

SEEDS OF PEACE

vol.29 No.3

September-December 2556 (2013)

Para Buddha, orang-orang suci yang telah meneguk inti sari dari empat kesunyataan mulia, menduduki takhta kemenangan, setelah menaklukkan Mara beserta pasukannya:

~ Life & Peace ~



Publisher

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF
ENGAGED BUDDHISTS (INEB)

Editorial team

Sulak Sivaraksa (advisor)
Harsha Kumara Navaratne (advisor)
Somboon Chungprampree (editor)
Patcharee Chonmanat (assistant)

Cover

Mr. Wang Jian
Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, China

Lay-out

Surapong Petnamlai

Distributed by

Suksit Siam
113-115 Fuangnakorn Rd.,
Bangkok 10200
Tel. (662)2259536-40
spd@semsikkha.org

Baht 100 per issue

Suggested annual subscription US\$50

Payment info:

- A cheque payable to "INEB"
Personal cheques from the UK, US,
and Euro are accepted.
- Paypal, please go to the INEB website

Seeds of Peace

666 Charoen-Nakorn Road,
Klongsan, Bangkok 10600 Siam
Tel. (662)860-2194
Fax. (662)860-1277
SOP@inebnetwork.org
www.inebnetwork.org

Seeds of Peace is published thrice annually
in January, May and September, in order to
promote the aims and objectives of the
International Network of Engaged Buddhists
(INEB) and its members around the world,
and the organisations under SNF including
Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) and
the School for Wellbeing Studies and
Research.

* Jinapanjara Gatha

** Painted by Mr. Wang Jian during INEB
conference, 2011, at Bodhgaya, India

3 Editorial Notes**4 Congratulation and Announcement**

Ms. Dara Viravong Kalaya and Mr. Naowarat Pongpaiboon
– Sunthorn Phu Award
Ms. Lahpai Seng Raw – Ramon Magsaysay Award
Ms. Somluck Hutunuwat – Santi Pracha Dhamma
Award

7 Country Report

7 Bangladesh: Global Appeal for End of Ethnic Cleansing
against Indigenous People of Chittagong Hill Tracts

7 Burma: Protecting Myitsone and Beyond
Pangmu Shayi

9 Cambodia: Cambodia's Farce Election
A dictator—and a distant whiff of Tiananmen Square
James Pringle

10 India: International Conference inaugurates Post
Graduate Diploma course in Socially Engaged Buddhism
Hans van Willenswaard.

11 Siam: The forgotten Free Thai hero *The Nation*

13 INEB

13 Asian Women's Interfaith Gathering
Ginger Norwood

16 Common Declaration from the 2nd INEB East Asia
Forum

17 International Buddhist-Muslim Joint Statement

21 Rebuilding Family, Community, Region, and Na-
tion: Amidst Nuclear Fallout
Rev. Toku-un Tanaka

25 Lessons from Fukushima *Harsha Navaratne*

28 From TV to temple: Female Buddhist monk walks a
pioneering path

33 Socially Engaged Buddhist Conference in Bangladesh *Sanat Kumar Barua*

34 SEM

Lao Buddhism for Development Project (LBFD)

36 School for Wellbeing

International Forum on Innovating Alternative Markets. Towards Food Security and Food Sovereignty.

38 Sulak Sivaraksa

38 Understanding the Status of Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Society

40 UNESCO's Memory of the World Program

42 The Case at the Supreme Administrative Court

44 Article

44 Beyond McMindfulness
Ron Purser and David Loy

46 Potentials and Pitfalls in Interreligious
Hans Ucko

51 Expose students to real world suffering: an approach to university education for social change
Zia Collinsfree

55 Film and Book Reviews

55 Pandora's paradox
Bangkok Post

57 Insult the King and... Go Directly to Jail
Timothy Garton Ash

59 Recommended Readings

Editorial Notes

Buddhism or Buddhists in Transition?

More and more of us are debating this topic along with the history of Buddhism. Perhaps this is because of the recent inter-ethnic incidents in Burma/Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bodhgaya (India) and Siam.

Buddhism and Secularization is a hot topic on facebook among Thai Progressive Buddhists. Key issues being discussed are the many cases of misbehaving monks, the centralization of Buddhism by the state government and the wrong system of Buddhist Education in Thai society.

Ven. Phra Paisal Visalo who has done comprehensive research on *'The Future of Thai Buddhism'* said -

"These kind of cases happened all the time, but it is big news now because of the influence of media. The media, does not just spread the bad news, but it also makes the monks become popular like 'celebrities'. In the past monks who were very popular did not become like this..... it is making people so attached with personal gain. When these 'celebrity monks' did something wrong it causes heart break to the lay Buddhist. "

This is similar to Pracha Hutuanuwatr, the first INEB Secretary who said,

"Deep down, the young generation are so 'spiritually innocent'."

These are just a few reflections of Thai Buddhist scholars and Seeds of Peace will have a fuller version of their interviews in the next issue. It would be good to have a collection of articles from any of you who would like to debate on this transition and contribute dealing with this issue. INEB are eager to collaborate with your good ideas to make this good practice at different levels, both individual and society. Please share with us.

In the past four months, we have engaged with many activities with different themes mostly focusing on building good relationships among human beings and human beings with nature. You will find progress and outcome reports in this issue.

INEB cordially invite you to join us for the forthcoming **INEB Conference on Inter-faith Dialog for Peace and Sustainability on October 30 to November 4, 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.** Please visit our website at www.inebnetwork.org for more details. We are look forward to having you join us, if you need any further information, please contact conference@inebnetwork.org

ASEAN Sunthorn Phu Award 2013

to Mrs. Dara Kanlaya (Lao PDR) and Mr. Naowarat Pongpaiboon (Siam)



Sunthorn Phu was recognised as an Important Person of the World by UNESCO, on the occasion of 200th anniversary of his birthday (1786-1986). The ASEAN Sunthorn Phu Award is issued to promote and exalt talented poets from ASEAN member countries. The Sunthorn Phu Award was organised by the Ministry of Culture of Thailand, entitled to the Thai first-class poet Sunthorn Phu.

The awarding ceremony was held at the Thai National Culture Hall in Bangkok on June 26, drawing poets from ten ASEAN member countries.

Lao poet *Dara Kanlaya*, better known for her pen name *Douangchampa*, has won the ASEAN Sunthorn Phu Award 2013 in Thailand, according to the Lao News Agency KPL.

Dara is a high-profile author, having produced some 60 short stories, over 90 poems, seven novels, and a two-hour play, "Boua Deng", selected by the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. She was the first Lao poet honoured with this award.

Dara, 73, a poet with national outstanding performances in various fields in poetry and writing, had received the SEA Write Award in 2010 and the National Artist in the Literature Category.

Dara Kanlaya or Douangchampa is a poet who has had great acknowledgments within the Lao society for 50 years.

She had been a pioneer of Lao Palm Leaf Manuscripts Protection Project from 1988 to 2004 and for National Reading Promotion Project since 1992.

Dara's writing theme mostly deals with women's issues and gender, promoting a better living standard for women through education. She also works as curator of old palm-leaf manuscripts, and studies classic Lao literature.- VNA (Vietnam News Agency)



Naowarat Pongpaiboon, is a Thai National Artist of Poetry and a SEA Write Award winner. He was born on March 26, 1940 in Kanchanaburi province in Thailand, and graduated from the faculty of law at

Thammasat University. His inspiration to be a poet arose early in his life, after he found his a ballad written by his father when he was a young man, and felt inspired to write one also. This marked the beginning of his path as a poet.

'Just a Movement' is the collection of his poems from 1973 to 1979, which earned him a SEA Write Award in 1980. Some parts of 'Just a Movement' reflect upon political crisis in Thailand, due to his involvement in the student movement. Later in 1993, he was praised as Thailand's National Artist of Poetry.

Now a 72 year old man, he still loves what he does. His blog is alive and updated with his valuable works.



Inter-Faith Dialog for Peace and Sustainability

INEB Biennial Conference 2013

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, October 27 to November 4, 2013

- 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)

Contact : INEB Secretariat Office, Bangkok, Thailand Tel. (+66 2) 438 9331-2, Fax. (+66 2) 860 1278, E-mail: conference@inebnetwork.org, Website: www.inebnetwork.org

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

Citation for the **2013 Ramon Magsaysay Award** Lahpai Seng Raw



LAHPAI SENG RAW
Myanmar

Myanmar is a country caught between its past and the future. The past is one of decades of ethnic strife world's longest- and fifty years of a brutal military dictatorship that plunged the country into isolation, turning it into one of the least developed in the world. With the general elections in 2010, Myanmar has taken its first uncertain steps towards a more open and democratic future, by ending its isolation and instituting a civilian government. The past, however, is not quite past, and in creating its future Myanmar is faced with complex and difficult challenges.

A sixty-four-year-old widow and member of the Kachin ethnic minority, Lahpai Seng Raw is at the forefront in facing these challenges. The daughter of a state-level public official and a teacher, she studied psychology at Yangon University. As a student, she personally experienced the military's abusive rule when she was detained on the suspicion that she had communications with her brother who was in the Kachin insurgency. In 1987 she

began to involve herself in relief work for internally displaced peoples in the Myanmar-China border. Moving to Bangkok in 1990, she then worked as development-in-charge in ROKA, the Kachin Independence Organization's humanitarian wing. In 1997, with the help of faith-based groups and non-government organizations (NGOs), Seng Raw took the bold step of establishing, in military-ruled Burma, the NGO called Metta Development Foundation. Metta addressed the problems of population displacement and emergency relief in the country's conflict zones, starting in northern Myanmar, where fighting between Kachin rebels and government forces had already displaced over 70,000 people.

Seng Raw's primary concern has always been that Metta build trust among all stakeholders through joint efforts in comprehensive, participative, long-term interventions. In agriculture, it has established more than 600 farmer field schools (FFS), capacitating over 50,000 farmers in improved farm and forest management. Metta also established schools and training centers in early childhood education. It introduced community-managed water, health and sanitation systems, and other healthcare projects. Metta provided funding and technical support for a wide range of livelihood projects. In 2008 when tropical cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar—the worst natural disaster in the country's recorded history—Metta's leadership, reach, and effectiveness was confirmed as it took the lead in a massive rehabilitation, reconstruction, and

development effort that covered large sections of the country and benefited hundreds of thousands of cyclone victims. Under Seng Raw's leadership, Metta has grown to be the largest NGO in Myanmar, with a staff of 600, branches outside Yangon, and three research and training centers. Its various programs have reached over 600,000 people in 2,352 communities.

Working in a war-torn and socially fractured country, Seng Raw has shown both amazing courage and a unique ability to work with both government and rebels. She fully appreciates that in addressing conflict and instability, it is essential to build a foundation of stable, self-reliant communities. With this conviction, she has advocated an inclusive peace and reconciliation process in Myanmar. She has herself been an example of inclusiveness, and an embodiment of what metta means, "loving kindness." A Kachin Christian—hence, twice a member of the minority—she has demonstrated tact and openness as a leader, working harmoniously with various groups across ethnic, religious, and political divides. After serving as Metta's executive director for thirteen years, she has deliberately relinquished the position to empower a new generation of leaders. But she remains active in the NGO community, and in peace and development efforts.

In electing Lahpai Seng Raw to receive the 2013 Ramon Magsaysay Award, the board of trustees recognizes her quietly inspiring and inclusive leadership—in the midst of deep ethnic divides and prolonged armed conflict—to regenerate and empower damaged communities and to strengthen local NGOs in promoting a non-violent culture of participation and dialogue as the foundation for Myanmar's peaceful future.

Citation for the 2013 Santi Pracha Dhamma Award

According to the principles of Mr. Puay Ungphakorn.

Ms. Somluck Hutanuwattra



Somluck Hutanuwattra is a name that may not be familiar with ordinary people. (Eventhough her first and last name may sound similar to a famous female figure two years earlier). Not to mention her reputation for facing confrontation in the business and social circle. She is well known for her guts and tough personality that match the old saying “People who love a lot like Leather , People who hate like mat”

However in an era of corruption and inequality where the vast majority of the population remain

in poverty whilst a small minority in the elite classes prosper Somluck is an interesting role model. If there was currently a public referendum on this issue we may have to accept the radical justice as seen in the movie *Les Misérables* that said, “Justice has anger in itself ... wrath of justice is justify to bring justice”

Her role as a business person may overshadow her recognition for humanitarian actions, which have been deep rooted since her childhood from her parents and mentors. This later led her to an obligation to become a nun.

As a result, it is not surprising that Somluck become both business-women and activist. Her work largely emphasizes on humanitarian activity rather than donations like many other organizations. This is because she realized the current situation of Thai society driven by materialism and hedonism, where only a few accumulate wealth and power through domination of natural resources both in Thailand and internationally. This is inline with the old saying “Money is a drug. Rice, fish is real” which has largely been forgotten in Thai society. However it is very relevant in

addressing the responsibility of business to society.

Violence and conflict within Thai society happens more frequently than ever before causing Somluck to continuously fight for humanitarian actions. This is to reveal the truth of what happens in a political rally; the unfairness in political structures and more importantly the injustice caused by the unfair use of power. The latter caused great distress and misery to those who suffered in the major flooding crisis in Bangkok in 2554.

Not to mention competition for natural resources that has been dominated and destroyed by domestic and international capital. Whilst the term “legitimate” is bandied about “human rights violations” follow. Somluck sees her role as a watchdog searching and sharing the truth necessary for Thai society. This fulfills her ambition to establish “Prachatum” or freedom of speech within the society. The results of Somluck’s persistent work supporting social justice must be respected and praised. She is a person who tirelessly works for society in line with the ideology of Ajarn Puey Ungphakorn.



1st FOUNDING MEMBERS’ CONCLAVE INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST CONFEDERATION (IBC)

“Collective Wisdom, United Voice”

HYATT REGENCY, NEW DELHI, 9-12 SEPTEMBER 2013

DELEGATION TO BIHAR 13-14 SEPTEMBER

www.asokamission.in

Bangladesh :

Global Appeal for End of Ethnic
Cleansing against Indigenous People
of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Proud to be Jumma Facebook Page.

Why this is important

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the Indian Sub-continent is the traditional homeland to the 11 ethnic groups who today collectively identify themselves to be an 'indigenous people', namely the 'Jumma.' The British colonized CHT in 1860. With the end of the British colony, the Sub-continent was partitioned into the two nations—Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Secular Democratic Republic of India—in 1947 on the basis of religion. Pakistan was formed with the Muslim majority areas, while India with the non-Muslim majority areas. CHT with 98% non-Muslims (Buddhists, Hindus and Christians) was annexed with East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in violation of the principle of the partition of the Sub-continent and without any consultation with the then—leadership of the Indigenous people. Such annexation is illegal, undemocratic and unfair.

East Pakistan emerged as a nation, 'Bangladesh', in 1971 from the womb of Pakistan through a bloody civil war. Bangladesh has been pursuing a systematic ethnic cleansing policy against the indigenous people—for their being 'different' from the majority Bengali Muslims—through

population transfer. It resulted in an alarming increase of Bengali Muslims from nearly 6% of the total CHT population in 1971 to over 65% in 2011. The successive Governments of Bangladesh perpetrated 13 major genocides against the indigenous people to pave the way for settlement of over a half million Bengali Muslim settlers in CHT in the 1980s and early 1990s. As a result, over 15,000 indigenous people were massacred, about 70,000 indigenous people were forced to cross over to India as refugees and hundreds of thousands of indigenous people were displaced internally. The ethnic cleansing against the indigenous people continues unabated to this day without any attention of the international community. It is a silent genocide and a crime against humanity threatening the very existence of the indigenous people and jeopardizing the peace process started with the 1997 CHT Accord.

**We urge you to
intervene with the issue
for:**

1. Immediate end of the Bangladeshi ethnic cleansing against the indigenous people and withdrawal of Bengali Muslim settlers from CHT;

2. Restoration of the traditional land right of the indigenous people as agreed upon in the CHT Accord;

3. Demilitarization of CHT; and

4. Justice with the victims of the genocides mentioned above.

References:

1. Massacres in the CHT: <http://www.angelfire.com/ab/jumma/massacre.html>

2. "Life is not ours" : <http://www.chtcommission.org/aboutcommission/work/>

3. Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: <http://www.iwgia.org/news/search-news?id=568>

4. Massacres in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvV2gv9pD2k>

5. Al Jazeera-The Stream: land struggle for Bangladesh's indigenous groups <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6tG0VpiejQ>

Burma :

Protecting Myitsone
and Beyond

By Pangmu Shayi

The fate of Myitsone has been in the hearts and minds of Kachins of northern Myanmar ever since plans to construct the Myitsone Dam were unveiled in 2001. This 6,000 - megawatt hydroelectric dam being built just below Myitsone, the Irrawaddy Confluence, by China Power Investment Corporation and Burmese contractor Asia World, is slated to be the world's fifteenth largest.

The dam has been passionately opposed by Kachin students, villagers and environmentalists alike from the very beginning because of the grave dangers it poses to the environment, to Kachin cultural heritage sites, and the land and livelihood of more than 10,000 villagers inhabiting the 47 villages

near the construction site.

The Kachins waged a lonely struggle at first. It was only after the dam construction phase began in early 2010, that the devastating ramifications of constructing a dam of such magnitude on the Irrawaddy, the lifeblood of the nation, caught the attention of downriver Bamas and lovers of the Irrawaddy nationwide. The Save the Irrawaddy campaign soon gathered steam and snowballed until on 30 September 2011, President Thein Sein was compelled to announce that the Myitsone dam project was to be suspended during his tenure. Sadly, indications are that the suspended construction will resume, despite the presidential decree.

Much has been said and written about the Myitsone Dam. But what is lesser known yet just as destructive, is the fact that the Confluence Region Hydropower Project (CRHP), of which the Myitsone Dam is a part, calls for building 6 additional dams farther north on the tributaries to the Irrawaddy, the Mali Hka and the Nmai Hka. As a matter of fact, the Chibwe Dam on the Mali Hka River, has been completed in spite of an existing law that prohibits dam construction on tributaries.

The area between the Mali and the Nmai rivers, in the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy, is the Triangle Area – the “other” Triangle Area. This region, said to be home to the Kachin people for more than 20 generations, is populated largely by Hka Hku (up-river) Kachins. The Hka Hku are a fiercely independent group, chronicled in anthropologist E.R. Leach’s “Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure” as a ‘Gumlao’ or Republican type of community, having rebelled against and overthrown the traditional ruling system of hereditary chieftainship.

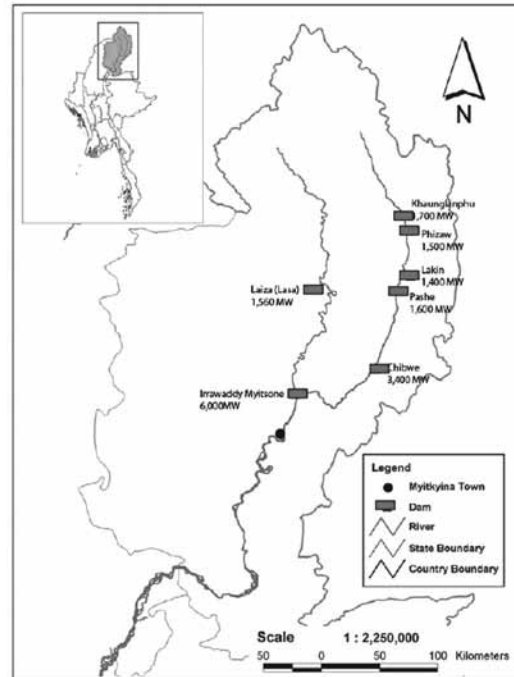
The Nmai Hka, as its name in Kachin indicates, is impossible to navigate due to the great rocks and boulders that litter its bed and the precipitous river sides which make landing impossible. As a result, very few outsiders have set foot in these remote parts. But for the lucky few who have, the landscape offers awe

inspiring beauty. “An ever expanding picture of untamed natural beauty with new marvels at every stage”, is how an American missionary who toured these parts in the early 1930’s described it.

The Triangle Area is part of a region considered one of the most bio-diverse in the world. It is home to the hornbill and other species of colorful birds, black-winged, green-bodied butterflies and other types of rare butterflies. From 1914 to 1953, it was the stomping ground of noted horticulturalist F. Kingdon Ward, dubbed “Nampan Du”, or “Flower Chief” by the locals for his obsession of collecting and cataloging the many varieties of rare orchids native to the area.

Sad to say, this most picturesque region is also one of the least developed areas in the country. It is a place forgotten and neglected by the rest of the country, the people left to their own devices to deal with issues of food insufficiency, lack of medical care and education opportunities, and such. The first ever aid agency to visit the area is the Metta Development Foundation. The Metta team, which made the visit in October 2005, reports a high infant mortality rate and prevalent instances of children and adults suffering some form of physical disability or mental retardation due to poor nutrition.

Aggravating these social and health ills would be the added environmental impact of constructing six dams on the rivers that



Map locations of dam projects
(Photo: International Rivers)

border the area. If the Myitsone Dam is any indication, villagers displaced by dam construction and others with no other viable livelihood opportunities, will resort to indiscriminate logging and small-scale gold mining, further eroding an already fragile eco system. The immediate Myitsone area is now almost bare of forests and trees, and the lovely orchids that used to grow naturally on these trees, ripped off and sold to markets in China.

It is crucial then, not just to stop the Myitsone Dam, but all other dam construction on the Irrawaddy and its tributaries. The campaign to save the Irrawaddy must also include saving its tributaries, the Nmai and Mali. One option of saving this biodiversity hotspot from the clutches of dam builders, is to target swaying political will, so that the entire Triangle Area is declared protected,

and all or most of it turned into a national park. Although easier said than done, it is not an entirely impossible scenario.

It is heartening to learn that the newly minted Ramon Magsaysay awardee, Lahpai Seng Raw, founder of the Metta Development Foundation, has pledged to use her award money of US 50,000 towards projects that will protect and preserve the Myitsone area, and provide income generation activities for its communities. The prize money is admittedly a mere drop in the ocean, given the magnitude of the needs, but it is certainly a step in the right direction. Hopefully Seng Raw’s selfless dedication will inspire other like-minded individuals and organizations, national and international, to take up the challenge of protecting and preserving our national treasure, that of Myitsone and the region beyond it.

Cambodia :

Cambodia's Farce Election

A dictator--and a distant whiff of Tiananmen Square

Written by James Pringle

Source: Asia Sentinel

The huge streams of young Cambodian aged 18 to 20, as they move through the streets of Phnom Penh in the evening on motorbikes, carrying the rising sun flag of the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), put one in mind of the students in the days running up to June 4, 1989, the infamous Tiananmen "incident" in Beijing.

There is the same naive enthusiasm of political neophytes, the burning desire for change, indeed the word "change"-- "doh" in Khmer -- is their rallying cry. They have the same carefree lack of fear of the forces of overwhelming power ranged against them. In China's case it was the People's Liberation Army, the so-called army of the people, and here it is the military forces of Hun Sen, not least the prime minister's special 10,000 "bodyguards" with their heavy weapons, and Chinese military helicopters.

