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PARTICIPATORY PEACEMAKING:  
SOCIO-ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTERDEPENDENT CO-ARISING AND THEIR  
RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to  
the Temple University Graduate Board

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in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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by  
Hsiao-Lan Hu  
August, 2008

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## ABSTRACT

PARTICIPATORY PEACEMAKING:  
SOCIO-ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTERDEPENDENT CO-ARISING AND THEIR  
RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Hsiao-Lan Hu

Doctor of Philosophy

Temple University, 2008

Doctoral Advisory Committee Chair: Dr. John C. Raines

This dissertation studies the social and ethical implications of the core Buddhist teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising, which is the logic of Buddhist reasoning and the guiding principle of Buddhist ethics. By appealing to the *Nikāya-s*, the foundational texts recognized by all Buddhist schools on the one hand, and referencing contemporary socio-economic studies and poststructuralist feminist theories on the other, I revive and theorize about a dynamic sense of Buddhist social ethics, examine its relevance in the contemporary world, and make it acceptable and accessible to the largest number of Buddhists and non-Buddhist scholars and activists. This approach of appropriating non-Buddhist sources in order to make the Buddhist *Dhamma* relevant in alleviating *dukkha* is grounded in the Buddha's own teachings and examples. Poststructuralist feminist theories not only offer a much needed critique to the pervasive androcentrism in Buddhist circles, but are also useful in capturing the dynamic complexities that

are conveyed by the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising. In poststructuralist feminist language, any individual subject is a socio-psycho-physical compound shaped and delimited by socio-cultural sedimentations as well as by his/her mental formations, hence the Buddhist teaching of Non-Self. At the same time, it is due to people's repeated actions that socio-cultural sedimentations are formed and *dukkha* is created and perpetuated in the world. Therefore, in the Buddha's teachings, *kamma* inevitably has a social dimension and demands attention to the *dukkha*-producing social norms. Ethics is thus not a set of rigid, inalterable rules, but an ongoing process of striving to be ethical in the midst of ever-changing relations among ever-changing beings. And *Sangha*, one of the Three Jewels in which all Buddhists take refuge, is not a closed community bound by blood relation or geographical proximity, but an unending effort of building communities and working interconnections with multiple different others. The cessation of *dukkha*, in this view, is not a static existence where nothing happens, but a dynamic endeavor of working on one's behavioral, emotive, and conceptual transformation in order to alleviate *dukkha* and continually make peace in this world. It requires the participation of everyone entangled in the interconnected web of life.

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I would like to thank Dr. John C. Raines, the chair of my doctoral advisory committee, for all the guidance he has provided me over the years. I have been moved by, and benefited from, his commitment to social justice and his care for underprivileged students. It was because of him that I met Dr. Daniel C. Maguire and got involved in the book project of *Violence Against Women in Contemporary World Religion: Roots and Cures*. Dr. Raines was also the one who called my attention to the position in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Detroit Mercy and thus pointed me to my future academic home. Moreover, I am indebted to him for persuading Dr. Rita M. Gross to serve on my committee. I am extremely grateful that Dr. Gross took a chance with me and agreed to sit on my committee even though at the time she had never met me. Her works have influenced and inspired me on many levels, and I cannot think of a better feminist Buddhist to critique my dissertation.

Dr. Rebecca T. Alpert is in every way my role model. I wish one day I could approximate her wisdom and strength in tackling all the difficulties I will encounter, and I wish I will have the same kind of humor and patience if my students in the future come to me with every little problem they have in the same way I did with her. Dr. Laura S. Levitt's energy and passion have always amazed me. She has read more revisions of all of my chapters than anyone else, with unparalleled enthusiasm. From time to time she would point out the potentials of my work that I myself did not see. Not being my main advisor, both Drs. Alpert and Levitt have however spent much time on me and generously offered their knowledge and

critical eyes. I have often considered myself fortunate that I am so much closer with all of my committee members than most graduate students I know.

Dr. Janine T. A. Sawada was the very first professor I worked with when I began graduate study at the University of Iowa. She accustomed me to the scholarship in the field and laid down the foundation of my academic discipline. For me, the most difficult part of leaving the University of Iowa was not being able to continue my study with her. Dr. Wendi Leigh Adamek is one of the most personable and caring professors I have ever had. She looked out for me when she was my advisor, and she has still spent much time talking with me via emails even after we both left Iowa. I learned a great deal serving as Dr. Adamek's research assistant and Dr. Sawada's teaching assistant, and it was wonderful being their student.

Dr. William C. Allen was the person who introduced me to the *Nikāya* texts, which have become the main Buddhist texts that I referenced in this dissertation. I am thankful that he had enough confidence in me and insisted that I be the first author of the book *Taoism* published by Chelsea House Publications. Dr. Thomas A. Lewis, whom I met at the University of Iowa, was the one who introduced me to Latin American liberation theology and piqued my interest in inter-traditional study. I took my very first course on women and religion with Dr. J. Kenneth Kuntz and I still find what he taught very useful.

After I completed my coursework, I still frequently sat in seminars without officially taking them. I thank Dr. Raines, Dr. Alpert, Dr. Allen, Dr. Khalid A. Y. Blankinship, and Dr. Vasiliki M. Limberis for indulging my presence in their courses and for enriching my knowledge. Venerable Karma Lekshe Tsomo of the University of San Diego is loving-kindness embodied. Her presence is always assuring and her words are always kind and encouraging. Dr. Douglas Berger was a knowledgeable teacher and a helpful friend. He has been very supportive of my

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Liora Gubkin reached out to me in my time of need even though they had only seen me a few times at conferences. Their friendship helped me through a personal ordeal, for that I am grateful.

My father had a paralyzing stroke in August of 2005 and passed away in May 2006. Neither he nor my mother really thought that a woman's place could be in the academe, and yet it was them who equipped me with the aptitude and discipline that I would need for advanced study. I am grateful that their belief in education outweighed all other presumptions and concerns. It was not easy for them to deal with the fact that I did not fit into either of their preconceived notions of a daughter, and it certainly was unsettling to know that their daughter was leaving them in more than one sense, and yet they let her go anyway. When I was in junior high school, once I questioned why it was always me who was assigned to cook while my brother was the one who enjoyed cooking and really had the knack for it. My father responded, "So you are saying all you should do is what you like and are good at? Following that line of thinking, in the future your brother will be a cook and you will get a doctorate just because you are good at school? That is preposterous!" In the last couple of years of his life, my father's attitude toward my academic pursuit changed significantly, and at times he would say that he wished he had had the means to support me so that I could have concentrated on my study instead of having to work to sustain myself for all these years. At one time he even asked me if there were more women than men in graduate school since, he said, women were both smarter and more diligent. It pangs me that he passed away when he was finally becoming appreciative of me, who was neither the second son he had believed that he had been destined to have, nor the girly "daddy's girl" that he had wanted. Much of my interest in religions can be traced to my mother. She has always been remarkably pious and excessively serious when it comes to

worship. It is through her practices that I understand the extent to which the “Three Teachings” interact and fuse with each other in East Asian cultures. And it is in her practices that I witness the power of social *kamma* in the sense of socio-cultural sedimentation. Often not happy with the gender roles herself, for my own good she still expects me to embody the same narrow definition of femininity that she has resented.

After my father’s passing, I realized that I am in no small way indebted to my only brother. He was the first one in the family who recognized my much suppressed intelligence. Since the onset of my father’s illness, he has made life easier for me, especially considering that I am still not the docile daughter my mother has always wished for. His way of making peace with the obstacles in his life while maintaining remarkable warmth and sensitivity in his personality, moreover, has been a continuous inspiration.

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knowledge helped me on numerous occasions. More importantly, it was thanks to the various forms of financial and social aids she had provided or procured for me, including her sister Terry's assistance, that I could come to the United States for an advanced degree in the first place. I am greatly indebted to her.

To my father

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, 'The ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, "These things are unwholesome, these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practised, lead to harm and suffering", then you should abandon them. ... when you know for yourselves, "These things are wholesome, these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practised, lead to welfare and happiness", then you should engage in them.<sup>1</sup>

This is a teaching about taking actions and accepting views. This teaching is given by a person who renounced the conventional ways of thinking and behaving. His oral teachings have attracted so many followers that he is retrospectively considered the teacher and founder of a religious tradition. This teacher is concerned with the prevalence and causes of *dukkha* (Sanskrit: *duhkha*), the unsatisfactoriness of ordinary life, the dis-ease of conventional existence, the suffering particularly pronounced at the trouble time of his. He affirms that the cessation of *dukkha* is possible and teaches the practices and views that can lead all sentient beings to it. At the same time, however, this teacher who teaches the Path to the cessation of *dukkha* discourages blind faith in any tradition, teaching, or teacher, himself and his own teachings included. He teaches his followers to be concerned with the practical ramifications of the actions they take and

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<sup>1</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, I.186-187; duplicated in III.65.

the views they accept. He encourages them to question, to doubt, to think for themselves and be critical.

This is the Buddha, “the awakened one,” and his teachings are called the *Dhamma* (Sanskrit: *Dharma*). His followers are now commonly called Buddhists in the English language, and their practices and views are now collectively termed Buddhism. In the long history of Buddhism the major exegetes of the *Dhamma* have largely been monastic males who were most likely from the upper strata of societies.<sup>2</sup> This privileged group usually had been conditioned to identify with the existing social orders and not to question them. As a result, Buddhist masters in history have been known more through their teaching about, and pursuit of, individual inner peace in various adversary situations, than through their effort in challenging and restructuring the social institutions at their times. Most of them also uncritically inherited an androcentric bias that has been persistent in most societies and in most ages. The privileged androcentric perspective of the major transmitters of the *Dhamma*, which focused on individual spiritual transformation and paid little attention to structural problems and gender inequity, has been kept alive in their commentaries and translations. Being the *Dhamma* teachers and lineage patriarchs, those privileged men were (and in some areas still are) revered in most Asian cultures, and as such their teachings sometimes became utterly unchallengeable. Thus, even though the

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<sup>2</sup> Buddhist scholar Roger R. Jackson notes that in pre-modern times the major theorists and disseminators of the Buddhist *Dhamma*, whom he terms “theologians,” were “an élite within an élite, for they were among the very few people within their societies who were able to separate themselves from lay life to follow the monastic calling, and they were, unlike the majority of the populace (and probably the majority of monastics) literate.” In addition to being separated from the majority of people and having the access to education, seen as “sources of spiritual power and temporal legitimation,” they were befriended by the political and economic elite in their society. Roger R. Jackson, “Buddhist Theology: Its Historical Context,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, edited by Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 5.

transmitters of the Buddhist *Dhamma* of later times were not necessarily of the upper classes, and even though some of them were not even male, they inherited their masters' blind spots together with their insights. As a result, they took the existing social orders and gender roles for granted and devalued social relationships, while focusing on inner peace *only* and overemphasizing isolated meditation and individualistic intellectual study.<sup>3</sup> Even among traditional Asian Mahāyānists, who often self-proclaim to be committed to “liberating all sentient beings,” the *socio*-ethical implications of the Buddha's teachings were often downplayed, while working on the individual mind was propped up as the gist of the Buddhist *Dhamma*. Cultivating one's own mind was often misconstrued to be not only the first task, but the *only* task. Socio-ethical engagement was thus rendered secondary by some, if not utterly unimportant.

At the same time, however, the Buddhist goal of the cessation of *dukkha* has never been disregarded, even though at times it was turned inward and individualized. Prior to the Western colonial rule that pushed Buddhism in Asia further down the path of social indifference and individual purification,<sup>4</sup> Buddhism in Asia had had a “considerable history of social

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<sup>3</sup> Rita M. Gross, “Where Are the Women in the Refugee Tree?” in *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist Christian Conversation*, by Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2001), 74-5.

<sup>4</sup> In his foreword to Walpola Rāhula's *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, Edmund F. Perry states,

The image of the Buddhist monk as a public leader engaging in social and political activities had been obscured, deliberately so, by Western colonialists and their accompanying Christian missionaries. By imposing a particular type of Christian monasticism upon the Buddhist clergy, restricting the clergy's activity to individual purification and temple ministries, the colonial administrators dispossessed the *bhikkhus* of their influence on the public life of their people and actually succeeded in instituting a tradition of Buddhist recluses, to the near exclusion of other types of clergy.

... The conspiracy to “convert” the Buddhist monk from public leader to disengaged recluse prevailed so widely and pervasively that today even in independent countries the monks have to struggle against so-called Buddhist politicians who, still possessed by the “heritage” left by the imperialists, want, more than the colonial

involvement.”<sup>5</sup> In the Theravāda countries, such as Ceylon (Sri Lanka), *bhikkhu*-s (Sanskrit: *bhikṣu*-s; male Buddhist renunciates) had served as the ethical and spiritual educators of the masses, preservers of cultural heritages, main providers of medical care and social services, and advisors to the rulers.<sup>6</sup> Even in East Asian countries where the Confucian tradition is said to have dominated the social, ethical, and political spheres, people with Buddhist persuasion, whether they were *bhikkhu*-s, *bhikkhunī*-s (Sanskrit: *bhikṣunī*-s; female Buddhist renunciates), or lay followers, often engaged in social work and disaster relief as an effort to fulfill the Mahāyānist bodhisattva vow of “liberating all sentient beings.” As engaged Buddhist theorist Ken Jones observes, “in both Theravada and Mahayana scripture, the practical relief of suffering is commonly given first priority.”<sup>7</sup>

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Christians, to silence and seclude the monks as though the monk constitutes a public menace. ...

