar is a magnificently rich country in our neighbourhood. Perhaps nothing can reflect this fact more aptly than the Shwedagon pagoda. The pagoda sits in the middle of Rangoon, a sprawling city of five million people, on the only hill for miles around.

According to its origin myth, the structure is said to contain eight miraculous strands of Buddha's hair that was given to two merchant brothers from Myanmar just days after his enlightenment. Historians agree that the pagoda could be referenced in old literature from the 11th century onwards though it was built into its present form over many centuries starting with the Mon Kings who ruled the present day Yangon region.

It is an enormous golden structure, nearly 100 metres high, shaped something like an upside-down funnel, with an octagonal base, a rounded dome, and a long spire. The lower sections are covered in gold leaf, the upper section in plates of solid gold. Altogether, the Shwedagon is said to be enveloped in no less than sixty tons of gold. More than in all the vaults of the Bank of England, the Burmese used to say during the British rule that lasted for well over a century 1948.

Myanmar is rich in natural mineral resources such as petroleum, timber, tin, zinc,

copper, tungsten, lead, coal, marble, limestone, precious stones, natural gas and hydropower potential. Myanmar is also fortunate in possessing huge areas of teak and other hardwoods. According to the most recent UN World Development Report, Myanmar has an estimated natural forest area of 43 percent.

Despite the vast reserves of natural wealth, Myanmar remains a mystery today to many outsiders. After its independence from Britain, Burma (as the country was formerly known) came under military rule due to persistent insurgencies. Myanmar has about 135 distinct ethnic groups which are classified into eight 'major national ethnic races.' There are at least 10 major armed ethnic groups who are fighting with the central government for more autonomy in resource use and cultural expression.

The Western governments have enforced long standing aid and trade sanctions on the country, forcing the country into a state of isolation and disrepair. As a result, there is large scale impoverishment in the country that extends from its economy to its education and social welfare systems.

However, ever since 2011, there has been a genuine attempt at comprehensive, inclusive and long-term reforms beginning with the establishment of multi-party democracy and easing of economic restrictions. Aung

San Suu Kyi was freed from her two decade long house arrest and her party was allowed to run for the parliament which it did with overwhelming success.

President Thein Sein has also introduced a slew of new reforms aimed at making Myanmar 'a modern, industrialized country' with a strong agricultural sector. Among others, the former military general has introduced a market-oriented exchange rate, which had been a source of lack of market confidence and economic instability. Addressing the 1st Myanmar Development Cooperation Forum in the capital city Nay Pyi Taw on January 19, the President said liberalization of trade and investment, building infrastructures, and developing transparency will be crucial to Myanmar's success in the future.

A delegation of the Centre for Bhutan Studies led by Dasho Karma Ura was invited to meet with the Chief Economic Advisor of the President of Myanmar, Dr U. Myint and representatives of other leading NGOs and CSOs like Metta Foundation and Spirit in Education Movement in Yangon from January 16-18. The delegation also met a representative of the 88 Generation Group that is composed of student activists who were incarcerated for their political activities.

Speaking with Dr U. Myint, the man who orchestrated the coming together of the two leading personalities of Burma, President Thein Sein and the Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Dasho Karma Ura said that GNH could deliver breakthroughs and inspirations on the two crucial issues facing Myanmar.

GNH is a philosophy of peace as much as it is of moderation and reconciliation. Given its underpinning in Buddhism which is the religion of about 80 percent of the people in Myanmar, people will easily identify with the search for not only external peace that is promoted by GNH, but also peace within the individual by being able to recognize the things which make an individual agitated and ill at ease.

As it is, Myanmar is today at a crossroad. A new civilian government has been formed and there is an unprecedented mood for peace and progress. As the country sets out on a new path to development, helped in parts by the lifting of restrictions heretofore imposed by the West, Dasho Karma Ura said that GNH can give the country a holistic paradigm for development. As everything starts anew, the country has the opportunity to select a path that leads to a sustainable future with the right care to its spiritual and physical environment.

It was agreed that a GNH conference in Myanmar could provide a platform for leaders of all ethnic groups and political persuasions to come together and find common ground in an ideal that is above narrow self interest and mutual mistrust. It could also help in maintaining the momentum of the initiatives for peace and progress that has resulted in the government agreeing on ceasefire with ethnic rebels except the Kachin fighters.

Dasho Karma Ura also said that a GNH conference could also see a sharing of mutually beneficial experiences and wisdom between two countries penetrated deeply by Buddhism. There are more similarities between Bhutan and Burma than differences. Apart from Buddhism, the Tibeto-Burman language family unites the people in the region. Like Bhutan, people in Myanmar also take pride in wearing their traditional costumes in public and private spaces.

In Yangon, one can't help but agree with the noted Burmese writer Thant Myint-U, a descendent of the former UN Secretary General U Thant who has said "for now at least, there is a new optimism, a new energy. If the country can forge a new path, and end the civil war once and for all, rebuild its shattered education system, and channel this energy towards creating jobs and raising incomes for all its people, it won't be a moment too soon."

GNH, it seems, can help in meaningfully





*Dasho Karma Ura and Dr U Myint*

engaging the people and their leaders, and ensure that this positive new energy is harnessed in sustaining the momentum of change and wholesome progress. Bhutan's genuine leadership in bringing wholesome global peace and harmony through such vital interventions can help this wounded giant in our region, a fellow Buddhist nation shake off its scar from years of decadence and emerge as a dynamic force in shaping a brighter collective future for the betterment of the world.

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## Community way of Buddhism in South India

.....

Every month, the Navayana Buddhist Society of India (NBSI) organizes a “Full Moon Day” celebration. The opportunity to organize the celebration of the historic event of Dr. Ambedkar’s 50th Golden Jubilee year of embracing Buddhism was given to ADECOM Network’s team with the participation of affiliated Dalit Collective representatives. The organizers from Dalit Collective planned the National Workshop and 200 members of its members embraced Buddhism at the Nagarjuna Training Institute, Nagpur. International bhikkhus and bhikkhunis gathered at the Institute to observe this ceremony.

This event was truly a historic and unforgettable moment in South India. For the first time many members, especially women, and Dalit leaders embraced Buddhism and immediately practiced it in everyday life.

At ADECOM we realized that a separate forum was essential to follow up actions on the people’s spiritual rights. On that basis preliminary discussions were held on five different occasions and at different places. Interactions with social activists, writers and intellectuals led to the conclusion to start a separate forum for Buddhist activities. ADECOM Network is a non-religious, non-political and non-profit organization. For this reason all the committee members were interested in

Conducting yoga and meditation sessions to strengthen inner values and expose the people to Buddhism, Ambedkarism, and feminism. Preaching Buddhist and spiritual values, especially the respect for one another's humanity and the path to a harmonious life for attaining enlightenment and peace.

NBSI

establishing a new body at the state level. This is the history behind organizing the NBSI for conducting Buddhist-related activities with affiliated groups.

ADECOM Network founded the “Navayana Buddhist Society of India (NBSI)” with the cooperation of writers of Tamil Nadu, scholars, artists, social activists and feminists. NBSI was registered in March 2009 and its registration number is 119/2009. Ms. P. Lalidalamalle is President of NBSI and coordinates its activities. NBSI is a forum for intellectuals, writers, social activists and volunteers to make our society a non-violent living space for mankind.

The main objectives are :

1. To construct public meditation and retreat centers for developing youths' leadership skills and qualities, focusing on ethical values derived from Buddhism and based on equality.
2. To invite monks and nuns for Dhamma talks.
3. To promote spiritual activities like yoga and meditation for strengthening inner values and exposing the people to Buddhism, Ambedkarism, and feminism.
4. To organize Dhamma trainings and activities, especially for the Dalits, tribal communities, ethnic minorities, and peripheral communities.



5. To promote universal values such as liberty, fraternity and equality; this society is dedicated to struggling for universalism.

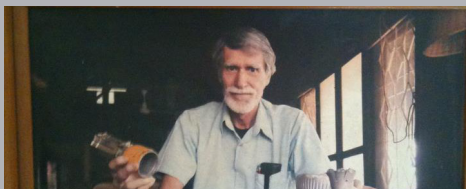
Actions for community development:

- To establish arts and crafts centers and skill development units for the people in the community.
- To organize exchange visits and retreats in the villages to promote community participation in all events.
- To organize mass meetings to promote Dr. Ambedkar's embraced Buddhism in South India.

Conclusion:

There is an urgent need to develop the cultural and spiritual rights of local communities. The people have long been practicing Tamil Buddhist culture. But they are not aware of their own roots and identity. NBSI is taking such an initiative to motivate and guide local communities to be aware of Buddhism, Ambedkarism and feminism.

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We regret to announce the death of our good friend.

**ROGER RUMPF**

(26 October 1944-9 April 2013)

Please refer to INEB's facebook for his obituary.

<https://www.facebook.com/INEB.BuddhistNetwork>

## Agreement of Land reforms between the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Govt. Of India and Jan Satayagarha

1 National Land Reforms Policy: While land reform is clearly a state subject under the constitution, the MoRD acknowledges that a National Land Reforms Policy announced by the Central could have its own importance. The MoRD will initiate a dialogue with the State immediately, put out a draft of this policy for public debate and discussion in the next 4-6 months and to be finalized soon thereafter. The draft Land Reforms Policy prepared by the Jan Satyagarha organized by Ekta Parishad will be an important input into the preparation of this draft. Civil society organizations will also be actively involved in this exercise.

2. Statutory backing to the provision of agriculture and homestead land: The MoRD will proactively initiate the dialogue process with states to take up steps on the issue of giving statutory backing (like MGNREGA and FRA) to: (a) provision of agricultural land to the landless poor in the backward districts; and (b) provision of Homestead Rights to the landless and shelter-less poor of rural areas, all over the country so as to guarantee 10 cents of Homestead to every landless and shelter-less rural poor household.





3. Homestead Land: The MoRD will propose doubling the unit to enable provision of 10 cents of land as homestead for every landless and shelter-less poor family as a component for Indra Awas Yojna (IAY).

4. Enhanced land access and land rights for the poor, marginalized and deprived landless: The MoRD has agreed to issue detailed advisories in the next two months exhorting the states to focus on the effective implementation of various laws enacted by legislature aimed at protecting the land rights of Dalits, Adivasis, and all other weaker and marginalized sections of society. Details of these advisories will be worked out in consultation with civil society organizations active on this issue. The MoRD will also take up a time-bound program for securing access to land to specific categories of marginalized and deprived landless families.

5. Fast Track Land Tribunal: The MoRD agrees to initiate a dialogue with states to establish fast track land tribunals / courts for speedy disposal of the cases pending in revenue and judicial courts in addition to the Central Scheme for legal aid to the entire person belonging to socially deprived section, whose lands are involved in litigation, particularly Dalits and tribal communities.

6. Effective Implementation of Panchayats (Extension of Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA): the MoRD will work with the Ministries of Tribal Affairs and Panchayat Raj to complete stakeholder consultation over the next four months so that detailed circular to states could be issued for ensuring effective

implementation of PESA by Empowering the Gram Sabhas to exercise the power given to them under the Act.

7. Effective Implementation of Forest Rights Acts: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs have issued a comprehensive set of revised rules on 13th September 2012 under the scheduled tribes and supported for effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the light of the revised rules and Directive issued by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and in the light of suggestion received from civil society organizations.

8. Forest and Revenue Boundary Disputes: The MoRD agrees to issue an advisory to states to setup joint teams of forest and revenue department to undertake a through survey of the forest and revenue boundaries to resolve disputes. The Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas will be fully involved in the survey and settlement process.

9. Survey, updating of records and governing Common Property Resources: The MoRD will exhort and support the states to carry out surveys of Common Property Resources (CPRs) with the direct involvement of the Gram Panchayats Concerned. The States will also be advised to ensure full implementation of recent Supreme Court's direction on this matter.

10. Task Force on Land Reforms: The MoRD will immediately setup a Task Force on Land Reforms Headed by the Union Minister for Rural Development to implement the above agenda. Members of the Task Force will include Representatives of MoRD, State



*Jan Satyagraha leader, P.V. Rajagopal, left, shaking hands with Minister*

governments, civil society organizations working on land reforms issues and all stakeholders concerned.

In the light of this Agreement Jan Satyagrah agrees to discontinue its present march and work with the MoRD to carry forward this agenda.

### Annexure 1

Suggested Agenda for action to secure access of land to the poor

1. Protection and development of lands belonging to Dalit and Adivasis: Measures to prevent alienation of Government lands assigned to Dalits; identification of Govt./assigned lands encroached by ineligible persons for restoring back to the original assignees; identification of tribal lands alienated to the nontribal in contravention to the existing land transfer regulation for restoring the land back to the tribal's and through inventory of land belongings to SCs/STs for taking up development of the land and provision of irrigation facilities under MGN-REGS and other programs;

2. Assignment of land to the landless poor : Regularization of unobjectionable occupation on the Government lands in favor of landless poor and issuance of tired deeds (

in scheduled areas, in favor to tribal only); resumption of land acquired, purchased and / or leased out to industries, etc. or acquired for development project but remaining unutilized, for distribution to the landless poor and State Government to identify all categories of lands available for assignment to the poor, giving priority to the poorest of the poor; to secure access to land to the specific categories of marginalized and deprived landless people such as nomads, particularly vulnerable tribal groups, single women, HIV-infected people, Siddhis (Gujrat & Karnatka), fisher folks, slum inhabitants, hawkers, leprosy infected people, physically and mentally challenged people, tea tribes, salt workers, pastoral communities, bonded laborers, mine workers, bidi workers, internally displaced people; resurvey and physical verification of Bhoodaan land to recover the Bhoodaan lands from encroachers, for allotment to the poor and to revisit the ceiling limit and implement ceiling laws, undertake reclassification of the lands and assign the surplus land to the poor.

3. Land-related issues of the poor: Identify the land-related problems being faced by the poor and take up a program for their resolution in a time bound manner; recoding tenancy to enable the tenants to secure loans from the bank; protect / provide

burial ground and the pathway to burial grounds, especially to the most vulnerable communities in the villages; and management of land records at the village in a transparent manner.

4. Land to the nomads: To issue appropriate directives to the state government to take up a campaign to settle the nomadic communities, by providing minimum homestead and agricultural land for sustaining their livelihoods.

5. Women's Land Rights: To ensure that land owned by a family is recorded either in the name of a woman or jointly in the name of the man and the woman.

### Annexure 2

Suggested Agenda for action for ensuring effective Implementation of the PESA, 1996 and FRA, 2006

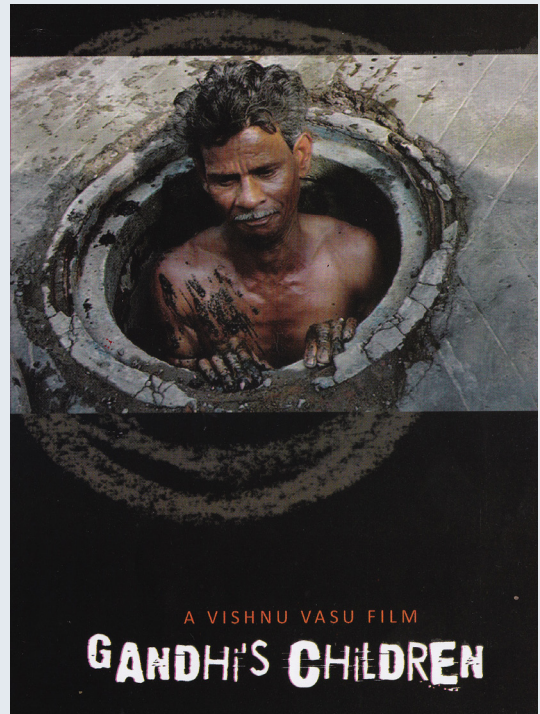
1. PESA – Align all state revenue laws and land-related relevant laws with PESA 1996 to recognize power of Gram Sabhas in writing through the Gram Panchayat of any proposed sale of transfer including mortgage of any land/ transaction in the village; authorize Gram Sabhas to call for relevant revenue records, conduct a hearing and direct SDM for restoration of alienated land in necessary cases; inform any changes in the land record including mutation to the Gram Sabhas; expand the list of scheduled V village by including all eligible but left out habitation; enforce in letter and spirit, the 'Samatha Judgment' in all acquisitions of tribal land for private companies and implementation of PESA to be strengthened by notification of appropriate rules over all other laws, with appropriate amendment being carried out in all the state laws that are in conflict with PESA within a period of one year.

2. Forest Rights Act - Securing to the Tribals, bank credit facilities in respect of the land granted under Forest Rights Act and other land laws; ensuring vesting of all the forest rights as defined under the Act, to the tribal communities, who were earlier displaced because of notification of National Park and

Wild Life Sanctuaries, and are rehabilitated under the provision of Forest Rights Act; settlement of Forest Rights, both individual and community rights, in respect of land proposed for acquisition, before land acquisition proceedings are commenced.