As Mao Zedong said: "Political power grows from the barrel of a gun." Hun Sen proved that in 1997 when he ousted Prince Norodom Ranariddh, winner of the first United Nations-supervised election of 1993, in a bloody putsch in which pulling tongues out of mouths with pliers was

applied as one singular torture mode I learned about at the time.

Ranariddh at least had weapons and experienced generals, and managed to hop a plane out. Nowadays the forces arrayed against Hun Sen's warriors don't have the military strength of a popgun, and no one with a military background. The only thing they may not lack is courage or numbers.

Hun Sen should have been forewarned. A million people had greeted King Norodom Sihanouk's corpse as it was returned last October from Beijing. They were angry.

As the opposition led by Sam Rainsy, who returned from self-exile last Friday having received a royal pardon, to be greeted by crowds of at the very least 100,000, begins its last-moment and somewhat quixotic campaign, one is struck by the similarities of the forces ranged against him with those at Tiananmen.

Sick as people are of the recent deadly assault on Cambodia's forests, especially in very recent times, as I witnessed two months ago in the burned-out but still smoking remains of them in eastern Monduliri province, and

talked to a frightened old lady whose house was destroyed, the land-grabbing of an elite few of the plots of the country and even city folk, and the 99 year leases awarded to Vietnamese companies growing rubber and sugar, Russian oligarchs and Chinese and South Korean entrepreneurs.

Of course, China was ruled by old men then like Deng Xiaoping. But, wait a moment, is Cambodia not also a place where leadership is reserved for elders? Though Hun Sen is only 61, many of his cohorts are in their 70s and early 80s: the same bleary faces have been in power for around 30 years, including the other two men in his ruling triumvirate, Chea Sim and Heng Samrin, former Khmer Rouge to the roots. The former needs to be carried on ceremonial occasions on a chair, and the latter recently celebrated his 80th birthday.

China and Hun Sen's Cambodia have the same economic philosophy, an anarchic form of capitalism, and a Maoist political order learned while they were members of the Khmer Rouge. Of course, the pro-Beijing element of the Khmer Rouge have been under trial at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, while the former pro-Soviet, pro-Vietnamese faction - the one of the unholy trinity - has ruled Cambodia since it was put in power by the Vietnamese army during the invasion 34 years ago (which started as a movement to save starving and oppressed Khmers).

It's a farce to call the hustings here "an election," with the cards stacked so much against the opposition, despite last minute concessions by Hun Sen, when he knows he has it in the bag. US President Barack Obama last November told Hun Sen he should make sure the election was free and fair, and pushed him to improve human rights. Hun Sen shrugged it off.

After all, 89 percent of Cambodians still live in rural areas, and this is where the regime has its ruthless political machine of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and its enforcers. No wonder when Sam Rainsy and his coalition partner Kem Sokha passed through Kompong Speu yesterday there was hardly an opposition member on the streets. They were either non-existent, or tucked away safely at home so they would not be fingered by the local CPP power-holders.

When I see the young people here on their cheerful patrols through the streets, I feel hope for the future. But then, I felt that earlier in Beijing until the massacre. I was not based in China in June 1991, but caught a plane there, stopping in Hong Kong where I watched tens of thousands of Hong Kong Chinese in a huge street procession against the violence in Tiananmen.

When I reached the capital, with a handful of journalists on an empty plane - foreign civilians were fleeing on flights out, not in. The immigration officials - surreptitious sup-

porters - stamped our passports anyway. On the streets were overturned buses with students and workers behind them, who avidly pored over the Hong Kong papers we brought in with news of Tiananmen and the killings.

The next day, outside the Jianguo Hotel, I had to throw myself on the ground as an undisciplined rabble of PLA soldiers started a panic and began firing in all directions, including into diplomatic flats where braveayis (middle-aged home-help with pudding bowl style haircuts) showed their mettle by throwing themselves on top of foreign children to protect them with their bodies.

There was not a vehicle on the road, so I bought a battered old bicycle from a passing man in a worn Mao suit, and pedaled down to Tiananmen on which a day or two before a single man had held up a line of tanks. Later, when buses started moving across Tiananmen again, I took photos through the window of tanks in front of Mao's portrait at the Gate of Heavenly Peace, and not a soul on the bus reported me, though one woman said she was afraid the PLA would fire through the windows, a valid point that made me desist further.

If you are a journalist who has witnessed massacres, like I have in China, Angola (of Belgian men, women, children and babies) and Cambodia - I witnessed dozens of executed (by Lon Nol's army)

Vietnamese floating down the Mekong past Neak Luong - in 1970, and reported it for Reuters - it's best to speak out about them from time to time to stop them happening again.

This is a cautionary tale, and I'm not saying it will happen here. But events of 1997 were not reassuring, and the same people are still in power. And if they stay in power, and try to put their offspring in power, there will be certain violence sooner or later, because people have had enough. As Information Minister Khieu Kanharith recently said, not necessarily in the same context: "This is Cambodia. Anything can happen here."

That's why I feel concerned for the young students on their motor-bikes and rising star flags of the CNRP of Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha. One knows Hun Sen is watching them too, and Hun Sen is no doubt fretting, as he tends to do. If he feels threatened, he will move. That's certain.

Hun Sen knows he would never win a fair election. In the past few months people here have really begun to express anger about the greed of the ruling elite, their villas and Land Cruiser SUVs, their land-grabbing of lands I have seen in eastern Monduliri province ? it's the same in neighboring Rattanakiri - the utter destruction of the forest, wildlife and rare plants and trees.

In truth, this election to take place next Sunday should not really be

held, because the cards are stacked so firmly against them by Hun Sen and his hangers-on. Even the European Union refused to send witnesses to the process this time.

But Hun Sen knows that a majority of voters in the capital oppose

him, and that he will lose here. If he tries a crackdown on Sam Rainsy's supporters, he will win the first round, and probably the second round too. What happens next? Possibly the three sons he is grooming for his successor roles will have thought better of it too.

India :

International Conference inaugurates Post Graduate Diploma course in Socially Engaged Buddhism

University of Pune, Department of Pali, India, 21-22 March 2013

Hans van Willenswaard

An unexpected but very timely initiative is taking shape at University of Pune, India. In the year 2014 the start will be made with a Post Graduate Diploma course in Socially Engaged Buddhism over two semesters. Course work will include short essays, book reviews, field work, research projects and a meditation retreat. The major initiators of the course are Prof. Mahesh A. Deokar, Head of the Pali Department, Dhammachari Lokamitra and Mangesh Dahiwalde.

The inauguration exchanges were held at the Conference Hall of Pune University and many prominent Buddhist leaders conveyed their congratulations and administered their blessings to this historic step towards strengthening the profile of Socially

Engaged Buddhism. The course will be shaped in the tradition of the teachings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and will pay due attention to Buddhism in India, Buddhism in countries with Theravada and Mahayana background, as well as Socially Engaged Buddhism in other parts of the world: Europe, America, Africa and Latin America.

Mangesh Dahiwalde opened the discussions emphasizing the importance of Dr. Ambedkar's guidance on applying Buddhist principles to contemporary governance challenges. Dhammachari Lokamitra pictured the transition from Buddhism as 'world denial' to a practice that integrates transformation of self with transformation of the world. Buddhism is a strong force supporting the emancipation of large sections



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891 – 1956)

of Indian society. Prof. Mahesh Deokar provided an overview of the course in socially engaged Buddhism and invited participants to contribute to making the course a success.

Ven. Sanghasena from Ladakh was the first speaker to congratulate the pioneers of the course.

“Sangha members and lay Buddhists should work in solidarity to resolve and redress various challenges faced by the Buddhist communities around the world. In order to do so, we need to empower our Sanghas and the laities for which we must plan to create more Buddhist colleges, institutions, universities, monastic and laymen training institutes and meditation centres.”

His powerful speech was followed by presentations of Buddhist monks and laypersons practicing socially engaged Buddhism in various parts of India. Interesting initiatives and observations were reported from Tamil Nadu by Gautam Prabhu. Buddhism had been prominent in the past in Tamil Nadu and “Tamil Buddhism” is revitalizing.

The second important factor impacting society, after the cast system, is the economic dominance exerted by modern industrial elites.

Lawyer Naresh Mathur presented developments at Deer Park Institute in Bir, the extreme North of India. He also pointed at the importance of the Mind and Life Institute as a platform for renewing Buddhism by dialogue with modern science. Art should be an integral element of socially engaged Buddhism. Ven. Sonam Puntsok reported on the promotion of organic agriculture and dignified rural livelihood in a programme in Bhutan, initiated by his teacher and the founder of Deer Park, Ven. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse.

The inauguration conference was blessed with a visit of Ven. – for the Indians “Guruji” -Arayawangso, a well-known Thai Vipassana teacher based in Mumbai, and a pioneering supporter of the Pali Department at Pune University. The Ven. Arayawangso emphasized the importance of this initiative in the tradition of Dr. Ambedkar. He explained that the Dhamma can be found in “normal” understanding of Nature and the development of a “natural path” from this pure understanding of truth.

Bhante Kalupahana from Sri Lanka explained that political engagement can lead to extremism: active engagement and rigorous detachment should go hand in hand. The new Director of the Tibet House in New Delhi, Prof. Geshe

Damdul illustrated how social engagement took shape in Tibet across history and how it evolved according to the challenges of the time. At present Tibet is caught in a culture of fear. Monastics are at the forefront of spontaneous uprisings, always followed by total suppression. “Implementation” of social goals should be approached as a “life-long retreat”.

In later sessions the multiple engagement of Buddhism in various fields was reviewed: Buddhism in economics, management,

psychology, aesthetics, politics. Dr. Supriya Rai gave lively examples of training business students and her previous work at TATA Motors. On behalf of the INEB working group on Buddhist Economics I proposed INEB could organize a workshop as part of the future course with the involvement of the growing group of resource persons – practitioners, researchers, policy makers – on “mindful” economics that are increasingly connecting through the network.

Siam :

The forgotten Free Thai hero

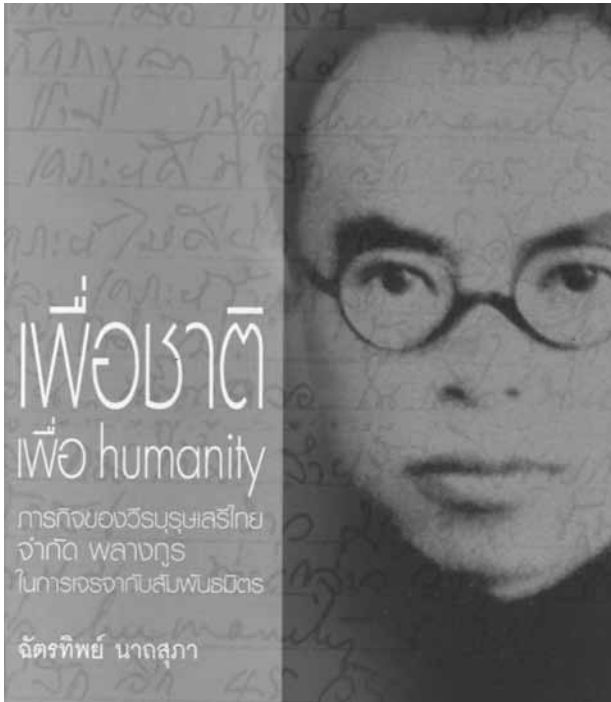
KUPLUTHAI PUNGKANON
THE NATION July 11, 2013

Despite a book being written about him, the story of Chamkad Balangkura has remained one of the least-known aspects of the Free Thai movement that rose against Japanese occupation in World War II. Now the author of the book has penned a stage play in the hope of wider recognition for the man who risked his life to take Thailand's case to China.

Historian and economist Chatthip Nartsupha revealed the depth of Chamkad's heroism in his 2006 book “Pheu Chart Pheu Humanity” (“For Nation, For Humanity”). It is a striking tale of a young man's clandestine mission

to sneak across borders and secure from China's Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek a promise that Thailand's independence would be recognised after the war. Chiang in turn pleaded Siam's case to US President Franklin Roosevelt. By that time Chamkad was dead, a victim of cancer doubtless fed by the enormous stress of his undertaking.

Professor Chatthip's book earned praise, but he feels the story demands a wider audience, so on August 30 and 31, his political-economy students at Chulalongkorn University will present a play about Chamkad at the school's Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for



Dramatic Arts. The production happily coincides with the professor's 72nd birthday, an auspicious one in Thailand.

Chatthip wants more people to be aware that Chamkad was one of the most important heroes of the National Liberation Movement, initially code-named the XO Group, led by future prime minister Pridi Banomyong. Better known to history as the Free Thai movement, this was the local effort to expel the Japanese occupiers by force. The support of the Allies was crucial - along with their readiness to recognise Thailand's post-war sovereignty.

MR Seni Pramoj secured the backing of the United States, and in 1943 Pridi decided to send 28-year-old Oxford University scholar Chamkad to Chongqing to seek help from the ruling Nationalist

Party. He would also communicate with British and American forces helping Chiang in the fight to oust the Japanese Imperial Army from China.

What Chamkad accomplished "was magnificent for the country", Chatthip says, but, because he died soon after his mission, still young, and his work was done in secret, his name "almost vanished in Thai history". Only a 1,000-page diary remained, chronicling his journey, preserved by his wife Chalopchalai. A copy is now available at the National Library, but Chatthip heard the story earlier while on a Pridi Banomyong scholarship for Thurakit Bandit University.

Chamkad was the eldest son of Phraya Padungwittayaserm, the scholar who wrote the well-known Thai textbook "20 Mai Muan Poem". Chamkad earned a scholarship

to study philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford in England, where he wrote "New Siamese Philosophy", a book that characterised the revolution of 1932 as a "renaissance" that transformed Thailand into a civil society and sowed the seeds of people power.

The title of Chatthip's book, "For Nation, For Humanity", are the words Pridi spoke to Chamkad as he left for China. Chamkad would repeat the phrase to himself during his mission - and again as gastritis and liver cancer seized him.

The meaning of "for nation" is clear enough, but Chatthip believes "for humanity" refers to victory in a battle for the compassion of all humanity. "I think there are three important lessons about Chamkad's act of bravery that younger generations should acknowledge.

"The first is simply that no one today realises how crucial it was to get China's support." That's forgotten because the US and British roles have always been emphasised.

Chiang Kai-shek was not expected to be easily appeased. Thailand had not been a good friend to China in recent decades, and the Thai government had been increasingly hostile to Chinese immigrants. But the movement's leaders were delighted to learn that Chiang was not only ready to recognise their aims but also to promote them among the Western Allies.

"In his diary," Chatthip says, "Chamkad wrote that Chiang told him,

no matter what the situation was, the Chinese government was willing to help Thailand regain its sovereignty. And the Chinese kept his promise."

The second revelation behind the mission, he says, was the compromise struck between Thai royalty and the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) that had usurped its power. He discovered that Mom Chao Suphasawat Wongsanit Sawatdiwat, representing the Thai royal interests in Britain, travelled to China and talked to Chamkad for seven days and nights to forge an agreement, based on democracy, that best met the homeland's interests.

And the third message from Chamkad's story is the important role that ordinary civilians played in the Free Thai movement, which ensured the Japanese ouster. "In the Thai historical records, much of the emphasis has instead gone to the heroic leaders and those who operated in foreign countries," Chatthip says.

These lessons aren't lost on Pornsilp Patcharintanakul, deputy secretary-general of the Board of Trade and Thai Chamber of Commerce, who will play Chiang Kai-shek in the Chula production. The story, he says, is full of "vital collective values that have been neglected. That spirit has gone today, everybody is interested in his or her own benefit, and corruption is common."

Asian Women's Interfaith Gathering

Ginger Norwood



I feel a connection with these women I've just known 2 ½ days. I don't even feel that with people I've worked with for years! When we are from countries where religious tensions are high, it is hard to look for commonalities. The situation makes us work separately. The exercises we've done make us realize we are praying and working for the same things in different ways.

The Asian Women's Interfaith Gathering, the first of its kind, was held January 18-20, 2013 at Wongsanit Ashram outside Bangkok, Thailand. The gathering brought together 35 women from 11 countries across Asia.

The focus and priority of the gathering was relationship—building among Asian women activists from various spiritual/religious perspectives. We aimed to create an environment where we were living the integration of spirituality and social justice activism as we came together to assess our strategies at such integration more broadly. The goal was to create space that was conducive to both active engagement and strategizing around the very pressing issues of injustice we are facing today (talking and thinking with our heads and hearts) and also of physical, mental and emotional support and rest, recognizing the urgent need for nurturing well-being among women

leaders and activists.

We structured the gathering very differently than the commonly adopted academic format of information exchange based on 'experts' who talk and 'practitioners' who listen; we did not have paper presentations or panel discussions. We used the time and space to really talk together as friends, equals, and allies. Each woman was asked to come prepared to share her thoughts, opinions, experiences, and visions on gender justice and spirituality in her context. All sessions were participatory, reflecting and sharing from our own experiences. We worked in small groups with effective reporting back so that everyone had a chance to share and engage. The gathering included morning yoga, guided meditation, spacious discussions on issues and also our personal lives, and evenings for fellowship and deeper connections.

Over the past three decades, women's issues and rights based approaches have grown within social organisations in Asia. Women in many countries throughout the Asian region have benefitted from heightened awareness and the ensuing action that has addressed many issues from gender-based violence to human trafficking. Yet, most approaches for gender justice are derived from the West and are not necessarily contextually relevant towards grassroots women in Asia. Importantly, these approaches often ignore the importance of self-awareness and the integration of spirituality for both personal and social transformation.

Through years of practical experience working for social justice, INEB and IWP recognize the essential and vital role of engaged spirituality in holistically addressing the social issues challenging the world today. An engaged spiritual approach seeks understanding of the self as the key to be able to understand others and integrates that understanding into actions that can bring change to wider society. Transformative, empowering frameworks based on cultural, spiritual and social values provide the space and tools to closely examine women's perspectives, which can enable women to not only understand, but to also

'Most of us are activists and most are burned out and have no time for self healing. This sort of interfaith learning program helps to build a strong foundation. I'm looking ahead at how to integrate all these concepts into our lives and work.'

engage in challenging the issues that they are facing.

This Asian women's interfaith gathering brought together activists to share experiences, lessons learned, and through a process of reflection, create a strategic document outlining successes, needs, strategies and future visions. The intention is that the gathering and related documentation will facilitate the process of developing further collaborative actions that help women to transform oppressive structures in their societies and participate fully in social change that benefits all.

The objectives for the gathering included:

- Bring together women of different spiritual traditions and across generations to build friendship and trust, and for collaboration

- To nurture social and spiritual values as foundations for sustainable and effective women's leadership for social justice

- To identify common needs and challenges, celebrate successes, and draw lessons learned about women's activism in Asia, resulting in a needs assessment

- Get energy, inspiration, rest After presenting the objectives and framework for the gathering, participants reflected on their own hopes and expectations for the three days together. Participants' expectations clustered into the following themes, around which the gathering was structured:

- Self care and love, personal spiritual practice, get inspired, be present, gain confidence and energy;

- Meet new friends, learn from each other, share stories;

- Integrate spirituality and social justice issues – peace; women's issues, gender, feminism

- Interfaith networking and collaboration;

'This conference is so different than others I have gone to. Usually I feel heavy. It is so much thinking and talking. In this one, I feel I can share openly my experiences and it feels peaceful.'

Gathering participants agreed this was the first time such an event has taken place in Asia. For many, it was their first time in an all women's space. For some, particularly those from countries where conflicts and violence in the name of religion have separated communities, the chance to meet and share across faiths with respect and love was part of a needed healing process. For women's rights activists who inhabit the world of women's conferences where religion is considered taboo, the space to explore spirituality and social justice as mutually inclusive fundamentals felt supportive and refreshing.

A highlight for many participants was the interfaith prayer ceremony for world peace on the second night of the gathering. Each religion/spiritual group shared a prayer/blessing/reflection as an offering to the unity of the group and the vision of a peaceful world.

As one participant reflected, 'The candle lighting ceremony for world peace was a profound experience for which I have no words to describe what I felt. Everything was so serene,

calm, refreshing and a great opportunity for me at least to learn about the work of our East-Asian counterparts.'

Fundamental to the success of the gathering was the spaciousness created by the retreat/workshop schedule and the attention to personal life sharing. From the first day, participants commented that they felt they knew each other well, despite having just met. Sharing in groups about their spiritual and social justice journeys created a sense of solidarity across differences that were built on both formally in sessions and through informal conversations and sharing throughout the three days. Mindful movements after breaks to energize and focus the group, as well as opportunities for individual and group creative expression contributed to the feelings many participants expressed that they were leaving the gathering feel more energized, relaxed, and open – a rare feeling for many who said they spend so much of their professional lives in meetings and discussions.

Outcomes

A clear outcome of the gathering was the opportunity to identify and connect with women from different countries and faiths/spiritual perspectives who work for social justice and gender justice. It afforded the opportunity for women from different countries to learn about one another's contexts, and women from the same country to share together across faith lines which often create barriers. Many women expressed that they felt alone when trying to raise these issues in their faith and activist communities, and the gath

ering broke those feelings of isolation.

Many participants talked about feeling personally re-energized and re-inspired as an outcome of talking and sharing with like minded women's activists. Mutual and honest exchange between and across religion/faith was identified as very helpful learning to gain insights on different perspectives. Such exchanges are very difficult in contexts where religious tension is high, and yet it is in those communities where understanding is needed most; having the space outside the contexts of conflicts supported deeper reflection.

Participants commented on the realization that the challenges women's activists are facing – across country and religious lines – share many commonalities, and thus our struggles for justice could be more collaborative and mutually supportive. Strategies identified – like reinterpretation

of religious texts from a gender justice perspective – have similarly been used by women activists in different religions, and the learnings for effective methods and approaches were beneficial to everyone.

Several participants articulated their personal realization as a result of the gathering of the need for self-care and well-being for themselves as women activists; the foundation for transformation is self love, and self transformation is intimately linked to social transformation. Self-love is a spiritual process, and thus the connection between spirituality and social justice begins with awareness of oneself and our well-being. Linked to that, the understanding of empowerment as integrating inner strength, personal change, social justice, human dignity, and spirituality, helps to place spirituality within the context of our work for women's rights. These are profound shifts in think-

ing and worldview within most activist cultures, and a shift that could contribute to the sustainability of individual activists, organizations and social justice movements.

Next Steps

'Let's make this more often. It is a way to build global citizenship. We share a lot more common values rather than differences. If we can bring this home and share with colleagues, it would make our lives easier and our work more bearable and mutually collaborative.'

In terms of tangible outcomes beyond the new insights of the participants, there was strong interest in more women's interfaith gatherings, both regionally - naming the power of meeting like minded activists from diverse contexts, and also country specific. Many participants named that interfaith gatherings contribute to solidarity and trust building among women, and would be very useful for organizing around social justice issues.

INEB's bi-annual conference will take place in Malaysia in November, 2013 and the opportunity for another women's interfaith gathering in conjunction with that conference was unanimously supported by participants as a specific next step.