... To this day Western scholars of Buddhism tend to perpetuate the image of the Buddhist monk as something like the medieval mystic recluse of the Christian faith. Edmund F. Perry, “Foreword to the English Edition,” in *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu: A Short History of the Bhikkhu in Educational, Cultural, Social, and Political Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), xii. Under the colonial rule, Buddhism was branded as a religion that lacked a social ethic and thus irrelevant to modern society. That (mis-)representation was furthermore taught to the colonized, especially the elite who received “modern” education and learned to see their own traditions through the colonial lens. George Doherty Bond, *Buddhism at Work: Community Development, Social Empowerment and the Sarvodaya Movement*, foreword by Joanna Macy (Bloomfield, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2004), 11; also 74-5 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 180.

<sup>6</sup> See Walpola Rāhula, *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu: A Short History of the Bhikkhu in Educational, Cultural, Social, and Political Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1974). May Ebihara’s study also shows that Buddhist monasteries in Cambodia provide social services such as health care and education. May Ebihara, “Interrelation Between Buddhism and Social Systems in Cambodian Peasant Culture,” *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, edited by Manning Nash (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1966), 175-96.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism*, 222.

According to the Buddhist *Dhamma*, ethical discipline is an indispensable part of the Path to the cessation of *dukkha*, and inner peace and social well-being are positively correlated. Part of understanding Non-Self and Interdependent Co-Arising is to see the mutual generations and mutual reinforcements between the “inner” states of an individual and his/her “outer” behaviors, between an individual’s behavior and the social realities, and between the seemingly “external” socio-cultural phenomena and the seemingly “internal” mental processes of individuals. Therefore, individual transformation includes ethical dealing with one’s surroundings, and social well-being is a *bona fide* Buddhist concern. Instead of being a modern invention inspired by Protestant Christian values,<sup>8</sup> social ethics has been ingrained in the Buddhist *Dhamma* since its inception.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, Peter Harvey introduces “Engaged Buddhism” as Asian Buddhists’ borrowing Western values and characteristics of Protestant Christianity in order to fight back against Western colonial rule, which has led some to call it “Protestant Buddhism.” Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112. Robinson et al. in *Buddhist Religions* also describe engaged Buddhism as a Western reform that seems to be inspired by Christian social activists of the nineteenth century even though many of the pioneers of engaged Buddhism are Asian. Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 304. They explain that the movement in Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century is called Protestant Buddhism both in the sense that it was a *protest* against Portuguese Catholic rule, and in the sense that it was primarily led by educated lay people (the Portuguese rule significantly reduced the number of Buddhist renunciates) who sought to strip away the elements that had no basis in the early texts. *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>9</sup> As Harvey notes in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, “Social activist Buddhists in Asia often claim that they are simply reviving the best features of Buddhism from the pre-colonial era, before the colonial era cut back the social outreach of monks.” Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 112. Robert Magliola also observes that the currently globally influential engaged Buddhists “were *perhaps* inspired *in part* by western models, but they have *revived* (long-untapped) political/social reserves in their own Buddhism.” (emphasis added) Robert Magliola, “Afterword,” in *Buddhisms and Deconstructions*, edited by Jin Y. Park (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 260.

In this dissertation I appeal to the foundational teachings recognized by all Buddhist schools in order to revive its social ethics that has often been downplayed and neglected. In this regard, this dissertation is an ethical theory of socially engaged Buddhism. At the same time, heeding the Buddha's own injunction as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, I also hope to maintain a spirit of inquiry taught by the Buddha.<sup>10</sup> I will enact a kind of critical thinking about traditional materials that allows me to keep in mind the true criteria for Buddhist views and actions: alleviating *dukkha* and contributing to welfare of sentient beings. In this effort, I am joining those who engage in critical and constructive Buddhist thinking,<sup>11</sup> exploring the ways in which the Buddhist teachings can be understood and revalorized to help deal with various forms of social *dukkha* in today's much Westernized and still patriarchal world. This critical-constructive approach to the Buddhist *Dhamma*, as I will show in Section 1.2 below, is perfectly grounded in the Buddha's own teachings and examples.

In the same effort of taking up the Buddha's injunctions to alleviate *dukkha* and work for the welfare of all, this dissertation also seeks to address the expectations and impositions of

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the opening quote, in the *Vīmaṃsaka Sutta* the Buddha invited his followers to investigate himself and taught that one should place confidence in him and his teaching only *after* investigating and gaining direct knowledge in this manner. *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.318-320 (*Vīmaṃsaka Sutta*). Ken Jones puts it this way: "Buddhism is essentially a tool of inquiry and an ideological solvent, open to untidy complexity and suspicious of fixed conclusions." Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> The critical-constructive Buddhist thinking, otherwise terms "Buddhist theology," involves "critiquing past elements of tradition inappropriate to a new time, recovering or re-emphasizing other elements, critiquing Western models inadequate for a fuller understanding of Buddhism, and exploring the potential of Buddhist experience to shine new light upon a host of contemporary cultural and religious concerns." John J. Makransky, "Contemporary Academic Buddhist Theology: Its Emergence and Rationale," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, edited by Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 18-9.

gender roles in Buddhist circles, which have resulted in much suffering for women and sometimes for men as well. The concept of *kamma*, in particular, has been frequently misused to justify male dominance. A female rebirth has been commonly viewed as the unavoidable result of negative *kamma* from past lives, and the purported negative *kamma* from past lives is used to justify the mistreatments that a woman endures in this life.<sup>12</sup> In light of these abuses and in the spirit of alleviating suffering, a feminist critique is much needed in the revitalization of the socio-ethical dimensions of the Buddhist teachings. Gender is a very basic aspect of individual identity to which one may tenaciously cling,<sup>13</sup> and yet the central Buddhist teaching of Non-Self has never been consistently applied to gender, which is rather questionable for a tradition dedicated to analyzing the constructedness of self-identity and discouraging all forms of self-clinging.<sup>14</sup>

I will build on the work of liberal/liberationist feminist scholars of Buddhism and extend their effort in addressing gender inequities by referencing recent feminist analyses of gender construction and various socio-economic ramifications of sexism and rigid gender roles. In particular, theories inspired by poststructuralism and Foucault, such as constructivism posed by Judith Butler, provide a richer language for bringing forth the socio-ethical implications of basic

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Ouyporn Khuankaew, "Buddhism and Violence against Women," in *Violence Against Women in Contemporary World Religion: Roots and Cures*, edited by Daniel C. Maguire and Sa'diyya Shaikh (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 174-91.

<sup>13</sup> Gender identity "is more basic for most people than identification in terms of color, shape, or even culture, and is far more addictive." Rita M. Gross, "The Dharma of Gender," *Contemporary Buddhism* 5, no. 1 (May 2004): 4.

<sup>14</sup> Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 128 and 158; also in Gross, "Buddhism and Feminism: Toward Their Mutual Transformation, Part I," *Eastern Buddhist* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 49-50; Gross, "The Dharma of Gender," 6.

Buddhist teachings such as Non-Self (Pāli: *anāṭṭa*; Sanskrit: *anātman*), Five Aggregates, *kamma*, and the significance of the *Sangha*. They help explicate the subtleties in these basic Buddhist teachings that would form a more nuanced and yet more radical critique of gender hierarchy and any other form of social inequity that claims to be based on inherent nature. More importantly, these feminist theories are useful in capturing the dynamic complexities that are conveyed by the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising (Pāli: *paṭiccasamuppāda*; Skt: *pratītyasamutpāda*; also translated as Dependent Origination, Interconditionality, or simply Co-Arising). In line with the perspective provided by Interdependent Co-Arising, ethics is not abiding by a set of rigid, inalterable rules, but an ongoing process of striving to be ethical in the midst of ever-changing relations among ever-changing beings. *Sangha*, one of the Three Jewels in which all Buddhists take refuge, then, is not a closed community bound by geographical proximity, much less by blood relation, but is an unending effort of building communities and working interconnections. The cessation of *dukkha*, in this view, is not a static existence where nothing happens, but a dynamic endeavor of alleviating *dukkha* and making peace that requires the participation of everyone entangled in the interconnected web of life. Recent poststructuralist feminist theories can be very helpful in my revitalization of this-worldly Buddhist social ethics informed by Interdependent Co-Arising.

On the other hand, social interaction is certainly not all there is in the Buddhist Path to the cessation of *dukkha*, just as individual inner peace is not. Aiming at the cessation of *dukkha* that is actually present in social realities, the Buddha's teachings cannot be reduced to social interactions, but they cannot be separated from social interactions, either. The cessation of *dukkha* is unattainable through "external" structural and behavioral changes alone, in the same way that it is unattainable through "internal" emotive and conceptual changes alone. The

Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path (Pāli: *ariya-atthangika-magga*; Sanskrit: *ārya-astanga-mārga*), through its Three Trainings of ethical discipline (Pāli: *sīla*; Sanskrit: *śīla*),<sup>15</sup> mental training (Pāli/Sanskrit: *samādhi*),<sup>16</sup> and wisdom development (Pāli: *paññā*; Sanskrit: *prajñā*),<sup>17</sup> is a holistic program that guides behavioral, emotive, and conceptual transformations altogether. In this regard, there is much in Buddhist teachings that is yet to find equivalents in recent feminist theories. Feminist theories are nonetheless useful in that they do not only provide a much needed critique to the persistent androcentrism in traditional Buddhist teachings and practices, but they can also serve as an interpretive tool that demystifies and yet brings forth the insights of Buddhism. They can help make basic Buddhist teachings accessible and acceptable to people who are concerned with their own and/or global social wellbeing but do not identify themselves as Buddhists.

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<sup>15</sup> The same word is also translated as virtue, morality, or precepts. Ethical discipline includes proper speech (Pāli: *sammā vācā*; Sanskrit: *samyag-vāc*), proper action (Pāli: *sammā kammanta*; Sanskrit: *samyak-karmānta*), and proper livelihood (Pāli: *sammā ājīva*; Sanskrit: *samyak-ājīva*). The Pāli prefix *sammā* or the Sanskrit prefix *samyak* is often translated as “right” or “proper.” The term itself, however, denotes comprehensiveness or completeness. The rightness or properness is predicated on being comprehensive and covering all grounds, not on being in accordance with absolute truth. See Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 103.

<sup>16</sup> This includes proper effort (Pāli: *sammā vāyāma*; Sanskrit: *samyag-vyāyāma*), proper mindfulness (Pāli: *sammā sati*; Sanskrit: *samyak-smṛti*), and proper concentration (Pāli: *sammā samādhi*; Sanskrit: *samyak-samādhi*). Some consider “proper effort” part of ethical discipline.

<sup>17</sup> This includes proper view (Pāli: *sammā ditthi*; Sanskrit: *samyag-dṛṣṭi*) and proper intention (Pāli: *sammā sankappa*; Sanskrit: *samyak-samkalpa*).

## 1.1 Foundational Texts and Basic Teachings: *Nikāya-s* in the Pāli Canon

In order to revitalize Buddhist social ethics, this dissertation appeals to the foundational texts and basic teachings that are recognized by all Buddhist schools. Buddhist literature is traditionally divided into three groups, called the Three Baskets (Pāli: *Tipiṭaka*; Sanskrit: *Tripiṭaka*): the *Sutta Piṭaka* (Sanskrit: *Sūtra Piṭaka*; the Basket of the Discourses of the Buddha), the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (the Basket of Disciplines for Renunciates), and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Sanskrit: *Abhidharma Piṭaka*; the Basket of Higher Teachings, referring to scholastic renditions of the Discourses). The three major branches of Buddhism, Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, however, do not recognize the exact same texts in the Three Baskets. Theravādins generally consider the Pāli Canon to be the authentic teachings of the Buddha and remain suspicious of many of the texts preserved in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna collections. Mahāyānists and Vajrayānists, on the other hand, generally do not question the legitimacy of the Pāli Canon, even though they may consider their respective tradition to be the ultimate form of Buddhism and may consider the Pāli Canon a product of the Buddha’s “skillful means”<sup>18</sup> that

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<sup>18</sup> Whereas in the Pāli Canon the term *upāya-kosalla* (Sanskrit: *upāya-kauśalya*) is relatively rare and simply denotes the Buddha’s marvelous skills in expounding the *Dhamma*, in the Mahāyāna school the term has mainly been used to claim Mahāyāna’s superiority to all pre-Mahāyānist schools by describing them as results of the Buddha’s *upāya* (commonly translated as “skillful means” or “expedient means”). The followers of the older schools might believe they had received and practiced the authentic *Dhamma* since, according to the tradition, it was the teachings transmitted by the Buddha himself and was acclaimed by the Buddha as the ultimate. In the Mahāyāna contention, however, the historical Buddha lied about the ultimacy, and the older teachings were in fact limited and restricted, for they were tailored for the early followers who were of more selfish inclinations and/or lesser spiritual potentials. At a glance, this Mahāyānist claim might seem disparaging of the Buddha (not to say disparaging of all older schools and all early followers), for it seems to accuse the Buddha of breaking the precept against lying. In the Mahāyānist rendition, nonetheless, the seemingly morally wrong act of lying is in fact the Buddha’s *upāya* for the purpose of convincing people of lesser capacities to

caters to people of lesser capacities. That is, Buddhists across traditions recognize early Buddhist literature as the basic and foundational texts of Buddhism, and they “see themselves as directly in the line of that early Buddhism.”<sup>19</sup> More importantly, various forms of “Modern Buddhism”<sup>20</sup> all see themselves as a return to the Buddhist *Dhamma* practiced at the time of the Buddha and all appeal to the early Buddhist literature.<sup>21</sup> In order to make the Buddhist social ethics that I am revitalizing in this dissertation acceptable and appealing to Buddhists across traditions, therefore, I will mainly reference the Pāli Canon for the key concepts of Buddhism.