All the forest land where the Forest Rights Act applies and where the process of the settlement of rights under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 has not been completed, it will be made clear that the process of recognition of forest rights under the Forest Rights Act will be completed first and then the settlement process take to its logical end facilitation absolute rights to the tribal's. All particularly vulnerable/primitive tribal groups without their date of occupancy on a particular piece of land will be exempted from furnishing of evidence of residence as required under Forest Rights Act. This will be done through appropriate amendment to the Forest Rights Act.

'Orange Areas' in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where large extent of land is under dispute between Revenue Department and the Forest Department shall be settled expeditiously.





## UnHappy Laos.

.....

The article below is written by Christina McMellon a PhD student at Edinburgh University's Centre for Research on Families and Relationships. Her research explores how young Lao volunteers in Vientiane understand and experience happiness and she has recently returned to Scotland to write her thesis after spending 2 years in Vientiane conducting fieldwork. This piece was originally part of an occasional blog which can be read at [www.christinainlaos.wordpress.com](http://www.christinainlaos.wordpress.com). For more information, Christina can be contacted at [christina.mcmellon@gmail.com](mailto:christina.mcmellon@gmail.com).

.....

A man who is wise and kind has disappeared and I am sad.  
I don't really know what else to write, but there is nothing else that I can do.

Sombath Somphone and I first met briefly in 2008. I'm sure that he doesn't remember that meeting but he told me about PADETC the community development organization that he had started and of which he was then Director and I decided that if I ever had the opportunity to come back to Laos I wanted to connect with him and with PADETC. At that point I was unaware of Sombath's long background of promoting happiness in development, but I made contact again when I returned to Laos at the end of 2010. We connected over a couple of long and inspiring conversations about happiness, particular after we discovered a common love of the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and of Plum Village.

I started to work more closely with Sombath in December 2011 when we collaborated to show the international documentary "Happy" to as wide a Lao audience as possible. Then, in a quick conversation in February 2012, the idea for "Happy Laos" was born and a piece of work that took up a significant amount of my last 6 months in Laos was begun.

I have talked about Happy Laos at length on here, but only in terms of trying to persuade you to part with your cash. I never actually shared the final film, which was very remiss of me. So, here it is. Please watch it and pay particular attention to the gentle mannered grey-haired 'happiness advocate' who talks about (among other things) how we need to stop looking outside ourselves to find happiness.

We (I hope I can talk on behalf of the many people who were involved) are very proud of the finished short film which encourages Lao people to think and talk about the things that truly make them happy. Maybe I'll write more about this another time; everything is interconnected, but this is a post about Sombath.

I left Laos at the end of October, spent a wonderful month in Thailand studying yoga, and came back to Scotland at the beginning of December. Then on Sunday 16th December I heard that Sombath had disappeared. I won't retell the story, which is easily accessible in the international press, but instead offer links to two open letters written by Sombath's niece, Somchit Phankham, and his wife, Shui Meng Ng and a link to the campaign to Find Sombath Somphone:

Sombath has been missing since 15 December 2012 with absolutely no word from

whoever is holding him and no update on the promised government investigation into his disappearance.

There is so much else to be said and nothing else to be said.

I don't want to speculate about motives or politics or implications because all of this is unknown and I am very far away. What I want to do is to focus on Sombath and to remember that a wise, kind, determined, gentle, sometimes infuriating, always inspiring man is missing. I keep wondering what advice he would give in this situation.

In May 2012 I interviewed Sombath for my research. As in all my research interviews I started by talking about research ethics and, in particular about how the interview was confidential. With a twinkle in his eye Sombath asked me why he would want his ideas to be confidential, requesting that I summarise everything that he would say so that he could widely share his views. I laughed. It was typical Sombath on the one hand it made perfect sense but on the other it felt potentially messy conflict with the ethical guidelines that I'd signed up to in the UK. He flattered me by claiming that I (a native speaker) could write it in a way that was much clearer in English language than he. I muttered something non-committal and thought about the exchange several times over the next few months, but he never asked again.

In very different circumstances, I now come back to that interview transcript. I've talked to my supervisors and decided to share. Ethics are – or at least should be – about doing the right thing and the only right thing I can do just now is to add my own tiny voice to all the amazing people who are working to keep Sombath in the public eye and raise awareness of his work and philosophy. So I'll finish this post with a (tidied but otherwise unchanged) extract from that interview and let him explain his view of happiness in his own words.

Sombath: People perceive that happiness is something magic, something superior, and therefore we need to look for the answer. but the answer is in everyday life...

Christina: It's right in front of us?

S: It's right in front of us - but we look through it.

C : How do you define happiness?

S : Well, people define poverty, right? People define stress. Happiness? ...there is a baseline happiness which is having no poverty or no stress...but if you want to be REALLY happy...then there are many types of happiness. People tend to think only of sense happiness... tastes good, feels good, looks beautiful, is good to your ears and so on. But these senses are reacting to something...you sense something and you have a perception of whether it's true or not and that perception is a judgment which depends on your culture, your past experience, your age...you make a judgment about whether that's good or not good...if it's good then you want it. Taste spicy food? Wow...that's good... but if you're not used to hot food you might think it's terrible! These are the senses' happiness and we can become addicted to these sensory happinesses. But they are temporary because your senses will never be the same...as you grow older what you used to eat is no longer good... when you were young your taste buds were more for sweet taste but as you grow older you enjoy bitter tastes. Things change...so that is happiness but it is temporary happiness depending on your situation, what age you are, your relationships and so on. It is happiness but it is superficial happiness... if we can go deeper than that, then we can find happiness that does not depend on the senses.

C : What does that deeper happiness depend on?

S : Oh yes, there is deeper level of happiness but it requires a lot of awareness that the senses are only temporary...if you look below the surface then you see something else below the waves for sure...

C : So in a sense the deeper happiness is in realising that the thing isn't permanent, it is in the non-attachment, being able to let go?

S : It is in the non-attachment. But that doesn't mean you should not enjoy your senses...just with awareness that they are temporary. Otherwise you attach to something that is good...you desire it...want more of it... but then there is also something painful

that comes with that...because nothing is permanent. If you don't know it is non-permanent, when someone says they loves you you say "ahh she's gonna love me forever" right? But there's no such thing as forever and then, if you don't have awareness, it's painful when you find out that's not true...so your happiness caused you pain.

You should enjoy with awareness. This is not a pessimistic view but at the same time it's not an optimistic view. There are good times there are bad times. If you can accept that then nothing really moves you.

C : How does that fit with PADETC and with development? Where do you see happiness should fit?

S : Well, I think this ability to understand things is very important. I keep stressing that we need to understand the present, learn from the past and based on these two things we should strategise for the future. But you know the future is always going to be changing, it will never be what you expect and you should not expect it to be the way you would like it to be.

And if we understand this when we work, we will not be too attached to the things that don't work out because we will understand why they don't work...but if something works we also should not be too excited about it but simply be aware of the conditions that makes it work. Those conditions will not be the same in every situation and, if you understand that, you will be continuously motivated to do things that are not to satisfy yourself, but really are for the common good...and that common good depends on all the conditions that surround the situation.

C : And that non-attachment maybe allows or opens up the possibility for things happening that don't we don't expect to happen, right?

S : Yes, and the deeper happiness comes in creating an environment or conditions where everyone can be happy. You will see the greater reward, when you see your fellow humans...your partners... really enjoying life...being very calm... and this will make you even more happy.

But you can become attached to doing



good also too...if you are doing good without expecting anything in return that's non-attachment.

C : Do you think that is why there is some resistance to the idea of happiness in the development world?

S : I think it's because we are not used to think this way, you see it's just perception, your mind is lured into accepting what it's told, so it is important to train it to really analyse things, especially to analyse yourself. We are always judging things outside us, we have been trained to distract ourselves from the self with what is out there. But then the self becomes based on what is out there. But, out there, there is always change so we will never find rest. So it's all about the mindset. If we only look outwards we are like rats on a wheel...

C : ...and it's really interesting what you say about that rat in the wheel could be an attachment to doing good... because it's a very familiar idea to me that that rat in the wheel is a attachment to getting more money or having more things or having a good status.... but attachment to doing good, to making the world how you want the world to be... that's interesting....

S : .. yes that's attachment, because you are going to be disappointed (laughs) for sure you are going to be disappointed.

C : What do you think is the connection between doing good and happiness?

S : I think doing good is really part of happiness because down deep if you feel that you are doing good you will be happy.

C : A distinction is often made, at least in western philosophy, between doing the right thing and doing the pleasurable thing...and one of the reasons I think that people are sometimes resistant to the concept of happiness is because they often connect it to doing the pleasurable thing rather than doing the right thing...

S : Yes! That's because the west has focused too much on a shallow and individual version of sensory happiness. Happiness is about understanding how connected we are and how temporary everything is...about sharing good times and sharing the pain...it's about giving...

C : (tentatively) it's relational?

S : It's all relational. It all depends on the particular conditions and connections.

C : Yes

S : If you do something to make another person happy it is likely that they will return the same kind of positive thing to you.

When the west talks about happiness it's individual sensory happiness, it's only one sense at a time but if you have two or three senses together...wow...you feel really high (laughs). But here actually, you know, like we said earlier, it's just doing mundane things... but sharing them with other people and being satisfied with them. If you get greedy you have to continue to be greedier and greedier to be happy- it never ends.

C : So there's an irony where you think that you are doing what you need to do to make you happy but actually what you are doing is keeping you stuck in a cycle?

S : Yes, we have the wrong path. We have the wrong path and that path is defined by our mind when we have no control over our mind. That is the case for 99.9% of the people.

C : And we are right back to the mindfulness again?

S : Yes!

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## Buddhist Text's True Author Identified as Thai Woman

Samanthi Dissanayake  
BBC News



*Khunying Yai Damrongthammasan was wealthy and extremely devout*

A little-known Thai woman has been identified by researchers as the most likely author of an important Buddhist treatise, previously attributed to a high-profile monk.

*Thammanuthamma-patipatti* is a set of dialogues, supposedly between two prominent Thai monks last century.

It had been attributed to one of them Venerable Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta.

But scholars believe it was really by a female devotee, making her one of the first Thai women to write such a text.



Printed in five parts between 1932-1934, initially without a named author, Thammamuthamma-patipatti (Practice in perfect conformity with the Dhamma) is viewed in Thailand as a valuable and profound Buddhist text which deals with Buddhism's different stages of awakening.

Dr Martin Seeger from the University of Leeds believes he has traced the authorship of the text to one Khunying Yai Damrongthammasan a wealthy and extremely devout woman who developed an impressive knowledge of Buddhist scriptures during her lifetime.

#### 'Profound text'

Ms Yai Damrongthammasan was born in 1886 to Thai nobility and grew up in Bangkok. Unlike most women in Thailand at the time, she was taught to read and write and, having studied with monks, she reportedly developed a sophisticated understanding of Buddhist doctrine.

After her husband died, she retired to a Buddhist monastery in southern Thailand where she meditated and studied scripture until her death in 1944.

"For those who know the text, it is very profound and significant and it has been reprinted many times," Dr Seeger says.

**She was quite rich and married to a well-known judge but it appears as if she was also a very humble person and not interested in promoting herself.**

Dr Martin Seeger  
University of Leeds

Dr Seeger, who was also ordained as a Buddhist monk in Thailand between 1997 and 2000, recalls how he owned the book when he was studying Buddhism.

At the time he did not even consider that it might have been by anybody other than the Venerable Luang Pu Mun - who is revered in Thailand and was a founder of the

Thai Forest Tradition revival movement.

But a friend of his insisted that something about the text did not add up: "When [my friend] said he heard that a woman may have written it, I became interested," Dr Seeger says. This interest intensified particularly as he had never heard of Ms Yai Damrongthammasan before.

With a grant from the British Academy, Dr Seeger set about investigating this thesis. The first clue came in a biography by her adopted son who was also ordained as a monk in which he said that the treatise had been written by her.

#### Wrongly attributed?

Dr Seeger interviewed people who had met Ms Yai Damrongthammasan and descendants of those who had known her. He researched biographies of various monks, cross-checking different sources until, he says, it became clear that she must have been the author of the book.

There are also several clues within the text which indicate that it was unlikely to have been written by a monk.

In fact, none of the most authoritative biographies of Luang Pu Mun ever claimed that he wrote it. He was only credited with authorship in later editions of the book, which featured pictures of him and another



Venerable Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta is revered in Thailand

monk on the cover. Dr Seeger thinks it unlikely that Ms Yai Damrongthammasan ever met Luang Pu Mun.

The monk died in 1949, a national figure, and the text appears to have been attributed to him after that.

Dr Seeger believes some followers of Luang Pu Mun may disagree with his findings. The Thai Forest Tradition movement has monasteries worldwide, including four in the UK.

But Justin McDaniel, associate professor of South-East Asian and religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania, says he does not think it is likely to provoke controversy.

"You have to understand that authorship in Thailand is never considered to be by just one person. This idea that a single person owns ideas is seen as a ridiculous notion," he said, adding that authorship is often seen as a composite.

He adds that the idea that Ms Yai Damrongthammasan produced the text is consistent with how women were viewed at the time.

**Women were seen as having the same capability when it came to Buddhist scholarship as men.**

Justin McDaniel,  
University of Pennsylvania

"At that time and in the present day, women were seen as having the same capability when it came to Buddhist scholarship as men, especially in the realms of meditation and scholarly study."

Indeed in 2006, of the top 100 scores in the highest level of Thailand's monastic exams, 97 were by women.

"I think it's actually a lot more common than people realise, that students of monks - and especially women who tend to focus more on scholarship - would be writing,"

Dr McDaniel says.

Humble but charismatic

Even though little direct evidence survives, stories about Ms Yai Damrongthammasan have been passed down generations from people who knew and met her - attesting, Dr Seeger says, to her charisma.

And her achievements, being able to read and write and her knowledge of canonical scripture, were very rare for a woman at that time. There was only one other woman who in 1928 wrote a similar text but she was a princess and Dr Seeger says it does not achieve the same level of profundity as this work.

"We have been looking for the original manuscript," he says, but much has been destroyed in the area where she lived out her last years.

However, Ms Yai Damrongthammasan never claimed authorship of the book and Dr Seeger says "the real reason that Khunying Yai decided to omit her name from the first edition might never be known".

He says there are several possibilities: people may have considered it inappropriate for a woman to discuss Buddhist doctrine at such a profound level at the time or she may have thought that Buddhist doctrine should be independent of an individual.

She may also have wanted to remain anonymous out of respect because of conversations that took place with a group of women who met regularly in the temple of Wat Sattanatpariwat to discuss Buddhism - but there is no evidence to confirm the dialogues are based on these.

Ms Yai Damrongthammasan's life story is striking: from wealthy wife to a reclusive life of meditation.

Her husband, a well-known judge, had been cremated at one of the most prestigious places in Bangkok, but her funeral was a simple affair that took place on a beach in southern Thailand.

"It appears as if she was also a very humble person and not interested in promoting herself," Dr Seeger says.

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# The Aim of “Engaged Buddhists” A Post 3/11 World

Hiroshi Nagai

*Zaikei Fukushi* - Magazine of the Association of Laborer's Pension Welfare  
January 2013

Amidst falling snow, a solitary Buddhist monk holds his left hand to his chest in prayer while chanting out loud. In his right hand, he holds a small bell with nothing on his feet but straw sandals. Around him are strewn the leftover wreckage of homes and automobiles.

This photo was widely circulated after it was taken on April 4, 2011 shortly after the tsunami in Northern Japan. The young monk, clad in the navy blue robes of the Rinzai Zen denomination, comes from Morioka City in Iwate Prefecture, and he struck this figure while praying for the peaceful rest of the souls of the victims of the great tsunami.

## “A Bird Cannot Fly with One Wing”

The occasion I had for seeing this memorable photo came during the one week recess of the Japanese National Diet, when I visited the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship in Yokohama for a international forum. An old friend of mine presented me an English language book with this photo as the cover. The book is entitled *This Precious Life*. Amidst the 12 party free-for-all leading up to the December national elections, I was able to shift to the discussions of this forum, and while looking over this book, think about which party I might cast my vote for.

The forum was entitled “The Wisdom of Interbeing and the Art of Happiness” and was a gathering of engaged Buddhists from around the world seeking for what contemporary society and a post 3/11 Japan should look like.

Engaged Buddhism in Japanese does not have a fixed translation, but it could be rendered “Buddhists participating in society” (shakai sankaku-suru bukkyo-to). These are Buddhists who are taking on various activities towards the resolution of various problems of humanity while basing themselves in Buddhist values.

The forum was the cooperative initiative of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) – a network based in Asia of members from over 20 countries – and the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB). The tsunami and nuclear disasters of 2011 have exposed the excessiveness of the ideology of economic centered development in contemporary society. Other Asian nations, which have promoted the same path, have been debating what lessons can be learned from the Japanese experience. Sulak Sivaraksa

is the founder of INEB as well as being an internationally known social critic, scholar, publisher, and social activist from Thailand. In his keynote speech, he explained that based on the Buddhist values of interdependence and impermanence in which all things exist in mutual relationship, life is not be lived as a spectator. Self and other, friend and enemy are fundamentally the same. Furthermore, in terms of the Fukushima nuclear tragedy, we should not take a stance of resignation as observers from the outside world.