Many of the visions/ideas that participants outlined on the final day are projects that can (and hopefully will) be initiated in a specific locale using available resources. Exchanges and the



possibility for joint programs across religion and country lines could deepen the work and strengthen the impact of the programs, and several participants said they were interested to explore the possibilities of coming together with others with similar ideas to develop the projects further. For others, development of their projects, even within their own locale and context, will require additional resources, and being part of a community/network for sharing ideas for resources and funding would be supportive.

In the months since the gathering, the group has maintained email contact as a whole and also individuals have contacted one another for specific ideas and project collaboration. IWP is committed to helping to maintain the 'community of practice' that was established in the gathering, in the least as a virtual forum for exchange and inspiration, and hopefully that can lead to concrete future partnerships and projects across country and religious lines. The gathering felt supportive, instructive, and unifying for the

women involved; more such gatherings and support to develop the ideas initiated here could be instrumental in promoting gender justice in Asia.

'I don't think there are other spaces and opportunities like this. I feel so privileged to have been a part.'

Common Declaration from the 2nd INEB East Asia Forum



We—members of the East Asian Network of Engaged Buddhists (under the International Network of Engaged Buddhists - INEB) from the three nations of Taiwan, Japan, and Korea—have developed the following joint declaration from our three day 2nd INEB East Asia Forum held in Seoul from June 27-29, 2013.

We fully realize that:

1. many of the individual and communal problems in contemporary East Asian society—such as alienation, suicide, and lack of concern for others—have developed from numerous common structural problems, especially the hyper-competitive social system that prioritizes economic growth.

2. the continuing proliferation of nuclear energy in the region—and its real as well as potential use for developing nuclear armaments—poses a critical threat to all life forms on our planet and the overall ecological system.

3. ethnic, religious, and ideological differences between East Asian peoples—much of which are based on unhealed wounds from the past century of conflict—continue to be used as a basis for hatred, division, and violent conflict.

Based on these realizations, we strive for the respective ideals :

1. To respect and care for life: Based on the Buddhist teaching of interconnectedness, we value a caring society where physical, social, psychological, and spiritual support are fully provided to all who face suffering. In addition, we value the equality of all people despite differences of gender, race, religion, social background, and personal disposition.

2. To respect and uphold “the non-duality of life and environment” (身土不二): Based on the Buddhist teaching of sufficiency and contentment (小欲知足), we value lifestyles that do not emphasize consumerism nor an economic system based on infinite growth that leads to armed conflict over natural resources and the proliferation of nuclear energy and armaments.

3. To embody peaceful coexistence (共生) in East Asia: On the basis of the Buddhist

teaching of universal compassion, we value an awareness of inter-connection and deep fraternity amongst the peoples of East Asian who share so much common culture. This bond extends to all sentient life in this region and the past generations—many of whom died in warfare against each other—and future generations—who depend on our present stewardship of the region.

By realizing these values of the Lord Buddha, we will take the following actions :

1. To strive for the development of Buddhist chaplain training systems, so that Buddhists may be better equipped to meet the most critical suffering of the common people through hospice facilities, suicide prevention and grief support groups, and the protection of animal rights.

2. To bring about the immediate phase-out of nuclear energy and nuclear armaments programs as well as their promotion

by our respective governments in other parts of the world. In turn, to promote sustainable ecological lifestyles by developing Buddhist temples and other Buddhist facilities as centers of alternative energy and low consumption.

3. To continue promote dialogues and exchanges among the three nations—especially among Buddhists and like minded religious persons—to learn from each other and to develop national cultures and a larger East Asian civilization that embodies universal ethics and mutual caring based on our spiritual traditions.

The Participants of the The 2nd INEB East Asia Forum, Seoul as represented by

The Korean Network of Engaged Buddhists (KNEB)

The Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB)

Taiwan Engaged Buddhists

International Buddhist-Muslim Joint Statement Shared Commitment of Action

Bangkok, Siam | 16 June 2013

Buddhist and Muslim leaders from South and South East Asian countries including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, have gathered in Bangkok, Thailand to address escalating tensions between two communities and potential spread of hatred across the region. The consultation was co-organized by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), the

International Movement for a Just World (JUST), and Religions for Peace (RfP).

We recognize these challenges facing the two communities in the region:

1) Rise of extremism, hate speeches and campaigns and instigation of religious discrimination and violence;

2) Prejudice, fear and hatred caused by ignorance, mis—

perception, stereotyping, negative impact of traditional and social media, simplification and generalization, and communal pressure;

3) Misuse of religion by certain religious, political and other interest groups and individuals;

4) Socio economic dimensions of conflict; and

5) Spill—over effects across the region.

We are also deeply aware that if Buddhist and Muslim communities can overcome the challenges that confront them, there is tremendous potential for the growth and development of ideas and values that may help to

transform the region. For Buddhist and Muslim philosophies embody gems of wisdom about the purpose of life, the position and role of the human being and her relationship with all other sentient beings and nature which could well liberate contemporary civilization from its multiple crises. The young in these two communities in particular should be imbued with these profound ideas and values about life and its meaning.

We endorse the Dusit Declaration of 28 June 2006 and commit ourselves to implementing its shared action across the region. Our actions will include intra-religious and inter-religious initiatives in education, advocacy, rapid reaction/solidarity visits/early warning/conflict prevention, constructive engagement with the government, strategic common action, and the effective use of media for positive messages. We will also engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships with governments, inter-governmental bodies such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the United Nations.

*Dusit Declaration
28 June 2006, Bangkok*

A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue on the theme 'Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia working towards justice and peace' was held at the Suan Dusit Place of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, Bangkok from 26-28 June 2006. It was organised jointly by the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (SPDI),

International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and International Movement for a Just World (JUST).

A total of 35 participants from eight countries attended the three-day Dialogue. Most of the participants were Buddhists and Muslims from Southeast Asia. A number of them were socially-engaged scholars and grassroots activists.

The Dialogue was part of a continuous process of interaction and engagement among individuals from the two communities that had begun ten years ago. Since Buddhists and Muslims constitute the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asia's 550 million people, dialogue aimed at enhancing understanding and empathy between the two communities is vital for peace and harmony in the region. In view of the critical situation in Southern Thailand, the Dialogue on this occasion assumed special significance. Apart from Southern Thailand, the Dialogue also reflected upon issues of concern pertaining to the two communities in a number of other Southeast Asian countries.

The Dialogue observed that for most of history relations between Buddhists and Muslims have been relatively harmonious. This has been due largely to a certain degree of mutual respect and a willingness to accommodate differences. This historical back-drop should provide the two communities with the strength and resilience to overcome the challenges that confront them today.

In order to overcome these challenges, the Dialogue made the following proposals:

Civil society groups should utilise to the fullest various

information and communication channels with the aim of increasing knowledge and understanding among Buddhists and Muslims of the principal teachings of their respective religions. Towards this end, SPDI, INEB and JUST undertake to produce a series of monographs in all the Southeast Asian languages which will emphasise the fundamental values and principles in Buddhism and Islam that give meaning to justice and peace. An attempt will also be made to disseminate documentaries on inter-religious harmony that embody real life episodes through various local communication channels as well as via webcasting, podcasting and broadcasting.

The mainstream print and electronic media should highlight those moral values and ethical standards that Buddhism and Islam share in common, and at the same time explain differences in doctrines and rituals with sensitivity. It should also regard it as a duty to eradicate stereotypes and prejudices about the two religions. The media should not aggravate inter-religious ties by distorting and sensationalising events that have implications for religious harmony. In this regard, the media should not allow itself to be manipulated by opportunistic politicians and public personalities who abuse religion and nationalism for their own agendas. Civil society groups should establish 'media watches' to monitor media reporting on matters pertaining to inter-religious ties.

Schools and universities should introduce and expand courses that seek to promote better understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. Since both religions are committed to justice and

peace, it would be worthwhile to increase peace studies programmes at all levels of formal education which focus on non-violence in conflict resolution. School and university curricula should not contain materials which create animosity and perpetuate prejudice between religious and ethnic communities. Civil society groups can help to initiate the development of curricula that reflect Buddhism's and Islam's concern for justice and peace. At the same time, they should monitor school and university curricula to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on inter-religious ties.

Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders should within the context of their respective faiths emphasise those ideas and values which conduce towards inter-religious harmony and the celebration of our common humanity. They should discard the tendency to be exclusive in their outlook and consciously cultivate a more inclusive and universal orientation towards religion. Differences between the two religions should not be allowed to create cleavages between their followers. Buddhist monks and the ulama should work together to eliminate prejudices, hatreds and misconceptions that sometimes tend to separate the two communities. Both should adopt a principled position against violence, especially the killing of civilians, and the destruction of places of worship regardless of who or what the target is. In this connection, civil society groups should engage with religious leaders in order to encourage them to become more inclusive and universal in outlook and more positively orientated towards justice and peace.

Government leaders and politicians should consciously nurture harmonious relations between Buddhists and Muslims and among people of other faiths through both their public pronouncements and policies. It would be utterly irresponsible of government leaders and politicians to exploit religious sentiments for narrow political gain. They should instead initiate meaningful reforms to existing political structures which would protect and strengthen the rights and dignity of the different religious communities. In certain situations it may even be necessary to devolve political authority through the empowerment of disenfranchised religious communities. To endow substance to the empowerment of the community, government and political leaders should adhere to moral principles such as transparency and accountability. Civil society and the media should not hesitate to expose irresponsible leaders who divide the followers of different religions in pursuit of their self-serving political agendas.

Apart from looking at the challenges facing Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia as a whole, the Dialogue also addressed immediate and urgent issues obtaining in specific country situations. The focus was of course on Southern Thailand.

In the case of Myanmar, there was concern over attempts by the government to control religious activities to the detriment of the communities in question. The state itself appears to be a purveyor of prejudice against certain religious communities. In Indonesia, the adverse socio-economic and socio-political situation has had a negative impact upon inter-religious

relations. Unethical methods of proselytisation by groups within a particular religious community allegedly supported by foreign elements have led to a further deterioration in majority-minority ties. There is also a need for the Malaysian state to be more sensitive to some of the legitimate interests of its non-Muslim minorities.

The Dialogue was of the view that the recommendations of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), established to study the situation in Southern Thailand, deserve the wholehearted support of the nation. It is significant that the NRC declared in unambiguous terms that religion is not the cause of the violence in the South. Injustices arising from the existing judicial process and administrative system and poverty and deprivation are more important contributory factors. Historical and cultural conditions have also played a role in prodding militants to resort to violence which has been met with excessive force by the state. The NRC recommends a whole gamut of measures to overcome the violence. Among them is the establishment of a Peaceful Strategic Administrative Center for Southern Border Provinces (PSAC) which inter-alia would seek to promote understanding of the situation and methods to solve the problem in all government agencies among people in the region in Thai society at large and in the international community. There is also a proposal for the state to engage in dialogue with the militants and to act decisively against state officials who abuse their power. There are also other recommendations for solving the unemployment problem, building confidence in

the judicial process and improving the education system.

The Dialogue also proposed that civil society undertake to ascertain the sentiments of the people in the three troubled provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala about the form of local governance that they prefer. A petition with at least 50,000 signatures on the form of governance they opt for should then be presented to Parliament for deliberation. This would be in accordance with the Thai Constitution and would reflect the democratic will of the people of the three provinces.

Monks and the ulama and Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders in general in the three provinces should make a concerted effort to break down barriers that have created a wide chasm between Buddhists and Muslims and instead build bridges of understanding between the two communities. This process would require honest and sincere introspection on the part of the religious leaders and others about their own flaws and

foibles. Critical self—analysis should go hand-in-hand with Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in the three Southern provinces.

INEB and other NGOs should initiate efforts to form a “People’s Watch” comprising both Buddhists and Muslims drawn from various sectors of society whose primary purpose would be to protect and safeguard places of worship, institutions of learning and hospitals among other public institutions. A “People’s Watch” would not only ensure the safety and security of these institutions but more significantly, it would also help foster a spirit of togetherness among Buddhists and Muslims.

Both Buddhists and Muslims from neighbouring countries especially those representing the influential strata in religion, politics and the media should assist in whatever way possible in the process of dialogue and reconciliation in southern Thailand. More specifically they should try to strengthen a more inclusive and universal approach to both religions

informed by values of justice, compassion and forgiveness.

Enhancing understanding and empathy between Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia has become imperative in view of the overwhelming power and influence of contemporary global capitalism rooted in global hegemony. The hegemonic power of global capitalism is the new ‘religion’ which threatens to undermine the universal, spiritual and moral values and world views embodied in Buddhism, Islam and other religions. This is why Buddhists, Muslims and others should forge a more profound unity and solidarity which will be able to offer another vision of a just, compassionate and humane universal civilization.

It is with this mission in mind that we hereby announce the launch of a permanent Buddhist-Muslim Citizens’ Commission for Southeast Asia.

Interactive Dialogue on Actions for Peace and Sustainability Consultative Meeting on



Rebuilding Family, Community, Region, and Nation Amidst Nuclear Fallout

Rev. Toku-un Tanaka

Rev. Toku-un Tanaka is the abbot of Dokei-ji temple in the Odaka Ward of Minami Soma City in Fukushima, some 17 kilometers from the nuclear power plants, as well as abbot of Chuzen-ji temple in the town of Futaba even closer to the plants.

The Splintering of a Buddhist Household

From the time of the tsunami disaster and nuclear incident of March 11, 2011, I became in a variety of ways both a victim and then a refugee, and since then I think I have come to truly understand how it feels to be a refugee. At present, I have four children ages eight, six, four, and one. On the very day of the tsunami before the explosions at the plants, we evacuated the area and went to live in Fukui Prefecture¹ near Kyoto. I have connections there because of my time training as a Soto Zen priest at our head temple Eihei-ji located in Fukui, so we could find a place to rent nearby.

Back in Fukushima, I have various duties to serve the community around my temple, and so, of course, I began to get requests from the lay people in the area for support shortly after the explosions at the reactors. So at the end of March, I decided that it would be best to return to Fukushima to meet people, listen to their concerns, share their worries over their health, and be part of the revival of the community with my temple as a center.

The work increased

rapidly, and I found myself wanting to help people in locations all over the place. I felt with all my heart that this was my duty. In doing so, however, I couldn't see my family at all. If I were able to take a 3-day break, I would make a plan to go home, but the work would soon intrude on the plan. We priests are taught to accept and take on what is asked of us, so I thought I did not have a reason to refuse. Basically, I thought any request I got I would try to fulfill. So quickly I began to carry out all these duties, and the time with my family began to disappear.

We used to live with my mother who helped out with the family. At first, she refused to evacuate with us, but then she moved south to Iwaki City, which is still within Fukushima prefecture. Without her or myself around, my wife was raising our four children by herself. There are times when nothing special is happening at home, but other times when there are and, of course, times when the children get sick. If one person in the household gets a cold, then it spreads easily to the others and creates a situation for my wife in which she really cannot bear being alone.

At one point, my oldest son did

not want to go to school anymore. He said his real school is back in Fukushima. It took him about a year to get used to his new school. Everyone around him there was quite nice. Unlike the experience of many other children from Fukushima who had relocated to new areas, he never heard anyone tease him and tell him not come around because of being contaminated by radiation. It took some time for him to make friends. Eventually, he developed many new friends who started to come over to play at our house.

From July to September, Buddhist priests get busy for performing ancestral rites for both the summer Obon festival to the Autumn equinox. During this time, for the most part, I was not able to return home nor meet with my family. For two years my wife and children had gratefully taken refuge in Fukui with the single-minded intention to protect our children from the radiation. However, my wife broke down one day in tears telling me that before the radiation gets her, she'll become sick from trying to endure this kind of broken up lifestyle. At this point, I too finally reached my limit.

So in March 2013, when the school semester ended, my wife and children moved to her parent's house in Iwaki City in Fukushima. My temple is located in Minami Soma, which located to the north of the nuclear power plants, while Iwaki is located to the south of them. If there is no traffic, you used to be able to get from one to the other in an hour and a half. However, because of the incident at the reactors, you can't use the usual through roads, so now it takes about three and a half hours using detours. The best way is to use Route 6, but to do so one needs to get permission from the authorities which can be

difficult. However, this is not just a problem of convenience but also the radiation exposure in driving so near to the reactors. While passing through this area on my commute, my Geiger counter alarm will go off, and even inside the car, I can get exposed to a dose of 30 microsieverts/hour.

In this way, life continues to be quite complicated. For the time being, I am now with my family again. However, never for a moment have I thought that we are now safer from the radiation. I have even thought about getting a lead apron to protect myself on my drives. It's been really gut-wrenching, especially having a one year old child. None of the children can go outside to play freely. The three older kids used to go around barefooted, and if some food fell on the ground, you could pick it back up, brush it off, and eat it without any worries. Now it's of course not possible to live such a lifestyle anymore. Recently, I've been going and coming back every day but have been thinking of how to make things easier and change my lifestyle.

Splintered Communities, Towns, and Province

After completing my training as a Zen monk some 15 years ago, I had the goal of living a self-sufficient lifestyle and cultivating the land. I imagined using one harrow and no heavy machinery. I felt if one cannot understand the same way of working as people in the past, then one cannot understand the intensity of these old lifestyles and, therefore, not understand the value of having machinery. If one can understand the value of having machinery, then I think one can understand why we made the shift to using them. This is a process of experi-

encing unknown things and shifts by oneself through cultivating the land, planting each single seed together with one's children, providing water, and pulling up weeds; then at the time of harvest, receiving together its incredible blessing and gaining a feeling of happiness. I had thought of educating my children in this way, but everything has totally changed now. This is so regrettable.

As Rev. Hidehito Okochi and the Inter-Faith Forum for the Review of National Nuclear Policy has stated before, with nuclear energy, there is the cost of life or rather the loss of life, because there is no technique that will provide us a solution to nuclear waste. Although we knew this, such an awareness that, "This will happen in the future and so it would be better to abandon it now," should have been transmitted earlier. I feel extremely frustrated that we did not motivate ourselves to sound the alarm on this totally unjust system. However, I think there is meaning in working to overcome this situation now, so I would like to consider what we can from here on.

In Fukushima, there has developed a bit of a dispute since the incident between the people of its different regions. Fukushima faces the Pacific Ocean, and the region is broken into three main blocks: the coastal area in the east, the middle part of the prefecture, and the far western part of Aizu along the Ou-u mountains. The coastal area is where the nuclear power plants are located, and the ocean breeze has a strong effect. When the explosions occurred at the reactors, it blew the radiation into the central and northern regions of the prefecture, where there are now high rates of fallout. Many of the laborers who worked in the power plants lived in the coastal areas, and it seems to me

that the people in the central part of the prefecture had little awareness of the nuclear issue before the incident. However, like the people in the coastal areas, they are now facing the problems of the radiation. The government only drew lines around areas at a close distance of 20 and 30 kms from the reactors, which means that anyone outside these areas does not qualify for health protection or financial compensation. In this way, there are people and their small children from the central region cities of Fukushima and Koriyama who have tearfully evacuated their homes using their own expenses. I share their feeling. We would all like to protect the children from the radiation.

I think that the people in the central regions, like Koriyama and Fukushima, who are also living in dangerous areas should also receive compensation. The demarcation of evacuations zones should not be determined by the number of kilometers from the nuclear plant but rather the rate of radioactivity in a region. For example, houses where the rate is 0.3 microsieverts/hour and above should have the right to evacuate. The right not to evacuate should also naturally be acknowledged. In the cases of those who have already evacuated, there needs to be a provision to secure an equivalent lifestyle as before the incident, especially in terms of health security. It has now been two years since the incident, and people have not received such provisions. I think this needs to happen for those in real need and for everyone's peace of mind.

My temple in the Odaka Ward of Minami Soma City is located within the 20 km restricted zone. There is another temple of my denomination located just up the road 22 kms from the reactors where I have been kindly

allowed to stay during this time. This zone between 20 and 30 kms extends northwards through to the Kashima Ward of Minami Soma, which is located outside the 30 km line. We could have not foreseen our present lifestyle where many stores are closed and the ones that are open are overcrowded. The roads are also overcrowded, because a number of them have been closed to access. So the style of driving in the area has become rough, and the people have become exhausted. Still nothing has changed about the limits of compensation that have divided the community. Nothing has changed about how people are worried about the radiation and about how to safely raise their children. This boundary that has been imposed upon us contains humans who have been put inside it and pushed outside of it, which has resulted in an invisible wall being created between them. We have always had the sense of being fellow citizens of one town, yet this line has now divided us.

The reality now is that if one makes a normal application for compensation, especially in terms of emotional damages, people from within the 20 km radius can receive 100,000 yen/month. This is for one person, so a household of five adults can get up to 500,000 yen/month. The people in my community are about 80-90% farmers or part time famers, and their monthly income had been until now less than 500,000 yen/month. In this way, people can make more money than they did before through such compensation. A new problem is developing from this in which some people say it is foolish to work and we should instead take the compensation. This is causing problems for the people in the area, especially among families,

because if a family member criticizes another for not working and trying to deal with their life more diligently, they get upset. If such a person had more opportunities, they might actually work harder, but these days there is very little opportunity around here. If we had really wanted to return to the lifestyle that we had before, we would have done so already. But we have been deprived of our farmland, and now what can we do with our fields and paddies? What can you do if the food you grow you cannot eat? People cannot see any hope so they have become depressed. With little to do every day, they begin to drink or just waste their time entertaining themselves.

In this way, children are seeing the dark side of their parents and grandparents. I think they wonder how will the adults overcome things? The children of Fukushima as well as the children from all over our country are looking to see how the adults will cope with this situation. Children are very sensitive, and they hold fast within themselves a dislike for war and an incredible fear of explosions. I myself cannot forget when I was small the fear of seeing an explosion on TV or the fear of reading about bombing and war. When I was growing up in the 1970s and 80s, there was the specter of imminent nuclear war. We grew up with the fear in the back of our minds that with one explosion our future would be thrown into chaos. So the real issue has become how we can come together to achieve the revival of our town, to protect our children, and to overcome our mutual differences.

Towards Revival: The “Politics” of Open Space and Natural Living

I feel that the way of thinking of each person and how they overcome problems is different. When I give a talk in front of 120 people, all 120 will have a different way of thinking. I think this is actually quite interesting. From a flower, every single petal is different, and since we are different, we can all compliment each other. If every flower and petal were the same, it would not be interesting at all. In this way, I think you first must acknowledge and accept such differences, without criticism or blame. We should not blame those people who are involved in nuclear power. Nuclear power engineers and promoters of the industry are after all just human beings who also have children. If you accuse them of anything, they'll just be dismissive. This attitude holds true for everyone, myself included. Even if you are aware of your own faults and then someone clearly points them out, it's still not so easy to acknowledge and actually solve—and this is of course true for the nuclear issue. If you trust this process and then experience a change from within, I think we can figure out a way to deal with the situation.