Among the Three Baskets, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* is most readily associated with ethics since it contains behavioral codes. In fact, most discussions about Buddhist ethics available either focus on the *Vinaya* alone or rely heavily on it. It is, however, not very practical to extract Buddhist social ethics from the *Vinaya*, for the simple reason that the majority of Buddhists in

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follow his teachings. By dismissing all other older schools as the results of the Buddha’s *upāya*, the early Mahāyānists branded them “Hīnayāna”, the Small Raft, and considered itself providing “Mahāyāna,” the Great Raft, an vehicle that is big enough to transport all sentient beings from the shore of endless suffering to the far-shore of *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāna*). Nowadays, the Mahāyānists who have been educated in Buddhist history do not necessarily hold this assumption, and yet less educated ones still commonly assume that Theravādins are the same as “Hīnayānists” and that “Hīnayānists” lack compassionate consideration for others. For the meaning of *upāya*, see Keown, comp, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, 318.

<sup>19</sup> Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 30.

<sup>20</sup> Such as the multiple strains of “Engaged Buddhism” taking place simultaneously in different regions, “Critical Buddhism” in Japan, and “Buddhism for the Human Realm” in Taiwan.

<sup>21</sup> See Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Unenlightened* (London: Penguin Books, 2002); Scott Pacey, “A Buddhism for the Human World: Interpretations of *Renjian Fojiao* in Contemporary Taiwan,” *Asian Studies Review* 29 (March 2005): 61-77.

the world are not renunciates and do not abide by the hundreds<sup>22</sup> of precepts contained in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. Moreover, many of the rules in the *Vinaya*, such as the practice of rain retreat, were simply customary practices among wandering ascetics in Northeastern India at the time of the Buddha.<sup>23</sup> A kind of Buddhist social ethics that may be recognizable and persuasive to Buddhists in the modern world, who are predominantly lay and mostly do not live in Northeastern India, has to be extracted from the *Dhamma* contained in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. More specifically, it has to be based on the very core of the Buddhist *Dhamma* acknowledged by all those who walk the Buddhist Path.

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<sup>22</sup> In the Theravāda tradition, there are 227 vows or precepts for *bhikkhus* and, theoretically, 311 vows for *bhikkhunīs*, although the *bhikkhunī sangha* has died out in the Theravāda tradition since the thirteenth century. In the Mahāyāna Dharmagupta tradition there are 250 vows for *bhikṣus* and 348 for *bhikṣunīs*, and in the Tibetan Mūlāsarvāstivāda tradition there are 253 vows for *bhikṣus* and 364 for *bhikṣunīs*. See Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Is the Bhiksuni Vinaya Sexist?” in *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 58. Based on the above, it is also quite obvious that the Basket of Vinaya is much less uniform than the Basket of the Sūtras. For the variances of the Vinaya texts, see Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 165 and 171-6.

<sup>23</sup> Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State Press, 1975), 4; Ian J. Coghlan, “A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004): 146. Étienne Lamotte therefore asserts, “While the Vinaya is only a convention (*samvṛti*) adopted as a line of conduct, the Dharma as propounded in the Sūtra represents the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*).” See Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, translated from French by Sara Webb-Boin under the supervision of Jean Dantinne (Paris: Institut Orientaliste de l’Université Catholique de Louvain, 1988), 163. Regarding the claim about absoluteness, please see pages 16-26 below.

Besides, *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are traditionally mentioned together as “*Dhamma-Vinaya*.”<sup>24</sup> Ian J. Coghlan expounds the mutually dependent and mutually enhancing relation between *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* as such:

If ethics [as reflected in the *Vinaya*] is not extensively taught, it is difficult to establish the basis for generating the correct view of *dhamma*, in accordance with the progressive development of the three higher trainings. If *dhamma* is not extensively taught, it is difficult to understand the need for ethics and the very nature of *dhamma* itself. Without a stable understanding of these two, negative internal and external conditions will tend to quickly undermine the spiritual life. Aspirants, therefore, need to train for a long period within a proper training structure overseen by others adequately trained in ethics and *dhamma*. Such realized guides are capable of directly demonstrating the path in accordance with their realization.<sup>25</sup>

Thai scholar-*bhikkhu* Phra Rājavaramuni also explains the connection and distinction between the Buddha’s teaching and the precepts: “Buddhism in its entirety consists of the *dhamma* and the *vinaya*. ... The *dhamma* deals with ideals and principles, whereas the *vinaya* deals with rules and circumstances in which these ideals and principles are practiced and realized.”<sup>26</sup> The *Vinaya* is the *Dhamma* spelled out in detail for a particular group of people in a particular socio-cultural context at a particular time, but the overarching principles of the *Vinaya* were laid down in the *Dhamma* recorded in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Therefore, even though the *Vinaya* is ostensibly more relevant in the discussion and construction of Buddhist ethics, it is the *Dhamma* recorded in the *Suttas* that provides the rationales for the ethical codes in Buddhism.

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<sup>24</sup> For instances, see *Majjhima Nikāya* i.102 (*Cetokhila Sutta*), i.163 (*Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*), ii.181 (*Esukārī Sutta*), and iii.48 (*Sevitabbāsevitabba Sutta*). See also Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 142-3.

<sup>25</sup> Coghlan, “A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics,” 147-8.

<sup>26</sup> Phra Rājavaramuni, “Foundations of Buddhist Social Ethics,” in *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics*, eds. Russell F. Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 30.

The *Sutta Piṭaka* in the Pāli Canon consists of four major collections of *suttas* called the *Nikāya-s*,<sup>27</sup> together with some other small texts that are grouped together as the fifth collection.<sup>28</sup> It has been recognized by scholars of the Pāli Canon that each of the four major *Nikāya-s* carries its own distinctive immediate objectives. The *Dīgha Nikāya* (The Long Discourses of the Buddha<sup>29</sup>) “is permeated by a concern with the propagation of Buddhism,”<sup>30</sup> and therefore the *suttas* in this collection either portray the Buddha in debate against brāhmins or glorify the Buddha. The *Majjhima Nikāya* (The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha<sup>31</sup>) “has its spotlight directed inward towards the Buddhist community itself,”<sup>32</sup> so *suttas* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* deal largely with the fundamentals of the Buddha’s teachings, including the building of community according to Buddhist ideals. The *Samyutta Nikāya* (The Connected

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<sup>27</sup> They are called *Āgama-s* in the Northern tradition and are preserved in the Chinese *Tripitaka*. For the differences between the *Āgama-s* and the *Nikāya-s*, see Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 155-6. Despite the variations in arrangement, Lamotte observes, “The doctrinal basis common to the āgamas and nikāyas is remarkably uniform.” *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>28</sup> The fifth collection, consisting of 15 or 14 or 19 or 12 books, is named *Khuddakanikāya* in the canon of some schools, *Ksudrakapiṭaka* in the canon of some other schools that use Sanskrit texts, and excluded from the canon of still others, such as the Sarvāstivādins. See Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 150-2 and 157-63.

<sup>29</sup> The collection consists of 34 *suttas* distributed into three sections. Its Sanskrit counterpart is the *Dīrghāgama*, which consists of 30 *sūtras*.

<sup>30</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction I,” in *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Anguttara Nikāya*, selected and translated from the Pāli by Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>31</sup> This collection consists of 152 *suttas*. Its Sanskrit counterpart *Madhyamāgama* has 222 *sūtras*.

<sup>32</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction I,” 9.

Discourses of the Buddha<sup>33</sup>) would have served as a reference for those “who were capable of grasping the deepest dimensions of Buddhist wisdom and who were charged with clarifying for others the subtle perspectives opened up by the Buddha’s Teaching,”<sup>34</sup> and as such it contains short suttas pertaining to philosophical theories and structures in which the *bhikkhu*-s and *bhikkhunī*-s are trained. And the *Anguttara Nikāya* (The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha<sup>35</sup>) focuses more on what is practical in terms of “personal edification,”<sup>36</sup> and hence the suttas in this collection teach basic ethical observances as well elucidate the methods of rigorous mental training.

More often than not, instructions contained in the *Anguttara Nikāya* were directed toward renunciant and lay male brāhmins who were most concerned with self-purification. The abundance of instructions on self-purification in this collection, then, is better understood as the result of the Buddha’s attempt to appeal to those male brāhmins, rather than the overall focus of the Buddha’s teachings. Likewise, it would be erroneous if one concludes, based on the Buddha’s teaching acts in the *Dīgha Nikāya* that aimed at propagating Buddhism, that the Buddha was only concerned with glorifying himself. It is probably best to look to the *Samyutta Nikāya* for doctrinal nuances and look to the *Majjhima Nikāya* for the Buddha’s instructions on community building. The exposition of central Buddhist teachings such as Co-Arising and Five

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<sup>33</sup> This collection has 7,762 suttas, which are divided into six sections (*vagga*) and further subdivided into 56 assemblages (*samyutta*). It is referred to as Complete *Samyuktāgama* and Partial *Samyuktāgama* in Sanskrit sources and consisting of 1,362 and 364 sūtras, respectively.

<sup>34</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction I,” 9.

<sup>35</sup> This collection consists of 9,557 suttas distributed into eleven groups (*nipāta*). Its Sanskrit counterpart *Ekottāragama* has 364 sūtras.

<sup>36</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction I,” 10.

Aggregates in this dissertation, therefore, will be drawn primarily from the *Samyutta Nikāya* and the *Majjhima Nikāya*. The *Dīgha Nikāya* and the *Anguttara Nikāya* will be referenced when the main point is the Buddha’s skillfulness in communicating with privileged non-Buddhists or male Buddhists with strong brāhmanic persuasion.

Citing the *Nikāya* texts in the Pāli Canon as the foundational teachings of the Buddha is not the same as endorsing the claim made by some Theravādins that Theravāda Buddhism is the “authentic” or “pure” Buddhism that has preserved the Buddha’s original teachings without change.<sup>37</sup> First of all, in terms of basic Buddhist teachings, one of the “Three Marks of Reality” (Pāli: *tilakkhaṇa*; Sanskrit: *trilakṣaṇa*; alternatively translated as the “Three Characteristics of Existence”<sup>38</sup>) in Buddhism is that everything in the phenomenal world is impermanent since it co-arises with its material and socio-cultural surroundings and therefore changes together with

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<sup>37</sup> For example, see Tavivat Puntarigivat, *Budkkhu Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism in Dialogue with Latin American Liberation Theology* (PhD diss., Temple University, 1994), 104. Many Western scholars on Buddhism have equated Theravāda Buddhism to early Buddhism as well, to the extent that the Theravādin emphasis of individual effort and its practice of not acknowledging women’s equal potential have been retrospectively, and quite inaccurately, attributed to early Buddhism. The prevalence of equating Theravāda Buddhism with early Buddhism, and sometimes even with Asian Buddhism as a whole, is evinced by the fact that a search of “early Buddhism” in a library catalogue is likely to bring forth entries on Theravāda Buddhism. See also Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 143; Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 32-3; David Seyfort Ruegg and Lambert Schmithausen, eds, *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1990), 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> The Three Marks of Reality are impermanence (Pāli: *anicca*; Sanskrit: *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (Pāli: *dukkha*; Sanskrit: *duhkha*; existential anguish or dis-ease; more commonly translated as “suffering”), and lack of self-essence (Pāli: *anattā*; Sanskrit: *anātman*; more commonly translated as “no-self” or “non-self”).

them. From a Buddhist perspective, that is, it is rather delusional<sup>39</sup> for one to claim that something has never changed for two thousand and five hundred years.