According to Sivaraksa, scientific and economic progress is cut off from the spiritual growth of the inner self. Nevertheless, Japan has continued up to this time to be at the forefront of modernization in Asia, which prioritizes western values. The result has been the destruction of abundant nature and traditional culture as well as the ruin of the mind and body, which in the end has brought about the new specter of nuclear contamination. Using the metaphor of “a bird cannot fly with one wing”, Sivaraksa explained that through a process of deep reflection and reviving the fundamental Buddhist teachings of wisdom and compassion, Asians should discover what is the meaning of a truly happy society.

#### The Shedding of “Funeral Buddhism”

Most of us Japanese have basically no connection with Buddhist priests outside of funerals. If Buddhist priests and teachings, like those in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, are not rooted in daily living, then the issue of priests taking part in social problems never comes up. However, from this forum, I was able for the first time to become aware of the emergence of engaged Buddhists who also come from the Japanese Buddhist world, which has been ridiculed as “Funeral Buddhism”.

One of the forum’s panelists was Rev. Yoshiharu Tomatsu, the abbot of Shinko-in, a Jodo Pure Land temple in Tokyo, who has been active to confront the nuclear issue. In

December of 2011, as the acting Secretary General of the Japan Buddhist Federation, which is comprised of 104 denominations nationwide, Rev. Tomatsu was central in the adoption of a declaration that “called for a lifestyle without dependence on nuclear power.” The declaration makes the appeal that as Japan is the only country to have been victim of atomic bombing, it must develop a deep concern for not just the humans who are suffering from nuclear contamination but all the various “life” that has been threatened during this incident, as well as build “a society that respects each individual ‘life’”.

Rev. Tomatsu also pointed out the mistake of the Japanese Buddhist world forgetting its origins and cooperating with the militarism of the Pacific War era and how important it is to make an investigation of this reality so that this mistake is never repeated again. “We must work towards the greatest happiness, which aims for the realization of a lifestyle that is humble in the face of nature, knowledgeable of sufficiency, and rejecting of the present society that only increases suffering through excessive materialistic greed.” Rev. Tomatsu also explained about developing local communities that support co-existence and respect.

The new activities of the Japanese Buddhist world are not limited to this “anti-nuclear” declaration. Buddhist temples were used as emergency shelters for victims of the tsunami, offered prayers at the burials of victims of the disaster, and created places for children to stay and consider the problems of atomic energy together with adults. This Precious Life, which I received as a gift, was published with the aim of introducing to the rest of the world the activities of Japanese engaged Buddhists and to create greater solidarity for building societies that protect “life”.

This goes beyond just being a Buddhist follower and extends to what each of us might be able to do. Ven. Huimin Bhikshu, the Dean



of the Dharma Drum Buddhist College in Taiwan, introduced the poem by Kenji Miyazawa, “Not Losing to the Rain” (ame-ni-mo makezu). Miyazawa was a great lover of nature and agriculture, and express this spirit in this poem, especially in the concluding verse, “Such a person, I want to become”. Ven. Huimin, who lived in Japan as an exchange student, said, “Beginning with an individual who aspires to ‘such a person, I want to become’, we can proceed to include the entire society, which might say, ‘such people, we want to become’”.

Miyazawa does not use any political words in this poem. However, the verse, “Every day four bowls of brown rice, miso, and some vegetables to eat,” speaks of being content in one’s daily life; and the verses, “If there is a sick child to the east, going and nursing over them... if there is a quarrel or a suit to the north, telling them to leave off with such waste,” are practical activities which have not changed in meaning for our present 21st century. Humanity cannot survive without a lifestyle that understands sufficiency. How can we build a society that cares for the sick and the socially disadvantaged? How must we carry out our duties to confront making a peaceful society without war?

In the elections of the National Diet, each party has battled in developing policies around nuclear energy, economics and public finance, diplomatic relations and security, and education. However, all of these issues can be summed up in Miyazawa’s poem and the photograph that I introduced at the beginning of this article; that is “life”. It’s not clear whether the political parties are showing to the voters policies that get to the root of the issues or not. I’m not sure I can find a policy or a politicians that can achieve such a thing. As we greet the New Year, I think we will continue to repeat these questions.



## Call to Action on Climate Change, From the Faith Groups of the World



This statement has been prepared after a series of dialogues by faith leaders and faith-based participants at the 18th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Doha, Qatar (26 Nov to 7 December, 2012). Faith-based organisations and faith leaders met during the COP to share perspectives on nature and religion, on the impacts of climate change around the globe, and to elaborate a shared commitment and obligation to provide moral and ethical guidance to humans to safeguard us against this immense threat to peace and well-being.

Doha was a special occasion as it was the first time the UNFCCC COP had been held in the Middle East and in an Arab State. We were enriched by the contributions of Islamic scholars, social activists, scientists, traditional knowledge holders and engineers. The Doha meetings were characterised by a respect for our human diversity and a passion for the importance of saving the planet from our current path of over-consumption and placing profits ahead of good sense and sustainability of resource use.

In all our Faiths and Spiritual paths is the notion of being blessed with the abundance of life and at the same time recognising our responsibilities – the responsibility to God, our karmic obligations, our responsibility to one another (our ubuntu), our duty to other species and to the Earth. Those who believe that we can despoil the Earth without consequences are mistaken and our scriptures set out this point clearly.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a gathering point for our respective governments to own and understand the divine instructions and obligations on humanity to live within the means of the abundance that we have at our disposal. Whether you belong to an organised religion or not, we all understand the meaning of responsibility and mutual inter-dependence. The climate crisis, which we have created together, requires a joint ethical and effective response.

Religion and spirituality are the space where we have an opportunity to look honestly at ourselves and our relationships with others, including with the Divine. As faith leaders and organisations we must be at the forefront of challenging the current human behaviour which is wreaking havoc with the planet's climate and threatens to pitch us into centuries of conflict and suffering.

The urgency for addressing climate change requires our most profound vision and most unselfish action agenda at the levels of individuals, Faith communities and Spiritual peoples. We seek equitable outcomes that recognise we all inhabit the same planet, and that we all inherit the outcomes of the collective actions taken on our behalf by our communities and governments. It is time for individuals to act with consciousness, and use resources sustainably. Our planet is a home, not a commodity.

We the Faith-based leadership, organisations and networks call on our congregations and our political leaders to recognise the seriousness of the threat to the planet caused by man-made climate change. With all of the other challenges we face in life, it is incredible that we are choosing to destabilise the climate upon which all of our national economies, human health, food security and physical safety rely.

There is an African proverb which says: "Two men in a burning house must not stop to argue". We say to our political leaders

and to civil society that our house is burning and the United Nations negotiations are not dousing the flames as a wise person would do, but rather they have wasted the precious years of early warning, and the slow pace of negotiations is allowing the fire to spread, threatening the entire planet.

We call on State Parties, our national governments, to enter into dialogue with religious leaders about the impasse that we see at the UNFCCC. We need urgent and effective actions to protect the planet from the violent impacts of climate change, and to get there we need a new configuration to achieve a human pact to work with each other in a spirit of generosity and mutual respect. Our ethical duty to value what we have, and to enhance social justice and respect for the other sentient life forms on Earth have to be prioritised to deal with this spiralling crisis.

We call on the United Nations General Secretary and the Executive Secretary of the UN Environment Programme:

- to meet with religious leaders and spiritual leaders of indigenous peoples to discuss the impasse of the UNFCCC negotiations and the urgent need for a global mobilisation to protect the planet from climate change;
- to meet with leading governments from the North and the South, from the Developed, Developing and Least Developed Countries to develop fresh political momentum to establish robust and binding emission levels for Annex 1 and non-Annex 1 countries;

Further we call on UNFCCC Negotiators to

1. Agree on a robust, binding Second Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol, the only legally binding instrument available for setting clear targets for Greenhouse Gases Emissions agreement. This should embrace a strong and binding review of Annex 1 targets for emissions cuts, introduce a mechanism for emissions ceilings for non-Annex 1 countries with provisions required to assist Least Developed Countries;

2. Work with civil society to transform the UNFCCC into a broader global platform where Major Groups and Stakeholders have a similar presence and right of participation as under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity;

3. Increase safeguards for vulnerable communities, including adhering to existing UN standards on human rights, women's rights, rights of the child and the rights of indigenous peoples;

4. Create a platform for faith-based relief and emergency aid agencies to share their experience with regards to human and ecosystem vulnerability and resilience, and adopt a programme of work on adaptation which focusses on public participation and a platform for faith-institutions to assist with public education, prevention interventions, and support to rural communities ...

5. Ensure a public reporting system with the United Nations on human rights violations related to climate related impacts and vulnerability. Create a system where political leaders responsible for accelerating climate change can be held liable for the violation of fundamental human rights, and impacted communities may provide feed-back and demand compensation due to climate-based loss and damage.

6. Adopt a policy framework on food sovereignty so as to protect diverse sources of nutrition, including pastoralism, wild food gathering, small scale farming and artisanal fishing. Adaptation needs to take into account and learn from traditional knowledge and institutional systems, including good governance and local custodians need to be legally empowered to protect precious natural resources.

7. Ensure that the emerging text on Loss and Damage takes into consideration the needs of the poorest communities. Loss & Damage need to address the rights of communities to protect local genetic diversity and ecosystem integrity.

8. Prioritise climate change finance, where developed countries must mobilise resources to meet their \$100 billion per annum by 2020 commitment, and should commit immediate funding to the Green Climate fund to support developing countries to reduce emissions and deal with the impacts of climate change. Those who have polluted the global atmosphere must be held responsible for repaying this debt to the planet, while the newly emerging economies must take an equitable share of responsibility for their current emissions and the future impacts of those emissions, according to the common but differentiated responsibility principle.

We the Faith organisations and leadership will lead by our actions and with our scriptures; We pledge to:

a) Co-operate with governments and civil society to improve communications, provide public education, mediate conflicts and promote disaster risk reduction and early warning systems;

b) Take responsibility as individuals, faith communities and institutions to act responsibly towards nature and the abundance of the Creator, to bring about changes in the construction and energy sources of our places of worship to demonstrate the importance of emission reductions.

c) Educate the clergy and our lay congregations about the causes of climate change, the threats to biodiversity, and to bring about change at community level;

d) Emphasise the importance of a stable climate and conservation of natural resources in our religious and spiritual teachings.

e) Support and encourage climate change mitigation and adaptation actions at the individual, village and community levels, with an emphasis on rediscovering the intrinsic value of being with nature, valuing biodiversity and promoting cooperation to defend our natural heritage;

f) We recognise that faith leaders

need to role models for cooperation and generosity. We commit to working with all faiths, respectfully and in our shared humanity to bring our wisdom and teachings into this crisis that all may benefit, and all may enjoy comfort and safety.

Some selected quotations:

“Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind: Yet most men understand not.” (Qur’an 40:57)

“But waste not by excess for God loveth not the wasters” (Qur’an 6:141)

In one hadith, the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) says to us:

“If the Hour (of Judgement Day) is imminent and anyone of you has a palm shoot (to plant) in his hand and is able to plant it before the Hour strikes, then he should do so and he will be rewarded for that action.”

“It is He who has appointed you guardians in the earth” (Qur’an 6:165)

“May there be rains at the right season. May there be a plentiful harvest. May the people be happy. May the rulers govern with righteousness.” (Theravada Buddhism)

“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Holy Bible Genesis 2:7)

*“Heavenly Father,  
Through your Eternal word all of creation  
came into existence,  
And is held in being by your Holy Spirit.  
In the live we lead and the choices we make,  
Help us to be mindful of the impact upon your  
world and its people,  
Near and far, now and in future generation, so  
we may be faithful stewards of all that you  
have entrusted to us,  
Until that time when all things are recon-  
ciled to you.”*

*(His Grace, Archbishop Thabo Makgabo,  
Anglican Church of Southern Africa)*

*“Set me, O Earth, amidst the nourishing*

*strength*

*That emanates from the body.*

*The Earth is my mother, her child am I;*

*Infinite space is my father,*

*May he fill us with plenty.*

*Peaceful, sweet-smelling, gracious Earth.*

*Whatever I dig from thee, O Earth,*

*May that have quick growth again,*

*May we not injure your vitals or your hearts.*

*Full of sweetness are the plants and full of  
sweetness these my words”>*

*(Hymn to the Earth – Atharva Veda Book XII)*

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (The Bible, Mathew 5:5)

“It is not too late. God’s world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children’s future. Let that generation start now”. (Pope John Paul II, Venice, 2002)

“Her [wisdom] ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths, peaceful. She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds onto her is happy” (Proverbs 3:17-18)

“Righteous people of good deeds are aghast at any wanton waste, and do all in their power to stop it, [while] the wicked are not thus; they delight in destroying the world even as they destroy themselves”. (Sefer Ha Chinuch 530)

“All that is around us is nothing but God. He is standing before all of us all the time ... it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, who appears in everything animate and inanimate” (Hindu scholar, Vinoba Bhave, commenting on the Bhagavad Gita)

“It is such a surprising thing. Nature is constantly giving the teaching, yet no one goes to the nature to receive them”. (Gurumayi Chidvilasananda).

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## In Dawei, Activists and Residents Find Their Voice

Marcus Rhineland

18 February 2013 / *The Myanmar Times*

SEM began engaging in Myanmar over 16 years ago, through the vision and commitment of Pracha Hutanawatr and Jane Rasbash. Together, they initiated the Grassroots Leadership Training (GLT), a three month transformative educational course for grassroots community development workers and religious leaders from both ethnic minority groups and the Sangha. Many of Myanmar's social that have become key facilitators of sustainable and empowering community-led development across the country, have their roots in the GLT.

Implicit in SEM's work was their role as an organisation to also embody the values of empowerment and sustainability, by acting as an incubator for empowering local staff to take forward the GLT and programme activities independently. This gradual process came to fruition in January this year, with the local team, GSMI, becoming an independent organisation and continuing the GLT programme.

With the changing dynamics of the country's political situation, and its impacts on Myanmar society, the original programme activities and intent have diversified, exploring opportunities and adapting to the changing political, social and economic landscape. Space is opening for a more vocal and critical civil society, who are exercising their rights to be legitimate stakeholders in determining the development path of the country. GSMI are also negotiating this space, collaborating with grassroots communities, social activists and

organisations, to explore together how best to ensure that people are able to participate together in effecting sustainable social change. The Green Bike movement is one such collaborative initiative, bringing together urban youth and activists to explore the interconnections of wider sustainability issues with personal values and practices.

Below is an excerpt from Marcus Rhineland at *The Myanmar Times*, who joined in one of the Green Bike movement activities to the proposed SEZ in Dawei.

A dozen dusty riders cycle past a sign reading KM 0+000 just after noon on January 31, ending a 400-mile, seven-day trip from Yangon to the site of a proposed special economic zone in Dawei, Tanintharyi Region.

The Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is slated to be the largest industrial project in Southeast Asia, with an initial investment of US\$8.2 billion. Myanmar and Thailand signed agreements to build the deepwater port and industrial complex at Dawei in 2008 and 2010 and work on access roads to the site started in 2011. Thailand hopes to benefit by converting itself into the "transport hub" of Southeast Asia, with high speed and freight rail links to China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia meshing with the proposed rail link to Dawei.

The project has attracted significant support from leaders of both countries. It also comes at a time when Myanmar is trying to attract greater foreign investment, particularly in manufacturing. But the political reforms



*U Aw Ba Tha explains the Dawei Special Economic Zone project to residents of Ma Yin Gyi. (Marcus Rhinelander/The Myanmar Times)*

that have accompanied the recent economic liberalisation have released pent-up frustration over the project and allowed activists and residents to raise their voices in protest.

Green Bike is a Yangon-based cycling group dedicated to promoting bicycles as a healthy and sustainable mode of transportation. The group left Yangon in the pre-dawn darkness of January 25: a dozen riders ranging from a former Air Force cycling champion to a 14-year-old student. Over the next week, they were welcomed at villages along the way by youth organisations holding signs and flowers, slept in monasteries and churches, and passed out literature about the benefits of cycling and the importance of sustainable development. On January 31, they arrived at Kilometer 0+000.

The group's "green" orientation extends beyond the bikes to other environmental and social issues. The trip to Dawei was planned in part to raise awareness about the economic zone. "When I reached here and I listened to the villagers, it seems they're really worried about relocation: they worry about their livelihoods ... they worry about their lives," said ride organiser Ko Thet Nai.

The night after their arrival at the SEZ, the Green Bike group slept at a monastery in Ma Yin Gyi village as guests of the head

monk, U Aw Ba Tha. The monk is one of the founding members of the Dawei Development Association (DDA), a grassroots activist group focused on sustainable development and property rights in the area. The Dawei SEZ is one of the group's core concerns, and Ma Yin Gyi is in the epicentre of the massive project.

More than 32,000 people live in the 204 square kilometres of the proposed development. Almost 4000 families in 21 villages face relocation from the port and industrial area.

"I have no hope to get anything from the company. My eyes fill with tears when I think of the future of this village," the monk said in the monastery's main hall. It is a view echoed by everyone I spoke to in the affected area.