What I want to focus on is creating a joyful space, like a festival (matsuri). This term “festival” harkens back to the past. When talking about politics, Japanese would use the terms osameru, which means “to rule” or “govern”, and matsuri-goto, which is another term for politics (seiji) or government. Now, these two terms matsuri and seiji have become divorced from one another, but originally politics (seiji) and matsuri-goto were synonymous. When planting season begins, there is gratitude for the earth and

for the spirits as well as gratitude for the coming harvest. The rain falls and the sun shines. These are all the carrying out of the matsuri-goto—these “political affairs” connect together all humans in a community, where there is never neglect to help one another. Therefore, I want to create matsuri that place importance on the smiling faces of everyone, especially the children, and to express gratitude for the earth and life. If many people or even one person can be brought into such a space, they might understand the feeling of the atmosphere and gain a sense of gratitude saying, “Yes, this is really important.” I think if we can create such a space, then we can create change from within.

Where I am from in Fukushima the interpersonal ties in the farming community are especially deep. Everyone knows that one person cannot live without the support of others. In this way of thinking, it would have been nice if we all could have evacuated together, because we felt that one person cannot evacuate alone. In order to protect the children, the mothers evacuated with them, but it's been really difficult for them to be in new areas that they are not familiar with. So little by little, we have been building a network of refugees among themselves. Our people have now been away from the places where they used to live for more than two years and still have not really been able to settle down. They still have longing for their hometown. Meanwhile, the people who have stayed behind have also been having a really difficult time. The numbers of people in the area are gradually decreasing. By this month, March, the number of people will decrease again as a new employment cycle begins around the country. Work

is really hard to get, and the labor supply is really lacking. There might be new people who return, like for example my own family, but I doubt anyone will return to their original place of dwelling. One thing I have heard is that doctors in the area are also gradually leaving, because as medical professionals they really understand what the situation is here.

So my feeling is that the disaster of 3/11 continues on. Amidst it all, we must ask how the people can find any more strength within them—both the people of Fukushima and the people of Japan. Over these two years, we have received all kinds of support from people. They have listened to us and become intimate with us. I am sincerely thankful for all this support in helping over get through this experience, and I am filled with gratitude.

However, this is a long term battle. My family and I for the time being have returned to Fukushima. However, as the rate of leukemia around Chernobyl suddenly rose five years after the incident, the evacuation zone may yet again widen and it is quite possible that we will have to evacuate again. Simply, at this time, I am with my family on a daily basis, and after two years of being apart I want to reconfirm my affection for them. I think it's good that my children can experience living with their father again. In this way, I have become determined to live my life moment by moment. It is still not clear how to concretely do what is best, but I think this is what is best for now. To say that we are living in Fukushima, I think means that we are valuing living moment by moment and day and day amidst this extraordinary situation.

If it is possible to stay and continue to rebuild our community

and our local networks, I think the temple will play a central role. In Japan Buddhist temples number around 70,000. This is actually more than the number of convenience stores. There are all different kinds of people who depend on a Buddhist temple, a Shinto shrine, or a Christian church. In this way, religious professionals need to overcome barriers between them, and religion in general should never speak about differences. We religious professionals should encourage each other on this matter. I and other young religious professionals are doing our best now, and we seek your assistance. We invite you to come visit us in Fukushima if you can. For women, 3-4 days should be no problem, and for men, I think up to an entire week is fine. Afterwards, I think it's best to take a rest for your body to recover a bit. I truly hope you will continue to support us, and I thank you all so much.

This chapter was transcribed, translated, and edited by Jonathan Watts and Rev. Jin Sakai from a talk given by Rev. Tanaka on March 3, 2013 at Ken-ju-in Temple, under the abbotship of Rev. Hidehito Okochi of the Inter Faith Forum for the Review of National Nuclear Policy and the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists.

Suksit Siam



117-119 Fuang Nakorn Road,
Bangkok 10200
Tel: 02-225-9536-8, Fax: 02-222-5188
email : suksit-siam@gmail.com
www.kledthaishopping.com

Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
except Sunday. English books on Engaged Buddhism are available.

Lessons from Fukushima

Harsha Navaratne

“Mothers come to me, almost every day, asking what they can do for their children...They tell me about the doctors they have seen and the hospitals they have visited...but still there is no clear answer for their children...As a Buddhist priest, I am talking to them and helping to overcome their suffering by listening and sharing their pain.”

The Buddhist priest speaking to us was from a traditional Japanese temple 20 kilometers from Fukushima. His voice was soft, and he paused for a few minutes after every sentence. Our entire group was listening intently, hardly taking a breath. Later, back in the van, as we traveled to the next temple, everyone was quiet and deep in thought. I was filled with sadness but also a firm conviction that it had been a right decision to visit Fukushima.

When we started planning the 2012 Executive Committee meeting for the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, Jon Watts suggested having it in Japan. The Japanese EC members agreed, and Rev. Okano offered to host the program in his temple. Then they recommended that we organize study visits before the meeting to learn more about Buddhism in Japan and see the work being done by engaged

Buddhist priests.

The Japanese hosts developed three study visits and I chose to join the Fukushima group without much prior thought. I had been concerned about the disaster when it happened, of course, but it wasn't until I listened to that village temple priest speak, that it fully hit me emotionally.

As a development worker in my own country, after 30 years of war and a devastating tsunami, I have heard stories like this from different people. I have heard the stories of people who lost their loved ones, people who had all of their belonging destroyed, people who had nowhere to go and nobody to help, people who felt they had no future, people with no hope.

Still, I never imagined that I would hear those stories in Japan. Japan has always been the dream country for other Asian nations. It is held up as the role model for economic development. I never expected to hear such stories of pain, loss, fear, helplessness and sadness. I never expected to hear about disenfranchised people and inactive policy makers.

Industrialization, economic liberalization, efficient management systems, maximization of gross national product, these were

supposed to be the secrets of Japan's development. These were the policies for economic growth that we “less developed” countries were supposed to learn and teach to the next generation. There were several people in the group from South and Southeast Asia, and we were all questioning how this was possible in Japan

Based on what we learned in our classrooms, what we read in the newspapers and literature, and what we watched in films and documentaries, Japanese society was supposed to be the most modern, the best organized, the most disciplined and efficient. How did this happen in a “developed” country? How did this disaster give them so much of a shock? Why is the recovery process not reaching all people?

It's true that most natural disasters are unpredictable and unpreventable, but in this case, people have mostly recovered from the earthquake and tsunami. They have not recovered from the man-made disaster at the Fukushima nuclear disaster. People who were living in the “declared area” within 30 kilometers from the reactor have lost all hope of returning home. Many communities are still displaced. In some areas, people are allowed to return during the day, but they cannot stay overnight or sleep in their own homes. The whole social fabric has been disrupted.

Even outsiders like us felt the loss. As we traveled from Tokyo, we went from the urban expressways to small, winding roads. The landscape has the lushness of our

tropical rainforests. There were small mountains and water streams flowing past forest trees, fruit orchards, paddy fields, and beautiful old villages with traditional houses and temples. All of these have become like ghost towns. There were no people to be seen. We didn't even see birds as we traveled.

We visited a village on the border of the demarcated area and met a woman who runs a natural food restaurant. She is a mother with three daughters. After the disaster, her family stayed in a temporary shelter, but she decided to return to her home and her restaurant and she is now actively trying to rebuild her community.

With a voice full of conviction, she told us, "I am worried about my children's future, but this is my home. It belongs to us. We have to bring normalcy back to our families and our communities. I have gone to Tokyo and participated in the protests. I hope our country's policy makers heard our voices. Do not repeat this mistake. Give our children a safe future."

Our group was made up of civil society activists and socially engaged Buddhists and we were looking for answers. What lessons can we learn from this disaster?

More than 25 years ago, the Chernobyl disaster taught us the danger of nuclear power generation. We know from modern research, ancient teachings, and our experience that everything is interconnected and interdependent.

One side of the planet can never be safe, if people on the other side are doing things that are short-sighted and potentially disastrous. Yet with all of our resources, information, knowledge and technology, we continue to choose unsustainable paths.

After Chernobyl, scientists and politicians told us that new plants had additional safety measures in place and this type of nuclear disaster would never be repeated. They said nuclear energy was a fully safe and environmentally friendly alternative to fossil fuels.

Fukushima has delivered a clear and final verdict. It is not safe. We cannot predict or control all of the potential disasters. It is not a long-term solution and we must close existing plants and find a way out. As normal citizens we got this message. The common masses heard this lesson, but did the policy makers hear it?

It doesn't seem like they have. There are still many countries with reactors near population centers and important ecological habitats. They are not taking steps to close existing reactors and they are still planning new ones. The advocates say that it is a superior technology, an alternative to fossil fuels, and the best option for rapid economic growth because they can quickly scale up production.

It's true that many countries are facing real energy challenges. Countries like Sri Lanka have tapped all available options for hydro power. In India, the economy is booming,

but poverty is a real threat to stability and democracy. The Indian government has to find urgent answers, and despite the availability of safer, sustainable alternatives, priority is being given to nuclear power.

Construction started on the Kudankulam nuclear power station in 2001. The site is at the southern tip of India in Tamil Nadu and any disaster would almost certainly affect my home country, Sri Lanka. Despite this proximity, the Indian authorities have not sought any input or participation from their southern neighbor. Nor have they sought input from their own people. There are more than 1 million people living in a 30 kilometer radius of the plant, and local people, fearing Fukushima-like disaster, have organized a People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy. According to S.P. Udayakumar, one of the representatives, "The nuclear plant is unsafe. No public hearing was held. It's an authoritarian project that has been imposed on the people." The protestors have filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Indian Supreme Court requesting that all proposed nuclear plants are stopped until satisfactory assessments are completed by independent agencies.

Indian officials have responded that the Kudankulam plant cannot be compared to Fukushima and the fears of the people are not based on scientific principles. "We are not in a tsunami prone area. The plants in Kudankulam have a double containment system which can

withstand high pressure. At least Rs 14,000 crore has been spent. If we don't operate the plant immediately, it will affect the economic stability of our country”.

Nuclear scientist and scientific adviser to the Indian Government of India Rajagopala Chidambaram has said “We have learnt lessons from the Fukushima nuclear accident, particularly on the post-shutdown cooling system.” He added Fukushima nuclear accident should not deter or inhibit India from pursuing a safe civil nuclear program. After Chernobyl they told us they had learned a lesson and this kind of nuclear disaster would not be possible in the future. As the saying goes, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”

What I learned from Fukushima is that we, as responsible citizens, cannot keep quiet. Nuclear disasters and nuclear waste affect people across borders and across generations. We cannot leave this decision in the hands of a few short-sighted government officials, who are driven by personal financial concerns and short-term economic gain. The larger the project is, the harder it is to stop. It builds its own vested interests and inertia. Social and environmental impact and sustainability are ignored.

Even if our leaders are democratically elected, they are not representing our values or our best interests on this issue. The general public needs to be directly involved in the debates and decisions on such major decisions

that can affect our lives today and impact generations to come. We need to speak up, mobilize, and act to see that there is an end to this nuclear mess.

In a recent opinion piece in the New York Times, Ward Wilson wrote “Nuclear weapons were born out of fear, nurtured in fear and sustained by fear. They are dinosaurs — an evolutionary dead end...Nuclear weapons — extremely dangerous and not very useful — are the wave of the past.”

All of the courageous people in Fukushima are trying to tell us the same thing about nuclear energy. Nuclear power is extremely dangerous and not very useful. Nuclear power is an evolutionary dead end. Even if it's not the easiest option in the short-term, we need to demand that our elected officials invest in the growing number of energy alternatives that are truly safe and sustainable.

The visit to Fukushima not only taught me a lesson about



nuclear power, it also taught me a lesson about the future of Buddhism in Japan. We were inspired by the people we met and the stories we heard over the two days we spent in the Fukushima area. We were inspired for their commitment to rebuilding their communities.

At the last temple we visited, a young priest gave us a tour. In one area, we saw ancient stone monuments that were fallen and scattered. It looked like a group of elephants had a fight and left a mess, but it was caused by the earthquake. The young priest told us that when the earthquake hit, he moved his family to a safe place in a nearby prefecture, and then he immediately returned to help other affected families. He spent many nights sleeping in a car and went for weeks without seeing his own family. He is hoping more people will return so they can fully rebuild the community.

Before the visit, we had heard that Japanese Buddhism was in decline and that the priests were only in the funeral service business, but that was not what we saw. For people who are searching for best practices, the Buddhist priests who are working in Fukushima provide a wonderful example. They have brought people back to the temple by being socially engaged, by connecting with people, and by supporting them when they are in need.

The best way to bring people back to the temple is to go out of the temple and connect with people where they are. “Charatha Bhikkhave carikam bhujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya.”

From TV to temple :

Female Buddhist monk walks a pioneering path



The idea of becoming ordained happened quite abruptly. I was already in my 50s. I liked putting on make-up in the morning and looking at myself in the mirror. I was wearing lipstick, eye lashes, whatever, you name it. I enjoyed looking beautiful.

But, one morning I looked at myself and I said – as if I was talking to another person – “How long will I have to do this?”

I had enough of the flashy life. Emptiness.

I thought, this life is a push-button system. But I was not the one who was pushing the button. You know, at eight o'clock I had to be here, nine o'clock somewhere else. I was not the one who actually planned to do it. I had to be jumping around as if someone else was pushing the buttons. I needed to lead my life with the quality of my choice.

People always say, you are very brave to do what you have done, because I was the only one woman [monk] in this country. But I didn't feel that way. I didn't feel one bit that I was brave. I felt as if it was a normal thing.

Some people would say, “How dare you wear the robe?” I said, “Why not?”

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda

This is part two of Mama Asia, a long-form journalism series in which Sally Sara meets 12 inspirational Asian women.

I'm sitting in the back of a taxi on the way to a Buddhist monastery outside Bangkok. I will be living with the monks for the next seven days. I know the monastery is on a busy highway in a poor neighbourhood. There will be more car horns and exhaust than dolphin music and scented candles.

The other thing I know is that the leader of the female monks is a tough character. Before she was ordained, she was a high-profile academic with her own talk show on Thai television. Her nickname was 'Stone' because she was so hard. She was sharply dressed and had painted fingernails that would make a Kardashian look twice.

Now, all that has changed. The glamorous professor has become a Buddhist monk – frugal with her possessions but not her ideals.

I peel myself from the sweaty, sunken seat of the taxi as I arrive at the monastery. Several dogs greet me with half-hearted barks, the kind only contented dogs can give. They lazily zig-zag around my feet as I walk towards the entrance. I slip off my shoes and place them in a rack near a small gate. Ceiling fans hum in a large open-air dining room with a sharply pitched roof.

The female monks are all outfitted the same, with mustard

coloured robes, bare feet and shaved heads. But it's easy to see who is in charge. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammananda walks towards me; she's tall for a Thai woman, her build is strong and straight.

"Welcome, welcome," she says.

I'm not quite sure how to greet a monk. I clumsily clasp my hands together, prayer-style in front of my face. She returns the gesture, gracefully. She's had plenty of practice dealing with people who don't quite know how to react.

"In the airport toilets, I hear the women saying, 'How dare she wear the robe?' I come out and smile and say, 'I am a female monk. In Buddha's time both male and female monks wore the same kind of robes.' I talk with them, it is an educational tool for me. They don't expect that I would answer. Luckily I have the height and I speak to their eyes. They are high-class women flying, it is always in the airport toilet that I have this kind of conversation."

It's only mid-morning but it's almost time for lunch. Ven. Dhammananda explains the monks don't eat after midday because they don't wish to appear greedy. Much of their food is donated by families in the neighbourhood.

I've come prepared, in case I get hungry. Every time I move my backpack, I can hear the crinkle sound of the packets of biscuits I've got stashed inside. I feel like some kind of junk-food smuggler. The monastery dogs eagerly sniff my luggage. Venerable Dhammananda gives me a knowing look.

The deal for the next week

is that I will live, eat, work and pray with the female monks. Every afternoon, Ven. Dhammananda will meet me in the library for an hour so I can interview her about her life. I'm given the rules for my stay - don't kill any living creature, don't speak falsely, don't take what is not given to you, don't commit sexual immorality or become intoxicated. Unless a Hollywood bad boy drops in for some rehab and a spiritual awakening, I'm guessing there won't be any temptation.

I've got the monastery guesthouse to myself. The ceiling fans rotate at helicopter speed. I lie flat on my back on the neatly made bed and doze, while the monks quietly study during the hottest part of the day.

By late afternoon, I join the monks working in the garden. I scrape up leaves from the lush trees, with a cheap plastic rake that bounces over the ground. My arms are glistening with a mix of sweat, mosquito spray and sunscreen. As I work, I hum my nanna's favourite song, Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man. I'm off in my own world. It's not until I stop raking that I realise the monks are working silently and dutifully. I'm a bit embarrassed.

We don't know which one comes first - the next life or tomorrow. Has it ever occurred to you? We don't know when we are going to die - it could be tonight.

After the gardening is finished, I follow Ven. Dhammananda to the library. As she talks, I can get a sense of her past and present blending together. Left to her own devices, she is naturally quick and even impatient. But her faith has tempered her. She explains that as a Buddhist she needs to keep her mind positive. Not just in theory but in reality, moment by moment. "His Holiness, the Dalai Lama said, 'we don't know which one comes first - the next life or tomorrow.' Has it ever occurred to you? We don't know when we are going to die - it could be tonight."

"The minute before you pass away is very important in our Buddhist practice because that minute or that second when you are departing, if you are holding onto something good, good thoughts, then you go to the good place. Unless we practise on a daily basis, on an hour-to-hour basis, we cannot be sure that when that minute comes that we will go that direction."

"I don't know when I'm going so I have to be careful all the time, Sally. It is logic, isn't it?"

But keeping peaceful thoughts hasn't always been easy. Ven. Dhammananda was the first woman in Thailand to become an ordained Theravada Buddhist monk. Theravada means 'doctrine of the elders'; it's one of the largest movements in Buddhism and is popular in countries including Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Thailand.

Ven. Dhammananda's decision to seek ordination was hugely controversial. She was criticised by conservative Buddhist leaders, who said it was wrong for women to wear the robes. Ven. Dhammananda had to travel all the way to Sri Lanka for the

ceremony, because no male monk in Thailand was willing to conduct it.

"I knew exactly what I was doing so I never wavered when people said something. There was not one single monk who would tell me in front of my face. So I said, anyone who speaks behind my back, that is considered unsaid. You have to come and speak to my face, then I will explain to you.

"The day that I ordained, I didn't see myself after they shaved my head. It was a very long day, I was very tired. I went to sleep. I had one of the deepest sleeps in my life. Then when I got up, I went into the washroom. I just happened to walk past the sink and above the sink was a mirror. I should have thought I looked strange with all my head shaved. But I thought, I have seen you before, it was that kind of feeling. It was not a shock."

Ven. Ven. Dhammananda's mother, pioneering educator Voramai Kabilsingh, established this temple in 1960. She was a strong, strident woman who followed her beliefs rather than convention. She rode her bicycle all the way to Singapore in the 1930s, as the only female member of the local Scout troop.

Voramai was educated by Catholic nuns. She was passionate about education and faith; she published a Buddhist newsletter from a homemade printing press and set up a makeshift school in her house for nuns and monks who were uneducated.

She shaped Ven. Dhammananda's childhood more than anyone else.

"We slept together on a cotton mat. I would fall asleep

watching her writing. That is my first picture of my mother, always a writer.

"My father, he was a politician. He did not stay with us; he belonged to the south, so most of the time he would be down south and he would come up only when the parliament was open.

"We lived in a small house in Bangkok. My father was well-to-do but when we moved in, we moved in on our own. He was not supporting us. My mother was the only breadwinner.

"I was eight years old. She would ask me to get up with her and the two of us would be meditating. I did very good, because they say that as young kids you don't have many worries, not like older people. I started very young. Maybe my mother might have seen that I would be the one who would have this."

Two years later, Ven. Dhammananda's mother took the first steps towards lower ordination, as far as a Thai Buddhist woman could go in the 1950s.

"She didn't tell us anything. She was not the type to discuss anything with her kids. She was not the kind of mother who would talk with you and play with you. It was very strange but none of us spoke. We were inside the barber shop, we were waiting for her. There was no communication. I guess we were all stunned I think. I was feeling strange and I was conscious that people were looking at us because my mother was having her head shaved.

"She said, 'My duty as a mother does not stop with my ordination.' This is a very profound sentence because men, when they receive ordination, they always

leave their families. But, if my mother had left us I would have been a street kid. So instead she turned the household into a temple. I was 10.

"There were white-robed women but the white-robed women were almost looked down on by the people. People thought maybe they had no place to go, maybe broken hearts. Mostly they were not educated, they had only four years of formal education."

My mother was not happy with the status of women at that time, she wanted to give education. She was looking for a piece of land outside Bangkok but close enough to go back to work. So, this is what we found and we have been here for 48 years."

I like to be a feminist but I like to be a happy feminist. I cannot be an angry person.

It was the first temple in Thailand built by women, for women. As an adult, Ven. Dhammananda supported the project but was also establishing her own career. She taught religion and philosophy at Bangkok's most prestigious university for 32 years. In 1983, Ven. Dhammananda was invited to speak about Buddhism at a women's conference at Harvard University in the United States. It was a turning point. She wanted to bring many aspects of feminism back to her homeland. But, she could see a big gap in culture. She could also see it was time to stop writing about Buddhism and start practising it.

"That conference was full of mostly feminists, very strong feminists, lots of anger and lots of crying and weeping. Some of the strong-headed feminists had been put in prison for many years. I agreed with the cause of what they

were doing but I didn't want to be like them, I didn't want to be angry.

"I like to be a feminist but I like to be a happy feminist. I cannot be an angry person. If I am angry, what I am doing is to shoot out negativity from me and it's not healing you, it's not healing me.

"If we do the way the Western feminists do, we will never achieve anything in this culture. In Thai culture we do not confront. There is no win-lose. The other party may know they are wrong but they will not accept it because they lose face."

That's the kind of battle Ven. Dhammananda has been fighting. She didn't read the local Thai newspapers for two years because the media campaign against her ordination was so strong. Instead, she decided to lead by example.

But that's a big challenge for a woman who is so determined and driven.

"I thought anybody who could not keep up with me was too slow, until I realised I had been moving all by myself - I needed to move with the group. If I am teaching my community to move with me, I need to be with them. That is the greatest training and that is the most difficult thing.

"You see, some people who work on social causes, they have breakdowns because they see so much injustice - there is a lot of injustice done to women.

"I see a lot of feminists who are unhappy; they are shouldering the suffering of the women of the whole world.

"If we hold so much on our shoulders, we will be suffering

ourselves and by suffering ourselves we are not helping anyone. This balance is very crucial for all of us. Each day is the balance between how can I benefit the world and yet how can I nourish myself."

The monks start the day with meditation, before dawn. They sit in rows in a small room upstairs. Their backs are straight and their eyes focused forward. I'm given a cushion, because the floor is hard. I can hear the hum of early-morning traffic on the highway outside as the monks start chanting. The sound is gentle and rhythmic, it folds over itself syllable by syllable.