Secondly, in terms of historical evidence, Theravāda Buddhism in South-East Asian countries has been compromised by political powers and reshaped by the existing local cultures as much as Mahāyāna Buddhism in East Asian countries has.<sup>40</sup> To say the least, the vestiges of Brāhmanism, especially its over-emphasis on individual purity and its hierarchical social structure, are still readily discernible today in Theravāda countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Brahmā is commonly worshipped in Theravāda countries under the misleading title of “The Four-Faced Buddha.” Even Tavivat Puntarigivat, who claims that Theravāda Buddhism has preserved the Buddha’s teachings “without any significant change,” acknowledges that in Theravāda countries such as his home-country Thailand, “monks not sympathetic to state policies are structurally excluded from senior administrative positions within the *Sangha*, just as monks supportive of the regime in power receive material and career advancement in the *Sangha* hierarchy.”<sup>41</sup>

One of the salient proofs of Theravāda Buddhism having been reshaped by the local culture and its political norms is the position and title of *Sangharāja* (literally, “the king of

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<sup>39</sup> In all branches of Buddhism, delusion (*moha*; synonymous with ignorance [Pāli: *avijjā*; Sanskrit: *avidyā*] in Buddhist usage), greed/lust (*lobha*; synonymous with *rāga*), and hatred/ill will (Pāli: *dosa*; Sanskrit: *dveṣa*) are juxtaposed as the three “poisons” or “root vices” (Pāli: *akusala-mūla*; Sanskrit: *akuśala-mūla*) from which evildoings spring. Immoral conducts, in other words, occur “through a misapprehension of the facts...together with an emotional investment,” which swings to the extremes of greed/lust and hatred/ill will. Together, the three root vices comprise *taṇhā* (Sanskrit: *tṛṣṇā*), the deeply seated fixations that cause *dukkha*. Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 64-8.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 146, 148, 150-3.

<sup>41</sup> Puntarigivat, *Budkkhu Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism*, 104 and 108.

*Sangha*”) within the Theravādin *Sangha* hierarchy, which is a direct contradiction to the Buddha’s own teachings and practices as recorded in the Pāli Canon. The Buddha considered himself a teacher who had “no closed fist of a teacher in regard to the teachings,” and not a ruler of the *Sangha*; therefore it would not be in conformity with his role as a teacher to appoint a successor. It was recorded that he said, “It does not occur to the Tathāgata, ‘I will take charge of the Bhikkhu Sangha,’ or ‘The Bhikkhu Sangha is under my direction,’ so why should the Tathāgata make some pronouncement concerning the Bhikkhu Sangha?”<sup>42</sup> As such, not only did the Buddha refuse to appoint a (male) successor as the ruler of the *Sangha*, but his final injunction to the *bhikkhu*-s and *bhikkhunī*-s was, specifically, “dwell with yourselves as your own island, with yourselves as your own refuge, with no other refuge; dwell with the Dhamma as your island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* the Buddha was recorded to have instructed, “What I have taught and explained to you as *Dhamma-Vinaya* will, at my passing, be your teacher.”<sup>44</sup> In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, it is recorded that, by not appointing a successor, the Buddha intended (or so as the compilers of the *Nikāya* texts understood it) for his disciples to lead a relatively egalitarian communal life according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, rather than to have a hierarchical structure with a king-like figure.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* V.153 (*Satipaṭṭhānasamyutta*); duplicated in *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.100 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).

<sup>43</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.42 (*Khandhasamyutta*) and V.154, 163-165 (*Satipaṭṭhānasamyutta*).

<sup>44</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.154 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).

<sup>45</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.9-10 (*Gopakamoggallāna Sutta*). See also *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.100 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*), and Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 62-5.

Related to the above is another glaring counterproof to the claim made by some Theravādins of transmitting the original Buddhist teachings without change: the current male *sangha* hierarchy's opposition to the restoration of the *bhikkhunī sangha*,<sup>46</sup> which was established by the Buddha himself as recorded in the Pāli Canon.<sup>47</sup> It might seem that male dominance was sanctioned by the Pāli Canon, which the Buddhist traditions in general and the Theravāda tradition in particular believe to have reached its current content and format at the First Council held immediately after the Buddha's death. Presumably, then, the Pāli Canon carries the Buddha's words as his own disciples remembered them. However, one has to consider the fact that the Pāli Canon had been orally transmitted for at least four hundred years before it was committed to writing.<sup>48</sup> Peter N. Gregory, scholar of early Buddhism, thus questions the validity of equating the Pāli Canon with the Buddha's own words:

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<sup>46</sup> David R. Loy, "The Karma of Women," in *Violence Against Women in Contemporary World Religion: Roots and Cures*, edited by Daniel C. Maguire and Sa'diyya Shaikh (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 55.

<sup>47</sup> For this reason, Rita M. Gross points out that "contemporary Theravādin Buddhism is not identical with early Buddhism, especially in practices regarding women." Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 29. The *bhikkhunī sangha* in the Theravāda countries was destroyed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

<sup>48</sup> Very few Buddhist texts in their present form can be definitely dated to earlier than the fourth or fifth centuries C.E., although some of the early texts may have been committed to writing in the first century B.C.E., approximately four hundred years after the Buddha's passing, which is traditionally dated at 480 B.C.E. though is now being challenged and reevaluated. The *Vinaya* texts were codified in their present form in about the fourth to fifth centuries C.E. See Gregory Schopen, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism, The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks, Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 24-5; Nancy J. Barnes, "The Nuns at the Stūpa: Inscriptional Evidence for the Lives and Activities of Early Buddhist Nuns in India," in *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, edited by Ellison Banks Findly (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 18-9 and 29.

Although the Pāli canon may, as a whole, be closer to the Buddha's "word" than any other extant textual corpus, it is still mediated by the collective memory of the community that compiled, codified, redacted, and transmitted it orally for hundreds of years before ever committing it to writing, and even when finally put into writing, it did not remain static but continued to be modified by the tradition over the ensuing centuries. As we have it today it is thus far removed from the Buddha, and we have no way of gauging how close or how distant any given statement is to the words of the Buddha.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, David R. Loy observes that the fact that the Buddha's teachings were orally transmitted for about four hundred years provided "many opportunities for some passages to be intentionally or unintentionally 'corrected' by monks less enlightened than the Buddha."<sup>50</sup>

Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi also point out in their introduction to the translation of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, "it is essential to realize that they [the Pāli texts] are the products of an oral tradition."<sup>51</sup> For the sake of oral transmission, "These were streamlined, condensed and standardized, cast into a format suitable for memorization; hence the prevalence of stock phrases, formulaic definitions and frequent repetition."<sup>52</sup> The suttas in the *Nikāya*-s themselves contain evidences of extensive editing for the purpose of memorization, and they were memorized and orally transmitted for approximately four to five centuries before they were finally written down and canonized. In other words, the Pāli *Nikāya*-s, the earliest Buddhist literature traditionally

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<sup>49</sup> Peter N. Gregory, "Is Critical Buddhism Really Critical?" in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism*, edited by Jamie Hubbard and Paul Swanson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> Loy, "The Karma of Women," 50. The *Vinaya* texts in fact supply the information that the *Dhamma* was not only uttered by the Buddha, but also by his direct followers, wise recluses (*rsi*), gods (*deva*), and apparitional beings (*upapāduka*). See Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 163-4.

<sup>51</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Introduction I," in *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

held to be the most authentic, are not the exact recording of the Buddha's exchanges with his followers. What might have actually taken place at the First Council, Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests, "was the drafting of a comprehensive scheme for classifying the suttas... and the appointment of an editorial committee (perhaps several) to review the material available and cast it into a format conducive to easy memorization and oral transmission."<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, according to the tradition, the First Council was attended by five hundred *bhikkhu*-s, and *bhikkhu*-s only. The prominent *bhikkhu*-s at the time of the Buddha were largely of upper-class backgrounds,<sup>54</sup> and it was highly likely that they had been heavily influenced by the androcentric culture in the larger society.<sup>55</sup> It was a culture, *bhikkhunī* scholar Karma Lekshe Tsomo points out, in which women "were classified as dependents either under the protection of their father, their husband, or, upon a husband's death, their husband's brother."<sup>56</sup> In that culture, "Women who lived under an unrecognizable agency were suspect and rejected — ostracized from their place of origin if suspected of an impropriety such as adultery or

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<sup>53</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, "General Introduction," in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 30.

<sup>54</sup> See Uma Chakravarti, "The Social Background of the Early Buddhists," in *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford, UK, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 124-31 and 146-7. The predominantly upper-class background of the early followers of the Buddha can also be seen in the *Theragāthā* ("songs of the male elders") and the *Therīgāthā* ("songs of the female elders"). Among the 328 *bhikkhu*-s and *bhikkhunī*-s depicted in these two collections of songs and poems, 41 percent was of the *brāhmin* caste and 23 percent was of the warrior-noble caste. See Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24.

<sup>55</sup> David Loy suggests that the Buddha's teachings reveal a struggle against the sexist social conditioning he received. Loy, "The Karma of Women," 50.

<sup>56</sup> Tsomo, "Is The Bhiksuni Vinaya Sexist?" 48.

prostitution, or of being a demon in human form.”<sup>57</sup> It was a culture in which women existed largely as men’s property, which was subject to plunder and abuse if the “ownership” was not clear or was not firmly established. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, for instance, the Vajjians’ “not forcibly abduct[ing] others’ wives and daughters and compel[ling] them to live with them” was extolled as a virtue,<sup>58</sup> which evinces that in India at that time it was not uncommon for men to use violence to snatch women from other men and force them to provide menial and/or sexual services.

Needless to say, in India at the time of the Buddha privileged men were more likely than women to have the freedom of leaving home and becoming renunciates if they so desired, and as a consequence privileged men were more likely to be in a position to make rules and define proper behaviors for the renunciates. Men in that society generally enjoyed much greater mobility as well as safety than women. In addition, upper-class families, having control over lower-class people and practically living off of their labors, could afford losing one man or two in the family to spiritual pursuits. By contrast, it was much more difficult for women to break the confines of their homes to follow the Buddha around since permission from the male kinsmen in charge was required in order to join the Buddhist *Sangha* as a renunciate. Even if a woman did successfully leave home, she was at a much greater risk of being assaulted in a society where women had to be owned by men and guarded by their “owners.” Incidents of

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.74.

male violence against female renunciates were recorded, and some regulations were designed to prevent it as a result.<sup>59</sup>

In a culture so deeply entrenched in these forms of sexism, it should not come as a surprise that the compilers of the Canon retained an androcentric or even misogynist attitude in general. In particular, amongst the anti-Brāhmanic renunciates (Pāli: *samaṇas*; Sanskrit: *śramaṇas*) at the time, celibacy was the norm, and Buddhism, being one of the only two religious orders that accommodated female renunciates (the other one was Jainism), was likely to incur suspicion and criticisms both from other celibate renunciates and from the larger androcentric society. It was highly probable that the Buddha tailored his teachings to suit the mentality of his predominantly male audience on the one hand, and to respond to the criticisms coming from the non-Buddhist society on the other.<sup>60</sup> It was also highly probable that the male compilers further sought to control and subordinate the women in the *Sangha* with behavioral codes in order to guard the reputation of the Buddhist *Sangha* under the societal expectation of establishing the ownership of women. Perhaps the male compilers did so also to help themselves deal with the requirement of celibacy at the close proximity of women:

The compilers of the various Buddhist monastic codes that we have appear to have been very anxious men. They were anxious about — even obsessed with —

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<sup>59</sup> See I. B. Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen*, reprinted (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 155-7.

<sup>60</sup> See Tsomo “Is the Bhiksunī Vinaya Sexist?” 50-3 and 61-7; Inyoung Chung, “A Buddhist View of Women: A Comparative Study of the Rules for Bhiksus and Bhiksunīs based on the Chinese Prātimoksa,” (MA Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1995), 14; Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 33-6 and 212; Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1991), 28-9; Chakravarti, “The Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Environment at the Time of the Buddha,” in *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 62; Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, 105-6 and 109-10.

maintaining their public reputation and that of their order, and avoiding any hint of social scandal or lay criticism. They were anxious about their body and what went into it; and they were anxious about women. They appear, moreover, to have been particularly anxious about nuns, about containing, restraining and controlling them. At every opportunity they seem to have promulgated rules towards these ends.<sup>61</sup>

According to the Theravāda tradition, the five hundred *bhikkhu*-s at the First Council reprimanded Ānanda for the “offense” of introducing women into the Buddhist *Sangha*,<sup>62</sup> which reflected the anxiety that Gregory Schopen, scholar of early Buddhist monasticism, poignantly points out in the quote above. The male compilers’ effort of keeping women contained and controlled is also reflected in the later interpolation, roughly in the first century B.C.E., of the *garudhamma* (Sanskrit: *gurudharma*), the eight special rules that subordinate *bhikkhunī*-s under *bhikkhu*-s and indirectly contribute to the demise of the *bhikkhunī sangha* in the Theravāda tradition.<sup>63</sup>

The Pāli Canon recorded largely upper-class androcentric understandings and redactions of the Buddha’s teachings. It does not preserve the exact words of the Buddha without change and does not reflect the Buddha’s own position in every regard. Furthermore, it is worthwhile

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<sup>61</sup> Gregory Schopen, “The Suppression of Nuns and the Ritual Murder of Their Special Dead in Two Buddhist Monastic Texts,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24, no. 6 (December 1996): 563.