Monks are at the forefront of the fight against the project. "If these monks did not stand with the people, all this would not be possible. ... The government, once they've see the money, they don't care," Ko Thet Nai said.

U Su Kyi Tha, a monk from a nearby village monastery, added: "We don't want compensation because the companies just take the land and give money. But villagers have no experience with money. They know how to grow crops but not [manage] money.



*Members of Green Bike on the road between Yangon and Dawei. (Marcus Rhinelandt/The Myanmar Times)*



*Members of Green Bike hand out leaflets to villagers during their ride from Yangon to Dawei. Photo: Marcus Rhinelandt*

To force farmers to work in factories is not positive development.”

The next day, in the village of Mu Do, the bike group stopped at a roadside teashop for a break. Mu Do is the first village scheduled for relocation – residents will have to leave next month – and the people we met were angry. U Thin Ladd, a villager and former military officer, was adamant that they would be worse off under the relocation plan. “The new houses are not good quality, not fit for human settlement. It’s not the way to run a democratic country, not listening to the people’s decisions,” he said. “The companies work with the government – they don’t care about the people. They think the people here are uneducated, so they can do what they want.”

His friend, U Aung Myint, broke in, adding: “In the new relocation site, there are no jobs! We are not sure what to do. Now we have crops. After we move – no land, no jobs. ... They give only one house per family. But we have extended families! Now there are 576 houses in the village, but we’re only going to get 343 houses. How can we manage?”

“The company said that we could get jobs on the construction. But we applied more than a month ago and have heard nothing.

People from away get jobs, but locals don’t. They’re always asking for money to get jobs - there is corruption everywhere!”

This sort of outspokenness, unthinkable only a few years ago, is common inside the proposed SEZ. Most of the ire is aimed at the company in charge of the project, Italian-Thai Development, the largest construction company in Thailand.

Ko Ley Lwin from Ya Laing village is also a member of DDA and outspoken in his opposition to the project. He said the country’s recent moves towards democracy had been critical for enabling residents to speak out. “After the changes, we have a small chance to speak, a small chance to organise, a small chance to move for our rights. I want to say thank you for our government.” But for many villagers from the Dawei area “there is still a little fear, they have had bad experiences in the past under the old government.” And in the future? “I want to say that our villagers and our people are united. Unity is the strongest. If we have unity, we can decide our life and future ... Me? I will stay here until my last breath.”

Ten kilometres north of the SEZ, in a narrow canyon of black rock, a concrete survey marker by the side of the road shows

the proposed location of a dam that would supply water to the zone. Above it, neatly written in white paint, a message reads “NO DAM.”

The idyllic valley of Kah Lone Htar is an example of the conflict between large-scale industrial development and the “sustainable development” advocated by many residents and civil society activists. The village of Kah Lone Htar is technically outside the zone and its compensation mechanism but it would be completely submerged by a reservoir supplying water to the industrial zone, and its residents appear united - and organised - in their opposition. As in Ma Yin Gyi, the opposition movement has been led by the village’s most senior monk, U Pyin Nyar Wun Tha.

“The community thinks that if they move, they’ll face problems, so they have to protest. We agreed not to sign the agreements because we have to protect our village. Just like we’d protect our nation,” U Pyin Nyar Wun Tha said. “The village has four committees; together we organise to educate the villagers about the problems we’re facing. To do this is approved by Buddhist teachings. Some people say that this is not a proper role for monks. But the Buddha says that we have to benefit the society. I have to work according to the Buddha’s teachings.”

Asked whether the village should be sacrificed for the success of the project, he replied: “Some people say, ‘The project can generate much profit. This means that we must move one village.’ I know that many big projects have few benefits for the local communities. ... But this village is very self-sufficient, with enough money from our plantations, fields and gardens: we don’t need anything from the company. Businessmen see only their own profits.

Recent reports indicate that the Myanmar government wants to reduce the size of the zone from 204 square kilometers to 150. This downsizing, however, is unlikely to satisfy the villagers who would still have to

relocate. A planned 3600-megawatt coal-fired power plant at the site was cancelled after opposition from environmental groups but a huge 1040-megawatt hydropower dam on the pristine Tanintharyi River could be build instead, with significant consequences for the region’s biodiversity and fishing industry.

Just a few miles from where the ride ended in Dawei, Green Bike organiser Ko Thet Nai relaxed on Maungmakan beach. “We used to live here in a traditional way; our environment and our people were very harmonious and sustainable. But when we follow ‘modernisation’, a lot of problems happen because people don’t care about our cultural values, people don’t care about our local wisdom, they just blindly follow modernity. Which is really, really dangerous for us,” he said.

“As for the emphasis on big industrial zones, maybe it can be a benefit for the short term; it cannot be a benefit for the long term. And then we can see who will win. For me, when I came here and talked to the villagers, definitely the villagers lose.”

Despite the scale of the Dawei project and its apparent high-level support, he is guardedly optimistic. “I foresee the civil society here is strong enough to fight against whatever they want and for whatever they want.”

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## Ecological suffering: From a Buddhist perspective

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The starting points of this talk are drawn from *The Wisdom of Sustainability* and the Conference Overview of the Inter-Religious Dialogue on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation. And I will alternate between these two points, which also structure my talk. The Inter-Religious Dialogue was held in Sri Lanka in September 2012, at the Islander Center. It was organized by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), the Sewalanka Foundation, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Sri Lanka National Office, and Commission on Environmental Economic and Social Policy (CEESP).

The concept of the conference grew out of recommendations at the INEB biennial conference in 2009. At this conference faith leaders, environmental and climate scientists, conservationists, and social activists from all over the world gathered to collaboratively explore the scientific foundations of climate change and biodiversity loss, its social, political, and economic drivers, the impacts of climate change on human societies and the environment, and the underlying human behaviors which contribute to climate change (Conference Overview, p.1).

The conference used three levels of engagement to frame the creation of actions by the participants. Through Micro-level (faith traditions, community action), Macro-level (policies, global influence), and Paradigm change (all levels of society), the participants of the conference created a roadmap for action based on six thematic areas: 1) Education; 2) Advocacy; 3) Personal change and eco-ethics; 4) Religious institutional change and eco-ethics; 5) Community change and modeling, and 6) Institutionalization of the network. In order to realize the roadmap for

action, the participants set up the Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology Network (ICE Network) to further commit to the action model. The ICE Network will function as a media platform which will facilitate and support the six thematic areas. The role of coordinating and following up these plans is filled by INEB. I will return to these key points toward the end of this talk.

In *The Wisdom of Sustainability*, I develop and elaborate on the work of E.F Schumacher and his ideas on Buddhist economics. By addressing the areas of Siamese history, peace-building, good governance, human security, sustainability, systemic violence, and the role of Buddhism in a world of change, I discuss alternatives to the mainstream development strategies and ways of being in our world. In a nutshell, I envision an updating of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Dhammic Socialism as a solution to the multiple crises in the present world. I concur with Ken Jones's idea of Dhammic modernity.

One of the main problems regarding ecological suffering is that it is a problem that has not been taken seriously by our political leaders or even by the people in general. Knowledge of the impending ecological catastrophe does not automatically or necessarily contribute to heightened political engagement. There are many reasons for this, including what is called "catastrophe fatigue" (i.e., the sense that catastrophe is expected and even normal), the feeling of impotence and cynicism, the failure to come up with adequate solutions, the lack of political will, etc. We have to stop doing things that compound these problems. We have to be more mindful in our actions. For politicians, environmental concern is often on the agenda, but more as a point of charity, and solutions so far have been 'band-

aid' like, only temporary fixes to let the burden off their shoulders while structurally changing nothing. Proposed solutions have minimal impacts while the ecological problem is a maximal one. Also, we don't have a proper institution that deals with the global environmental problems. We cannot rely on organizations such as the UN, where member countries have yet to endorse alternatives to neoliberal capitalism, where no great profits can be made from environmental issues and therefore they are not prioritized. This is why hope lies in the hands of smaller movements that can influence and spread actions, from a bottom-up approach at the local and regional levels. Breaks with the dogma of free market capitalism can also be seen at the local or regional level—for instance in Ladakh or in various parts of Latin America. But ultimately to solve the problem we must not forget that a new internationalism is badly needed. Local, regional or national institutions must serve as platforms that support this internationalism.

In *The Wisdom of Sustainability* (p. 23) I suggest that in the process of creating a culture of peace, we should apply the Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering exists.
2. Suffering has causes.
3. We can stop (re)producing the causes of suffering.
4. A path of living mindfully can show us the way.

By applying these four truths to situations of conflict we can acknowledge the problem, find the root causes, and prevent unwanted consequences through mindful living-mindful of our actions, our environment, our brothers and sisters, and of our neighbors. What are the causes of ecological suffering? How can we stop or uproot them? To what extent are we part of the problem? To what extent are we reproducing ecological suffering through our way of life, political economy, etc.? To be mindful means to always insert ourselves in the big picture. To be mindful also entails critical thinking (including critical self-reflection) so that our actions will also be critical or mindful. We should desist from uncritical actions that reproduce ecological

suffering. For instance, to what extent are our acts of resistance complicit in reproducing ecological suffering? To what extent is ethical consumption-buying organic food, green products, etc.—really a critical action that will help end ecological suffering? Is it really possible?

Next, the destructive patterns of consumerism need to be addressed. The 'American Way of Life' is the problem. At the session on Eco-systems, Energy and Disasters, the urgent need to take mitigation and adaptation actions to support vulnerable communities dealing with impacts occurring today and in the projected future was highlighted. The example of the Himalayas, which is most sensitive to climate change because of the high altitude, was given. This encouraged joint responses from neighboring countries because of the important interconnections between the Himalaya, the plains, and the coastal areas of Asia.

There is a need to move beyond, not behind, representative democracy. More direct forms of democracy are needed. Representative democracy reduces the people to "the represented." The people need to reclaim their sovereignty; they can be much more than merely "the represented," or consumers choosing political parties during elections.

We also need to find alternatives to the capitalist system. So far ideological alternatives to neoliberalism have not been seriously explored, with a few exceptions such as the concept of Gross National Happiness as advocated by Bhutan. As for collective transformation, we can turn to the alternative models provided by Ladakh and Kerala in India. At the national level, we can look at the Bolivarian revolutions in Latin America. But virtually all major states in Asia or the Global South are capitalist in one way or another. The basic idea is that if one is concerned about the environment, one must find alternatives to capitalism, one must talk about a new political economy. A more simple way of living may also be necessary to help avert the ecological catastrophe. It's high time for Buddhist economics.

Lastly, we must move beyond discussion,

into action (2012, p.31). This is of course crucial but with a small reminder that without critical thinking or mindfulness, action becomes uncritical and changes nothing. This is not about the opposition between on one side thinking and talking and on the other side acting. The point is not about getting things done, but doing them meaningfully.

It is here that religious and inter-religious actions can come to play a direct role. Through personal commitment to lower carbon emissions and lead a simpler life and by harmonizing Self and Nature, people can be mindful of their impacts on environment and be part of change. The next point is to strengthen relationships between climate change actors for long-term partnerships in action and solidarity. This can contribute greatly to the transformation towards a more sustainable culture among people if it is implemented.

Religious institutions can reduce their negative environmental impacts and set a good example for surrounding communities, for example through the use of clean energy and creation of green spaces. In particular, the linking of religious institutions across faiths can facilitate common ethics and practices regarding environmental change; for instance, the integration of climate change and biodiversity loss into religious teachings.

Things that can be done include the establishment of eco-villages, organic and ecological small scale farming, artisanal fisheries, local ecosystem conservation, urban gardening, food security projects, indigenous knowledge system support and community forestry. These things are already being practiced in many places worldwide; through greater connections we can be inspired by one another.

In conclusion, our world needs to be healed, everywhere, at every level. Our knowledge of what is to be done is always imperfect. We know that we need spiritual dimension as well as scientific and technological know-how. As flawed individuals, it is something difficult to succeed. At the same time, it is something that we cannot refuse to do. Buddhism teaches us that the process of healing our self must go hand in hand with making our planet

a more livable place for generations to come. The problems that the world is facing are immense. Buddhists must not shy away from offering maximal solutions to these problems in order to make Buddhism relevant for the 21st century.

*Lecture at the International Buddhist-Christian Conference, Union Theological Seminary, New York. April 20, 2013*

*Please refer to INEB's facebook for the full text.*

*<https://www.facebook.com/INEB.BuddhistNetwork>*

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## Siamese Society from the Perspective of Its Tenth Intellectual

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### I

I don't know the exact origin of the word 'intellectual'. All I know is that several individuals have labeled me as an intellectual. For instance, Saichon Sattayanurak examines the thoughts of ten leading Siamese intellectuals from past to present in her research funded by the Thailand Research Fund. I happened to be the tenth on her list, and the only one who is still living. Allow me then the liberty to unashamedly use this number in the title of today's speech, and please bear in mind that I am not implying anything about the Tenth Reign.

Apparently, the Thai word 'panyachon' was derived from the English word 'intellectual'. On the definition of 'intellectual', T.R. Fyvel put it well in the book *Intellectuals Today* (Chattos Windus, 1968): which word not be repeated here. There is also the word 'intelligentsia' which related to 'intellectual'. Here I will rely on Isaiah Berlin's "The Role of the Intelligentsia" (*The Listener*, 2 May 1968).

Based on Berlin's account, the term was first used approximately 100 years ago in Russia. Those who called themselves 'intelligentsiya' (derived from 'intelligenza' in Italian) were a minority group. They were exposed to Western culture and know-how and were proficient in foreign languages. They also felt excluded by or alienated from the masses. As a result, they often felt like foreigners in their own country. Some of them felt a sense of noblesse oblige toward their (seemingly) less cultivated, fortunate and modern compatriots. They gradually organized into many groups and deemed that it was their responsibility to express ideas and views freely in public in various forms in order to aid the masses. This was happening against the backdrop of a reactionary Russian regime that opposed any kind of reformism, not to say egalitarianism.

From Berlin's account we can say that an expression of disagreement or opposition—whether right or wrong—does not automatically make a person an intelligentsia. Any disagreement must also be prescriptive and based on reason. It must aim for progress not disaster and must be based on good intentions, not spitefulness, egoism or personal aggrandizement. In other words, the intelligentsia is different from the cynic. The latter makes criticism by and large in order to appear smarter than others and has nothing really constructive to offer. The cynic takes great joy in knowing what is wrong, but does not really care about correcting it. The cynic only gazes backward and has no hope for the future.

There are many cynics in Siamese society but little if any intelligentsia. Small wonder that Herbert Phillips argued that there were only literati in Siamese society; that is, those who at best sought to reclaim the country's glorious past without the ability to think about constructing a different future (see "The Culture of Siamese Intellectuals" in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society: Homage to Lauriston Sharp*, eds. Skinner and Kirsch). However, if we study the past carefully we will see that at the time of the intelligentsia's birth in Russia, a similar event also took place in Siam. In 1884, Siamese

officials in England and France requested King Chulalongkorn to embark on political reforms and transform the kingdom into a constitutional monarchy (commonly known as the Incident of Rattanakosin Era 103).

Based on Fyvel's definition above, we can argue that the individuals who made this request were the country's first generation of "technical intelligentsia." However, absolutism ultimately co-opted all of these individuals. The only exception was Prince Prisdang who fled the kingdom and became ordained as monk in Sri Lanka. He returned to Siam during the Sixth Reign, but the ruling elites treated him as *persona non grata*.

We can also say that Tianwan and K.S.R. Kularb were Siamese intellectuals during the Fifth Reign. Both were oppressed by the Siamese government, and the ruling elites turned a deaf ear to their pleas and constructive criticisms.

## II

The name "Siam" came into official use in the beginning of the Fourth Reign, which was a time of great change the most significant one being the opening of the kingdom to Western influence and extra-territorial rights. Although nominally independent and sovereign, Siam was practically a pseudo-colony of Britain.

Although King Mongkut was a highly capable monarch, his aptitude for ruling has often been over-exaggerated. The successes and failures resulting from the kingdom's opening to the West must be taken into full consideration when examining the Fourth Reign. The decision to open the country would not have been possible without the support of the principal adviser to the king who was the head of the powerful Bunnag clan (Dit Bunnag); the latter was also instrumental in engineering Mongkut's ascension to the throne. The king himself conceded this point saying, "I made a rule that if I want to do anything. First of all I must seek advice from the powers that be. If they agree with my proposal, I will then carry it out. I will never do anything against their advice." (Quoted in Neon Snidvongse, "The Development of Siam's Relations with Britain and France in



the Reign of King Mongkut 1815-1868", Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1960)

Moreover, Sri Suriyawong (Chuang Bunnag) became the right-hand man of King Mongkut toward the end of the Fourth Reign. He also served as Regent during the early years of the Fifth Reign. Sri Suriyawong told Townsend Harris, the American envoy to Siam, thus: Kings who claim the superior birth rights often forget that they themselves came from the commoners. Once they feel above there and neglect to listen to the voice of the suffering hour, the dynasty often does not last more than four reigns."