I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to be thinking. My mind swirls and wanders. I'm hungry. Rather than going deep into meditation, I'm thinking about lamb chops. Ven. Dhammananda looks over at me as I change my sitting position on the floor, because my movement is distracting. Morning after morning and night after night, I do my best to chant along. But meditation eludes me completely; instead it's Eat, Pray, Chops.

That afternoon, I confess to Ven. Dhammananda, that I'm not really having a spiritual awakening during the chanting. She smiles and admits her mind wanders sometimes too, but when it all works well, it's worth the wait.

"It doesn't happen every time but certain days are superb, really."

It's Mother's Day. Local women are coming to the monastery to have lunch and receive blessings. Later in the afternoon, one of Ven. Dhammananda's adult sons pays a visit.

He greets her warmly but respectfully - she is mother and monk to him, the mothering hasn't stopped.

Later that afternoon, when we sit in the library, Ven. Dhammananda explains her decision to leave her husband and seek ordination.

"My husband was not angry but confused maybe. I think the time had come where I had to choose my life, what was meaningful for me.

"I felt a little bit of guilt, yes. We had been married more than 30 years. My husband is now settled with another woman, so I feel at ease. My youngest son was 24, so I didn't feel guilty for leaving them."

Ven. Dhammananda has told her story many times but she is patient with my questions. For all her strength and toughness, there is vulnerability. She says that before she was ordained, she was desperately lonely, even though she was surrounded by her family. Something was missing. Being a wife, mother and professor wasn't enough anymore.

"One night, I was waiting for my sons, they were all grown up. It was about six o'clock in the evening. I was living in this big house and I was stretching my neck, looking out the window, waiting for them and wondering when they would return. I thought, no, this is not going to be my life.

"In Buddhism we talk about renouncing the world. Suppose I waited until I was 60 and I didn't renounce. That is not renouncing. You have to be at the height of the material world and then you leave - that is renouncing.

"The most beautiful thing about it - I am happy. It has become such a natural part of me."

The sunrise on Saturday morning is rumbling red, the air is already hot and humid. The monks and nuns have freshly shaved their heads, ready for their weekly alms round, when they receive offerings from the community and give blessings in return. The monastery dogs howl as Ven. Dhammananda leads the monks out the gate.

It's an almost silent procession. The monks wear identical flip-flops on their feet and walk quietly in single file. One follows with a white cart to collect the offerings. They only stop when they are invited to. Even if someone is standing on the roadside, holding out a bowl of rice, they don't assume it's for them until it's offered. There's no preaching.

"We have been walking like this for seven years. I should get tired of it. Every day we go out, there are always new faces. Something beautiful happens along the way. Our pushcart is full. In the beginning, we started with only one route and then the people in another direction heard about us."

People bow their heads as they offer containers of freshly cooked food. I can smell basil, chilli, coriander, lime and jasmine rice. A frail, sinewy woman in a wheelchair clutches a teddy bear as she receives a blessing from Ven. Dhammananda. Other family members form a human chain, holding hands as if the blessings will travel from one to another like electricity.

"There is one particular woman who literally has to touch me after putting an offering. I give blessing, she touches me just to make sure she could rub off

something from me. It is very funny.

"Religion is never complete without the participation of women. We complement each other. Are you comfortable on a chair with only three legs, when it should be four? This is the kind of education we need for the local people for them to realise that one is missing. This is very important.

"I feel sorry for us women, that we have been framed. People who really frame us are so happy that they really keep us there. But there are many more wonderful things beyond these boxes."

Ven. Dhammananda leads the monks and nuns home. Some of the monastery dogs have escaped and join the procession. They trot with confidence and take on any of the street dogs along the way.

The monks cast elongated shadows on the walls and roads as daylight arrives. Their posture is straight, their hands are clasped. Without the donations from the community, the monks would have nothing to eat. It's a weekly exchange and demonstration of trust. The monks assist some of the most vulnerable in the neighbourhood and provide a sanctuary for those who seek faith. In return, they are nourished by the community.

People say all kinds of things but it is only their lips. If you are swayed by what people say then you can never, ever do anything.

Ven. Dhammananda has fought hard to get here. She likens strength to a rice plant that sways above the ground. If the plant is not supported by roots that run deep and wide, it will fall over when the wind blows. Ven. Dhammananda says if women feel trapped by their circumstances, they need the courage and determination to bring change.

"My message is this: number one, the way out is possible; number two, you have to start; number three, you have to start now because everyone is waiting for everyone else to start, so it never gets started. You can do it.

"I have never been bothered by what people said because I know they are speaking out of their unwholesome mind. People are negative about me but it will eat them up. Negative things never nourish a person so they cannot do it for a long time. You must be certain of this. Negative thoughts will never, ever last.

"People say all kinds of things but it is only their lips. That's it. If you are swayed by what people say then you can never, ever do anything."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-28/custom-venerable-bhikkhuni-dhammananda-closeup-not-for-re-use/4572880>

Socially engaged Buddhist conference in Bangladesh

Sanat Kumar Barua
Edited by Jill Jameson



On June 7, 2013, INEB partner The Atish Dipankar Society (ADS) - a youth based Buddhist Humanitarian society- organized a conference on 'Socially Engaged Buddhism in Bangladesh.'

This was on the 21st anniversary celebration ceremony held at Madarsha Buddhist Temple in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Buddhist monks, leaders and activists from different parts of the country participated in this first time event. Renowned Buddhist monk, and the president of Bangladesh Bhikkhu Mahasabba, prof Banosree Mahathero presided over the session. Prof Dr Bikiron Prasad Barua was a chief speaker, Dr Basumitra Barua from USA, prof Dr Subrata Baran Barua, Ven Dr Priya Darshi Thero were also present as guest speakers. Social thinkers, grassroot leaders and devotees of dhamma participated eagerly in the conference.

ADS president and co-ordinator of the conference, Sanat Kumar Barua presented the key note paper on 'Socially Engaged Buddhism in Bangladesh'. He expressed the purpose and a light understanding of Socially Engaged Buddhism through

INEB and Engaged Buddhists in Bangladesh. He described "Engaged Buddhism" as referring to Buddhists who are seeking ways to practically apply insights from their meditation practice and spiritual teachings to social, political, environmental and economic suffering and injustice.

Thich Nhat Hanh defines the term 'engaged Buddhism' which was created to restore the true meaning of Buddhism. "Engaged Buddhism is simple Buddhism applied in our daily lives. If it's not engaged, it can't be called Buddhism. Buddhist practice takes place not only in monasteries, meditation halls and Buddhist institutes but in whatever situation we find ourselves.

Engaged Buddhism means the activities of daily life combined with the practice of mindfulness."

"Engaged Buddhism is not simply being a Buddhist and involved in politics and social justice issues, rather, Engaged Buddhists critically and creatively apply the Buddha's teachings to transform themselves and their societies. Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam, Ajan Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia, the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma

and Ajan Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand are modern-day leaders who embody Engaged Buddhist principals and have guided organizations."

Sanat told the conference that Buddhism and Buddhists are a living force in Bangladesh. Buddhist culture and civilization are inherent in Bangladesh as it was a Buddhist country for several hundred years. Buddhists need to engage more with society and find ways of putting compassion into action for social change. We cannot change the past, but we can learn from our mistakes. We can work to change the conditions, and we need more unity for the sake of existence, for the sake of future generations and for future Buddhism also. 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' is a new concept in Bangladesh both for inner change and outer change by practicing Buddhism in our daily lives.

It is important that individual Buddhists and Buddhist organizations take much more active role in responding and sharing ideas about socially engaged Buddhist initiatives and networking in Bangladesh & beyond the country.

The speakers said it's a congregation of Engaged Buddhists who are refuted in the Triple Gem and embody Buddhism in their daily lives. Pansasila/five precepts are the principle guidelines for a pure Buddhist society, primarily for social engagement. They thanked ADS members for a fruitful attempt in organizing a conference on Socially Engaged Buddhism. The speakers also appreciated INEB's role and activities for the well being of Buddhism and Buddhist communities and world humanity. Buddhists of Bangladesh will be encouraged and guided to be more Socially Engaged, rebuilding a better, peaceful and dignified society for all.

Lao Buddhism for Development Project (LBFD)



Who we are

In 2001 monk leaders of the Lao Sangha joined the Grassroots Leadership Training Program (GLT) of Spirit in Education Movement (SEM, Thailand). In the training, they had a chance to learn the potential of Buddhist Sangha; they realised that in the midst of this rapidly changing society, the Sangha can play significant roles with regard to sustainable development through the concept and practice of socially engaged Buddhism.

With the approval of the Sangha, those GLT alumni originally founded the Lao Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in 2003 and invited Venerable Saly Kantasilo - the vice-president of the Sangha - to head the project and organisation. Furthermore, BDP has been continually supported by SEM and the Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC, Laos) since its inception.

BDP was originally established to build a more sustainable society by encouraging processes of social justice, ecological sustainability, peace and reconciliation and the alleviation of poverty through community

development work. Once the monks and nuns - who are natural cultural leaders in Theravada Buddhist communities - are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, they would be able to dedicate themselves for societies in a more egalitarian way consistent with the spirit of Buddhism and Lao moderate socialism.

Since its establishment, BDP has brought monks and nuns from across the country and provided them a number of trainings in order to strengthen their capacities and skills, so that they are able to actively participate in promoting justice, ecological sustainability, cultural integrity, holistic education and self-reliant development in society.

What We Do

Spiritual Development & Meditation

To date, BDP alumni and monk volunteers have established six meditation centres in Vientiane Capital, Bokeo, Luang Prabang and Saravane provinces. These centres regularly provide the spiritual trainings and meditation courses for an average 2,000 peo-

ple each year.

Through Mobile Dhamma for Education, about 40 volunteer monks and novices provide value-based teachings to students in 45 schools, a drug addiction treatment centre and a blind and visually impaired school in Vientiane. Additionally, there are approximately 30 monks providing value-based education at schools in Bokeo, Oudomxay and Xiengkwan provinces.

In addition to teaching and learning activities in educational settings, monk and novice volunteers conduct a variety of value-based and environmental awareness-raising activities; for instance, they have cooperated with schools, communities, NGOs and government departments to encourage forest preservation through tree ordination ceremonies.

Due to the tons of unexploded ordnances (UXOs) left in many areas of Lao PDR such as Xiengkwan, monk and novice volunteers also disseminate information on its dangers of UXO's and UXO accident prevention.

Community Development initiated by alumni

There are two main community development projects initiated by two monk alumni of BDP. Two projects have been launched in two communities in Khammouane and Saravane provinces. BDP assists in terms of financial support, training and advice in order to strengthen monks' leadership and project management and empower youth to engage in community change. Many activities have been carried out in these two communities, including organic farming, environmental protection, alternative energy, income generation, and mobilising villagers to establish a saving and welfare cooperative fund.

Furthermore, BDP promotes knowledge and experience exchange between these two communities and with other interested communities, in order to create mutual partnership between communities in the future.

Public Information & Dissemination

BDP disseminates knowledge on socially engaged Buddhism and promotes public awareness of socio-economic development

trends, environmental, and cultural challenges in Lao society through a variety of media such as books, periodicals, radio programmes and other non-printing materials.

Capacity Development

During the previous decade, BDP has especially put emphasis on training to strengthen the capacity and to raise social awareness of alumni, faith-based actors, NGO, and youth. In collaboration with SEM, PADETC and other partner organisations, it has conducted a variety of training courses, study visits, reflection and planning meetings etc.

Our Future plans (2013-2015)

Now BDP is moving toward its second decade, built on the strong relationships developed with alumni, the Lao Sangha, and civil society organisations in Laos. From 2013-2015, the organisation aims to create a stronger Socially Engaged Buddhism movement in Laos through these three approaches:

1. An engaged Buddhist training program will be provided to empower at least 30 monks, nuns, youth and civil society ac-

tors in Laos each year (2013-2015).

2. At least 10 small appropriate projects initiated by alumni will be funded each year.

3. A collaborative network of Socially Engaged Buddhist organisations across the country will be created in order to promote their mutual assistance and benefits.

In the last ten years, BDP has served and supported a dedicated Buddhist clergy and lay people, and now it has earned a reputation nationwide through its alumni and volunteers working for communities across nine provinces of Lao PDR. Today, BDP still provides opportunities for new volunteers to develop their skills and initiate new projects, with the aim of achieving sustainable happiness, security, sufficiency and wellbeing - socially, culturally, spiritually and ecologically - of Lao society.

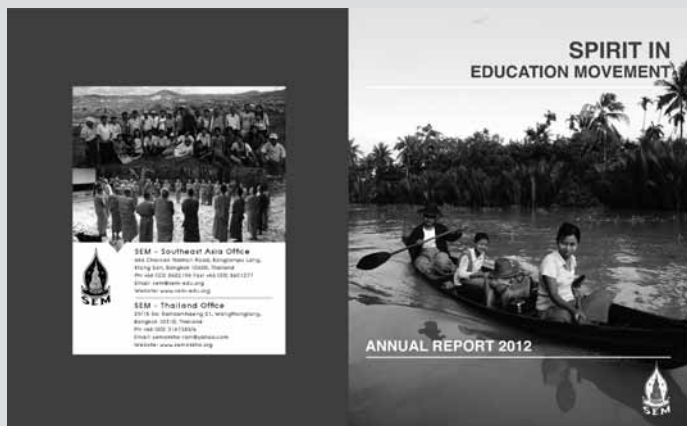


Buddhism for Development Project (BDP)

Office : Ban Thatluang Neua,
Saysetha Dist, Vientiane
Capital.
P.O.Box 5801, Lao PDR.

Tel/fax: +856-21 453 944 Cell
phone: +856-20 222 8440
Email: bdp.laos@yahoo.com
www.laobdp.org

If you wish to get a copy of SEM's annual report, Please contact : sem@sem-edu.org



International Forum on Innovating Alternative Markets. **Towards Food Security and Food Sovereignty.**



*Closing World Café session
at Queen Sirikit National
Convention Centre*

An International Forum on Innovating Alternative Markets was held in Bangkok, 7-12 May 2013. We still would like to thank you all sincerely for your determination to travel from far or break away from work nearby and join the process of exchanging experiences on “the alternative food movement” in Asia, and exploring collaboration towards the future.

The forum was organized by Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise, the Towards Organic Asia (TOA) team and the School for Wellbeing Studies secretariat. Participants came from 13 Asian countries and 10 outside Asia.

The major topic during the forum was the question how ‘Participatory Guarantee Systems’ (PGS) can liberate “organic agriculture” from the high cost image and high-end markets focus it is generally associated with. For small-scale farmers “organic” should be accessible as

ity guarantee should rather be based on self-organization between farmers and consumers, supported by community- and social-enterprises as well as other stakeholders.

Enabling exchanges between major organizations in this field was a challenging and unique co-operative experience for the TOA team. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) was represented by its global PGS Committee, including members from India, New Zealand, Peru, Spain, South-Africa, USA and Brazil. Their work is close to supporting “Community Supported Agriculture” (CSA), which in Asia was pioneered by Teikei groups in Japan. The global network of CSA initiatives, URGENCI (based in France), was represented by its newly formed Asia network with practitioners from Japan, India and China. In China in particular, CSA is a booming movement,



Ajarn Sulak (left) and Ajarn Suthipand Chirativat (right) with the IFOAM committee.

Irma Janny, La Via Campesina Coordinator for S.E. Asia

demonstrated by the successful “Little Donkey” project from nearby Beijing.

La Via Campesina, ‘the International Peasant’s Movement’ represents about 200 million farmers worldwide. Representatives came from Indonesia, Nepal, Korea (with associates from Philippines) and the Thai group was headed by the “Assembly of the Poor”.

Previous to the Forum a Towards Organic Asia Steering Committee was held with our partners from the Mekong region: Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand + Bhutan. A major action-research project was agreed to be explored. In August 2013 the second Young Organic Farmers (YOF) meeting will be held in Vietnam, following the initial gathering in Laos in 2012.

The forum turned out to be an important opportunity for us to strengthen our engagement with “the alternative food

movement” in Asia in a global context, mutually learn more on Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), and on empowering small-scale organic farmers’ interaction with mindful consumers .

In light of the 40th anniversary of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) last year, it was good to re-discover the Asian roots of IFOAM and URGENCI – the international Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) network – and celebrate that this year both URGENCI and IFOAM established Asian chapters. The resonance with our La Via Campesina colleagues (Indonesia, Nepal, Korea, Thailand) was remarkable and we all benefit enormously from their well-grounded advocacy, upholding the value of “solidarity” with the peasants of Asia.

We hope the combination with our “Green Fair 6 – community organic” and the “Organic and Natural EXPO” of the Thailand

Ministry of Commerce contributed to the insight that we are living in a period of unprecedented opportunities for progress of the organic agriculture and agro-ecology movements in Asia, notwithstanding the enormous obstacles we also face. The input of so many young and future leaders was very encouraging.

Our keynote speakers Andre Leu (Australia), President of IFOAM, and Pablo Solón (Bolivia/Thailand), Executive Director, Focus on the Global South, inspired us to renew our commitments and join hands to strengthen our common efforts.

Sponsors included CCFD-Terre Solidaire (France), Chula Global Network, the Indian Studies Centre of Chulalongkorn University, the Green Market Network, the Organic Agriculture Innovation Network (OAIN), as well as Iona Foundation and NatureandMore, both from the Netherlands.

Understanding the Status of Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Society

A number of prominent scandals have recently surfaced from the Sangha community, leading to public outcry and confusion. One involves a famous foreign monk who abruptly disrobed after 37 years in the monkhood. He has a lot of followers as many Thais, especially in the middle and upper classes, greatly respect him. Another involves a monk who owns a fleet of luxurious cars and a private jet, calls himself an “arahant” (the Holy One), goes shopping in Paris, is found kissing a young novice in a photograph, and plans to donate a number of expensive vehicles to high-ranking monks in the ecclesiastical order. Still another concerns two monks openly challenging one another for a public debate. Small wonder that many have declared that it is dark times for Buddhism in Siam or that the religion is nearing its end. There is a kernel of truth in this observation, but the problem is also much more complicated and deserves to be carefully unpacked.

We must begin by understanding that the Buddha founded and practiced the Dhamma and then achieved Enlightenment. In other words, he underwent transformation (i.e., experienced rupture, liberation from defilements and self-attachments) from an ordinary person to become the Enlightened One. The Buddha and the Dhamma are inextricable from one another. This is especially true when the Buddha first delivered his teachings to five disciples, who ultimately asked to be ordained, establishing the first Sangha community. As such, the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha were born.

Bhikkhus and bhikkhunis are individuals who are in search of a noble life—a sublime, celibate and chaste life. They have rejected lay life, which entails compromises with violence and exploitation on a daily level, to live in a noble community based on equality, solidarity and freedom from greed, hatred and delusion. Ambedkar was thus correct to point out that the Sangha was the first democratic

community in the world.

The Buddha passed away after spreading his teachings for 45 years. He did not name a successor to take his stead. He simply stated that the Dhamma-Vinaya (the Doctrine and the Discipline) would be the teacher when he was gone. In other words, as long as Buddhists continue to uphold and practice the Dhamma-Vinaya, the religion will survive. If not, it will simply fade away according to the law of the Three Characteristics of Existence. Put another way, Buddhism will not survive if Buddhists assume that someone else (e.g., monks) will maintain it for them.

Thus Thais who are concerned about the fate of Buddhism in the country must ask themselves an important question: are we genuine practitioners of the Dhamma-Vinaya and do we seek refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha in order to liberate ourselves from suffering or are we Buddhist only in name—someone who sees the Buddha as an image that will make us richer, healthier, more powerful, more popular, and so on. Put bluntly, do we reduce the Buddha to being a magic phallus amulet (paladkik)?

The Dhamma is the Doctrine and the Vinaya, the Discipline. When we have faith in the Buddha’s teachings, we practice the discipline. At the heart of the Buddha’s teachings is the reduction and eventual overcoming of selfishness in order to help others, including other living beings and the natural environment. This entails the transformation of greed into generosity, hatred into love or loving-kindness, and delusion into wisdom. All these features are contrary to the dominant values of capitalism and consumerism. The point is that if we don’t understand the new religion of capitalism and consumerism, the teachings of the Buddha will never find a way into our hearts. For instance, an act of charity or merit-making can actually be a form of expressing and strengthening self-attachment. The meditation retreats that we take can actually work to pacify and make us escape back into ‘reality’, which

is underpinned by various modes of violence and injustices, from which we in the middle and upper classes benefit on a daily level. Acts such as merit-making and meditation will never enable us to understand the Buddha's teachings.

The act of giving (*dana*) is a means to lessen selfishness. If in giving one (secretly) hopes to reap benefits in return such as good fortune, a place in heaven, etc., it is simply a way of increasing selfishness. Buddhism envisions different modes of giving. At the most basic level is the donation of materials (*amisadana*) such as food, clothes, lodging, medicines, and so on. We can begin by giving things we have in excess and then proceed to things that we hold dear—including our family life. More important than material gifts is *Dhammadana* or the gift of Truth or *Dhamma*. This is not about donating things such as *Dhamma* books and CDs because these are material gifts and can be seen as *amisadana*. Rather it entails speaking the truth to power, truth-telling in a deceitful and hypocritical society. As such, the gift of *Dhamma* requires moral courage as well as the willingness to assume all the risks and consequences of speaking the truth. Finally there is *abhayadana* or forgiveness, which is derived from the absence of fear. Our most immediate and intimate enemies are the greed, hatred and delusion in us. We fear being poor; losing power, security, exclusive status or fame; not having knowledge; succumbing to sickness and death; and so on. If we gradually overcome these fears we will not see others as enemies—including other religions, nations, ethnic groups, etc. More specifically, we may still be in conflict with them but we will not hate and dehumanize them. With forgiveness “we” becomes non-exclusionary, and this paves the way toward solidarity.

Morality or *sila* is a means to cultivate ‘normality,’ meaning a life based on non-domination and non-exploitation of self and others. The Five Precepts are intended for this matter. As Alan Watts, who was one of the first British Buddhists, explained why he became a vegetarian: “Cows cry louder than cabbage.”

If one finds the Buddha's teachings appealing and feels ready to be ordained in order to pursue a noble life, then one inevitably has to accept the Discipline or set of practices and prohibitions that when violated would also terminate one's status as

monk. These are the acts of sexual intercourse, killing human being, stealing and faking extraordinary achievement. Put another way, a life of non-domination and non-exploitation requires upholding celibacy and chastity, eating and sleeping little, leading a simple and humble life, and not having a job. Life is nourished solely by asking or begging for food. All food is almsfood. Clothes come from patching together old cloths left behind by the dead or thrown away. Medicines come from mixing herbs found in the jungle with urine. And so on. This is a way of life that challenges or ruptures the mores of society.

Having no job also means that monks cannot possess money. Upholding the Tenth Precept (i.e., abstaining from accepting money) is what truly distinguishes the ordained from the lay Buddhist. A lay person can abstain from sex, minimize food consumption, and lead a simple life. But s/he must work and earn money in order to survive—hoping at least that the job is based on Right Livelihood.