<sup>62</sup> See Tavivat Puntarigivat, “A Thai Buddhist Perspective,” in *What Men Owe to Women: Men’s Voices from World Religions*, edited by John C. Raines and Daniel C. Maguire (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 230-1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 217; Tsomo “Is the Bhiksunī Vinaya Sexist?” 48-9; Bhikkhunī Kusuma, “Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women’s History,” in *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 5-12; Barnes, “The Nuns at the Stūpa,” 19; Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 33-8; Kajiyama Yuichi, “Women in Buddhism,” *Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, 15, no. 2 (1982): 53-70; Akira Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns: An English Translation of the Chinese Text of the Mahāsāṃghika-Bhiksunī-Vinaya* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982), 47-98; Loy, “The Karma of Women,” 51, footnote 3.

to bear in mind that, in the Buddhist worldview, texts are also phenomena (Pāli: *dhammas*; Sanskrit: *dharmas*)<sup>64</sup> that have been interdependently co-arisen, which means that texts also bear the “Three Marks of Reality,” i.e. unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, and lack of self-essence. In other words, from the Buddhist perspective, no text is sacred, if the word “sacred” means in and of itself holy, permanently true, and worthy of unconditional veneration.

To say that texts are not sacred in Buddhism is not to suggest that textual study bears no importance for Buddhists. Buddhism, as other religions, is to some extent defined by its texts and Buddhists do commonly use traditional texts to gauge their understandings and guide their practices. In Buddhist terms, now that the Buddha entered *parinibbāna* and is no longer in the world, a follower aspiring to realize Buddhahood can only learn the *Dhamma* from Buddhist texts or from knowledgeable practicing Buddhists, whose knowledge is likely to have been based on their study of Buddhist texts. Moreover, in the contemporary world of rising literacy rate and increasingly individualistic approach to religious traditions, more and more Buddhists are turning to the voluminous Buddhist texts by themselves for insights and guidance. Discourses that are based on the study of classical texts still carry more weight than those that are not, and

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<sup>64</sup> *Dhamma* (Sanskrit: *dharma*) is a multivalent word in both Hindu traditions and Buddhist traditions. Rooted in the verb *dhr*, meaning to support or to sustain, the word *dhamma* refers to the natural order or universal law that underpins the operation of the cosmos in both the physical and moral senses. It is popularly translated to mean religious-social duty in Hindu traditions. Yet in the Hindu context the word can also mean the customary observances of a caste or sect, law usage and practice, righteousness, justice, norm, morality, virtue, religious or moral merit, piety, religion, sacrifice, and so forth. In Buddhism, it is used to denote the totality of the Buddha’s Teaching, the Buddhist Path as a whole, any one of Buddhist principles, or any individual element or phenomenon that collectively constitutes the empirical world and existence, including physical objects, activities, circumstances or conditions of life, as well as mental objects, psychological processes, and character traits. In the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition it also designates the reality of Buddhahood. See Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, 74; and Jonathan Z. Smith and William Scott Green, with the American Academy of Religion, eds., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 315-6.

discourses that invoke the Buddha and appeal to the core teachings can speak to Buddhists across traditions. Even though the Buddha's own position remains unknowable due to the factor of oral transmission, it is worth noting that some egalitarian and protofeminist statements do appear<sup>65</sup> amongst the androcentric or even misogynist regulations in the Pāli Canon. The very appearance of egalitarian statements suggests either that the Buddha himself had not been as misogynist as the compilers of the Pāli Canon were, or that at least some compilers understood the Buddha's teachings very differently. At any rate, the fact that those egalitarian statements exist amidst the highly androcentric tradition speaks volumes. It refutes an entirely misogynist reading of Buddhist teachings and can support a gender-inclusive revalorization of Buddhist ethics that is well grounded in early Buddhist texts.<sup>66</sup> The Buddha's own teachings and examples, moreover, support an all-inclusive revalorization, as shown in the following section.

## **1.2 Dhammic Exegesis: Interdependent Co-Arising and the Cessation of *Dukkha***

The singular goal of the Buddha's Teaching is the cessation of *dukkha*, and therefore a view or practice that is not conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*, or at least conducive to the alleviation of *dukkha*, is not worth endeavoring for Buddhists, let alone holding onto. The cessation of *dukkha*, rather than religious identity or cultural boundary, is the criterion for adopting a view or practice.

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<sup>65</sup> Loy, "The Karma of Women," 52.

<sup>66</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 30-1.

The Buddha on numerous occasions discouraged his followers from dogmatically clinging to philosophical views or religious doctrines. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, for instance, the Buddha said that religions came into dispute with one another “because of lust for views, because of adherence, bondage, greed, obsession and cleaving to views.”<sup>67</sup> In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha said it was in terms of not propounding “full understanding of clinging to views” and not propounding “full understanding of clinging to rules and observances” that a teaching would be “unemancipating” and “unconducive to peace.”<sup>68</sup> Even when talking about his own teachings, the Buddha cautioned against clinging and then reiterated that the purpose of imparting or learning or practicing the *Dhamma* was emancipation and cessation of *dukkha*:

Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering. If others abuse, revile, scold, and harass the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no annoyance, bitterness, or dejection of the heart. And if others honour, respect, revere, and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no delight, joy, or elation of the heart.<sup>69</sup>

And the Buddha went on to suggest his listeners adopt the same attitude. He taught the *Dhamma* in order to cease *dukkha*, not to provide an anchor for identity clinging or any form of self-absorbed dejection or elation. And his followers were instructed to do the same.

The Buddha likened his Teaching to a raft, which was built solely for the purpose of crossing a great expanse of dangerous water and reaching the far shore that was safe and free from fear. He asked his listeners to reason about the proper use of the raft:

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<sup>67</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, II.iv.6.

<sup>68</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.66-67 (*Cūlasīhanāda Sutta*).

<sup>69</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.140 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*).

By doing what would that man be doing what should be done with that raft? Here, bhikkhus, when that man got across and had arrived at the far shore, he might think thus: "... Suppose I were to haul it onto the dry land or set it adrift in the water, and then go wherever I want." Now, bhikkhus, it is by so doing that that man would be doing what should be done with that raft. So I have shown you how the Dhamma is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping.

Bhikkhus, when you know the Dhamma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even the teachings, how much more so things contrary to the teachings.<sup>70</sup>

The Buddha gave teachings for people to practice and utilize so that *dukkha* would cease in their lives. The teachings in and of themselves were not meant to be sacred or inalterable, not to mention the texts that carried those teachings. They could be abandoned, as the simile showed, once they served the purpose of transporting people across the *dukkha*-filled body of water. And they should be abandoned if they did not help alleviate *dukkha* or, worse, ended up producing more of it.

Having the cessation of *dukkha* as the criterion also means that a teaching helpful in removing *dukkha* from life should be learned and put into practice, even if it was not given by the Buddha or a Buddhist master. As reflected in the opening quote, the Buddha taught his followers not to cling to or dismiss a teaching on account of the identity, lineage, school, or denomination of the teacher. Whether a teaching is to be accepted and practiced depends on whether it is conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*.

What kind of teaching would be considered conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*? The Buddha was reported to say that it is through not understanding Interdependent Co-Arising that "this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, the ill destiny, ruin and the round of

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<sup>70</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.134-135 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*). See also Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 38-40; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 31.

birth-and-death.”<sup>71</sup> Not understanding Interdependent Co-Arising, not understanding the ways in which persons and things co-arise and condition each other, people behave themselves in such ways that produce *dukkha* for others as well as for themselves. And *dukkha* keeps being re-produced when people keep not understanding the interconditionality of people and things. Eventually the vicious cycle of *dukkha* production is formed and people are caught up in it and unable to “pass beyond states of woe.” If not understanding Interdependent Co-Arising leads to *dukkha*, as it is presented in the quote, then the cessation of *dukkha* cannot be effected without understanding Interdependent Co-Arising.

Moreover, it has been established among both early Buddhists who compiled the *Nikāya*-s and contemporary established Buddhist scholars that Interdependent Co-Arising is the central teaching of the Buddha that can string all of his teachings together. It is also the rationale for the other most crucial, most well-known, albeit often misunderstood, teaching of the Buddha: Non-Self. In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Sāriputta (Sanskrit: Śāriputra), who traditionally has been recognized as the wisest and most scholarly among the Buddha’s direct disciples, reported: “this has been said by the Blessed One: ‘One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination.’”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, Ānanda, reportedly the Buddha’s closest disciple and his personal attendant, was amazed at the fact that the entire meaning of the Buddha’s teachings could be stated by a single phrase, i.e. Dependent Origination.<sup>73</sup> David J. Kalupahana, author of *Ethics in Early Buddhism* and *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, states, “The Buddha’s

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<sup>71</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, ii.55 (*Mahānidāna Sutta*).

<sup>72</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.190-191 (*Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta*).

<sup>73</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, II.36 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

explanation of the nature of existence is summarized in one word, *paṭiccasamuppāda* (Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda*),”<sup>74</sup> Co-Arising. Thai Buddhist activist-scholar Sulak Sivaraksa, founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and twice nominee of Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 and 1994, writes, “The concept of interdependent co-arising is the crux of Buddhist understanding.”<sup>75</sup> David R. Loy, Zen philosopher and social critic, explains the relation between Dependent Origination and Non-Self: “The central insight of Buddhism is...not only a denial of ego-self but a critique of all self-existing ‘thingness.’ This is the point of *pratitya-samutpada* (dependent origination), the most important Buddhist doctrine.”<sup>76</sup> Engaged Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy points out that *paṭiccasamuppāda* was what the Buddha realized under the *bodhi* tree,<sup>77</sup> and that it serves not only as an explanation of human existence, but also the ground for Buddhist morality and the means for liberation.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 53.

<sup>75</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 71.

<sup>76</sup> David R. Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 182.

<sup>77</sup> The Pāli/Sanskrit word “buddha” means “awakened one.” The traditional account relates that the Buddha-to-be, after experimenting with asceticism for six years and finally realized the value of the middle way between self-indulgence and self-mortification, sat down under a shady species of tree (the *pīpala* or *assattha*) at Bodhgayā (in the Ganges River plain of northeastern India) and resolved not to rise until he had an awakening and attained liberative knowledge. The tree was retrospectively called the *Bodhi Tree* (or the *Bo Tree*), with the Pāli/Sanskrit word “bodhi” meaning “awakening” or “enlightenment.” Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 1 and 8; Keown, comp., *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, 36; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 21-2.

<sup>78</sup> Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 26-7 and 40.

Interdependent Co-Arising is the core, the summary,<sup>79</sup> and the logic of Buddhist *Dhamma*. In fact, “wisdom” in Buddhism is frequently defined as seeing Co-Arising, seeing “into the arising and passing away of phenomena, which is noble and penetrative and leads to the complete destruction of suffering,”<sup>80</sup> and being mindful in Buddhism is to be mindful of the formation or arising of phenomena in the world, including one’s body, one’s mind, and one’s very own existence.<sup>81</sup>

Since any one thing depends on multiple causes and conditions to come into existence and in turn is merely one among many causes or conditions for other things, the “logic” revealed by the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising is not a logic of linear causality, but a logic of network causality. “Buddhist causality,” Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg state, “is seen as a cosmic web of causal conditions rather than linear and mechanical notions of pushpull

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<sup>79</sup> Some may think that the Four Noble Truths are the summary of the Buddha’s teachings, and many Buddhist masters begin their series of *dhamma* talks with them, honoring that they were the first *Dhamma* talk given by the Buddha after his enlightenment. However, the reasoning behind the Four Noble Truths, behind the arising and cessation of *dukkha*, is Interdependent Co-Arising. Besides, the Four Noble Truths was first directed at the five wandering ascetics that the Buddha had once practiced with, and according to the early texts all of them had attained very advanced levels of ethical discipline and mental training. That is, the very concise first *Dhamma* talk directed at them might not be suitable as the first talk to average people who have little or no background in mental training and whose level of ethical discipline is probably not comparable to that of the five wandering ascetics. This does not mean the Four Noble Truths are unimportant or will not be discussed in this dissertation. They are undeniably central in the Buddhist *Dhamma*, and different parts of the Four Noble Truths are referred to throughout this dissertation.