(From Journal of Townsend Harris, ed. Consenza, New York, 1930)

Whether or not King Mongkut felt troubled and uneasy because he did not possess decisive power cannot be proven. He did find plenty of time to produce 88 royal children during his relatively short reign (after 27 years of celibacy in the monkhood). From a Buddhist perspective, did he choose to express royal or sovereign power in private, sexual matters instead? That is, channeling hatred (*dosacarita*) into lustfulness (*ragacarita*)? He often punished wives or concubines who went against his will harshly-even brutally. The disturbing story of Tubtim as told by Anna Leonowens is well-known.

Lustfulness was thus King Mongkut's main shortcoming (a flaw inherited by his immediate successor). As a teacher, however, he was a genius. He produced many brilliant disciples, both lay and ordained. For instance, one of his lay disciples published the book *Kitchanukit*, which was intended for the instruction of the young and which expressed a worldview that transcended the outdated Buddhist cosmogony expressed in the *Three Worlds of King Ruang*. Henry Alabaster captured well this achievement in *The Wheel of the Law: Modern Thai Buddhism* (1871)- a book which helped to spread Buddhism to foreign lands.

King Mongkut founded the Dhammayuttika Order as a reform movement when he was a monk. He aimed to enhance monastic discipline and purge superstitious and non-

Buddhist elements from the religion. He emphasized rationalism in Buddhism, treating it as on the same level as modern scientific thought, thereby counter-acting the prejudices of many missionaries. This however had the unintended consequence of robbing faith and spirituality from Buddhism. Put another way, Buddhism in the kingdom became corrupted from within.

When one of his sons began to reorganize Sangha education during the Fifth Reign and absolutely controlling the Sangha institution in the Sixth Reign, the study of the Scriptures was emphasized at the expense of contemplation and meditation practice. In other words, Sangha education was deprived of mental training. When Buddhist education became patterned like lay education, there was a disconnection between head and heart. Virtue was downplayed. With the neglect of the supramundane or transcendental, the main objective of Buddhist education for monks became nothing more than climbing up the ecclesiastical order. The Sangha began to weaken. As such the Wheel of Dhamma, epitomized by the Sangha, became increasingly impotent against and therefore could not counterbalance the Wheel of State. Even though King Mongkut felt that he was more knowledgeable than most monks, he still felt it prudent to heed the warnings of the brilliant Somdej Toh of Wat Rakang. Here he was following a best practice tradition: all of the previous kings of the Chakkri Dynasty had great monks who acted as their moral conscience.

In the Fifth Reign, however, the Wheel of Dhamma was deliberately placed beneath the Wheel of State as witnessed by the Sangha Administration Act R.E. (Rattanakosin Era) 121 or 1910 of the Common Era. Not only did the king exert absolute control over the Sangha he also maneuvered to overpower various officials and families that had provided vital support to the monarchy between the Third Reign and the early years of the Fifth Reign. He even abolished the title of the Vice Roy. With the passing of Sri Suriyawong, King Chulalongkorn became the country's first truly absolute monarch.

Here, King Chulalongkorn was emulating the absolutism in Europe, especially Russia and Prussia. Unfortunately, he did not realize that absolutism was entering its twilight globally; and that not long after his reign it would be gone. The king also thought highly of England. But he couldn't see that the monarchy there was essentially an important symbol-with actual power lying in the government and parliament.

It seemed that King Chulalongkorn received precious little knowledge of economics, politics and administration during his two trips to Europe in 1897 and 1907. He tried to befriend several European monarchs, and assumed that he was their equal. He did not question British colonialism in India and Burma. He did not see imperialism and colonialism as a wrong that needed to be corrected. Rather, he felt that the ruling elites in, for instance, India and Burma were too ignorant and backward. Therefore, being colonized was the inevitable price they had to pay. The important lesson the king learned was thus: to maintain Siam's independence, the country must produce 'modernizing' elites and it must be (selectively) reformed along Western lines.

The king made it clear that his sons would be educated abroad. Likewise, the eldest sons of his younger brothers would also be granted this privilege. He believed that they would help preserve absolutism in the kingdom as well as its independence. Additionally, the king also sent a small number of commoners to study abroad. Interestingly, Mr. Scott, an Englishman and long-time resident of Siam, commented to Prince Damrong Rajanubhab while the latter was in exile in Penang that King Chulalongkorn was a great monarch who benefited Siam in numerous ways with the exception of sending Thais to study abroad, especially when they were too young. For Scott this was a major blunder because these Thai students were uprooted from their culture. Ultimately, they were proud of being like farangs rather than Siamese.

Let's look at a concrete example. During the Fifth Reign, Bangkok greatly expanded beyond the Rattanakosin isle. On

the Suan Dusit side, we could witness Siam's civilized status, which in practice meant copying farangs. The consecrated hall of the latest Buddhist temple was constructed with marble and foreign materials. And so was the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Needless to say, the king's palaces and those of his wives and sons were constructed in Western style. To paraphrase a Latin saying, when Augustus became emperor Rome was a city of clay. When he passed away, it was made of marble.

## IV

In its first announcement, the People's Party stated six major principles.

1) Must maintain securely the independence of the country in all forms, including political, judicial, economic, etc.;

2) Must maintain public safety within the country and greatly reduce crime;

3) Must improve the economic well-being of the people by the new government finding employment for all, and drawing up a national economic plan, not leaving the people to go hungry;

4) Must provide the people with equal rights (so that those of royal blood do not have more rights than the people as at present)

5) Must provide the people with liberty and freedom, as far as this does not conflict with the above four principles;

6) Must provide the people with full education.

More than eight decades have passed since the declaration of these principles. To what extent have they been achieved? Have we moved forward or backward in any of these principles?

1. On political and judicial independence, the People's Party successfully brought an end to extraterritoriality and treaty constraints that hindered the country's legal autonomy in 1938. According to the "24 June National Day" song, which was popular at the time, the revolution was a great event that marked the advent of modern constitutional democracy in the country. Thai people now have freedom and rights along with happiness because the country has achieved full independence.

Today, can we really claim to have full independence? Or are we nominally sovereign but our national policies have been circumscribed and dictated by the American and Chinese empires-along with transnational corporations and global Capital?

The 1932 Revolution declared all Thai citizens equal before the law. Subsequently, the Thai court tried its best to uphold the principle of justice, fearing that the 'civilized' world would intervene to impose constraints on the country's legal system. In other words, the court was very trustworthy and respectable. This trend continued even during the early phases of military dictatorship in the country. However, things began to change for the worse after the mysterious death of King Rama VIII. As I put it in my oral closing statement on the case of lese majeste on 3 April 1995:

When King Rama VIII was found dead in his royal chamber, the government created fake witnesses and three innocent people were sentenced to death although the case was appealed to the Supreme Court. Later on one of the main witnesses, Mr. Tee Srisuwan, became a monk and confessed that he gave a fake statement that condemned the three victims to death....Likewise, there are clearly fake witnesses in the case against me this time. This shows that there has been little improvement in the credibility of the Royal Thai Police since the time of Police General Phao Sriyanon.

At present, it also seems that the Thai court has not fully appreciated Pridi Banomyong's vital role in ending extraterritoriality and reclaiming legal autonomy in Siam. In a recent interview on a public television channel the Supreme Court spokesperson merely gave credits to Kings Rama V, VI, and VII. He did not find it fit to mention the name of the commoner Pridi. Is this a bad case of ingratitude?

At least the present Chief Justice of the Criminal Court recognizes that the BE 2550 Constitution is flawed in large part because it forces the Supreme Court to be an actor in the country's political conflicts. In other words, this undermines the court's

image as an impartial or politically neutral institution. This shows that the Chief Justice of the Criminal Court possesses a modicum of ethical courage and is willing to speak the truth to power. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of most of the judges in the system. If the court's independence and impartiality cannot be restored and if most of the judges in the system don't have loving-kindness and are unjust, then there's little hope for progress in Thai society.

2. At present, there is less security in Siam than 80 years ago in large part because of inefficient bureaucracy and police corruption and abuse. The police have become a state within a state, for instance. The mainstream mass media disseminate hatred, lustfulness, greed, and ignorance in various forms. The education system has not performed any better in this matter. And since the time of Sarit Thanarat, absolutism has returned in different guises.

3. Needless to say, economically the country is a failure. It has failed to secure the well-being of the people. It has betrayed the great cause to reform or even move beyond capitalism as envisioned in Pridi's Outline Economic Plan of 1933. As such, any attempt to overcome poverty these days must be treated as a kind of dangerous lie.

First in the name of 'modernization' and then 'development' and 'globalization', we have destroyed local communities and traditional ways of life. We have exploited rural people and uprooted them from their simple way of life, which was rooted in Buddhism.

4. Equality is important for democracy. The Buddha created the Sangha as a community of equals. Absolutism destroyed equality in spirit and in practice. Furthermore, the modern education system and the mainstream mass media make social inequality appear as natural or even desirable.

5. There will be meaningful freedom when there's courage to challenge the sacred and magical, including absolutism in different guises. People must have ethical courage. We must continue to fight for the Truth despite the great opposition of capitalists, militarists, and absolutists. There must be a space for

agonistic debate and discussion. The mainstream mass media have not been able to provide and protect this space for us. One of our last great journalists was probably Kularb Saipradit. After his exile to China, the standard of Thai journalism plummeted drastically. Turning to the television industry, we also need to point to Supsiri Viriyasiri's ethical courage.

6. Our education system has become a system of mass intoxication. It is unable to truly teach ethics. It has succeeded in producing cold and efficient machines rather than humans who are compassionate toward others and concerned about animals and the natural environment. Our education system must revive the three-fold training and make it relevant to the contemporary world.

## V

Education plays a crucial role for change and emancipation, individually as well as collectively. We must know ourselves, not only the external world. Since the breath is vital for living, we must learn to breathe properly; that is, mindfully. We must learn to breathe in peacefulness and tranquility. When properly practiced, we will also learn to evaluate and criticize ourselves, minimize self-attachment and see the interdependence of all beings.

Self-transformation or emancipation should be the elementary foundation of education. Having virtuous friends also helps in this process since they can act as our external voice of conscience, saying things we might not want to hear about ourselves.

As for collective transformation, we can turn to the alternative models provided by Ladakh and Kerela in India. We should not hastily dismiss Bhutan's experiment with Gross National Happiness. Nor should we turn our backs on alternative movements in the US and Europe. We also have a lot to learn from promising, grassroots movements in our neighbors such as Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

Militarism, capitalism and consumerism will not be easily dismantled. We must confront structural violence and struggle to overcome it through the power of truth and nonviolence. The Tibetan government in

exile has relied on nonviolence and the power of truth to fight against Chinese occupation of Tibet for more than 50 years. One day, it may be successful like Gandhi's movement.

King Chulalongkorn traveled to India in late 1871-the last year of the regency period-he learned three terrible things from the British Raj: (1) the people must be educated to accept the domination of the ruling elites; (2) political power must be centralized; and (3) armed violence must be used against those who resisted the centralization of power.

Our present ruling elites have not strayed far away from these three lessons. Our elites, past and present, have hardly noticed that Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, was born into an untouchable caste and later converted to Buddhism. The Indian Constitution has never been torn apart. Thai tourists to India-even those who called themselves 'pilgrims'-hardly ever paid attention to this aspect of India. Likewise, the Thai ruling elites have hardly associated India with Satyagraha, Hind Swaraj and the Sarvodaya movement. Little do they know of Rajagopal and his fellow young activists who have spent years cultivating the consciousness of the poor and landless and mobilizing them to defend their basic rights over land and resources, which are being threatened by privatization or undermined by local and international capital with the assistance of the Indian state. (Thai red and yellow shirt leaders and supporters have a lot to learn from Rajagopal's movement. They should cease their quarrel, join hands, and reach out to and work for the poor.)

In Siam today, there is a high percentage of absentee landlords. Is this legitimate or just? The Crown Property Bureau is a major landlord, owning over one-third of the land in Bangkok. It has forced tenants out in the name of land development; that is, capital accumulation. Is this right? Individuals like Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, one of the richest men in the country and in the world, are also buying large tracts of land to enrich their private empires. And so on. Is it ethical to turn a blind eye to these phenomena?



In conclusion, the Thai ruling elites have long used England and later the US as models, without really properly understanding them. I propose that there are other possible models. Let me once again turn to the Tibetan government in exile. Some of its policies are noteworthy and adaptable to the suit the needs of contemporary society. They are as follows:

1. The government should promote the right livelihood of the people. In the case of the Tibetan government in exile, it even dissuades the raising of livestock for profit, not to say of the production of weapons, poisonous drugs and chemicals, etc.

2. Considerations on environmental sustainability must be included in every activity and practice.

3. Inspired by Buddhism, development must be sustainable and multi-dimensional.

4. Any activity or practice that hurts the poor must be immediately stopped. And every attempt must be made to reduce the gap between rich and poor.

Add these four new principles to the original six proclaimed by the People's Party (of course, rearticulated to be relevant to contemporary conditions), we will have ten principles to fight for-ten principles from the 10th Siamese intellectual.

*Pajarayasara Public Lecture at Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation on 17th March 2013*

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## Thich Nhat Hanh

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I first met Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Sri Lanka in 1972 (then still known as Ceylon) at an international conference organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on "The Role of Religion in Peace Making."

At the time, Nhat Hanh was already well-known in his country for his "third way," or an alternative to both communism and capitalism. He claimed that American imperialism under the guise of liberalism, had replaced French colonialism in Vietnam. He found it necessary to speak in the US to make Americans realized the negative consequences of the war. His writing was published by progressive Christians, under the title *Lotus in the Sea of Fire*. As a result, he was forced to go into exile in France.

I could see his remarkable talent from the very first time we met. He told me that the conference was not very successful and that its only benefit was providing an opportunity to make new friends. Now that he had found in me his only kalyanamitta at the conference, he already considered it more than worthwhile.

In those days, I was responsible for the establishment of the Pacific Ashram, which was funded by a foundation in the USA. Its aim was to support youths in the Asia Pacific region, including Americans. They would occasionally come to live together for about three weeks at a time for meditation, discussion, writing, drawing, etc.

Brewster Grace was my main collaborator. We organized the first gathering at Kuala Dungun in Malaysia, and according to the plan the second one was to be held in Chiang Mai. Thepsiri Suksopa recommended that it be held at Palad Temple on Doi Suthep mountain. I suggested that Thich Nhat Hanh be invited to serve as a resource person, so that the young participants would have a chance to learn from his experience and wisdom.

At the gathering in Chiang Mai (held during 23 March to April 30 1975), Venerable Payutto represented the Thai side; Swami Agnivesh, the Indian side; and Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese/French side. Nhat Hanh asked us to invite Cao Ngoc Phuong (Chan Khong), a Vietnamese Buddhist nun, to come as his atten-



photograph by Thirach Rungruangknokkul

dant at her own traveling expense.

Karuna Kuslasai worked with me to run the Ashram. Several interesting youths participated in our event such as Pracha Hutanuwatr, then still a monk, Phra Pisan Visalo, then still a lay person, Wisit Wangwinyou, Santisuk Soponsiri, etc. Also present among the participants was a Westerner who was no longer young: Professor Robert Bobilin. At that time he was Head of the Department of Religion at the University of Hawaii. He wanted to take part in the event— not as a teacher – but in order to learn together with the young people. Later he wrote an article on the three sages—Thai, Vietnamese and Indian—entitled “Three Wise Men on the Mountain,” which was published in *Seeds of Peace* magazine in 1975.

The Ashram in Chiang Mai greatly impressed Thich Nhat Hanh. During the gathering he met many young Thai friends who were a source of inspiration. He recounted this experience in the book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. The book was written in Vietnamese and translated into English by his American pupil, Mobi. He had planned to publish a Vietnamese version in South Vietnam. However, it was halted by the American defeat in and withdrawal from South Vietnam. Consequently, an English version first appeared in Siam before the Vietnamese one. Meanwhile, Pracha translated the book capably into the Thai language, and it was published by Komol Keemthong.

This was one of Pracha’s very first books.

Thich Nhat Hanh also coined the important concept of “Engaged Buddhism.” Inspired by his concept as well as actual practice, I founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Also, *Seeds of Peace*, which was an INEB magazine, was inspired by him. Now Nhat Hanh’s books are increasingly translated into Thai and warmly welcomed by Thai readers. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu admired Nhat Hanh for his poetic talent and profound rhetoric, especially the book *Present Moment: Wonderful Moment—Mindfulness for Daily Living*. As Buddhadasa Bhikkhu said to his attendant monk Singthong, “All you need is only to read this book and bring it into practice.” This was perhaps his last advice.

After Saigon fell to North Vietnam, a number of Vietnamese left the South. Many fled by boat. Some died at sea. Some were raped and tortured by Thai pirates. Nhat Hanh mentioned about these tragic incidents in his powerful poem “Please call me by my true names.” When he was still in Saigon, he founded the School of Youth for Social Service. He was attacked by both the Right and Left, and five of his students were cruelly murdered. After deep meditation, he composed a moving play, *The Path of Return Continues the Journey*, which is about nonviolence and forgiveness. These two pieces as well as many others have been translated into Thai.