Unfortunately, it seems that many leading monks in Thai society all have a career. They go to deliver sermons and receive financial contributions (now called a necessity in life) in return. The size of a financial contribution also depends on the monk's popularity and ecclesiastical rank. Some also sell amulets, holy water, etc. on the side. A number of them have used the money obtained for a good cause like building schools and hospitals. But since when is it a duty of monks to gather money to build schools? Therefore, the recent case of Luang Pu (Elder Monk) Nen Kam Chattigo is extreme but definitely not anomalous.

If an ordained cannot maintain celibacy and chastity, then disrobing is always a good option. She may turn into a good lay person. This is better than remaining a shameless, fake monk. Fake monks are widespread in the Thai Sangha community. Many have ecclesiastical titles and high administrative positions. Many no longer have time to meditate and engage in critical self-reflection in order to further improve themselves. Many don't have virtuous companions to provide them with sincere criticisms. Rather they surround themselves with sycophants. Many seek to increase their power and wealth by pandering to the forces of absolutism, capitalism and nationalism. And so on. In sum, Nen Kam is but the tip of an iceberg.

UNESCO's Memory of the World Program : The Case of the Minute Books of the Council of Siam Society under Royal Patronage

UNESCO is a paper tiger. It often portrays its excellence in embarrassing ways; for instance, in the recognition of great personalities worldwide. Even M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, who had committed the crime of plagiarism, is listed by UNESCO as one of the world's great personalities. Its World Heritage program is influenced by vested interests such as those of the tourism industry and local politicians. This program has also ruined many sites that are said to be of great significance for the common heritage of humanity. For example, once Luang Prabang was declared a World Heritage site, it became thoroughly commercialized, teeming with hotels, guest houses, tourists, and so on.

One UNESCO program that may not be relatively well-known is Memory of the World, which includes many important documents from all over the world such as the Magna Carta and the Gutenberg Bible—but also more suspiciously the film *The Wizard of Oz*.

As for Siam, a number of its documents have been registered under this program. They are as follows: 1) the King Ramkhamhaeng Inscription (since 2003); 2) archival documents of King Chulalongkorn concerning reforms in Siam (since 2009); 3) the epigraphic archives of Wat Pho (since 2011); and 4) the minute books of the Council of Siam Society (in 2013). All these four documents are infused with the ruling class ideology. As such, the memory that they cultivate is only that of a usable past—usable to the powers-that-be.

The authenticity of the Ramkhamhaeng stele has been put into question, especially by Piriya Krairiksh a former president of the Siam Society. In other words, it could have been fabricated by King Rama IV himself. For me, this is really beside the point. Even if authentic, the stone inscription can be interpreted as an early form of propaganda by the ruling class to proclaim their greatness. The archival documents from King Chulalongkorn's reign don't contain any criticism of the king's policies and actions. The epigraphic archives of Wat Pho were on a variety of subjects, both religious and secular. However, they were all made by King Rama III as well as Thai scholars who were in his favor. Not even mentioned in the epigraphic archives is the

great poet Sunthorn Phu. In sum, although all these three documents are good historical records, they must be treated with great caution, especially as academic references.

The same logic applies to the fourth set of documents, the minute books of the Council of Siam Society under Royal Patronage. According to UNESCO's website, these minute books include "the official records of the Council meetings and the General Meetings of the Siam Society from 1904 to 2004 and beyond. It reflects the Society's system, process and outcome of work, its obstacles and challenges, the personalities and organizations contributing to its success and the scope of its work in a century of great international changes and development. It testifies to the continuous transactions and cooperation of an international and intellectual nature, among the many generations of people elected to carry out the work of the Siam Society over the long and eventful century." This seems to be an overstatement, to say the least.

I was a Council member of the Siam Society. Before my time the Americans tried to push the Siam Society, to perform more actively in the field of the social sciences, but the Council, under the presidency of Prince Dhani, refused their offer as the Society did not want to be involved with American hegemony in this country. Hence they went to Prince Wan and asked him to found the Social Science Association of Thailand. Eventually Dr. Puey Ungphakorn succeeds Prince Wan as the President of the new Association. I was then its second Vice-President. The senior Vice-President was Kasem Suwannakul, who also often served as Acting President during Council meetings. During one meeting I pointed out that the minutes did not record a previous decision of the Council to use the Society's money in a particular way. The Acting President however responded that it was an insignificant matter. When I contended that the Association was a legal entity and therefore its administrators should respect the law and rules of the Association, none of the members reacted favorably to my remark. The minutes thus did not mention about this financial decision as well as the Council members' reactions to my suggestion.

As for the Siam Society, at a meeting held in

1969, there was a debate on whether or not the Council's meeting should be conducted in Thai rather than English; this also meant that the minutes would be recorded in Thai. After all, the reasoning went, the Siam Society should be free from 'Western imperialism.' Michael Smithies, an Englishman fluent in Thai, was the one who raised this point. Aside from Smithies, the other Western members of the Council were also fluent in Thai. The proposal however was shot down because the Honorary Secretary (M.R. Pimsai Amranand) felt uncomfortable recording the minutes in Thai. Again, this fact cannot be found in the minute books registered under the Memory of the World program.

Moreover, my name could be found nowhere in the minute books. In fact, I was the person who nominated Phya Anuman Rajadhon to be President of the Siam Society. I was the one responsible for finding and selecting a number of the Society's Presidents, including Prince Naradhip Bongsprabandh, Chitti Tingsabadh, and MR Patanachai Jayant.

I served as a Council member for almost two decades. My actions and the changes that I brought were not deemed worthy of being recorded in the minute books. When I ran afoul with the Honorary Secretary, I handed in my resignation. Prince Naradhip Bongsprabandh, who was the President, graciously visited me at my home and asked me to change my mind. Perhaps this too cannot be found in the minute books.

When I clashed with the Honorary Treasurer (Mrs. Katherine Buri), I also handed in my resignation. This time, the President, MR Patanachai Jayant didn't plead me to change my decision. He merely said he felt sorry for my departure. However, when he wanted to be President for another term but couldn't muster the support of several Council members, he came to ask for my help. I was then no longer a Council member, but I did what I could and he got what he wanted. This is hardly worth a mention in the minute books.

When I was a Council member, I only asked individuals with academic excellence to serve as honorary members such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Venerable Payutto, Puey Ungphakorn, Prawase Wasi, Miss I.B. Horner, Soedjatmoko, and William Gedney. It seems that the Society has not kept up with this practice.

When the Siam Society was approaching its 72nd anniversary, I proposed that a celebration be held in good old Siamese way, replete with fortune-tellers and masseurs. A Western Council member responded that this idea was inappropriate because

the Society is under royal patronage. I then had to correct him by saying that during the time of absolutism these 'lowly' practices were in fact a part of palace life.

From the minutes, it can be seen that a number of high-ranking princes such as Prince Vajirayan, Prince Devavongse Varoprakarn, and Prince Narisaranuvativongse had been invited to be vice patron of the Siam Society. Only Prince Damrong accepted the offer. To understand this we have to turn to the Thai sources. King Rama V saw the Siam Society as a Western plaything, and he insisted that high-ranking princes not be part of it. Prince Damrong was the exception because he had always liked being in the company of Westerners.

Dr. O. Frankfurter was a founding member of the Siam Society who also became one of its early Presidents. He had served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as librarian of the Vajirayan National Library. He was a German nationalist who published underground anti-British propaganda tracts prior to WWI and urged the Siamese government not to side with London. This fact can be cross-checked in Sathirakoses's *Fuen Kwam Lang*, a book which I had asked him to write.

Sukit Nimmanhemmin played a significant role in altering the direction of the Siam Society in 1969. He was then serving as senior Vice-President. When the President, Phya Anuman Rajadhon, passed away we asked Sukit to take charge of the Society. He declined the offer. And therefore he had to take me to go invite Prince Naradhip Bongsprabandh instead. While Sukit was the Acting President he supported my initiative to organize a national conference on Buddhism and Thai society at the Siam Society. The conference was held in collaboration with the Buddhist Association of Thailand. Sanya Thammasakti was President of the Association at the time. Both Sukit and Sanya presided over the conference opening ceremony. A rising star at the conference was P.A. Payutto. It was also the first Siam Society conference to hold a discussion session in the Thai language. (The first keynote address made at a Siam Society in Thai was delivered by William Gedney.)

In conclusion, the minute books of the Council of Siam Society are pretty sanitized and lifeless. As a whole, they seem to be concerned about farangs praising one another more than anything else. Above, I've tried to disrupt a bit this feel-good picture of the Siam Society. However, the present president and Council Members of the Society are much concerned with preserving Thai national heritage and environmental balance. This is to be admired.

The Case at the Supreme Administrative Court

Question: Please tell us about your oral closing statement at the Supreme Administrative Court on 9 July 2013. What was the atmosphere like in the court room?

Answer: In my oral closing statement I respectfully reminded the Court that I had asked my lawyer to submit a written statement to it since 30 January 2013, and the accused party did not object to this act. But the Court did not refer at all to my written statement in its case summary of facts, which was sent to me on 31 May 2013.

The Court responded that it would reconsider my written statement. In my oral closing statement I reiterated the two main points I had made in written form. They are as follows:

1) The state officials in charge of print media in Bangkok, the accused party, did not read my Thai book *A Quarter of a Century of Thai Democracy: A Path Filled with Obstacles* in its entirety. This book is 272 pages long. They merely quoted excerpts found in pages 1-14, and accused me of lese majeste. They did not specify where I precisely defamed the King. Nor did they explain why or how my words violated the King's dignity. In sum, their action was not just and not based on the rule of law. These state officials did not act as the protector of the law. Rather, they used the law to oppress the citizens. Furthermore, it seemed that they were serving a certain tyrant who controlled the Thai police. I also pointed out the decision of the Supreme Court in 1995 dismissing the charge of lese majeste against me. It stated that "The wording in the disputed sentences is strong, impolite, and inappropriate. However, when we look at the whole context of the

talk and not only parts of it, we can clearly see the intention of the defendant was to give a talk that was respectful and loyal to the monarchy. He did not want any group of people to abuse the monarchy for political purposes."

This may serve as a legal precedent for the Supreme Administrative Court's decision. It seemed that the Administrative Court of First Instance did not take the aforementioned Supreme Court's decision seriously. I felt that it acted like a defender of state officials more than that of freedom-loving citizens.

2) The first accused party alleged that my book disturbed public order citing Article 9 of the 1941 Printing Act. A crucial point is that the book was first published in 2006. One full year had elapsed before I was charged with lese majeste. During 2006-7 there was no evidence that the book caused public disorder or moral degradation. Also the book did not trigger a public uproar against me. On the contrary, several state and private universities as well as organizations and institutions in society invited me to give lectures or share my knowledge—a role I have consistently performed for more than 50 years. If the accused party cannot counter-argue this fact then it shows that the charge pressed against me is unfounded.

If the Supreme Administrative Court takes these two points into consideration, then I am confident of receiving justice.

What I didn't inform the Supreme Administrative Court was the case in which Police General Charan Chittapanya instructed the Attorney General to prosecute me for lese majeste on 17 December 2004. I had to testify with the police many times. A number of witnesses were also

summoned to testify on my behalf. Eventually, the police gave the green light to the Attorney General to prosecute me. But the latter backed down, citing the following reason:

“The testimonies of numerous witnesses, who come from all walks of life, show that after they read the said article in the alleged offender’s subscribed magazine, they were not of the same view that the article’s content defamed the King. Many said that the article had an academic content. Thus it cannot be convincingly said that the said article defamed King Rama IX. Moreover, one of the witnesses could not verify that the alleged offender was the author of the said article. They felt that the alleged offender was merely looking for new subscribers to the magazine, which printed the said article. Therefore, the claim that the alleged offender intended to break the law is not substantiated.

Additionally, according to the secret and most urgent document of the Advisory Committee on National Security Cases Involving the Monarchy, no. ๒๕0200/1328 dated 8 September 2010, the alleged offender is loyal to the monarchy. Based on the available evidence, it cannot be verified that the alleged offender intended to commit the wrongdoing. Therefore, Sulak Sivaraksa, the alleged offender, would not be prosecuted.”

In any case, I believe that the reasoning of the Supreme Administrative Court will be as sound as that of Supreme Court or the Attorney General.

A transparent and accountable justice system will help protect the well-being of the country’s inhabitants and freedom-loving citizens as well as the security of the monarchy, which must not be used as a tool to destroy political opponents as has long been the case in this kingdom.

Buddhist Engagement in the Nuclear Crisis

FEATURING JOANNA MACY, DAVID LOY, PHRA PHAISAN VISALO, REV. TAITSU KONO (CHIEF PRIEST OF MYOSHINJI RINZAI ZEN), REV. HIDEHITO OKOCHI & THE VOICES OF THE BUDDHIST PRIESTS AND SOCIAL ACTIVISTS OF FUKUSHIMA

Fukushima3/11 has become a watershed; the moment when it became very apparent that the sacrifices of modern industrial development had outpaced the benefits. While Japan became the first Asian nation to achieve a high level of modern development, it accomplished this feat by dismantling its intimate rural communities and ancient cultural traditions for alienated urban life based on workaholicism, consumerism, and the endless drive for growth and success. Its rich natural environment has been slowly compromised in this process with the present specter of nationwide nuclear contamination endangering life itself. For a country that has a rich Buddhist history of over 1,400 years, it seems the Buddhist values of sufficiency and harmony with others and with nature have no role in contemporary Japan, nor it seems do Buddhist priests and Buddhist temples. As Japan has been the leading nation within Asia of the promise of modern development, is its situation the fate that the rest of Asia and the Buddhist world must follow? And how about the West that is already experiencing the same dislocations as Japan? This volume explores these questions while putting at the forefront the voices of the people of Fukushima and the Buddhist priests and temples who have provided material and spiritual lifelines to the people who remain there. The volume also explores through a Buddhist lens solutions to the Fukushima crisis as well as the wider problems of nuclear energy, climate change, development policy, and human well-being.

excerpts from the book will be released on an ongoing basis until publication in November, 2013.

For more information see: <http://jneb.jp/english/activities/buddhismnukes/newpublication> or contact the editor Jonathan Watts: ogigaya@gmail.com

Beyond McMindfulness

by Ron Purser and David Loy

Suddenly mindfulness meditation has become mainstream, making its way into schools, corporations, prisons, and government agencies including the U.S. military. Millions of people are receiving tangible benefits from their mindfulness practice: less stress, better concentration, perhaps a little more empathy. Needless to say, this is an important development to be welcomed -- but it has a shadow.

The mindfulness revolution appears to offer a universal panacea for resolving almost every area of daily concern. Recent books on the topic include: *Mindful Parenting*, *Mindful Eating*, *Mindful Teaching*, *Mindful Politics*, *Mindful Therapy*, *Mindful Leadership*, *A Mindful Nation*, *Mindful Recovery*, *The Power of Mindful Learning*, *The Mindful Brain*, *The Mindful Way through Depression*, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*. Almost daily, the media cite scientific studies that report the numerous health benefits of mindfulness meditation and how such a simple practice can effect neurological changes in the brain.

The booming popularity of the mindfulness movement has also turned it into a lucrative cottage industry. Business savvy consultants pushing mindfulness training promise that it will improve work efficiency, reduce absenteeism, and enhance the “soft skills” that are crucial to career success. Some even assert that mindfulness training can act as a “disruptive technology,” reforming even the most dysfunctional companies into kinder, more compassionate and sustainable organizations. So far, however, no empirical studies have been published that support these claims.

In their branding efforts, proponents of mindfulness training usually preface their programs as being “Buddhist-inspired.” There is a certain cachet and hipness in telling neophytes that mindfulness is a legacy of Buddhism -- a tradition famous for its ancient and time-tested meditation methods. But, sometimes in the same breath, consultants often assure their corporate sponsors that their particular brand of mindfulness has relinquished all ties and affiliations to its Buddhist origins.

Uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical and religious Buddhist context is understandable as an expedient move to make such training a viable product on the open market. But the rush to secularize and commodify mindfulness into a marketable technique may be leading to an unfortunate denaturing of this ancient practice, which was intended for far more than relieving a headache, reducing blood pressure, or helping executives become better focused and more productive.

While a stripped-down, secularized technique -- what some critics are now calling “McMindfulness” -- may make it more palatable to the corporate world, decontextualizing mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose, as well as its foundation in social ethics, amounts to a Faustian bargain. Rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots.

Most scientific and popular accounts circulating in the media have portrayed mindfulness in terms of stress reduction and attention-enhancement. These human performance benefits are heralded as the sine qua non of mindfulness and its major attraction for modern corporations. But mindfulness, as understood and practiced within the Buddhist tradition, is not merely an ethically-neutral technique for reducing stress and improving concentration. Rather, mindfulness is a distinct quality of attention that is dependent upon and influenced by many other factors: the nature of our thoughts, speech and actions; our way of making a living; and our efforts to avoid unwholesome and unskillful behaviors, while developing those that are conducive to wise action, social harmony, and compassion.

This is why Buddhists differentiate between Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*) and Wrong Mindfulness (*miccha sati*). The distinction is not moralistic: the issue is whether the quality of awareness is characterized by wholesome intentions and positive mental qualities that lead to human flourishing and

optimal well-being for others as well as oneself.

According to the Pali Canon (the earliest recorded teachings of the Buddha), even a person committing a premeditated and heinous crime can be exercising mindfulness, albeit wrong mindfulness. Clearly, the mindful attention and single-minded concentration of a terrorist, sniper assassin, or white-collar criminal is not the same quality of mindfulness that the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist adepts have developed. Right Mindfulness is guided by intentions and motivations based on self-restraint, wholesome mental states, and ethical behaviors -- goals that include but supersede stress reduction and improvements in concentration.

Another common misconception is that mindfulness meditation is a private, internal affair. Mindfulness is often marketed as a method for personal self-fulfillment, a reprieve from the trials and tribulations of cutthroat corporate life. Such an individualistic and consumer orientation to the practice of mindfulness may be effective for self-preservation and self-advancement, but is essentially impotent for mitigating the causes of collective and organizational distress.

When mindfulness practice is compartmentalized in this way, the interconnectedness of personal motives is lost. There is a dissociation between one's own personal transformation and the kind of social and organizational transformation that takes into account the causes and conditions of suffering in the broader environment. Such a colonization of mindfulness also has an instrumentalizing effect, reorienting the practice to the needs of the market, rather than to a critical reflection on the causes of our collective suffering, or social dukkha.

The Buddha emphasized that his teaching was about understanding and ending dukkha ("suffering" in the broadest sense). So what about the dukkha caused by the ways institutions operate?

Many corporate advocates argue that transformational change starts with oneself: if one's mind can become more focused and peaceful, then social and organizational transformation will naturally follow. The problem with this formulation is that today the three unwholesome motivations that Buddhism highlights -- greed, ill will, and delusion -- are no longer confined to individual minds, but have become institutionalized into forces beyond personal control.

Up to now, the mindfulness movement has avoided any serious consideration of why stress is so pervasive in modern business institutions. Instead, corporations have jumped on the mindfulness

bandwagon because it conveniently shifts the burden onto the individual employee: stress is framed as a personal problem, and mindfulness is offered as just the right medicine to help employees work more efficiently and calmly within toxic environments. Cloaked in an aura of care and humanity, mindfulness is refashioned into a safety valve, as a way to let off steam -- a technique for coping with and adapting to the stresses and strains of corporate life.

The result is an atomized and highly privatized version of mindfulness practice, which is easily coopted and confined to what Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, in their book *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, describe as an "accommodationist" orientation. Mindfulness training has wide appeal because it has become a trendy method for subduing employee unrest, promoting a tacit acceptance of the status quo, and as an instrumental tool for keeping attention focused on institutional goals.

In many respects, corporate mindfulness training, with its promise that calmer, less stressed employees will be more productive, has a close family resemblance to now-discredited "human relations" and sensitivity-training movements that were popular in the 1950s and 1960s. These training programs were criticized for their manipulative use of counseling techniques, such as "active listening," deployed as a means for pacifying employees by making them feel that their concerns were heard while existing conditions in the workplace remained unchanged. These methods came to be referred to as "cow psychology," because contented and docile cows give more milk.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, an outspoken western Buddhist monk, has warned: "absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism." Unfortunately, a more ethical and socially responsible view of mindfulness is now seen by many practitioners as a tangential concern, or as an unnecessary politicizing of one's personal journey of self-transformation.

One hopes that the mindfulness movement will not follow the usual trajectory of most corporate fads -- unbridled enthusiasm, uncritical acceptance of the status quo, and eventual disillusionment. To become a genuine force for positive personal and social transformation, it must reclaim an ethical framework and aspire to more lofty purposes that take into account the well-being of all living beings.

POTENTIALS AND PITFALLS IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Hans Ucko

“No religion is an island” is a paraphrase on John Donne’s powerful words: “No man is an island”. I have many times heard this paraphrase by the Jewish scholar A.J. Heschel and I have often used it myself. It is strange that we have to say it. Of course no religion is an island. Islam cannot do away with its links to Christianity and Judaism. There is a bridge between Judaism and Christianity. Buddhism is related to Hinduism and there is an intrinsic link between Jainism and Hinduism. Sikhism is not possible to understand without its context in India.

People of different religions have lived together since time immemorial. India is maybe the best example of people of different religions living together. Hindus, Christians, Muslims have lived and are living together. So, what’s so new about interreligious dialogue that we now need to provide advice about potentialities and pitfalls? Maybe interreligious dialogue is new in the sense that religion in dialogue seems to be taken out of its context in culture, ethnicity, tradition, history and presented as a thing in itself. One of the most important pitfalls is that we think that we can present religion as an entity in itself. It is a similar reduction of religion as when we reduce a human being to one identity. He is Hindu or Muslim or Christian as if this said it all. It doesn’t. We are not only Christians or Muslims, we are Christians in India and not in the US, we are Muslims in Europe and not in Pakistan. The difference is important.

Increased mobility, large-scale movement of refugees, and economic migrations has resulted in more people of different faiths living side-by-side. What has been a centuries-old experience in India has in our time become a world-wide experience. But living side-by side doesn’t immediately mean contact and interaction. Where mechanisms for

dialogue and encounter exist, there are opportunities to foster greater knowledge and awareness among people of different religions. Unfortunately, increased relations between communities have on the other hand often been marred by tension and fear. For many communities, this tension seems to confirm a need to protect identities and distinctiveness. But a legitimate search for identity is easily amalgamated with hostility towards neighbors of other religions and cultures and everything is blurred. We witness today throughout the world and among the followers of major religious traditions a rise in influence of movements and leaders, who for the sake of political expediency seek to mobilize their believers in the name of preserving a perceived threatened distinctive identity.

One of the most dangerous manifestations of identity is in ethnic conflict, where more often than not religious identities, loyalties, and sentiments become components in pushing sharp distinctions between “we” and “they.” My identity is defined over against the other. When people are elevating their identity as a banner or looking for ways of either inventing or reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential. We witness today many vehement assertions of identity and we are constantly exposed to the formation of group identities over against a common enemy. A particular politics of identity based on a sense of victimization, reducing identity to a single affiliation, facilitates the creation of “identities that kill”, says the French-Lebanese author Amin Maalouf. We see it often. The resentment of the West in many parts of the Muslim world, the frustration against the US for its foreign policy in relation to some Arab states and Israel feeds Usama bin Laden and his followers. The perceived humiliation of the Arab nation is an incitement to the creation of an identity, which defines itself as being constantly under attack. The perceived marginalisation of migrants in Europe furthers a self-image and identity, which is only defined as underdog. The reaction is self-marginalisation and in the end, when there is no longer any hope or future visible, or no light in the tunnel, an explosion of violence.