<sup>80</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, IV.94; also V.2, VIII.30, VIII.49, VIII.54, and IX.3. Also, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, it is said that having “correct wisdom” means one is able to see, as it really is, “this dependent origination and these dependently arisen phenomena.” *Samyutta Nikāya* II.27 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

<sup>81</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.55-63 (*Satipatthāna Sutta*).

causation.”<sup>82</sup> Instead of seeing one and only one cause leading to one and only one effect without being affected by the effect, Interdependent Co-Arising points to multiple causes, multiple effects, and mutual influences among phenomena in the world. To see Interdependent Co-Arising is to see the causes, origins, and conditions<sup>83</sup> of phenomena, to understand the network of origination, and to comprehend under what conditions have things and events in human life come to be what they are. Under this light, a teaching or analysis that presumes only one cause for all existing problems or proposes only one measure as the solution to all problems is to be viewed with more suspicion than those that acknowledge the intricate interrelations among multiple causes and recommend multiple measures simultaneously for dealing with *dukkha*-filled and *dukkha*-inducing situations.

The *Nikāya*-s present the Buddha first and foremost as a teacher, a human being who came to understand the interconditionality of existence as it is and sought to teach it, not some speculator who invented doctrines or some supra-human being who imposed rules:

Whether Tathāgata arise in the world or not, it still remains a fact, a firm and necessary condition of existence, that all formations are impermanent ... that all formations are subject to suffering ... that all things are non-self.

A Tathāgata fully awakens to this fact and penetrates it. Having fully awakened to it and penetrated it, he announces it, teaches it, makes it known, presents it, discloses it,

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<sup>82</sup> Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will: Pali and Mahayanist Responses,” in *Freedom and Determinism*, edited by Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O’Rourke, and David Shier (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004), 284.

<sup>83</sup> In the Pāli tradition, *hetu* (cause), *samudaya* (origin), and *paccaya* (condition) have been understood as synonyms. *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.57 (*Mahānidāna Sutta*). See also Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction” to the Book of Causation (*Nidānavagga*), in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2002), 516.

analyses it and explains it: that all formations are impermanent, that all formations are subject to suffering, that all things are non-self.<sup>84</sup>

The Buddha was a teacher who taught what he had realized. He taught in order to enhance the listeners' comprehension of the conditions and conditionality of existence and to motivate them to engage in conscious, self-initiated trainings and practices that would be beneficial for all in the interconnected web of life. For teachings to be understood and to serve the function of motivating the learners, they have to reflect the immediate objectives of a particular moment, to appeal to what the targeted audience would take for granted, and to suit the interests, dispositions, and capacities of the learners.

The Buddha was very skillful in making use of the beliefs and concepts permeating the Indian culture at his time in order to gradually and gently bring his interlocutors to understand and practice the *dukkha*-alleviating *Dhamma*, whether or not they planned to become Buddhist renunciates or identify themselves as the lay followers of the Buddha.<sup>85</sup> For example, although taking a non-theistic viewpoint and discouraging metaphysical speculations, the Buddha frequently talked about the gods in the Hindu pantheon, as well as *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*) and rebirth, all of which were common beliefs in his day.<sup>86</sup> In dialoguing with a young brāhmin

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<sup>84</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, III.134; *Samyutta Nikāya* II.25. See also Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> John J. Makransky, "Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present." *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 344 and 346; Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 29.

<sup>86</sup> James R. Egge, in particular, studied the way in which the Buddha ethicized the concept of *kamma* in *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravāda Buddhism* (Richmond, England: Curzon Press, 2002), 41-67. David R. Loy understands that religious teachings often involve what poststructuralist feminist theorist Judith Butler would call performativity; that is, one can only get one's messages across to the audience by means of performing the established socio-cultural tropes with a difference. The idea of performativity

named Vāsettha, the Buddha appealed to the supposed untainted nature of Brahmā, the supreme deity that Vāsettha believed in, in order to persuade Vāsettha to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, to discipline himself, and to give up hate, ill-will, and impurity.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to re-appropriating the taken-for-granted concepts in the larger socio-cultural context, the Buddha also adapted to the particular interests, dispositions, and capacities of his interlocutors.<sup>88</sup> Bikkhu Ānanda observed that the Buddha, when addressing rural folks, used similes that were familiar to them, such as bullock cart, seed, or irrigation ditch, so that his teachings could be more easily comprehended.<sup>89</sup> In order to instruct a brāhmin named Sundarika Bhāradvāja who believed in purification through ritual bathing in the holy rivers, the Buddha spoke of “inner bathing” through moral practice.<sup>90</sup> In the same vein, when talking to a

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renders scriptural literalism invalid, and on this ground Loy suggests that Buddhists should not accept as literal truth everything said in the Pāli Canon. Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7; see also Loy, “The Karma of Women,” 59-60.

<sup>87</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* i.246-251 (*Tevijja Sutta*).

<sup>88</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi note that the Buddha “explains the principles he has seen in the way most appropriate for his auditors.” Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction II,” in *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 13. The same point was made by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. in his introduction to the book *Buddhist Hermeneutics*: “The Buddha is said to have taught different things to different people based on their interests, dispositions, capacities, and levels of intelligence.” Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Introduction,” in *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Bhikkhu Ānanda, “The Buddhist Approach to the Scriptures,” *Journal of Dharma* 21, no. 4 (October-December 1996): 370-1.

<sup>90</sup> “A fool may there forever bathe / Yet will not purify dark deeds. / ... / It is here, brāhmin, that you should bathe, / To make yourself a refuge for all beings. / And if you speak no falsehood / Nor work harm for living beings, / Nor take what is offered not, / With faith and free from avarice, / What need for you to go to Gayā? / For any well will be your Gayā.” *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.39 (*Vatthūpama Sutta*).

brāhmin named Sigāḷaka, who was obsessed with carrying out the ritual of paying homage to the six directions according to the “Ariyan discipline,” the Buddha added an ethical thrust to the concept of paying homage to the six directions. He identified the east with parents, the south with teachers, the west with wife and children, the north with friends and companions, the nadir with servants, and the zenith with practicing religionists, and then taught that to pay homage to the six directions was to respect people and treat them in a humane way.<sup>91</sup> In dialoguing with another brāhmin named Kūtadanta, who was concerned with making the most profitable sacrifice, the Buddha instructed that the most profitable sacrifice was to perfect oneself in morality and wisdom, thereby successfully stopped him from carrying out an excessive sacrifice that would have involved killing seven hundred bulls, seven hundred bullocks, seven hundred heifers, seven hundred he-goats, and seven hundred rams.<sup>92</sup>

In order to persuade his predominantly privileged male audience to practice the *dukkha*-ceasing *Dhamma* realized by him, the Buddha appealed to their beliefs and concerns. The similes and concepts the Buddha used are obviously rather remote for people living in today’s globalized and very much Westernized world. Also, although many of the Buddha’s teachings in the *Nikāyas* transcend time and culture, others are no longer practical or practicable. Targeting an audience living in Northeastern India two thousand five hundred years ago, some of the Buddha’s teachings can no longer induce *dukkha*-alleviating understandings and practices. That is to say, it is not being true to the Buddha’s own teachings for Buddhists nowadays to strictly adhere to the languages and instructions contained in the early Buddhist texts.

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<sup>91</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.180-192 (*Sigāḷaka Sutta*).

<sup>92</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* i.143-148 (*Kūtadanta Sutta*).

Following the Buddha's own example, Buddhists should not cling to "Buddhist" texts if they are remote or impractical in the current contexts, just as Buddhists need not hesitate to employ the non-Buddhist rafts if they are conducive to ethical behaviors and the alleviation of *dukkha* in the current contexts.

In today's much Westernized world in which privileged people more often than not have received Western education, Western philosophies and theories are likely to be more appealing than traditional discourses. More importantly, no matter how wise and enlightened the Buddha might be, he did not offer any analysis on the co-arising of this world we currently inhabit. That is, in revealing the interconditionality of human existence and worldly phenomena, and in explicating the ethical implications of the Buddhist teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising, it is far more relevant and cogent to cite contemporary analyses on subjectivity, power relations, and global socio-economic interdependence, than to cite the classical presentations in the Pāli texts or any traditional Buddhist texts, particularly if the audience is Western or Westernized elite. At the very least, citing contemporary theories and analyses may help people living in the contemporary world to better understand the formation or co-arising of their own existence and the phenomena in their own world. The understanding of Co-Arising, as mentioned above, is a crucial component of what the Buddha would have called "wisdom" in that it can guide people to choose the most *dukkha*-alleviating courses of actions possible. In other words, incorporating contemporary Western theories in this much Westernized world may be necessary to introduce or reintroduce the socio-ethical dimensions of Buddhism to Western and non-Western, Buddhist and non-Buddhist educated elites, who in Buddhist view have been more responsible than others for

the *dukkha*-inflicting conditions in the world.<sup>93</sup> In the process of constructing or reconstructing ethics that is in accordance with the Buddha's Teaching, relevant to the contemporary world, appealing and meaningful for people of Western backgrounds and people with Western education who live in the much Westernized and globalized world today, and excluding neither women nor non-elites, therefore, I will search for insights from both the foundational Buddhist sources and contemporary Western studies and theories, particularly socio-economic studies and poststructuralist feminist critiques.

### **1.3 Constructing Non-Adversarial Engaged Feminist-Buddhist Social Ethics**

For the cessation of *dukkha* for all Buddhist and non-Buddhist beings *in this world*, followers of the Buddha need to transcend their "Buddhist" identity, maintaining the spirit of questioning as the Buddha taught when it comes to traditions and traditional teachings, and ever so skillfully employ non-Buddhist means as the Buddha did in response to the arising of new *dukkha*-producing situations.

The Buddha taught that one should not speak or act for the sake of gaining worldly advantage or promoting oneself.<sup>94</sup> He also emphasized that the *Dhamma* was not intended for personal triumph in ego-driven debates:

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter Four of this dissertation.

<sup>94</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, V.12. See also Bhikkhu Chao Chu in "Buddhism and Dialogue Among the World Religions: Meeting the Challenge of Materialistic Skepticism," in *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World*, edited by Joseph Runzo (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 170-1.

Here, bhikkhus, some misguided men learn the Dhamma — discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, exclamations, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions ... only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning in debates, and they do not experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma. Those teachings being wrongly grasped by them, conduce to their harm and suffering for a long time.<sup>95</sup>

Those who used the Buddhist *Dhamma* to elevate themselves and to put others down, the Buddha said, were misguided and were wrongly grasping what he taught. They were only producing more *dukkha* when they used his teachings not as means of alleviating *dukkha* but as tools for winning glory and fame for themselves, or for attacking people of different opinions or of different lineages. The practice of the Buddhist *Dhamma* itself includes the restraint from egocentric opposition.

“While the Buddha is described as participating in public presentations of his experiential, dogmaless Dhamma, and thereby disagreeing with other peoples’ practices or traditions,” Paul R. Fleischman points out, “he never did so with an oppositional, conversional fervor. ... He expressed his nonviolent ethic but he did not campaign for it.”<sup>96</sup> In the examples given in the above section, the Buddha did not bluntly demolish others’ belief systems, but neither did he give his consent to all practices. He sought to communicate his ethical concerns with his interlocutors in the most nonadversarial ways, which was crucial in getting his messages across to them. For instance, when Ajātasattu Vedehiputta, the king of the Magadha, planned to attack the republic of the Vajjians, he sent his chief minister Vassakāra to the Buddha, believing the Buddha would divine the outcome. Instead of vehemently condemning the militarism on the

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<sup>95</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.133 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*).

<sup>96</sup> Paul R. Fleischman, *The Buddha Taught Nonviolence, Not Pacifism* (Onalaska, Washington: Pariyatti Press, 2002), 33.

part of the Magadhan, which might have provoked him to take even more aggressive measures, the Buddha turned to his disciple and attendant Ānanda to inquire if the Vajjians had been practicing the seven ethical principles that he had taught. Eventually the Buddha led Vassakāra to reach the conclusion by himself: “if the Vajjians keep to even one of these principles, they may be expected to prosper and not decline — far less all seven. Certainly the Vajjians will never be conquered by King Ajātasattu by force of arms.”<sup>97</sup> By being non-adversarial, the Buddha practiced the nonviolent *Dhamma* he taught and deterred the Magadhan king from inflicting suffering without further creating oppositions.

Sallie B. King observes that nonadversariality is one of the most important features of various forms of contemporary Engaged Buddhism,<sup>98</sup> which is not surprisingly based on the examples set by the Buddha himself. He disagreed with the conventional world in many regards, including the necessity of being oppositional or confrontational. “One does not have to choose between either confronting someone or getting rolled over,” Gross remarks with regard to the transformation brought forth by practicing the *Dhamma*, “even though that’s what the conventional world teaches us.”<sup>99</sup> To practice the Buddha’s teachings requires one to find and walk the “middle path” (Pāli: *majjhimā-patipadā*; Sanskrit: *madhyamā-pratipad*)<sup>100</sup> between confrontation and acquiescence.

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<sup>97</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.72-76 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).

<sup>98</sup> Sallie B. King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), 230.

<sup>99</sup> Rita M. Gross, “What Keeps Me in Buddhist Orbit?” in *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Christian-Buddhist Conversation*, by Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2001), 114.