Nhat Hanh faithfully practiced what he preached, especially in helping the “boat people.” He addressed the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace at Singapore, and raised a large sum of money to purchase a big boat for transporting Vietnamese refugees abroad. However, many countries cruelly turned down these refugees. And the donor organization later denounced him for disregarding its standard operating procedure.

In those days, Nhat Hanh had many young Thai friends who willingly cooperated with him. However, the October 1976 crisis forced me to flee abroad. Although I did not have a chance to help him in Siam, I stayed close to him in France. From his small place in Paris, Nhat Hanh moved to the Sweet Potatoes Community and eventually settled down in Plum Village, which recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. Plum Village now has branches in the US as well as in many other countries, including Siam.

Nhat Hanh's publisher in the US, Parallax, has published two of my works. Parallax has greatly contributed to Nhat Hanh's international appeal. Unfortunately, Arnold Kotler, its co-founder, became disappointed with Nhat Hanh and resigned. I tried to arrange their reconciliation—but to no avail.

In the early days, Nhat Hanh entrusted me with full responsibility for the translation of his books into Thai. He never demanded for royalty payment. Komol Keemthong Publishing House used its increased revenues not only to sustain its business activities but also to support various projects for the younger generation. After Nhat Hanh founded the Plum Village Foundation of Siam in 2007, the Sangha of Plum Village has since started to collect royalties. Yet it has maintained good relations with Komol Keemthong and Kledthai publishers. However, with the exception of these two publishing houses and a few others, the Plum Village Foundation in this country generally prefers to work with the biggest Thai publishing houses (i.e., the ones that pay the highest royalties).

When Nhat Hanh was in Siam in 2007, I went to see him at Buddhamonthon. But due to his coordinator's mistake, we didn't get to see each other. I finally met him in person when he visited Siam once again in 2010. I consider myself as his kalyanamitta because we are both working to serve Buddha and bring his Dhamma into people's daily life so that they can manifest wisdom, compassion and loving-kindness in the service of all sentient beings.

It is necessary to take into account how Plum Village is going to put its idealistic concept into practice in the midst of the capitalist globalization. If Nhat Hanh is able to see through this issue, the Sangha he founded will achieve *akaliko* (literally, beyond time).

One success in Dhamma practice is Goenka's movement. His method is being conducted widely, even in prisons. And it is not dependent on the capitalist system for expansion—although his movement lacks the dimension of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

9 March 2013



ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

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American Protestant missionaries established the first Christian school in Bangkok. It was initially situated on the Thonburi side but ultimately moved to Sathorn road and became known as Bangkok Christian College.

Prince Damrong Rajanubhab observed that Catholics and Protestants differed in their methods of proselytization. The latter were often more humble and down-to-earth. They reached out to the masses. They got married, worked as doctors or teachers, and published books. Then when the locals began to admire them, the proselytizing process would begin. Here Dan Beach Bradley, who came to Siam during the Third Reign and was credited with introducing the first Thai-script printing press to the kingdom, was an exemplary model. Yet, even Bradley conceded that he was utterly unsuccessful in converting Thais to Protestantism.

On the other hand, Catholics were attached to their priest status and targeted the ruling elites in society. They represented themselves as the embodiment of Western know-how, which was superior to that of the Non-West, to win the hearts and minds of the ruling class for instance, this was apparent during the reign of King Narai. However, this method also proved to be a failure in the Thai kingdom as it was in China. Nevertheless, it was successful in Vietnam.

My simple point is that Father Colombet was probably emulating the American protestant

missionaries when he established Assumption College (AC). He correctly noted that as Siam was increasingly opening up to the West since the Fourth Reign, the country was in need of good schools for boys (and later girls) of birth and breeding. At first he built a small school only for Christian students. But, being the visionary that he was, he eventually enlarged the student body by admitting the enrolment of non-Christian students. This was in line with King Rama V's desire to modernize the kingdom. On 15 August 1887, H.R.H. Crown Prince Maha Vajirunhis represented King Chulalongkorn in laying down the cornerstone for the construction of the school's first building.

Along with the school, its administrative body comprised of priests must also be enlarged to guarantee its effectiveness. This would allow the administrators to have time to pray and further expand their knowledge. And Assumption College would be in a better position to compete with the school set up by American protestant missionaries as well as the new public schools established by the Siamese state.

Father Colombet thus returned to France to seek help from the Superior General of the Brothers of St. Gabriel, who eventually sent five reverend brothers to take over the school's management. They began work in 1903. Reverend Brother Martin de Tours led the new management team, which included Reverend Brothers Arbaire, Augustine, Gabriel Ferreti and Hilaire. Brother Hilaire was the youngest in the team and proved to be a genius in the studying and teaching of the Thai language. His *Darun Suksa* (or Thai language manuals) was widely used in all Catholic schools.

On the whole, the French missionary priests and St. Gabriel reverend brothers in Siam shared the same political orientation: they valued the monarchy, despised the republic, and shunned any mode of political economy that smacked of leftism. In short, they were conservatives and reactionaries. They even opposed modern forms of knowledge that contravened the Church's teachings. For example, world history as taught at Assumption College would begin with the creation

of the world based on the Book of Genesis and would end with the reign of King Louis XIV, which established close contacts with King Narai. Small wonder that the St. Gabriel reverend brothers were close to the Siamese royal court. The latter did not convert to Christianity but facilitated the works of missionaries in the country and enabled them to have access to the king and other royal family members. This kind of relationship no longer existed in France. Perhaps the reverend brothers could experience the good old days in France while living in Siam.

To briefly sum up, between 1903 and 1932 Assumption College went along well with the absolute monarchy in Siam. It produced many outstanding students who went on to work for the Siamese bureaucracy as well as foreign and local companies.

Assumption College taught students to be diligent and disciplined. AC students also tended to be more proficient in the English language, especially when compared to students from the government's schools. Its teachers paid close attention to every student and tirelessly worked to pull out the best in them. AC teachers treated all students equally, regardless of their class, religion, ethnicity and blood. Orphan students received full scholarships and lived in the school's compound. This spirit of equality was lacking in other schools, especially during the period of absolutism. For instance, at Suankularb College, which was founded by King Chulalongkorn and is the country's oldest public secondary school, royal family students had their own cafeteria separated from others. Thus Prince Damrong sent one son to Assumption College to teach him something about social equality.

At the same time, the school failed to reach out to the poorest strata in Siam, particularly those living in the rural areas. Also the school's administrators did not recognize that the time of absolutism was over. They could not keep up with the changing times.

The 1932 Revolution shook and divided the school. Shortly after the revolution, a number of high school students revolted against the



school's authority. It was however quickly and gently put down by the school. The revolution also meant that many royal family members who were the school's supporters or patrons were now brandished as public villains. AC alumni were thus divided into two. Even the Vice President of the Old Alumni Association was rounded up, imprisoned and exiled to the Tarutao islands. He eventually escaped to Singapore and ultimately Australia.

Brother Hilaire spoke well for the school's position when he visited the man in Bang Kwang Central Prison. He told him not to worry about his son who was also studying at Assumption College. The school would take care of his tuitions until he graduated. (However, when the son was studying at Chulalongkorn University, he was dismissed from the university after visiting his father in Singapore.)

Brother Hilaire didn't seem to realize that the arch-enemy of the man in prison would later become the country's premier and dictator using Hitler and Mussolini as role models. Although Field Marshal Phibunsongkram was educated in France he despised this group of French missionaries in Siam. Eventually, he would expel them from the country. The Field Marshal also hated French Indochina, ultimately declaring war on it.

Assumption College was partly ruined during the Second World War and had to relocate to Sriracha. The school was also unable to maintain full independence during the war. Its curriculum had to reflect the prevailing nationalism at the time, stressing Thai-ness and obedience to the country's ruler. Students had to wear the student military uniform and had to stand in row to pay respect to the national flag in the morning before class. And so on.

Fortunately, the Spanish and Italian reverends were allowed to continue running the school (because they were not nationals of enemy states). More importantly, several AC alumni also played a vital role in the Free Thai Movement such as Luang Aduldejarat, Direk Jayanama and Puey Ungphakorn. While Puey was preparing to clandestinely enter Siam via India he even had an

opportunity to further his knowledge of the Thai language with Brother Hilaire who was in exile there.

The French missionaries returned to Siam when the war ended. Brother Hilaire once remarked that postwar Thais tended to de-value dignity, truth and diligence. They were more obsessed with money and power and cared less about the good. These might have been because of the postwar conditions as the people struggled to make a living, as the cost of living was rising dramatically, as families were broken, and so on. Interestingly, it was in the postwar period that the ugly word "corruption" first came into popular usage in Thai society.

To what extent has the St. Gabriel brotherhood been successful in cultivating the moral, ethical and religious development of Thai reverends. In my opinion, the Thai reverends were very successful in improving the material conditions of the school. For instance, the school was enlarged to include a commercial college and a university. Many of the Thai reverends became capable teachers and great administrators. The important question however is how many of them actually led a way of life like that of Brother Martin de Tours or matched the excellence across disciplines of Reverend Brother Hilaire.

For me, among the Thai reverends at Assumption College, Brother Vicharn Songsiengchai clearly stood out. He acted as a *kalynamitta* to all students. He was open to the younger generation. He was willing to understand the poor and socially excluded. He encouraged AC students to go to the rural areas to engage in social and development work and live with the villagers. The idea was to practice solidarity. He often went with them "to sleep on dirt and eat on sand" as a Thai saying goes.

The great task ahead for Assumption College under the management of the St. Gabriel brotherhood is to create an alternative to mainstream education. At the broadest level, this means joining hands with others, both secular and religious, to revive (or maintain fidelity to) the basic insight of Brother Hilaire's timeless words,

reinterpreted, crudely translated and rewritten from poetry into prose as follows:

Enlighten yourself. Open the eyes. Seek for knowledge.

Study the words of teachers and of God with alertness and diligence.

You will be prosperous with treasures in the present.

But never forget that Heaven is superior.

This appears to be a Christian teaching with a lot of Buddhist echoes. After all “Buddha” means “the enlightened one.” And the eyes can also refer to the Eye of Wisdom (*Dhammacakkhu*). “Words of teachers: should be interpreted not as mainstream knowledge but as criticisms. In Thai the word for “teacher” is “kru”, which means heavy, intense, serious, strong, or substantial. Thus the teacher’s words are things that we may not want to hear about ourselves or that hurt our pride but are nevertheless crucial for self-criticism and change. “Words of God” are higher than those of our teachers or kalyanamitta. They can be found in the Bible, the Koran, sacred writings, etc. When we have learned both worldly and sacred words carefully and use them to reevaluate and improve our conducts we will accomplish great wealth in the present. Finally, “Heaven” is higher than any worldly treasure. It does not necessarily mean the other world. Rather it refers to the proper or good path, which leads us to minimize self-attachment and serve all sentient beings. The path to “Heaven?” ultimately leads to the cessation of sufferings—a blissful void.

Framed photographs of four AC alumni adorned one of the walls of Brother Hilaire’s office. They were designated as role models for AC students. These four individuals were:

1) Chao Phya Srithammathibet, the most successful of the early batches of students under the absolute monarchy; he was the last Chao Phya of old Siam.

2) Khuang Aphaiwongse, the only French major who became prime minister. Brother Hilaire did not post the photographs of other AC alumni who became premiers such as Phya Manopakornnitada and MR Seni Pramoj on his

office wall. It seemed that the reverend brother did not notice Khuang’s deceitfulness and deviousness.

3) Luang Aduldejarat, an honest and trustworthy Police Chief who however was also authoritarian.

4) Direk Jayanama, a highly capable foreign minister who supported the Free Thai Movement and was very close to Pridi Banomyong. Out of these four individuals, his greatness seemed to be the least understood or appreciated by contemporary Thais.

Likewise, present AC students should learn from numerous alumni’s both their strengths and shortcomings. We should further ask who else among AC alumni deserved to be honored.

If I am forced to pick only one illustrious AC alumni it would be Puey Ungphakorn. The reason for this is not because of his success at the Bank of Thailand or in the field on non-governmental development, which was of course unparalleled. Nor is it because of his honesty and humility, great love for family and wife, or involvement in the Free Thai Movement. Rather, it is because he possessed great moral courage, especially in confronting the military dictatorship. His well-known open letter to Thanom Kitticachorn (“Nai Khem Yenying’s Letter to Nai Tamnu Kiatkong, Village Headman of Thai Charoen Village”) was written in a polite manner. But it was driven by a deep and powerful sense of virtue. He wrote the letter knowing well that it would entail great personal cost. But he willingly wrote it to maintain his dignity and support the great causes of peace, democracy and justice. Therefore, he is a worthy model for present AC students.

*A lecture in Thai at the college on Febuary 22,2013*

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## Sulak, Fearless Champion of All Truth

Pravit Rojanaphruk

3 April 2013 / *The Nation*

Many Thais are not quite sure of what to make of Sulak Sivaraksa. One day the noted social critic appeared to be on the Democrat Party's side by supporting MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra for Bangkok governor. Then, just two weeks later, he appeared on national television, Thai PBS, harshly criticising the Democrats and others who supported the current form of lese majeste law.

In a political climate where deep polarisation has taken roots, many on both sides of the political divide regard Sulak as a threat if not their enemy. This is nothing new for Sulak, who turned 80 last week. Back in the 1970s, both communists and ultra-royalists considered him their foe as well.

Whether you like or dislike Sulak, agree or disagree with him, the man has few bad virtues, and that's quite rare in Thai society.

First, Sulak is a life-long promoter of the culture of criticism. This is why, although he is a self-avowed royalist, he insisted that loyalty demands dissent. He supports amending the draconian lese majeste law and promotes a climate where all public figures in this country, be they friend or foe, should be subject to public scrutiny.

Second, throughout his life, Sulak has refused to seek political office or economic gain from his activism and intellectual work. Sulak, as a public intellectual, refuses to subject himself to the leadership of one political camp or the other, while many intellectuals and activists today are more than happy to keep silence about the problems of their side while working under their patrons and supporters. Thus we see many red-shirt intellectuals being soft on ousted

and fugitive former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra or on the red-shirt movement and the same can be seen among yellow as well as multicolour-shirt intellectuals.

Because of this quality, Sulak agreed to testify in court to assist red-shirt Ekachai Hongkangwan, who sold unauthorised DVD copies of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and WikiLeaks documents but was found guilty last month of lese majeste. At the same time, despite his support for Sukhumbhand, Sulak on Thai PBS last month also harshly criticised the Democrat Party, accusing it of exploiting royalist sentiment since its inception six decades ago, until the coup in 2006. "They have yet to recover," said Sulak.

It's people like Sulak of whom the elites and those in power are most wary. On the same day, this person, the only one who has been tried and acquitted three times of lese majeste, could both praise and criticise His Majesty the King. Sulak will not easily yield himself to cookie-cutter characterisation, and some people have a hard time deciding which side he is on, whether Sulak is a friend or enemy.

"A brave person must have the courage to face the truth. Do not run from the truth. One must have moral courage and make full criticism. It's all right if some criticise you. Let them do so. We must give opportunity to those who disagree with us, as disagreement is a foundation of democracy," the man said on Thai PBS on March 18.

# Buddhist Nationalism in Burma

Institutionalized racism against the Rohingya Muslims led Burma to genocide.

Maung Zarni



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For those outside Burma, the broadcast images of the Theravada monks of the “Saffron Revolution” of 2007 are still fresh. Backed by the devout Buddhist population, these monks were seen chanting metta and the Loving-kindness Sutta on the streets of Rangoon, Mandalay, and Pakhoke-ku, calling for an improvement in public well-being in the face of the growing economic hardships afflicting Burma’s Buddhists. The barefooted monks’ brave protests against the rule of the country’s junta represented a fine example of engaged Buddhism, a version of Buddhist activism that resonates with the age-old Orientalist, decontextualized view of what Buddhists are like: lovable, smiley, hospitable people who lead their lives mindfully and have much to offer the non-Buddhist world in the ways of fostering peace.

But in the past year, the world has been confronted with images of the same robed monks publicly demonstrating against Islamic nations’ distribution of aid to starving Muslim Rohingya, displaced into refugee camps in their own country following Rakhine Buddhist attacks. The rise of genocidal Buddhist

racism against the Rohingya, a minority community of nearly one million people in the western Burmese province of Rakhine (also known as Arakan), is an international humanitarian crisis. The military-ruled state has been relentless in its attempts to erase Rohingya ethnic identity, which was officially recognized as a distinct ethnic group in 1954 by the democratic government of Prime Minister U Nu. Indeed, in the past months of violent conflict, beginning in June 2012, the Rohingya have suffered over 90 percent of the total death toll and property destruction, including the devastation of entire villages and city neighborhoods. Following the initial eruption of violence in western Burma, several waves of killing, arson, and rampage have been directed at the Rohingya, backed by Burma’s security forces.

Over the course of the past few years an extremely potent and dangerous strain of racism has emerged among Burma’s Theravada Buddhists, who have participated in the destruction and expulsion of the entire population of Rohingya Muslims. The atrocities occurring in the name of Buddhist nationalism in Burma



are impossible to reconcile with the ideal of metta. Buddhist Rakhine throw young Rohingya children into the flames of their own homes before the eyes of family members. On June 3, 10 out-of-province Muslim pilgrims were pulled off a bus in the Rakhine town of Taunggoke, about 200 miles west of the former capital, Rangoon, and beaten to death by a mob of more than 100 Buddhist men. The crime occurred in broad daylight and in full view of both the public and local law enforcement officials.