The problem with identity is when it is made into an absolute. Maalouf warns against an

understanding of identity, which portrays itself as a sort of fundamental truth, an essence “determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter”. Not to fall into this abyss or pit, we should reject reducing ourselves or being reduced to one identity alone. We are more than Christians and that is a good thing.

We may have lived side by side with people of different faiths but we may not have interacted with them as Muslims or Hindus per se but only as neighbors. When in the name of dialogue we come together as Hindus and Christians, we should make it a point that our coming together is not only marked by dialogue but that we seek genuine relationships with people of different faiths. This is particularly important as we live in a time not only of an increased awareness of religious plurality; we are also witnesses to the potential role of religion in conflict, the growing place of religion in public life, all presenting us with challenges that require greater understanding and cooperation among people of diverse faiths.

Whenever religious plurality gives rise to communal tensions there is a possibility of religious sentiments being misused. Religion speaks for some of the deepest feelings and sensitivities of individuals and communities; it carries profound historical memories and often appeals to uncritical confessional solidarities. Interreligious relations and dialogue are meant to help free religion from such misuse, and to present opportunities for religious people to serve together as agents of healing and reconciliation. In a number of countries there are dialogue partners who are able to cooperate, across the religious divide, in concrete efforts of peace making. There are also cases where religious leaders are invited to play a visible role in state-sponsored peace initiatives. It has worked in local contexts but also in some national and regional situations of conflict; I am thinking of Hindus and Muslims working together to heal communalism in Mumbai and in Gujarat. I am thinking of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone, which brought an end to conflict in the country. This is a potential in dialogue, which we should cultivate.

But it is also a potential pitfall. The impact of dialogue in the context of conflicts may disappoint high expectations. When it is unable to quell conflict, its relevance is questioned. There are often expectations that dialogue can significantly contribute towards resolving political or communal conflicts and restoring peace, in situations where religion seems to be implicated. However, by its very nature, interreligious dialogue is not an instrument to

instantly resolve problems in emergency situations. Dialogue is not an ambulance. Dialogue is prophylactic health-care. Contacts and relations of precious trust and friendship between people of different religions, built quietly by patient dialogue during peacetime, may in times of conflict prevent religion from being used as a weapon. In many cases, such relations may pave the way for mediation and reconciliation initiatives. At times of communal tension or at the peak of a crisis, contacts across the communal divide may prove to be invaluable in the construction of peace.

Efforts to prevent polarization between religious communities at the world level are more important than ever. Through media, people tend to perceive conflict in one place as part of a conflict in another, causing enmities in one part of the world to spill over into other regions. An act of violence in one place is used to confirm the stereotype of the “enemy” in another place, or even to provoke revenge attacks elsewhere in the world. The crisis between Muslims and Christians concerning the Danish cartoons of Mohammed is a case in point. We must as much as it is possible try to de-globalize situations of conflict and analyze each one within its own context. The emphasis on the specificity of every context does of course not prevent people of faith in other parts of the world from being both concerned and involved. An interreligious engagement in one place may in fact be an essential contribution to peace building and reconciliation in another place. Also good news can travel well across our planet. It is a potential of dialogue that it can enable people of different religions to foster a counter-culture in situations when stereotyping is rife. In some places in the US, following September 11, Christians and Muslims provided another message than the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists. They were together, prayed together and countered the dangerous simplifications. They refused to be separated from each other in times of hate speech and lynching mentalities.

Individuals and communities may, even with the best of intentions, encounter problems and difficulties in interreligious relations and dialogue. Sometimes the call for dialogue is met with hesitation, suspicion, indifference or opposition both from within one's own community and from other religious communities. Although dialogue by its very nature is direct encounter, there are invisible participants on each side in every dialogue. Our dialogue partners will *mutatis mutandis* every so often hold us responsible for what fellow Christians have done or neglected to do, said or not said. Muslims will recall the crusades

in their dialogue with Christians. Hindus will remind Christians of the inevitable link between mission and colonization. Jews will recall the long history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in Christian Europe. And even if it is not mentioned aloud, the crusader and colonialist-cum-missionary are invisibly present. It is a pitfall to think we can come to a dialogue as if there was no history before us.

But not only history colors the dialogue. Religion is not a monolith and religious people are not all the same even if they belong to the same religion. I can think of few other instances than religion, where “pars-pro-toto” seems to set the rules. A religion can be whole-sale dismissed because a meeting with a protagonist of that particular religion went wrong. While I may be open to dialogue, there are co-religionists of mine, troubled and disturbed from meeting people of other faiths, who through their attitude affect the way people of other faiths look upon my religion. There are deep disagreements within religions and we know that the dividing lines do not always go between religious communities but often within religious communities. The differences may not be only theological, but relate to social, political, and moral issues. We may for various reasons find ourselves in opposition to some of those with whom we share a common faith. In fact, one experience in dialogue is that one sometimes may feel closer to a person of another faith than to the person next to you in the pew. You may not share the same faith but there is an affinity and relationship that transcends religious boundaries. The saying by Ernst Simon is an experience of many: “The people I can pray with, I can’t talk to, and the people I can talk to, I can’t pray with.”

We come in many religious communities across people who seem to be primarily interested in the growth of their own community through various forms of mission and proselytism. They seem to have little interest in dialogue or may make use of it to further their missionary design. Dialogue is their method to get to know the other more in depth, but for a purpose that is not one of dialogue. One wants to learn what is holy in the religious tradition of the other in order to proselytize better. Such situations can be discouraging for people willing to engage in dialogue. I recall a rabbi, who said: “My relationship with the Divine is like my relationship with my wife. There comes a moment when I want to close the bedroom door so that no one can watch my wife me and making love. The same goes for my relationship with God. It is not for public consumption, dialogue or not!”

Dialogue cannot only be an occasion to

come to terms with issues of divergence. Dialogue will wither if we only meet in the context of divisive issues. Dialogue offers also a possibility and space to building alliances on issues of common concern between people of different faiths. It is important to seek such partners and explore ways of rebuilding the credibility of dialogue enabling people to enter a relationship of mutual respect and openness in discussing divisive issues or seeking ways of a common witness.

Interreligious dialogue needs intra-religious dialogue. It raises also the importance to work intra-religiously with our inter-religious findings, i.e. to inform our community about our findings in and through interreligious relations in order that we may tell our brothers and sisters about what we have learned from our friends of other faiths: what is important, which are the sensitivities in relation to religious traditions, etc.

Motivations for dialogue can sometimes be conditioned by power relations between religious communities and by the importance, objective and subjective, of numerical disparities. Discriminatory practices exacerbate distrust and division. The intermingling of state policies and confessional identities rooted in communal traditions may lead communities to look at each other as a threat. This is particularly true in times of uncertainty or political and constitutional changes involving a redefinition of state-religion relationships. Interreligious dialogue cannot shy away from recognizing the effects of uneven power relations and the impact of mutual perceptions, no matter how distorted they are. The relevance of dialogue initiatives depends largely on their intentional and concentrated effort to dispel fears and suspicions between those who are seen to represent religious communities. Equally, it is essential that interreligious dialogue creates an opportunity for strengthening cross-confessional loyalties, always upholding, in discussion and joint action, the centrality of the common good and inclusive political participation.

Linked to the issue of power is the reality of asymmetry in dialogue. It is not a given that we mean the same when entering into dialogue and we may not be in the dialogue for the same reasons. One might be in the dialogue because being in dialogue is part of being religious: spirituality and religious commitment is strengthened and intensified. The other may be in dialogue because he wants to address a controversial issue. One wants dialogue for spirituality; the other wants to have the dialogue partner support a need: a Muslim cemetery, the right to kosher or halal slaughter. A Christian will in

dialogue with Jews try to find out more about the early church and the first Christians. The Jewish partner wants a Christian support for the politics of the State of Israel.

In dialogue we nurture relations. Building bonds of relationship with those considered “the other” is the goal of all dialogues. Such bonds however are not built easily or quickly. Therefore patience and perseverance are crucial in the practice of dialogue. The tenacity to go on, even when the fruits are not obvious, is one of the basic disciplines of dialogue. In dialogue we grow in faith. For Christians, involvement in dialogue produces constant reappraisal of our understanding of the Biblical and theological tradition. Dialogue drives all communities to self-criticism and to re-thinking the ways in which they have interpreted their faith traditions. Dialogue brings about change in the experience of faith, helping people to deepen and grow in their faith in unexpected ways.

Some would due to their experience in dialogue confess that in the relationship with the other, one’s faith in God has grown and changed. They have over and over again met with God, and they have learned that God is more, that God is “Allah-u-aqbar” or as Jacob said it, “God, you are here and I didn’t know it”. They have come to understand that God truly has many mansions. They have come to appreciate that one cannot exhaust God, that God is always “Deus semper maior”; one cannot grasp God, understand God, hold God. “God is unknowable and incomprehensible. The only thing knowable and comprehensible about God is his unknowability and his incomprehensibility”, said St John of Damascus.

But there is a pitfall, the pitfall of saying it is all the same. All religions are the same. Behind all religions there is one religion. Every religion is like a river and they all unite in a sea, where they become one sea. While it is beautiful and even sometimes helpful to look at how much unites us, there is a risk of going for the lowest common denominator or for avoiding the beauty of difference. Appreciating difference frees us from thinking that we hold it all in our hands, that we understand it all. Difference, diversity is such a good teacher to help us not to fall into the pitfall of hubris. Difference is such a good experience for realizing that we still are not there, we do not possess the truth and that we in our otherness need each other to know better where to go and where not to go. The other is in his or her otherness a constant invitation to walk together towards the whole truth. No one has it and it is only as we remain with each other that we will see the

whole truth or as the following story has it where not to go for the whole truth.

A man was lost in a dense, dark forest. As the daylight faded into the lengthening shadows of dusk and the thickness of night gathered, he became more and more frightened. After three days and nights of this painful feeling of being hopelessly lost, he became desperate.

Finally, on the fourth day of wandering about, at dusk, he saw something approaching him from afar. He filled his pockets with rocks to throw and prepared a heavy club from a branch with which to defend himself. His heart beat wildly in his breast. The perspiration of fear gathered on his brow as the unknown creature loomed larger and larger as it approached. It was as tall as a man. He crouched behind some bushes. He grabbed for some of the sharpest stones and prepared to attack frozen with fear.

Then, he realized that the frightening creature monster was a human being. He threw the stones away, but kept his grip on the club just in case. When the man was all but upon him, he threw the club away too as he threw his arms about the shoulders of the man. It was his own brother!

The man held on to his brother with love and gratitude. “Thank God you came in search of me. Please show me the way out of the forest.”

One brother looked at the other with tears in his eyes as he answered: “I am lost now too, my brother. But I can show you what paths NOT TO TAKE. Together, we will find the way out.” We are in it together. We are thrown at each other and we need each other. No religion is an island.

Participation in multireligious prayer has become increasingly common as a consequence of involvement in interreligious dialogue. Concrete situations of everyday life provide opportunities for encounter with people of different religions: inter-religious marriages, personal friendship, praying together for a common purpose, for peace or in a particular crisis situation. But the occasion can also be a national holiday, a religious festival, a school assembly, and other gatherings in the context of interreligious relations and dialogue. There are various forms of prayer among people of different religions. For some, praying together could be a spiritually enriching occasion, for others it is anathema.

Prayer-life is intimate. We pray in our native tongue or use a language that is intimately associated with prayer. Interreligious prayer cannot be thrust into the life of dialogue. There is a potential and there is a pitfall. We need to keep both in mind.

There are questions to be addressed. Does prayer mean the same thing for all of us? Certain religious traditions are doing what has been done since ages: same hymns, same psalms, and same liturgy. This is what is important, you do the same things. This is what gives you comfort and meaning, whereas in another religious tradition there is no problem having a new liturgy, having new prayers for each occasion etc.

Coming together to pray is not so easy. It is my experience that we also in such a peaceful thing as interreligious prayer cannot rule out power as a factor. The dominant religion will set the tone also in interreligious prayer. In an interreligious praying for peace at the 38th parallel between the two Koreas, the one setting the tone for all the other religious traditions present was Christianity and in this case Korean Presbyterians. The dominating discourse was Christian and in the liturgy Buddhists and Muslims said Buddhist and Muslim prayers as if they were Presbyterians.

The question is also what we do in interreligious prayer? The Pope in Assisi 1986 made an interesting distinction in his invitation the Prayer for Peace. He invited people to come together to pray. He did not invite people to come to pray together.

And yet it is the latter, which is particularly challenging. One has been together from different faiths for a long time, working together, studying together and now one would like to express this fellowship and love for each other in prayer together. In expressing together in prayer the fears of all, the worries, the hopes, the dreams, the gratitude, this is what one is longing for.

Prayer together is an invitation to friendship. It is an invitation to enter into the mystery of the Ultimate, which is beyond human intellectual grasp and understanding. It is a sign of the unity of humanity. We recognize the reality of religious diversity, which for us constitutes a theological mystery. Interreligious prayer may be viewed as a relational bridge: between peoples, between faith communities, between religions. Interreligious prayer may lead us to acknowledge the sacred that is present in the religious experience of the other.

There is however a danger of reducing the prayer to the lowest common denominator and of losing the distinctive richness of each tradition. If the intent is to mould the resources of the multiplicity of religions involved into a single act of prayer, a blended unitary content that may reflect each of the participating groups, there is a risk that not one of us will feel at home. While a base-line of harmony and acceptability may triumph, the lowest common

denominator risks destroying the distinctive and particular. The outcome is a blend belonging to no particular tradition: it sits outside the orbit of the religions concerned; it is a liturgical orphan, a spiritual hybrid. Were this the only mode of interreligious prayer it would be justly criticized as a reductionist enterprise.

But there is also a thematic conjoining of prayers, or other appropriate input, from the contributing religions, around a particular event or need or common communal point of reference. The real differences and unique dimensions and contexts, as well as the different content, of the contributions are mutually respected and upheld: there is no sense, through the event, of uniting the religions as such, or subsuming them under some inclusive umbrella of any one of them, or advocating the notion of a supra-religious identity embracing them all in and through the prayer-event. There is no attempt to blend the diversity into a kind of spiritual porridge; nor is the outcome marked by the happy randomness of a smorgasbord. It is a prayer with mutual commitment; persons from different faith traditions use mutually authentic language, rites, and symbols to express their common commitments to transcendent Reality and one another. The development of such a covenant relationship in community grows out of deep commitment to one another and involves the profound difficulties such a commitment entails. Consequently this form of interfaith coming together is often rare and profoundly meaningful.

The issue of interreligious prayer is a fitting end to our walking through potentialities and pitfalls in interreligious dialogue. The way out is not easily seen. We need each other to remember what sensitivity in relation to prayer, worship and spiritual discipline means. It is however in our deepest relations to God that our embrace of dialogue is to be rooted, in our religious tradition, in our spiritual longing and in our awe that God is making everything new.

Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko is the President of Religions for Peace Europe and is a Fellow in Interfaith Studies at Hartford Seminary, CT. He lives in Switzerland and Sweden. hansucko@gmail.com

The story was first told by the late Rabbi Marshall Meyer at the WCC Assembly in Canberra 1991. I have shortened it and modified it.

Expose students to real world suffering : an approach to university education for social change

Zia Collinsfree

'The oppressor shows solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops seeing them as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated of the sale of their labour'

Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (p.26)

After 7 years of teaching at Thammasat University, outside Bangkok, I decided to do an experiment, born out of longstanding curiosity and a desire for radical change. I have taught an English course to undergraduate engineering students for three years. The course teaches engineering related language for the workplace. Despite my best efforts to engage the students using videos, the internet and personalisation for interest and relevance, we remain within the classroom, cut off from the outside world. I believe that there is no substitute for first-hand interaction with reality. Most students here no work experience whatsoever and are very comfortable. They have spent most of their time in classrooms and have very little real life experience or knowledge. While very nice, they do not seem to be able or willing to ask questions, discuss or think for themselves. Every cohort I have taught has behaved this way. Such behaviour is disturbing when we consider the rapid industrial development taking place in Thailand. These students, as engineers, may enter the working environment without a full understanding of the impacts that their employers and/or their line of work may have on the environment and on people, including themselves.

Industrial and economic development in Thailand and its impacts

According to the Thailand Board of Investment (2012), the country is a popular investment location for manufacturing industries and is the second largest economy in ASEAN. Worawit Jarernlert, an economist, states that government policy since 1988 has been to make Thailand into an export-orientated economy and encourage foreign investment, free trade areas and industrial estates. This development has not

been without its impacts. In Map Ta Put, one of Thailand's biggest industrial estates, villagers claim that industrial emissions are causing cancer and respiratory illnesses. Occupational diseases and accidents and health and safety issues are becoming more common with increasing industrialisation. Workers lack safely training and information and Thai society lacks a safety culture. As a result, the environment and workplace health and safety are seen as distant problems. Industry is only interested in expansion and growth, not workers' quality of life. The focus is on dealing with problems when they arise rather than preventing them. As I teach engineering students, who are most likely to be involved in industry, I decided that they should meet real people who are affected by it, by carrying out an out-of-class project.

In the past, Pridi Panomyong, the founder of Thammasat University, required all students to carry out an out-of-class project. They were to experience real life among the poor and disadvantaged in places like prisons and factories. This was in order for them to understand problems they faced and to consider how they could use their knowledge to help those people. In the present day, a programme run by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) arranges for American students who have been involved in voluntary organisations and community projects in their own areas to live and work among the rural poor in Thailand for 17-18 weeks. They become part of the local community and this changes their perspective, developing a true social conscience. The groups are encouraged to use this conscience to form a group vision, which they hopefully will see through on their return to the USA. My idea for an out-of-class project was to move closer to the ideal of university education and away from the current undesirable reality.

Ideals and shortcomings of Thai higher education

Puey Ungpakorn, the Rector of Thammasat University before the 1976 coup, felt that universities should produce open and independently minded, critical, morally upright professionals with a concern for the common good. If universities expect public support (which incidentally will decrease as Thammasat is becoming autonomous), they should serve society. Variety of thought should apply, not rote learning. Puey defined university study as engagement with community events and national problems with interdisciplinary collaboration for in-depth knowledge, not just theory. Sulak Sivaraksa argues that students' duty is to serve the poor and learning need not be restricted to the classroom. Universities should be places of discussion, not teaching (the role of schools).

In reality, however, university is seen as simply a means to climb the career ladder, while avoiding real world problems and producing graduates who think rationally, overlooking moral issues. Students are preoccupied with getting a high paid job and many aim to work for top companies without thinking what those businesses do to people and the environment. Even the Thai Ministry of Education admits that students are unable to think critically, analyse or learn independently. Observers have commented that mainstream education involves theory and rote learning without intellectual or personal development. The content is not applicable to real life. Questions are rare, there is little challenge of conventional viewpoints and students are not encouraged to explore the outside world. As a result, most Thai students tend to be underexperienced, naive and ignorant. Perhaps an out-of-class project would change this.

Purpose of the project

An out-of-class project allows students to report and reflect on something real, relevant, meaningful and unknown and learn about the truth of life (suffering), challenging the shortcomings of the mainstream education system. I want to revive Pridi Panomyong's idea, which disappeared from Thammasat after his exile. By doing this, I hope to challenge the mainstream thinking in Thai society, which focuses on profit and industrial development at the expense of workers and the environment.

Project procedure

The project involved a visit to the Council of the Work and Environment Related Patients' Network

of Thailand (WEPT). WEPT aims to raise occupational health and safety awareness and fight for entitlement to compensation from work-related injuries.

Due to students' lack of experience and their isolation from the real world, it was essential to prepare them for the task. To do this effectively I needed to bring the subject close to home. I purposely gave no clue as to what we would be doing (the project), in order to maximize the impact of what would be a short but powerful experience. In the class before the visit, students were asked to list as many industries connected with their field of engineering as they could, so that they could make links between their field and the wider world. This they found difficult despite having completed an assignment on the topic. After summarizing related industries as a class, they were then asked where most of these industries operate. The answer came: 'factories'. The students then listed everything they could think of that was made in factories, which included everyday items. After this, they received a sheet with the following questions:

What do you know about _____?

- o people who work in factories
- o their jobs
- o their lives
- o their bosses (the industry owners)

What are your opinions of these things?

The sheet was divided into 'before' and 'after' sections and students were told that there was no right or wrong answer. Students completed the 'before' section without any help, relying on their current experience and knowledge. The 'after' section was left blank. I then showed the students a picture slideshow of the organisation's activities, getting them to guess what was happening, before briefing them on the project task.

During the visit, student groups met and interviewed sufferers of industrial diseases and injuries who have been treated unfairly by their employers and attended a consultation session where patients brought in evidence of disease and injustice. They also saw a graphic picture slideshow of case studies of workplace injuries. The suffering of some workers was clearly visible and students were very upset, concerned and shocked. Everyone, even the usually passive students, was very involved and interested in the interviews, asking questions on their own initiative.

Straight after the visit, students filled in the 'after' section of the 'What do you know about...?' sheet. This sheet served to show the students the

difference in knowledge and viewpoint before and after the visit. They also completed a reflection sheet which asked the following:

1. What did you think of the visit?
2. What did you learn from it?
3. What does it mean to you?

Project benefits

The completed 'What do you know about...?' sheets were revealing as to the difference in students' knowledge before and after the visit, for example:

What do you know about the industry owners?	
BEFORE	If the workers do a good job, they will be treated well by their bosses. If they can't do a good job, they will not have a good relationship with their bosses.
AFTER	The bosses pay the workers if they finish their work, but they are not interested in workers' health. If someone gets ill from their work, they can't request anything from their boss because the boss fears that that person will give the business a bad name.

Questionnaires, interviews and reflection sheets showed that students were very positive about the project, which gave them a new perspective and knowledge of unknown truths:

'I thought that this project was good. It made me know things that are kept secret. I gained experience from real stories and learned about workers' problems that are not discussed in Thailand'

'It made me see people in a new light, it changed some of the ways I see workers. Usually we think that we are paying workers so they should do what we tell them to do. Most of the time we don't think of how those workers feel (about what they have to do).'

'I learnt about real working life, that it isn't always easy, you have to adapt to it. We have only ever studied theory. I got to think about other peoples' feelings and I saw people who are suffering. When we finish our studies we might have to be managers. We have to consider our subordinates more'

Feelings about the project

Students' comments showed shock, surprise and a sense of value for health and life over profit. They

enjoyed the project, which they thought was a good idea, and wanted it to continue and expand for successive generations of students:

'I feel really lucky that I joined this activity. If I hadn't, I couldn't have been made aware about problems in the workplace and industry'

'I never thought that this sort of thing happened in my country'

'I learned that every life has value, even that of a lowly labourer. Money is not the most important thing in life, but rather a life without disease'

The students' reactions during the visit showed that they had never encountered such an experience before. Students were able to link the project to their studies, even if their field was not directly related. This indicated that the project, to an extent, helped them to see connections between their field and the rest of the world.