<sup>100</sup> “Middle Way” or “Middle Path” is one of the most potent phrases in Buddhism and is meaningful on many levels. It is used as a synonym of the term “*Dhamma*” in the sense of the

Being oppositional and confrontational often aggravates a given situation in that it often prompts the interlocutors to take a defensive stance and thereby blocks the channel of communication. In addition to aggravating a given situation, being adversarial will also further perpetuate the pattern of conflict by nurturing the seed of self-other dualism, and thus it is fundamentally contradictory to the Buddhist project of nurturing *dukkha*-reducing, peace-enhancing individuals and environment. To be consistent with the Buddha's Teaching requires one to conduct oneself in the most peaceful way possible at every moment without yielding to unwholesome, *dukkha*-producing conventions of being antagonistic and adversarial. Therefore, this dissertation, while attempting to maintain the spirit of critical inquiry and to employ contemporary Western studies and theories in the exegesis of Buddhist *Dhamma*, does not aim at enticing conflicts between "Buddhist" and "non-Buddhist" systems of thoughts.

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totality of Buddhist practices, or more specifically in the sense of the Noble Eightfold Path. It recalls the Buddha's eventual renunciation of worldly enjoyments (and attachment to the conventional way of life) on the one hand, and asceticism (and complete withdrawal from society) on the other. It also signifies the Buddha's rejection of both eternalism (that the Self exists independently, permanently, and unchangingly) and nihilism/annihilationism (that nothing exists or a person's spiritual dimension completely perishes after death), of both attachment to existence and attachment to non-existence, and of both the exclusive focus on the *kamma* of oneself and the exclusive focus on the *kamma* of others (see Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation for more explanation of the Buddhist view of "Self" and *kamma*). After Nāgārjuna of the Madhyamaka school, the most influential thinker in the Mahāyāna tradition, the principle of "Middle Way" has become the touchstone for the authentication of Buddhist doctrines. In the Mahāyāna setting, the middle also denotes "combination of elements that, taken in isolation, would be considered extreme," and as such it also denotes the ultimate transcendence of isolated extremes. In Buddhism, it is in the avoidance of extremes that the epistemic, ethical, and soteriological path is to be found, although the exact locale of the middle remains elusive and is constantly being redefined. By contrast, Roger R. Jackson observes, the middle has multiple negative connotations in the West. Roger R. Jackson, "In Search of a Postmodern Middle," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, edited by Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 227-37. See also Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, 162-3.

This dissertation studies the social and ethical implications of the core Buddhist teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising. In order to formulate a Buddhist social ethics that is acceptable and compelling to the largest number of Buddhists and Buddhist scholars, I took Buddhism back to its roots, referencing mainly the earliest texts whose legitimacy in the voluminous Buddhist literature is the most widely acknowledged and the least disputable. Chapter Two examines the “Socio-Ethical Dimensions of Early Buddhism.” The ethical emphasis of the Buddha is manifested in his refusal of answering metaphysical questions, his redefinition of nobility, and his teachings with regard to the cultivation of wholesome states and wholesome conduct in this world. The Buddha’s non-violent challenge to the social hierarchies is particularly significant if the religious, political, social, and economic situations of his time are put into consideration. The repeated injunction on the importance of associating with “good friends” testifies to his grasp of the fundamental sociality of human existence. In addition, the institution of the full *Sangha* consisting of the four assemblies to a great extent challenges the normalized and naturalized hierarchies in the society, de-essentializes classes and genders, and establishes the middle path between accepting the conventional way of life and cutting off all connections with it. The androcentrism and classism that can be observed in the history of Buddhism, in as much as they result in the disregard or even justification of the suffering of women and non-privileged people, contradict the Buddha’s own teachings and therefore need to be critiqued. The Buddha recognized as *dukkha*-producing the ways in which people had been relating to each other and treating each other, and he exemplified a way of responding to social problems and being active in the world without being antagonistic.

Having grounded this social ethics in early Buddhism and its texts, starting with Chapter Three, “A Feminist Exegesis of Non-Self: Constitution of Personhood and Identity,” I will cite

poststructuralist feminist analyses and contemporary socio-economic studies, using them to reveal the subtleties of the Buddhist *Dhamma* as well as the blind spots of traditional Buddhist teachings and practices. On account of their convergence with the Buddhist analysis of the Five Aggregates, poststructuralist constructivist feminist theories can provide an exegetical framework for the Buddhist teaching of Non-Self and bring forth more fully the subtleties of the dynamic constructiveness of inter-relational individual beings that the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising conveys. The complex socio-psycho-physical entity that we usually call “self,” including its gendered aspect, is socially constructed as well as mentally constructed. The understanding of social conditioning can call into question the validity of traditional gender roles and gender hierarchy that still pervade Buddhist organizations. The Buddha himself did not honor any other traditional social hierarchies, and the fundamental Buddhist teaching of *anāṭṭa* clearly does not support the idea that any social group is inherently superior to another.

Neither the negation of “Self” in Buddhism nor the rejection of autonomous subject in poststructuralist feminist theories dissolves moral responsibility or moral agency. Chapter Four, “Person-in-*Kammic*-Network: Moral Agency and Social Responsibility,” investigates the social meaning of *kamma* and the moral agency and responsibility a constructed subject has in the constitution and reconstitution of himself/herself and in the constitution and reconstitution of the socio-cultural contexts in which s/he is embedded. The teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising reveals the fundamental sociality and interconditionality of human existence. It deconstructs the concept of independent “Self” that stays uninfluenced by its surroundings, but by no means does it dissolve moral responsibilities of individuals. If it is in the existing socio-cultural contexts that an individual is constituted, it is through individuals’ actions that they as well as their socio-cultural contexts are constructed and reconstructed. It is in this light that the

Buddha's ethicization of the long-existing term *kamma* can be rightly understood. Inasmuch as a person interdependently co-arises with the contexts s/he is in, as well as with people around her/him, every volitional action helps reconfigure the socio-cultural contexts as well as one's own personality and character, and every person is directly or indirectly responsible for the wellbeing of others. This complex social implication of Interdependent Co-Arising can be further accentuated by taking a look at the contemporary socio-economic and environmental studies on the global situations. What seems to be individual *kamma* more often than not has its social and even global impacts, and the cessation of *dukkha* depends on all those who are tangled in the same *kammic* web of existence realizing the social dimensions of their actions and striving to be socially conscionable.

Chapter Five considers the "Buddhist Self-Reconditioning and Community-Building." The optimal environment for the fundamental sociality to be recognized and for the sense of responsibility to grow is a community that is intimate enough for all members to be aware of the reverberations of their actions and small enough for them to make decisions together. To build an intimate small local community, however, is not the same as to have a closed system in which the group identity supplants the individual identity and the internal differences are homogenized. Based on the *Nikāya* texts, Buddhist community-building ideals include viewing different others as resources and continually building connections with multiple others. At the same time, the Buddhist *Dhamma* recognizes the "internal" factors in the production or reduction of *dukkha* in the "external" world of social interactions. Consisting of the "Three Trainings" of ethical discipline, mental training, and wisdom development, the Noble Eightfold Path is a program that allows people to consciously and proactively recondition the individual "internal" states that build up themselves as well as their "external" actions that build up the cultural contexts.

Chapter Six, “This-Worldly *Nibbāna*: Participatory Peacemaking,” further elaborates on the participatory and dynamic nature of both *dukkha* and *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāna*; “blowing out” or “extinguish” the causes of *dukkha*; the cessation of *dukkha*). Norwegian peace studies scholar Johan Galtung differentiates three kinds of violence and observes that physical violence is induced by structural violence, which is grounded, sanctioned, and justified by cultural violence. The current “culture of war,” as termed by peace studies scholars, is a culture that breeds and intensifies greed, promotes egocentric attachments and oppositions, and justifies and glorifies aggression and domination. Peacemaking therefore involves far more than stopping wars and other forms of physical violence; the culture has to change. It is due to people’s on-going unreflective participation that the “culture of war” has come into existence, and it requires all individuals’ on-going mindful participation to create and maintain the “culture of peace.” Peace is therefore neither a static power structure, nor an end point that can be reached once and for all. Likewise, in accordance with the Buddha’s this-worldly socio-ethical concerns recorded in the *Nikāya*-s, *nibbāna* can be understood to have a very this-worldly and dynamic character. Besides working on the self’s behavioral, emotive, and conceptual transformation, it involves building connections throughout the web of co-arising, and continually *making* peace by networking with multiple “others” and choosing the most “wholesome” and least violent courses of actions possible in every given situation.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOCIO-ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF EARLY BUDDHISM

Contrary to the popular misconception that Buddhism is other-worldly oriented or that Buddhism is *only* about individualistic inner peace, the early Buddhist texts bear witness to the Buddha's highly this-worldly ethical concerns and his unconventional social visions. They show that the Buddhist Path could not be reduced to individual inner peace only, let alone an other-worldly mystical pursuit only. The practical this-worldly character of the Buddha's teachings can be seen in the Buddha's refusal of metaphysical speculations. Instead of addressing the metaphysical questions, the Buddha redirected people's attention to their own ways of behaving in the world, and he redefined nobility by associating it with this-worldly wholesome states and wholesome conduct. Ethical behavior in this world thus was integral in the Buddha's teachings. The ethics that the Buddha taught was very social in character and was not something that could be practiced in isolation. In addition to repeatedly emphasizing the importance of associating with "good friends" (Pāli: *kalyāṇa mitta*; Sanskrit: *kalyāṇa mitra*), the Buddha established the *Sangha* that not only altered the convention of renunciates wandering about in isolation,<sup>1</sup> but also challenged the prevalent gender hierarchy and class hierarchy at the time by accepting men and women from all castes. Therefore, instead of asserting that

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Harvey says that the Buddhist monastic *Sangha* was a "middle way" between solitary renunciates and brāhmin householders. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 73. For the meaning of the term "householder," see page 78 below.

Buddhists need to externalize or extrapolate the Buddhist inner peace as if social ethics was non-existent in the Buddha's teachings prior to the introduction of modern Western values, I will argue that what Buddhists need to do is to heed the most basic Buddhist *Dhamma* and revitalize the Buddha's own teachings.

## 2.1 The Liberative Is Ethical: This-Worldly Wholesomeness

The Buddhist path, in all branches of Buddhism, is the Noble Eightfold Path, which includes ethical discipline, mental training, and wisdom development. It may seem that ethics is only one of the three main parts of the Noble Eightfold Path. However, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the collection that deals with the subtlety of the Buddha's teachings, ethics is likened to earth, based on which the entirety of the Noble Eightfold Path is established and cultivated.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, in the *Nikāya* texts it is evident that the Buddhist goal of *Nibbāna*, the cessation of *dukkha*, has a strong ethical dimension. Thus Damien Keown maintains in *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, "ethical perfection is a central ingredient in the Buddhist *summum bonum*."<sup>3</sup>

Ethical behavior is an indispensable component of advanced "inner states" in the Buddha's teachings. Whatever meditative attainment one had, the Buddha expected it to be reflected in one's conduct:

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<sup>2</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, V.45-46 (*Maggasamyutta*). Therefore, Thomas Kochumuttom argues that the practice that the Buddha emphasized, i.e., the Noble Eightfold Path, was ethics-based. Thomas Kochumuttom, "Ethics-Based Society of Buddhism," *Journal of Dharma* 16, no. 4 (October-December 1991): 410-20.

<sup>3</sup> Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 22.

When a noble disciple is possessed of virtue, that pertains to his conduct. When he guards the doors of his sense faculties, that pertains to his conduct. When he is moderate in eating, that pertains to his conduct. When he is devoted to wakefulness, that pertains to his conduct. When he possesses seven good qualities, that pertains to his conduct. When he is one who obtains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four jhānas [advanced meditative states] that constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant abiding here and now, that pertains to his conduct.<sup>4</sup>

Even when instructing about loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity,<sup>5</sup> which seemingly referred to mental states only, the Buddha's emphasis was still unequivocally on ethical conduct: one who did evil deeds could not develop these states, and one who attained "the liberation of the mind" by these states would not do an evil deed.<sup>6</sup> An advanced meditative state was to have the outward manifestation in ethical conduct, and the lack thereof was considered to obstruct to the development and attainment of superior inner states. In the early Buddhist discourses, "inner" states could not be separated from "outer" behavior.

The same correlation between "inner" states and "outer" conduct was expected between wisdom and moral behavior. The Buddha said in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, "His action marks the fool, his action marks the wise person, O monks. Wisdom shines forth in behavior."<sup>7</sup> Wisdom and morality were so positively correlated in the Buddhist discourses that the expression "the wise" was often found in the contexts of moral issues. Wisdom was to be manifested in ethical behavior, and ethical persons were considered wise persons:

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<sup>4</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.358 (*Sekha Sutta*).

<sup>5</sup> They are referred to as "the four boundless states," the four "Immeasurable Deliverances of Mind," or the four "Divine Abidings" (*brahmavihāra*).