One of the most shocking aspects of anti-Rohingya racism is that the overwhelming majority of Burmese, especially in the heartland of upper Burma, have never met a single Rohingya in person, as most Rohingya live in the Rakhine State of western Burma adjacent to Bangladesh.

Physical appearance aside from language, religion, culture, and class is an integral marker in a community of nationalists. The importance of complexion is often overlooked when examining racism across Asia. Rohingya are categorically darker-skinned people sometimes called by the slur “Bengali kalar.” Indeed, the lighter-skinned Buddhists of Burma are not alone in their fear of dark-skinned people and belief that the paler the skin, the more desirable, respectable, and protected one is.

The virulent hatred and oppression directed at Muslims extends to any Buddhists who are considered to have helped them. In October 2012, local Rakhine Buddhist men were named, degraded, punished, and paraded around public places wearing handwritten signs that said, “I am a traitor.” Their crimes? Selling groceries to a Rohingya.

The rose-tinted Orientalist take on Buddhism is so hegemonic that Westerners are often shocked when they hear of the atrocities carried out by militarized Buddhist masses and the political states that have adopted or manipulated Buddhism as part of the state ideological apparatus. Buddhism’s

popular image as a peaceful, humanistic religious doctrine immune to dogma contradicts a long history of violent Buddhist empires from Emperor Ashoka’s on the old Indian subcontinent to the Buddhist monarchies of precolonial Sri Lanka and Siam, and the Khmer and Burmese kingdoms—some of whom sanctioned war with recourse to the dharma. The oppression carried out under Burmese President Thein Sein and his Sri Lankan counterpart, President Rajapaksa, is just the latest from a long line of violent Buddhist regimes.

Prejudice arises wherever communities of different faiths, classes, and ethnicities coexist and interact. But genocide is not an inevitable outcome of group prejudice; there have to be institutional mechanisms and an organized harnessing of forces, generally enacted by the state. Burma’s lay public and political society, while supposedly informed by the worldwide ideals of human rights and democracy that spread across formerly closed leftist polities, have evidently failed to undergo what Aung San Suu Kyi famously called “the revolution of the spirit.” Instead, they have chosen to pursue a destructive nationalism that is rooted in the fear of losing property, land, and racial and religious purity.

The Burmese state has mobilized its society’s Islamophobia through various institutional mechanisms, including the state media outlets and social media sites, the presidential office’s Facebook page among them. Burmese-language social media sites, which thrive out of the purview of international media watchdogs, are littered with hate speech. Postings of graphic images of Muslim victims, including Rohingyas, on Facebook—easily the most popular social media website in the newly opened Burma—have been greeted with approving responses from the country’s Buddhist netizens, both within the country and throughout the diaspora. The few Burmese and foreign human rights activists and journalists who dare to speak out against this rising tide of racist, fascist tendencies in

Buddhist society have been increasingly subjected to slander, cyber-threats, and hate speech. Journalists have repeatedly expressed dismay over the volume of angry hate email they receive from Burmese citizens whenever stories are published condemning the recent violence.

In a documentary first aired by Al Jazeera on December 9, 2012, Professor William Schabas, one of the world's foremost experts on genocide and until recently the president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, characterized the sectarian violence against the Rohingya as genocide. "We're moving into a zone where the word can be used," Schabas said "When you see measures preventing births, trying to deny the identity of the people, hoping to see that. . . they no longer exist, denying their history, denying the legitimacy of the right to live where they live, these are all warning signs that mean that it's not frivolous to envisage the use of the term genocide."

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which entered into force on January 12, 1951, states: "In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- ( a ) Killing members of the group;
- ( b ) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- ( c ) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- ( d ) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- ( e ) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The ruling Burmese, both the Buddhist society and the Buddhist state, have committed the first four of these acts, though the state denies wrongdoing by their security forces

during the nearly six months of violence in 2012 that left 167 Rohingya Muslims dead and 110,000 refugees.

As for paragraph (e), malnourished, poorly educated Rohingya children have not been "forcibly transferred" to another group, but there have been instances of Rohingya children being brutally murdered-stabbed, drowned, burned alive-by the Buddhist Rakhine.

During a public lecture in Brunei, Southeast Asia, on December 2, 2012, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), was asked by a student what the OIC-with its 57 member states representing, in theory, at least 1.5 billion Muslims was doing to address the persecution of Muslim minorities around the world. In his response, Ihsanoglu described the Burmese democracy icon and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi as a human rights activist for Burma's Buddhists. Suu Kyi, he said, is "only interested in the human rights of the Buddhists because they are human beings and the Muslims are not." While the emotion behind the statement is understandable, there is a political calculus at play. Aung San Suu Kyi has little to gain from speaking out against the treatment of the Rohingya Muslims. She is no longer a political dissident, she's a politician, and her eyes are fixed on a prize: winning the 2015 election with a majority Buddhist vote.

Prior to his lecture in Brunei, Professor Ihsanoglu sent a letter to Suu Kyi on behalf of the OIC in which he pressed the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader to use her enormousawza, or earned societal influence, to help stem the tide of Buddhist racism against the Rohingya and the Muslim population at large. The letter was met with silence. In failing to decry the human rights abuses against the Rohingya, Burma's iconic leader-who is seen in some Burmese Buddhist circles as *bhodhi saddhava* ("would-be Buddha")- has failed to walk the walk of

Buddhist humanism.

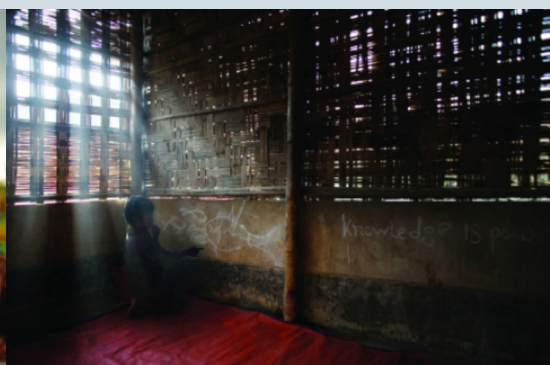
On January 4, 2013, the 65th anniversary of Burma's independence from British rule, Suu Kyi said in a speech at the NLD headquarters that Burma's people need to rely on themselves if they want to realize their dream of a free and prosperous nation. "Don't expect anyone to be your savior," she warned. But as the Burmese magazine *The Irrawaddy* pointed out in a recent editorial, "Suu Kyi is right that Burma doesn't need a savior; but it does need a leader."

The current leaders of Burma's 25-year-old human rights movement now speak the language of national security, absolutist sovereignty, and conditional human rights, echoing the language and sentiment of their former captors, the ruling military. The NLD and the democracy opposition have failed to see their own personal and ideological contradictions. Their embrace of conditional human rights and their absolutist reading of sovereignty indicates that they have talked the talk of Buddhism, with its ideal of universal lovingkindness, but have failed to walk the walk. Many student leaders and human rights activists of the 1988 uprisings who spent half their lives behind bars in the notorious military-run Insein Prison as "prisoners of conscience" are unprepared to extend such human rights ideals to the Rohingya Muslims, a population that the United Nations identifies as one of the world's most persecuted minorities.

Buddhism, as a religious and

philosophical system, has absolutely nothing to say about the political, economic, and cultural organizations that we call nation states. Buddhism is not about people imagining a national community predicated upon adversarial relations but rather about using one's own intellectual faculties to see through the nonexistent core-essence of self. Yet in Burma, this humanistic philosophy has proven itself indisposed to guard against overarching societal prejudices and their ultranationalist proponents, those Burmese who vociferously profess their adherence to Buddhist faith, practice religious rituals and patronize Buddhist institutions, and then proceed to commit unspeakable atrocities against anyone they imagine to be an enemy of Buddhism, the Buddhist state, Buddhist wealth, Buddhist women, and Buddhist land. Instead of propagating the guiding societal principles of religious tolerance, nondiscrimination, and social inclusion among lay devotees, the influential Buddhist clergy themselves have, in their outspoken criticism and picketing against the Rovingya, become an entire people's most dangerous threat.

Throughout the alien British rule from 1824 to 1948, the Buddhism of colonial Burma contributed to the formation of a common national identity, providing a basis for concerted anti-imperialist efforts among disparate social classes and ethnolinguistically diverse Buddhist communities with conflicting political interests. The current resurgence of



racism is a direct result of a half century of despotic military rule. The careful construction of an iron cage—a monolithic constellation of values, an ad hoc ethos locks in and naturalizes a singular view of what constitutes Burma's national culture. The dominant population remains potently ethnonationalist, essentializing Buddhism as the core of an authentic Burmese national identity.

For a minority of Burmese Buddhists, the combination of Buddhist nationalism and strong racial distinctions that served as an ideological springboard and a rallying cry against the British Raj is now scorned as a thing of the past. But for many Burmese Buddhists, the same ethnoreligious nationalism that once served the Burmese independence movement has provided an environment in which their racism can flourish.

Buddhist-inspired social forces have proven to be a double-edged sword over the years. In the newly independent post-WWII Burma of the late 1940s, Marxist-inspired revolutionary nationalists led by the martyred Aung San (Aung San Suu Kyi's father) set out to forge a new multiculturalist, secular, and civic nationalism. In 1948, after Aung San was assassinated by a rival Burmese politician (and less than 90 days after the country's newly acquired independence), Burma plunged into a long series of armed revolts against the central state. Aung San's successors gradually abandoned any attempts to secularize Burmese nationalism along the lines of civic nationalism, which would have moved the Burmese away from the premodern provincialist blood- and faith-based view of national identity.

Against this backdrop, the popular racism of the Buddhist majority presents itself as a potent social force that can be appropriated by Burma's national security state to unify and rally anti-Muslim Burmese citizens. Burma's state authorities, consisting predominantly of generals and ex-generals,

are also generous patrons of Buddhist institutional activities such as dana and pagoda and temple building. These military leaders will continue to feed the masses their opiate—the pretension of Buddhism, with its effect of normalizing human suffering—to the masses, as long as the Buddhists believe that their faith, and not their political economy, promises better rebirth. As one regime official told me, “The bottom line is, we don't want any more ‘Mus’ in our country, but we can't possibly kill them all.” As a solution, the reformist state leadership has outsourced the job of cleansing its Golden Land to the Rakhine Buddhists.

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*Maung Zarni is a Burmese activist and scholar. He is a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics and the founder of the Free Burma Coalition.*

**Image 1 :** Jonathan Saruk/Getty images. Thousands of unregistered Rohingya Muslim refugees from Burma live next to the registered refugee camp at Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Bangladesh.

**Image 2 :** Thet Htoo/Zuma Press/Newscom. Rakhine men and a Buddhist monk hold handmade spears and watch as a fire burns in Sittwe, capital city of Rakhine State. Two weeks of clashes between Rohingya Muslims and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists left an official death toll at 50, with 58 injured and more than 2,500 houses burned down.

**Image 3 :** Soe Than Win/AFP/Getty/Newscom. Rakhine Buddhist monks pray in Lagon, Burma, in June 2012. Several thousand monks took to the streets of Mandalay to protest against a world Islamic body's efforts to help Muslim Rohingya in strife-hit Rakhine State.

**Image 4 :** Jonathan Saruk/Getty images. An unregistered Rohingya child draws on the wall of a classroom provided by the charity Islamic Relief at Leda Refugee Camp, Bangladesh.



# Mourning for Her

Venerable Wu Yin

Translated by Shwu-Jen You

.....

(1)

I am the girl who was raped.  
I take the time tunnel back to India,  
To a speeding bus in New Delhi,  
A weary and terrified girl with her helpless  
boyfriend:  
Grieving and wailing, our shaking bodies curled  
into balls  
We both fight back with all our strength  
But finally we cannot withstand the beating and  
kicks that endlessly rain down upon us, the blows  
of the iron rod.  
My crying fades gradually; my valiant strength  
runs out.  
My clothing is in shambles, my body torn apart  
and wantonly ravaged.  
I pass out in grief and righteous anger, but again  
and again I wake and struggle to survive, so I can  
shout for the deliverance of women.  
I suffocate gradually, as though crushed by the  
weight of millions of years of oppression, and  
wake no more.

(2)

I am the rapist.  
In the midst of the frenzy I stand up and look at  
my four companions;  
They take turns raping the woman, their eyes filled  
with hatred and rage.  
I see myself, seething with resentment, in the eyes  
of that cringing, wounded boy.  
Why am I here? Memories flash through my mind  
and I see the simple and innocent boy, cherished  
by his mother, that I once was.  
Abruptly, the driver stomps on the brake and stops;  
I lose my footing and stumble.  
The driver walks maliciously toward the woman;  
Tearing open his clothes as he goes, he pounces  
upon the woman like a hungry tiger.  
Instantly, the world freezes.  
And I suddenly realize: I have fallen into the world  
of snake demons!  
I see myself: one of a great mass of snakes, coiling  
and winding around each other.

(3)

The revolving world moves ever forward;  
India's caste system has been abolished, but a scar  
remains vivid on people's brows.  
Oh how the young, tortured man hates being  
unable to protect his girlfriend!  
He stands up straight, fists clenched, and mutters  
in exasperation:  
"What does it matter whether I'm a Brahman,  
Vaisya, Kshatriya, or Sudra?  
Caste can't magically protect anyone!  
We're going to get married next year. She's smart!  
She'll be the best doctor in India!"  
Dear boy, be strong! I can't be your bride next year.  
A wise man once said, "A man becomes noble  
because of his conduct, not his birth."  
My people, all of the same stock, will gradually  
come to see this truth.  
In the new era, whoever wants to thrive will have  
to rely on their effort and ability.

(4)

"My darling daughter!" Ah, that is Mama's cry;  
Her piercing wail reverberates through the ages;  
it blots out the sky, it covers over the earth.  
Dear Mama, please don't cry for me.  
Because of my death, I see our countrymen  
pondering what course India will take;  
I see men and women all over the world re-  
considering the relations between the sexes.  
Our people have invented technology that the  
whole world admires; they are very intelligent!  
Everyone's mind is like a clear mirror; even the  
minds of the men who assaulted me.  
In their minds the scene of my terrified eyes and  
battered body will play ceaselessly;  
Don't cry, Mama, they will be punished; we have  
lots of work to do.  
The bones of good girls, sacrificed as I was, pile up  
as high as a snow-capped mountain;  
Only when humankind mourns the deaths of all  
these women will the endless strife gradually  
subside and stop.



THE DALAI LAMA

March 19, 2013

Shri Sulak Sivaraksa  
The Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation  
666 Jaroennakorn Rd.  
Banglumphoo Lang, Klongsarn  
Bangkok -10600  
THAILAND

Dear Shri Sulak,

I understand that it will shortly be your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and on this significant occasion I would like to offer you my greetings and to wish you many happy returns of the day, hoping that you will continue your good work for a long time to come.

I remember our initial meeting during my first visit to Thailand more than forty years ago when we were both younger men. Our paths have crossed many times since then. I continue to admire the work you have done to draw attention to the problems facing humanity and the courage with which you have offered suggestions for solving them. I also appreciate the determination with which you have shown Buddhist teachings and practice to be relevant in the world today.

With my prayers and good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Dear and Respected Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa,

My sincere greetings, felicitations and good wishes for your 80th birthday. Your meaningful life have been source of happiness and the aspiration for countless people. Your service to the Buddha Sasana and sentient beings had been exemplary. Wish you a very very long and healthy life. With respectful regards,

Yours sincerely,  
Samdhong Rinpoche

Dear Ajarn Sulak,

Congratulations on your 80th birthday. I hope you will have many more years of creativity and troublemaking. It is not an exaggeration to say that the arc of my life curved radically since we met more than two decades ago. I am grateful for the time we have had together - in your home, in ours, and in the fields of engaged Buddhism. And I am aware that so many of my closest friends and comrades have come from your own wide circle of Buddhists, activists, and thinkers. Please take good care.

With Love,  
Hozan Alan Senauke  
INEB AC/Clear View Project

Dear Ajarn and INEB friends,

On behalf of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship here in the U.S., I send our warmest wishes to Ajarn Sulak on his 80th birthday. For decades, Ajarn has been a true kalyanamitra to many of us as we walk on the path of socially engaged buddhist work. We are thankful for Ajarn's wisdom, courage, and kindness that we have received through personal connections, his prolific writing and inspiring work. May Ajarn be blessed with good health, joy and happiness always. And may no harms come to you so that you can spend the next few decades without worries :-).

FYI: On the eve of Ajarn's 80th birthday, he still did not stop making waves. And this time, it might actually be a really Big One! Ajarn made history with his appearance on Thai PBS (public television) a few days ago, debating with another academic about the monarchy and its survival. This is the FIRST time in Thai history that such a dialog was broadcasted on television. The program ignited fear and hatred in many people and institutions, who viewed the show as dangerous and threatening to the nation. It is my hope that this will eventually lead to a positive change in how we deal with differences in opinions, politics, etc.