Students compared the project to their usual coursework, summarized below:

Conventional academic work

- useful for their future careers, but predominately theoretical:
 - o focus on processes / structures, even on field visits (people ignored)
 - o isolates students from real life
 - o boring: unable to imagine
- Students dissatisfied and desired:
 - o Greater real world engagement
 - o Integrated technical and social content
 - o More out-of-class, social activities

Out-of-class project

- liked it
 - o emphasis on real life
 - o meaningful and tangible
 - o could meet and talk to real people

Students' comments about conventional academic work show that the Thai university education system is detached from the real world. The fact that students had such a positive attitude towards the project as compared to their faculty work indicated that they were dissatisfied with the current education system and desired change. One student said that industrial relations are affected by

graduate managers' isolation from reality. This response, made spontaneously, implied that this issue was a concern, while also showing the result of the prevalent reductionist viewpoint:

'In the engineering faculty there is only studying followed by exams; there is no learning about real life in the outside world. When students come out of university, it's hard for them to fit in with other people. That's why employers and workers don't get on. They (the bosses) don't understand what life is about. It's necessary for each party to understand each other'.

Project criticisms and suggestions for improvement

Students' criticisms were largely constructive, lack of time being the main concern. More time, both in the duration of, and amount of, visits would have allowed greater interaction with workers and in-depth understanding. Students thought that greater interaction may have allowed them to help the workers:

'If you took us there more often we would know about this group in greater depth. We would become part of them and appreciate their feelings more. We could follow up their progress to see how they get on'.

One student pointed out that the class had only met victims of industrial injuries, but not the perpetrators and therefore the project risked being one-sided in perspective. I admit that this might have been the case, but I reasoned that the viewpoint of the latter is already heard in mainstream society. Besides, time was limited so I had to prioritise. Ideally the class would have met several groups, as done by CIEE, following which students could decide for themselves.

Changing the mindset and the system

The reductionist mindset, prevalent in mainstream engineering education, comprehends systems by studying their component parts, while the engineer/designer is seen as independent and separate from the system. This worldview is in contrast to a holistic paradigm where the engineer is included as part of the system and therefore anything designed by that engineer incorporates his/her beliefs. A holistic worldview regards the engineer as integrated into the technical system, so his or her beliefs are incorporated into that technology. This means that items designed by engineers contain 'knowledge systems, social institutions, social practices and

human relationships'. The project may have helped students to start developing a holistic worldview rather than a reductionist one.

Potential for positive change

Students' view of the project as a welcome, valuable change indicates an educational gap which this project, if expanded and continued, has the potential to fill. Furthermore, students' hope for positive social changes arising from the project suggested that it has the potential to do so. It is potentially a powerful tool when developed fully and applied correctly. Although it needs to be extended much further, the project fulfils Pridi Panomyong's intention that students learn from the poor. This project can be applied to other disciplines such as business, economics, law and medicine. Meeting the workers was educational and thought-provoking. While the project may cost money and take time to organise, it is worthwhile for building engaged citizens capable of questioning their own lifestyles and mindsets, as well as what they can do to improve the world. Multiple visits are needed to allow students greater contact with the workers and follow up their progress. This may increase the likelihood of positive change within individuals.

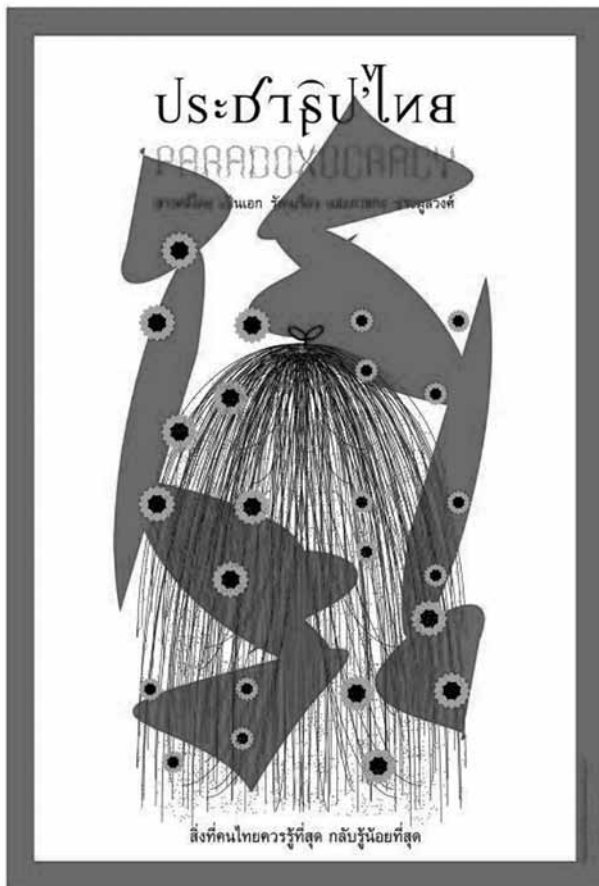
Acknowledgements: I am very grateful to Dr David Streckfuss for his advice on the project, which I will hopefully one day get the resources to expand to make it as effective as his. I would also like to thank Sulak Sivaraksa for his encouragement, as well as the participants in this study.

For more information about this project, please contact: miccollinsfree@yahoo.co.uk

Did you renew your subscription?

May we remind our readers to renew your subscription or help others who cannot afford to pay for Seeds of Peace so the publication will be available to all who seek something to read beyond those provided by the mainstream mass media. The suggested rate is USD.50.00 per year. If you can support more, we would be very grateful for your generosity. Your money will go to support INEB activities for grass-root people in poor countries.

Pandora's paradox



This coming Monday, June 24, marks the 81st anniversary of the birth of democracy in Thailand. It's been a rough road we've taken since the 1932 Revolution, followed by subsequent coups and counter-coups, the decades of dictatorship, the student uprisings, the money politics and the complication of visible and invisible forces, right up to our deep divides of now. All of these are presented in an ambitious documentary film to be released on Monday. *Prachathipathai*, or *Paradoxocracy*, chronicles and

comments on the eight-decade journey of Thai-style democracy whose past is sometimes forgotten and whose future is always uncertain.

Directed by movie veteran Pen-ek Ratanaruang and documentary filmmaker and former *A Day* magazine founder Pasakorn Pramoolwong, the film has a rare Monday opening, to emphasise its message, when films usually open here on Thursday, while its subject matter is even rarer in a movie industry where ghosts and romantic comedy

stories abound.

Amidst our ongoing political schism, the film is more than enough to create a stir among the general public, intellectuals and pundits. There is speculation and heated criticism even before the film has actually been seen, the film has been censored at a few points, with sound muted. To many, there are probably only two ways this film is going to turn out: a move subject to a reaction of colour-coded resentment or a brave mission that dares to address issues we most need to hear but which nobody has the courage to say.

The narration starts at the 1932 Siamese Revolution that transformed Siam, as it was known, from absolute to constitutional monarchy. As the narrator's voice fills in the detail, all significant episodes of our democratic voyage are recounted and discussed through interviews with many prominent Thai thinkers, writers and academics: Sulak Sivaraksa (sharp, take-no-prisoners funny), Thongchai Winichakul (enlightening), Jiranan Pitsuwan (on-the-ground experience during October 1973), Prinya Thewanaruemitkul (clear-eyed), Worachet Pakeerut (passionate, informative), to name just a few.

The interviewees, who make up the film's gripping rhythm, dissect the transformation through various notable historical and political events like World War II, the 1947 coup d'état, the Oct 14, 1973, student uprising, the

Oct 6, 1976, massacre, the Thaksin Shinawatra government's rule from 2001 to the coup d'état that ousted him in 2006, and up to the present day.

"For me, it started with the frustration of not knowing which side to choose," says Pen-ek, referring to the political divide. "I didn't have enough information to decide and I felt like I had some sort of defect because other people surrounding me could choose which side they wanted to support."

As for Pasakorn, it started when Yingluck Shinawatra was elected prime minister.

"Before that I didn't care about politics and I hadn't read the newspapers for several years. But when she got elected, I was like, 'Who is this woman? Then I started reading the newspapers again and I started to feel uncomfortable with all the chaos, the roadblocks, the street protests and what various groups of people were saying. And I started to wonder if we were playing by the same rules. And if those rules were democracy, I wondered whether it was the same democracy we were talking about.'"

Unlike other documentary filmmakers who set out to portray a subject they specialise in, this project started out as both directors attempting to find out what democracy really is and understand what the ongoing political chaos is all about. The directors admitted that what drove them to the project was that

insistent demon of curiosity.

"We were very naïve when we first started out," says Pen-ek, who's well-known internationally as a filmmaker with a dark sense of humour. "The information and the truths we were faced with from the people who really know their subject sometimes got us so depressed that we didn't want to go on. For every landmark event there is always more than one set of truths."

Democracy is such a vast and difficult subject, and the first challenge for them was to find the right place for the narration to start.

"The origin of democracy dates back as far as the classical era of ancient Greece," says Pasakorn. "Each academic has his own starting point. Some say that our country has had it since the reign of King Rama V. We start at 1932 so that our film will have a definite shape, and whether the 1932 transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy was too early or too late for our country is an interesting key question for our film to begin with."

The idea for the film title Paradoxocracy comes from the interview with Thongchai, an eminent academic. In the movie, Thongchai explains that the road of democracy is full of paradoxes, for example, how the 1932 Revolution can be viewed both as the birth of democracy and the advent of military dictatorship. The key question that has been debated over the years

regarding whether the 1932 Revolution was an act of "picking the fruit before it's ripe", in short, whether Thai people were "ready" for the new system, is a key concern that resonates throughout the film.

For a story seemingly heavy in history and politics, Paradoxocracy is surprisingly easy for the audience to follow, even for those who have never been interested in the subject. With rare photographs and old news footage, the audience is guided from period to period. If the chairs in the cinema were straight and wooden, and the popcorn wasn't allowed, it could feel like a history class at school, only much more enjoyable and with a lot of teachers taking turns talking to you.

And yet, the question being thrown around, typical of the paranoid mindset and prejudices of today, is whether the filmmakers are inclined to any colour-coded ideology. In short, is this a yellow-leaning or red-leaning film? And despite repeated statements from the directors that their film came out of interest and curiosity rather than ideology, the speculation has been intense.

"When awakened politically, it's impossible to stay unbiased," says Pen-ek. "The history, the route of democracy makes it hard for us to stay so."

"What we have been trying since the start though is to always be aware of what we are doing and never let our emotions get involved." Not only does the film make it clear that each

interviewee seems to be speaking from beyond the simplistic red-versus-yellow divide, they also encourage understanding rather than trying to assign blame, even though they probably could if they wanted to.

For example, when some interviewees criticise Thaksin it's not only to lay blame for what he did but also an attempt to understand his motives and even speak about the good side of him as well. Then there's another paradox within the film: the sound in some parts of the documentary are muted and the accompanying English subtitles are crossed out. It is a paradoxical twist within itself. A film about democracy doesn't get the full right of democratic freedom of expression. And

yet with the censorship, Pen-ek believes that the film feels even stronger since it creates a sense of mystery, and the message of the story attains a strange meta quality.

Another unusual appeal of this documentary is the way we can in some ways relate to the directors. We hear them ask questions and sometimes get confused with what they are hearing. This puts them in the same position as the audience, not as storytellers but as beginners who are eager to learn.

As for their hopes of what the audience will get after watching the film, Pen-ek says that it's more suitable for those who know little and are confused about the situation.



But for those who have already chosen their side, it's going to be useless. We hope people come to see this with their minds open.

This is just to ignite them to be more interested in the subject and go further into it on their own.



Published: 19 Jun 2013
by Bangkok Post
<http://www.bangkokpost.com/lifestyle/interview/355794/>

Insult the King and... Go Directly to Jail

Timothy Garton Ash

Thai royal nurses holding candles at a celebration of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's eighty-fifth birthday, Bangkok, December 2012

Paula Bronstein/Getty Images



She sits calmly smiling at me across the lunch table: quiet, matter-of-fact, professional. Yet just a week ago, Joop's husband, Somyot Pruksakasemsuk, was condemned to ten years in prison for *lèse-majesté*—plus a further year on a related defamation charge. What was Somyot's mortal insult to Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the world's longest-reigning monarch?

A magazine he edited had published two articles: one, a tale about an unnamed family that kills

millions of people to maintain itself in power, the other, a fictional story about a ghost that haunts Thailand and plots massacres. The court held that both referred to the king and his Chakri dynasty, and that merely publishing them merited ten years in prison under Article 112 of Thailand's criminal code. As the Good Soldier Švejk exclaims in Jaroslav Hašek's classic novel, "I never imagined that they'd sentence an innocent man to ten years. Sentencing an innocent man to five years, that's

something I've heard of, but ten, that's a bit too much."

At first it might be tempting to view Thailand's *lèse-majesté* laws as a minor eccentricity in the exotic setting of *The King and I*, the self-styled "land of smiles," a favored holiday destination for millions of Western tourists. But when you meet someone whose husband has been unjustly sentenced to more than a decade in prison, the smile is wiped off your face. As you look a little closer, you realize that all this is deadly serious. In a sense, the

political future of an important Southeast Asian country hinges on that one small article of the criminal code. And these days, Anna, the governess in *The King and I*, might be locked up just for singing "Shall We Dance?"—let alone "Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?"—on a YouTube video.

As David Streckfuss explains in *Truth on Trial* in Thailand, his richly informative book on *lèse-majesté* in Thailand, early-twentieth-century edicts to protect the absolute monarch of Siam were originally inspired by European examples—notably that of Wilhelmine Germany. But over the last one hundred years, European and Thai law and practice have evolved in opposite directions. While *lèse-majesté* laws remain nominally on the statute books of some European countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain, you can in practice say whatever you like about the queen of the Netherlands, who earlier this year announced her abdication, or the king of Spain—not to mention his son-in-law, the Duke of Palma, currently on trial for corruption. (Try that on the crown prince of Thailand.)

They order things differently in Thailand. Article 112 of the 1957

criminal code prescribed imprisonment “not exceeding seven years” for “whosoever defames, insult or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-Apparent or the Regent.” In a 1976 amendment, the prison term was increased to “three to fifteen years” Then, after the September 2006 military coup that deposed the government of Thaksin Shinawatra, the number of lèse-majesté cases soared. Such charges inevitably became mixed up with the fierce conflict between the Yellow Shirt and the Red Shirt that has roiled the country’s politics ever since. And Somyot is very committed Red Shirt, a labor activist who also frontally challenged the legitimacy of Article 112 in the country’s constitutional court. That challenge seems to provoke his arrest, five days after he launched his petition drive in 2011, whereas the magazine article had appeared in 2010. (The constitutional court rejected his petition, which had collected more than ten thousand signatures, on the ground that the king is “the center if the nation.”)

In the Internet age, these battles don’t stop at terrestrial frontiers. Like most other state in the world, Thailand has been struggling to assert its sovereignty over cyber-

space. It has done so in particularly disproportionate way on just this issue. A BBC correspondent, Jonathan Head, was charged lèse-majesté for saying that the Thai people were worried about the succession-which, if you talk to anyone ready to speak about it privately, they clearly are. The past excesses of the current heir recounted in Paul Handley’s book *The King Never Smiles* help explain why¹. The police lieutenant colonel who had lodged the charge against the BBC correspondent actually admitted to Streckfuss. “The truth can’t be said.”

The whole of YouTube was blocked here for some time because of video allegedly “insulting” the king. It was unblocked after YouTube agreed not to allow computers with an Internet Protocol (IP) address in Thailand to have access to those particular videos. (IP addresses are generally assigned in blocks to countries, and such filtering by national IP address seems to be becoming a new international norm. In December 2011, an American blogger, or Gordon was sentenced to two and a half years in a Thai prison, just because he had linked on his blog to downloadable Thai language excerpts from Paul Handley’s biography of the king. He was released

last summer—on a royal pardon. This leaves me wondering which century we’re in. The twenty-first? The seventeenth? Or, most plausibly, some weird mixture of the two.

I was invited by the European Union delegation in Bangkok to speak at a seminar on “reconciliation and freedom of expression.” In response to this seminar, there was a small demonstration of ultra-royalists—dark-yellow shirts, so to speak—outside the EU delegation office

I left Thailand for Burma with a clear sense that this state of affairs is not just unacceptable but also unsustainable. No one is doing the monarchy itself, let alone the whole “land of smiles,” any service by the blatantly political abuse of lèse-majesté law to hand down sentences such as that on Somyot. As Europe’s surviving royal houses have learned, to strangle open, democratic debate about the royal family is no way to secure the future of a constitutional monarchy. More broadly, history teaches that trying to slave off reform only increase the likelihood of revolution.

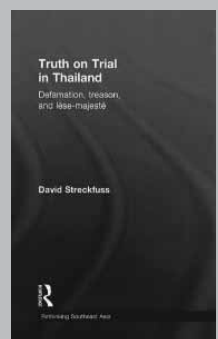
And if, for writing this article, next time I pass through Bangkok I am detained “as a guest of His Majesty”—to adapt a delightful British euphemism for a

period spent in one of Her Britannic Majesty’s prisons—then so be it. It will help to make the point. Perhaps the EU might even a finger on my behalf. And I promise not to spend my enforced leisure singing any hits from *The King and I*.

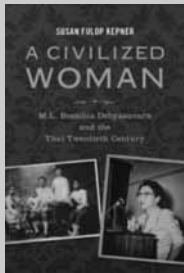
from *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 60, No. 9, May 23, 2013

- This is the second of three articles on free speech in South and Southeast Asia. A third article, on Burma, will appear in a coming issue.

¹Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej* (Yale University Press, 2006).



Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-Majesté by David Streckfuss Routledge, 494 pp., \$49.95 (paper)



A Civilized Woman: M.L. Boonlua Debyasuvarn and the Thai Twentieth Century

Author : Susan Fulop Kepner-
Publisher : Silkworm Books



ALAN SENAUIKE EVERYTHING IS BROKEN SONGS ABOUT THINGS AS THEY ARE

Recorded by Charlie Wilson
between September 2011 and
August 2012
Produced by Alan Senauke and
Charlie Wilson



DEVELOPMENT OF THE
HUA-YEN SCHOOL DURING
THE TANG DYNASTY

Author : Ven. Hsien Du
First Publisher : In 2006 By
Hua-Yen Lotus Association,
Taipei



THE STORY OF LUMINARY

Publisher : Luminary Buddhist
Institute, 2012



YOUR FRIEND, THE TIBETAN
REFUGEES

A Chronicle of The Tibetan Aid
Project 1969-2000
Publisher : Dharma



PARTICIPATORY
GUARANTEE SYSTEMS

Case Studies From Brazil,
India, New Zealand, USA
Publisher : Germany by
IFOAM, February 2006



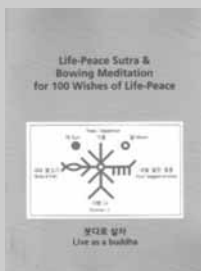
UNIVERSAL VALUE AND
RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The 12th "Theory and Practice
of Master Yinshun's 'Thought'"
International Conference and
The Forum of 20th Anniversary
of The Founding of Life
Conservationist



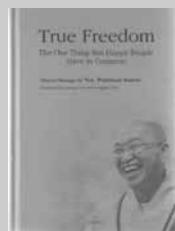
TRUE HAPPINESS
HERE AND NOW

Dharma Messages : Ven. Pomn
yun Sunim
Translated : Youngtae Choi and
Juyoung Yoo
Publisher : South Korea , March
2013 by Jubgt Publishing Co.
Jubgt Society Foundation



LIFE - PEACE SUTRA AND
BOWING MEDITATION FOR 100
WISHES OF LIFE - PEACE

Author : Ven. Dobup with Lifepeace
Fellowship



TRUE FREEDOM
THE ONE THING THAT HAPPY
PEOPLE HAVE IN COMMON

Dharma Messages : Ven. Pomn
yun Sunim
Translated : Youngtae Choi and
Juyoung Yoo
Publisher : South Korea , Semmer
2011 by Jubgt Publishing Co.
Jubgt Society Foundation



JUST 20
INTERNATIONAL MOVE-
MENT FOR A JUST WORLD



IT'S LIKE THIS

Author : Venerable Ajahn Chah
Translated From The Thai :
Thanissaro Bhikkhu
Printed in The United States Of
America



STILL FLOWING WATER

Author : Venerable Ajahn Chah
Translated From The Thai : Thanissaro Bhikkhu
Printed in The United States Of America



CURRENT DIALOGUE
DECEMBER 2011

Publisher : The World Council of Churches for More Than 25 Years



ON THE RECEPTION OF
BUDDHISM IN GERMAN
PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE :
AN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Editors : Pornsan Watamagura,
Heinrich Detering
Publisher : The Centre for
European Studies at Chulalongkorn
University



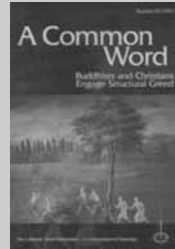
CHULALONGKORN INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE OF ORIENTAL
STUDIES (CHICOS) BUDDHISM
AND BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY IN
WORLD LITERATURE

Editors : Pornsan Watamagura,
Heinrich Detering
Publisher : Chulalongkorn University
Printing House



LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN

A Special Edition
Commemorating The World
Economic Forum On East
Asia - Held in Nay Pyi Taw
5-7 June 2013



A COMMON WORD
BUDDHISTS AND CHRISTIANS
ENGAGE STRUCTURAL GREED

Editor : Martin L. Sinaga, On
Behalf of The Lutheran World
Federation - A Community of
Churches
Publisher : Lutheran University
Press under The Auspices of The
Lutheran World Federation



A JOURNEY OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION FROM
WITHIN THE CENTER FOR PROMOTION OF
MONASTIC EDUCATION(CPME)

Author : Shui Meng Ng CPME Education Advisor
Publisher : The Center for Promotion of Monastic Education
(CPME) in Collaboration with Phaung Daw Oo Monastic
Education School (PDO), The Socially Engaged Monastic
Schools (SEMS), The Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)
and American Friend Service CommitteeM (AFSC)



PEMBAGUNAN UNTUK MANUSIA
EKONOMI BUDDHIS KE-21
THE WISDOM OF SUSTAINABILITY
BUDDHIST ECONOMICS FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY

Author : Sulak Sivaraksa
Publisher : HIKMAHBUDHI
& Institut Nagarjuna



THE JOURNAL OF THE SIAM
SOCIETY VOLUME 100, 2012

EDITOR : Paul Bromberg
Publisher : Amarin Printing
and Publish Public Company



KEEPING THE FAITH

Author : Perer Williams
Publisher : Lussaud, France



LE BOUDDHISME ENGAGÉ

Un livre d'Éric Rommeluère publié
aux Éditions du Seuil, 192 pages,
broché 21 x 14,