I am sorry I won't be able to attend the event in Bangkok. Hoping to see photos or video from the celebration later :-).

peace and love,  
aNcHaLEe  
Anchalee Kurutach

Dear Achan,

I remember the first time we met: I was an intern, assisting, at one important conference or another. My job was to take care of important leaders. I was new, and unfamiliar, and so I asked you who you were. And you said, "I am a trouble maker."

May you make trouble for many more years to come!

Matt  
Matthew Weiner, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean Office of Religious Life  
Princeton University

Dear Ajarn Sulak,

I wish you a very Happy 80th Birthday on 27 March.

On this very special day, the Jungto Society Sangha and I wish you good health, longevity and happiness in countless years ahead, and in your continued spiritual journey to practice and spread the Buddha's teaching, wisdom and loving-kindness.

I will see you soon in New York!

With all my best wishes,  
Venerable Pomnyun  
from Seoul, Korea

16th March, 2013

To the most venerable Ajarn Sulak,

It is such a joy and honor to be a part of the celebration events for your eightieth birthday. Bound by my heavy duties here in Taiwan, it is a pity that I cannot make the trip to Bangkok and dedicate my cordial birthday wishes for you in person. However, despite the geographical distance between us, I have always felt very close to you because you have always been a role model in my mind. All the continuous efforts you have made, all the support you have provided, and all the writings and actions you have produced for Buddhism, for all sentient beings, for world peace, for justice, and for our environment have inspired me and encouraged me to follow your footsteps and go all out to take up the challenges posed by these urgent tasks.

A respectable senior with compassion and wisdom shall be blessed with health and longevity. I pray with all my heart that, for the sake of all sentient beings, and for the lasting benefits Buddha Dharma may bring to the world, you shall stay with us and work with us all for the long years to come.

May you enjoy all the blessings, merits, and longevity!

With heart-felt reverence and best wishes,  
Bhikshuni Chao-Hwei

# The Unofficial Court Jester of Modernising Siam

An unusual, revealing and entertaining account  
of a controversial figure in Thai history

Published: 7/01/2013 at 12:00 AM by Bangkok Post

THE MAN WHO ACCUSED THE KING OF KILLING A FISH  
The Biography of Narin Phasit of Siam 1874-1950 by Peter Koret  
Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai ISBN 978-616-215-043-2  
725 baht

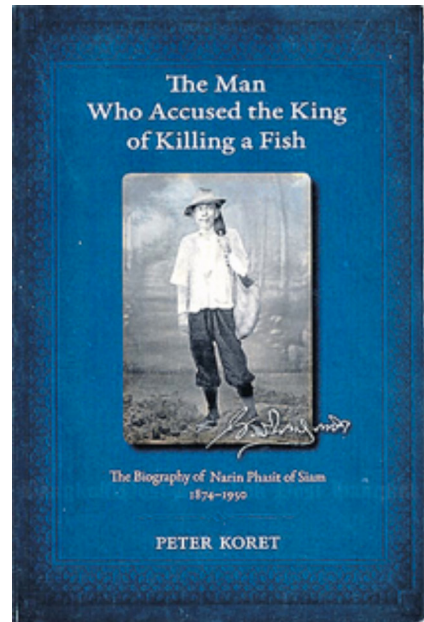
He claimed that his only aim was “to benefit the royalty, my country, and the Buddhist religion.” But many others, especially those in power, thought he was a nut and a “Man of Great Nuisance to Society”

In 1909, Narin Phasit has risen from commoner origins to become governor of a province at the young age of 35 no mean feat in the absolutist era. Discovering the province riven with banditry, he proposes a campaign of suppression. His superiors oppose him vehemently. He defies them, succeeds spectacularly and is rewarded with a medal and royal audience.

He defies his superiors again by attacking a foreign monopoly on river transport and is dismissed from government service. He launches a competitive ferry service and is soon financially ruined. This descent from rising star to destitution is prelude to an extraordinary career as the unofficial court jester of modernising Siam.

He forms a Buddhist Society. The Supreme Patriarch lends support and the first issues of its journal enjoy a wide readership. But the authorities become wary when Narin wonders why Siamese Buddhism is so rotten that it has led scarcely anyone to enlightenment. Patronage dwindles. Narin fires off letters to the king, ministers and senior officials. He writes press articles complaining about their failure to reply. He publicises the causes of individuals who have fallen foul of the state. He publishes fat books detailing his exploits. He pens pamphlets criticising Siam’s involvement in World War I. He announces his plans to be ordained.

The authorities have no idea how to deal with him. His views are infuriating, but not illegal.



In 1916, King Vajiravudh concludes Narin is “unhinged to the point of being totally out of control.” In 1917, he is jailed for two years. On release, he is ordained but quits after three months, railing against the ignorance of the monkhood.

He starts a business selling medicinal alcohol (ya dong) and makes a rapid fortune before the government outlaws his product. With the proceeds he builds a seven-storey temple on the banks of the Chao Phraya River and tries to donate it to the religious authorities.

In 1928, he announces plans to revive the institution of female monks. In a 212-page book, Narin explains that the Buddha had ordained female monks and that the revival would help counter the unfortunate position of women in Siamese society. His two daughters and a handful of other women appear in the robe. They collect alms in the locality with no difficult, signifying acceptance. The authorities veer between panic and total uncertainty over how to respond. The Minister of Religion pays Narin a personal call.



The Supreme Patriarch issues a ban on female ordination. A monk believed (wrongly) to have ordained Narin's daughters is defrocked. The Council of Ministers holds four emergency sessions, concluding that "a failure to act would weigh heavily on the stability of HM's government."

The female monks are arrested. Narin's eldest daughter Sara resists and is forcibly defrocked and jailed. Narin publishes another long book with photos of these dramatic events. On release, Sara and her colleagues don robes imported from Japan, and Narin announces a new order of monks. Later she takes up residence in a temple in Saraburi and becomes greatly liked by her monastic colleagues. Narin ordains himself and plans to go overseas as a religious envoy but is forestalled by official intervention.

Narin welcomes the political change of 1932. He fires off letters and pamphlets to the new politicians, proffering plans and offering assistance. Phraya Phahon invites him for a chat but without consequence. Undeterred, Narin sends off proposals to amend the draft constitution, a grand plan to eradicate theft, and invective against the Ratchupakan tax, a remnant of the old system of head tax and corvée.

He is soon frustrated by the lack of response. He compiles more fat books and fierce pamphlets and hawks them around the streets of the capital. He is arrested and jailed. He promptly goes on hunger strike but is dissuaded by a sensitive intervention by Phraya Phahon. On release he founds the Society to Assist People in Overcoming Their Barbarian Crazyness and plans to stand at the first democratic elections in 1937 but is distracted by other pursuits.

In 1936 he launches an attack on General Phibun Songkhram, then minister of defence, for authoritarian tendencies – an extraordinarily predictive insight. As the emerging political army starts to laud King Naresuan as a symbol of military heroism, Narin pens a subversive variant contrasting Naresuan with the contemporary army leadership. Narin also celebrates the historic role of King Taksin, anticipating a historical revision of a generation ahead. But as he persists in his attacks on Phibun, he is beaten up on the street by hired thugs, and sent to jail and "military indoctrination camp" for a total of five years.

Despite his advancing age and these constant blows, Narin is unfazed. In a desperate attempt to save Siam, he founds a new association dedicated to the millenarian belief in the Future Buddha, and makes contact with international networks devoted to universal peace. In 1948, he stands for election in Bangkok, winning a majority in every polling station but one where a continuous ring of soldiers votes throughout the day, determining the result. Two years later, he dies.

This is an extraordinary and rather beautiful tale. Narin was part of the public world that emerged with the spread of education and growth of the city in the early 20th century. But while most critics concentrated on political and social reform, Narin specialised in confronting the powerful with truth questions. The title comes from an incident when Narin criticised a fishing trip by King Prajadhiphok in Japan as "illegitimate and against all conventions".

Narin's constant criticism of the rotten state of the monkhood had a large element of truth but was embarrassing for those who wanted religion to form one of the three pillars of the new nation-state. His arguments for female ordination had strong logic but challenged one of the pillars of patriarchy.

King Prajadhiphok accused Narin of "seeking a name for himself in a wildly inappropriate manner". In truth, Narin seems to have been uninterested in popularity. Yet he clearly attracted sympathisers who appreciated either his ideas or his persistence in defying authority to present them.

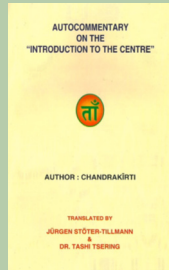
The style of Peter Koret's account varies between biography, novel and 18th-century essay. He liberally imagines the thoughts and motives of Narin and his antagonists in the key scenes. He engages the reader throughout like a voiceover commenting on the action. It's a high-wire act which may entertain or infuriate.

Koret tells us nothing of Narin's life prior to the opening scene when he is aged 35. This gives the tale a certain coherence, but seems mean given that we readers are bound to be curious. Still, that's a minor criticism of an unusual, revealing and highly entertaining book.



How Theravāda is Theravāda?  
Exploring Buddhist Identities

Edited by Peter Skilling /  
Jason A. Carbine / Caludio  
Cicuzza / Santi Pakdeekham  
Publisher : SilkWorms Books



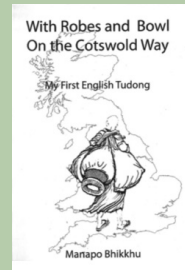
Autocommentary on  
the Introduction to  
the Centre

Author : Chandrakirti  
Translated by Jurgen stoler  
Tillmanin / Dr. Tashi Tsering



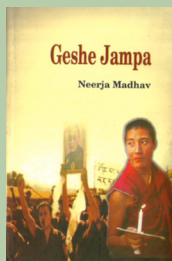
Dynamics of Civil Society  
Movement in Northeast  
Thailand

Edited by Noriyuki Suzuki /  
Somsak Srisontisuk



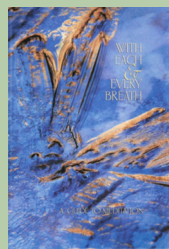
With Robes and Bowl  
On the Cotswold way

Author : Manapo Bhikkhu



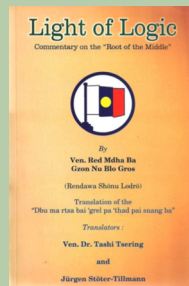
Geshe Jampa

Author : Neerja Madhav  
Publisher : Ketan Prakshan



With Each and Every  
Breath : A Guide to  
Meditation

Author : Thanissaro Bhikku



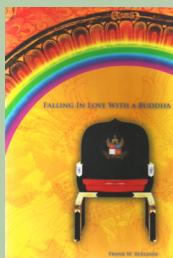
Light of logic : Commentary on  
the "Root of the Middle"

Author : Ven. Red Mdha Ba  
Gzon Nu Blo Gros  
Publisher : International  
Buddhisht Academy



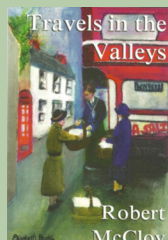
Hornbills

Author : Pillai Poonswad  
Publisher : thailand  
Hornbill Project, faculty of  
science mahidol University



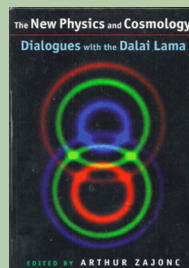
Falling in Love with  
A Buddha

Author : Frank W. Berliner



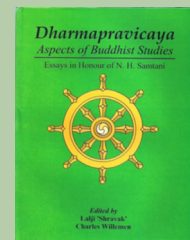
Travels in the Valleys

Author : Robert McCloy



The New Physics and  
Cosmology : Dialogues  
with the Dalai lama

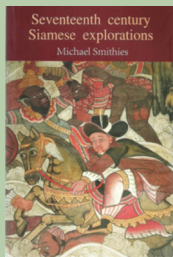
Edited By Arthur Zajonc



Dharmapracicaya  
Aspects Of Buddhist Studies

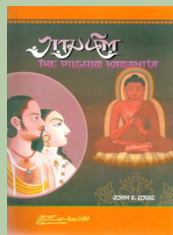
Edited By Lalji Shrivak /  
Charles Willemen  
Publisher : Buddhisht  
World Press

## Recommended Readings



Seventeenth Century  
Siamese Exploration

**Author :** Michael Smithies  
**Publisher :** The Siam Society  
under Royal Patronage



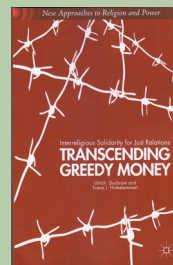
The Pilgrim Khamnita

**Author :** John E. Logie  
**Publisher :** Sathirakoses-  
Nagapradipa Foundation



In Remembrance of Paintings  
and Poetries of  
Angharn Kallayanapong

Bangkok Art and culture centre



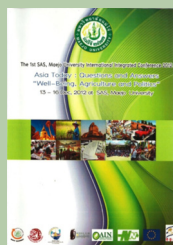
TRANSCENDING GREEDY  
MONEY

**Authors :** Ulrich Duchrow,  
Franz J. Hinkelammert  
**Publisher :** Palgrave  
Macmillan



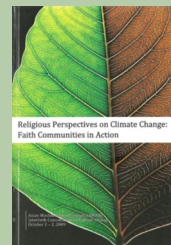
Mothering Innovation :  
Profiles in Sustainability

**Authors :** Dr. Ratana Malar  
Selvaratnam and Dr. Sundari  
Ramakrishna  
**Publisher :** Malaysian  
Envoiremental Non governmental  
Organisation (MENGO)



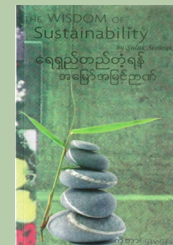
Well-Being, Agriculture and  
Politics

1st SAS, Maejo University  
International Integrated  
Conference 2012  
13- 16 Dec, 2012 at SAS,  
Maejo University  
**Publisher :** School Of  
Administrative Studies (SAS)



Religious Perspective on  
Climate Change Faith  
Communities In Action

Asian Muslim Consultaion on  
climate Change (AMAN)  
Interfaith consultation on  
climate Change (Oct 1-2,2009)  
**Publisher :** Asian Muslims ac-  
tion Network



The Wisdom Of  
Sustainability

**Author :** Sulak Sivaraksa  
(Burmese edition)



Sakyadhita (News letter)

**Publisher :** Sakyadhita Interna-  
tional Association of Buddhist  
Women



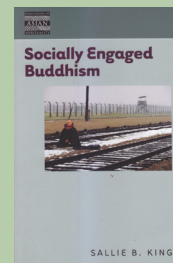
Engagement

Bulletin of the Judson Research  
Centre for Inter faith Studies,  
Dialogue and Current Issues  
**Publisher :** Judson Research  
Centre Of the Myanmar Insti-  
tute Of Theology



Vimkuth Shiksha  
(Reclaiming the Gift Culture)

A Bulletin of Shikshantar  
Compiled and Edited By  
Manish Jain and Shilpa Jain



Socially Engaged Buddhism

Sallie B. King  
**Publisher :** University  
of Hawai'i Press





# INTER-FAITH DIALOG FOR PEACE AND SUSTAINABILITY

INEB Biennial Conference 2013

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
October 27 to November 4, 2013

As we search for new paths away from the ones that have led to our present environmental, economic and psycho-spiritual crises, our religious traditions have a critical role to play. They help us move beyond the material, and shape our understanding of the world, our values, and our behavior. Religious teachers and practitioners recognize that personal transformation is the root of global transformation. However, religions must do more to join together to exert a progressive influence on their cultures and nations away from narrow minded chauvinisms. In Asia, it has become critical that the two largest religious forces, Buddhism and Islam, disengage from the politics of identity and join hands to lead the region towards just, sustainable, and peaceful co-existence. The specific objectives of the conference are to:

- Increase Buddhist-Muslim understanding and develop mechanisms for future collaboration
- Promote inter-faith dialog, exchange and collaboration on issues of common concern
- Celebrate and expand the spirit of kalyanamitra and inter-faith friendship

The conference will include a variety of events :

- Interfaith Awareness Youth Camp (27-31 October)
- Interfaith Women Retreat (27-29 October)
- Buddhist Muslim Study Tour (30-31 October)
- Buddhist Muslim Collaboration Platform (1 November)
- INEB General Conference 2013 (2-4 November)
  - Planet, People and Profit: Business for a New Economy
  - Tradition and Modernity: Spirituality and Religion in a Changing World
  - Conflict Transformation
  - Faith, Climate, and Ecology: Inter-Faith Response to Climate Change
  - Responses to Nuclear and Alternative Energy
  - The Pursuit of Happiness: Policy for Wellbeing and "Gross National Happiness"
  - Loneliness, Illness and Death: Spiritual Guidance for Challenging Times
  - Half the Sky: Women in Society
  - Yuppie, Hippie, Dropout: Young Leaders Making New Paths
  - Eating is a Religious Act: Mindfulness and Food Systems
  - Spiritual Arts

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Organizers: International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), International Movement for a Just World (JUST),  
Malaysian Network of Engaged Buddhists (MNEB)