<sup>6</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* X.208.

<sup>7</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, III.2.

Wisdom is purified by morality, and morality is purified by wisdom: where one is, the other is, the moral man has wisdom and the wise man has morality, and the combination of morality and wisdom is called the highest thing in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Not only is the entirety of the Noble Eightfold Path ethics-based, the goal that the Path leads to, *nibbāna*, is inseparable from ethical behavior, too, despite the popular tendency of imagining *nibbāna* to be a purely “inner” state in which ethics does not matter at all or no longer matters.<sup>9</sup> The Buddha taught,

When lust, hatred and delusion have been abandoned, he neither plans for his own harm, nor for the harm of others, nor for the harm of both... In this way, brāhmin, Nibbāna is directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, worthy of application, to be personally experienced by the wise.<sup>10</sup>

A person who realizes *nibbāna* is a person who is completely rid of the three poisons of lust, hatred, and delusion and completely ethical. In fact, in the *Nikāyas*, an *arhant*, one who has reached *nibbāna*, was said to be “incapable of taking a wrong course of action on account of

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<sup>8</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* i.124 (*Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta*).

<sup>9</sup> For the better part of the twentieth century scholars of Buddhist ethics were generally of these two opinions (see Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 8-18 and 83-105), although some others, such as C. A. F. Rhys Davids, Hammalava Saddhatissa, Donald K. Swearer, John Ross Carter, Damien Keown, and Abraham Velez de Cea, did recognize ethics to be indispensable in the Buddhist *Dhamma* as a whole and *nibbāna* in particular. Keown, for example, understands *nibbāna* to be the perfection of moral and intellectual virtues, but “not an ontological shift or soteriological quantum leap.” Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 107-8. He further points out that “the view of ethics as preliminary or instrumental usually involves an understanding of karma as a mechanism for personal reward or retribution, which tends to corrode the framework of morality which is by nature interpersonal.” *Ibid.*, 13. In the Buddha’s own teachings recorded in the *Nikāya* texts, as will be shown in Chapter Four, the term *kamma* was not used in the passive sense, nor was it a strict mechanism that required calculation.

<sup>10</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, III.55.

desire, hatred, delusion or fear.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Buddha himself was described as one who was pure in conduct and foremost in the highest morality (Pāli: *adhisīla*; Sanskrit: *adhiśīla*).<sup>12</sup> That is, in Buddhist discourses, spiritual attainments, including the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*, are expected to go hand-in-hand with superior ethical conduct. Therefore, T. W. Rhys Davids states,

*Nibbāna* is purely and solely an *ethical* state, to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight. ... all expressions which deal with the realization of emancipation from lust, hatred and illusion apply to *practical* habits and not to speculative thought.<sup>13</sup>

In classical Buddhist discourses, ethical behavior was not only expected from the Buddha’s own followers, but also from non-Buddhists who claimed higher spiritual status. With respect to what kind of renunciates should be revered by lay people and what kind of renunciates should not, the Buddha set down a very simple criterion:

Those recluses and brahmins who are not rid of lust, hate, and delusion... whose minds are not inwardly peaceful, and who conduct themselves now righteously, now unrighteously in body, speech, and mind — such recluses and brahmins should not be honoured, respected, revered, and venerated,” and those who are rid of lust, hate, and delusion and *consistently* conduct themselves righteously are worthy of reverence.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* IX.7. Also see *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.133 (*Pāsādika Sutta*) and iii.235 (*Sangīti Sutta*).

<sup>12</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* III.126; *Dīgha Nikāya* i.171-174 (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*), iii.217 (*Sangīti Sutta*); *Samyutta Nikāya* I.139 (*Brahmasamyutta*).

<sup>13</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids, “*Nibbāna*,” in the Pāli Text Society Dictionary. He further suggests that the notion of *Nibbāna* being a self-existent state was developed later in the scholastic *Abhidhamma* period.

<sup>14</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.291-2 (*Nagaravindeyya Sutta*).

In the Buddha’s teachings, that is, ethics is neither only provisional nor something that is irrelevant in the pursuit of the ultimate emancipation from *dukkha*. Ethical practices are the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path and are expected both in the process of pursuing the goal and after reaching the goal. Ethical practice both leads to *nibbāna* and is perfected by it. For this reason Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids declares that “Buddhist philosophy is ethical first and last.”<sup>15</sup>

According to the *Nikāya* texts, the Buddha was in fact very much this-worldly oriented. When refuting the doctrines of nihilism, non-doing, and non-causality, the Buddha says that even if those doctrines were true, a person with bodily, verbal, and mental misbehavior is still “here and now censured by the wise as an immoral person,” and a person with bodily, verbal, and mental good behavior is still “here and now praised by the wise as a virtuous person.”<sup>16</sup> That is, in whichever way one may like to imagine the ultimate reality or speculate about the metaphysical truths, there is still this world and whatever one does, speaks, and thinks still affects others directly or indirectly, just as one is still in turn affected by the wholesome or unwholesome conduct of others. By refusing to address metaphysical and/or other-worldly questions, the Buddha was redirecting people’s attention to their conduct here and now, which in the Buddhist discourses was far more important and urgent.

One classical example that is often quoted to demonstrate the Buddha’s practical concern and his sense of the urgency of ethical practice is the “simile of the poison arrow.” To insist on having metaphysical questions answered before starting leading an ethical life, the Buddha said,

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<sup>15</sup> Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys Davids, “Introductory Essay,” in *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: The Pali Text Society, 1974), xxii.

<sup>16</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.402-409 (*Apaṇṇaka Sutta*).

is like a person wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison wanting to know, before letting the surgeon pull out the arrow, every single detail about the man who shot the arrow and about the making of the bow and the arrow shaft.<sup>17</sup> One would have died before all the details regarding the origin of the poisoned arrow were known; it was far more important and urgent that the wounded person let the surgeon treat the wound and heeded the surgeon's medical instructions for the sake of recovery. In the same way, one would have died before one's metaphysical curiosity was satisfied. It was far more important and urgent that people paid attention to their actions that were here and now affecting others as well as themselves, and strived to conduct themselves in wholesome ways before it was too late.<sup>18</sup>

Devoting one's energy to metaphysical speculations, in the Buddha's teachings, is "unbeneficial," because "it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life," and "it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna."<sup>19</sup> Metaphysical questions are therefore "unfit for attention."<sup>20</sup> David J. Kalupahana in *Ethics in Early Buddhism* explains that, for the Buddha, "Any conception of truth not relevant to making human life wholesome and good would simply be

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<sup>17</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.428-430 (*Cūlamālunkya Sutta*).

<sup>18</sup> The following poem contained in the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* conveyed the same point that, regardless of the past or the future, one should make the effort to be ethical right now:

Let not a person revive the past / Or on the future build his hopes; / For the past has been left behind / And the future has not been reached. / Instead with insight let him see / Each presently arisen state; / Let him know that and be sure of it, / Invincibly, unshakeably. / Today the effort must be made; / Tomorrow Death may come, who knows?  
*Majjhima Nikāya*, iii.187 (*Bhaddekaratta Sutta*).

<sup>19</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.431 (*Cūlamālunkya Sutta*) and i.485-486 (*Aggivacchagotta Sutta*).

<sup>20</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.8 (*Sabbāsava Sutta*).

metaphysical and therefore unedifying.”<sup>21</sup> What is “fit for attention,” according to the Buddha’s teachings in these texts of early Buddhism, is the proper way or ways to conduct oneself here and now. In addition to refusing to answer metaphysical questions, therefore, the Buddha urged people to take up wholesome conduct and associated nobility with noble actions rather than upper-caste origins.

In the pre-Buddhist brāhmanical discourses, nobility was claimed by the performers of sacrificial rituals who generated power via physical performance of the rituals and ritual chanting. The cosmic power generated by chanting was termed *brāhman*, and not coincidentally the ritual performers who chanted were called *brāhmaṇas* (“brāhmins” in the anglicized form). The brāhmins were said to be born out of the mouth of the primordial cosmic man Puruṣa (or, in a later rendition, out of the mouth of the creator god Brahmā). The place of their origin, mouth, supposedly defined their social function as well as justified their high social status and inherent nobility. Being born out of the mouth of Brahmā, their duty was to chant, and being born from the top portion of the primordial/divine body, they were inherently superior to those born out of other parts of the body.

The Buddha challenged the priestly class’ self-proclaimed nobility and redefined the word *brāhmaṇas*. In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, a young brāhmin called Assalāyana, who was said to be a sixteen-year-old “master of the Three Vedas with their vocabularies, liturgy, phonology, and etymology, and the histories as a fifth; skilled in philology and grammar,”<sup>22</sup> went to challenge the Buddha’s teachings which, in this brāhmin’s eyes, failed to heed the proper

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<sup>21</sup> David J. Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>22</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.148 (*Assalāyana Sutta*).

distinction of the castes. The Buddha responded first by observing that customs might vary from region to region, and then by pointing out that brāhmins were born by women just as all other castes were, and they were also supposed to reap what they had sowed just as people of all other castes. At the same time, a fire lit by a non-brāhmin would have radiance and heat just as a fire lit by a brāhmin, and people of all other castes were as capable of developing loving-kindness and other wholesome qualities as brāhmins were.<sup>23</sup> Caste differences and proper inter-caste relations were prescribed by the brāhmins, and the Buddha questioned whether the whole world had authorized them to prescribe things as such.<sup>24</sup> There was no difference between the four castes at all and that the brāhmins' assertion of caste differences was "just a saying in the world."<sup>25</sup>

In terms of questioning the legitimacy of caste distinctions and repudiating the inherent superiority of privileged people, the Buddha was certainly anti-brāhmanical. However, he was not anti-brāhmanical in the sense of associating evils with privileges:

I do not say...that one is better because one is from an aristocratic family, nor do I say that one is worse because one is from an aristocratic family. I do not say that one is better because one is of great beauty, nor do I say that one is worse because one is of great beauty. I do not say that one is better because one is of great wealth, nor do I say that one is worse because one is of great wealth.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.148-153 (*Assalāyana Sutta*). See also *Majjhima Nikāya* i.284 (*Cūla-Assapura Sutta*), ii.85-6 (*Madhurā Sutta*), and ii.128-30 (*Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta*).

<sup>24</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.178 (*Esukāri Sutta*).

<sup>25</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.86 (*Madhurā Sutta*).

<sup>26</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.179 (*Esukāri Sutta*).

In the Buddha’s teachings, one was “better” or nobler if one abstained “from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from misconduct in sensual pleasures, from false speech, from malicious speech, from harsh speech, and from gossip,” and one who engaged in misconduct was “worse,” regardless of one’s caste origin.<sup>27</sup>

In the same way that the Buddha referred to a renunciate’s conduct to determine his/her worthiness of reverence, he used ethical conduct to redefine the term *brāhmaṇas*, disassociating it from the caste system and refuting the claim of inherent nobility on the part of the brāhmins:

I call him not a Brahmin [*brāhmaṇas*]  
Because of his origin and lineage.  
If impediments still lurk in him,  
He is just one who says “Sir.”  
...  
Who does not flare up with anger,  
Dutiful, virtuous, and humble, ...  
Who is unopposed among opponents,  
Peaceful among those given to violence,  
Who does not cling among those who cling:  
He is the one I call a brahmin.  
...  
One is not a Brahmin birth,  
Nor by birth a non-brahmin.  
By action is one a Brahmin,  
By action is one a non-brahmin.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, in the Buddha’s discourses, nobility is not something one is born with, but something one has to establish through noble actions. Those aristocrats and priests who called themselves

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<sup>27</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.179 (*Esukāri Sutta*).

<sup>28</sup> *Sutta Nipāta* 119-122 (*Vāseṭṭha Sutta*). This sutta is the ninety-eighth sutta in the *Majjhima Nikāya* but is not included in the edition published by the Pāli Text Society because it is identical with the sutta of the same name in the *Sutta Nipāta* that has been published in two versions by the Pāli Text Society. It is included in *Majjhima Nikāya* published by the Wisdom Publications. In the same vein of this quote, the Buddha called a *bhikkhu* who had expelled evil unwholesome states a *brāhmin*. See *Majjhima Nikāya* i.279 (*Mahā-Assapura Sutta*).

*Ariyans* (noblemen) did not necessarily have the “Ariyan dispositions (*ariya-vāṣā*)”<sup>29</sup>, and those lower-caste people who were despised by the “Ariyans” might well display their nobleness through moral self-conquest.<sup>30</sup>

Nobility is established through taking noble actions, and in the *Nikāyas* that which is acclaimed as noble is wholesome (Pāli: *kusala*; Sanskrit: *kuśala*). In the same vein, a “noble disciple” is said to be someone who feels ashamed of and dreads “bad behaviour by body, speech and mind” and “anything evil and unwholesome,” and so “lives with energy set upon the abandoning of everything unwholesome and the acquiring of everything wholesome.”<sup>31</sup> The “supreme attainment” is to be perfected in what is wholesome.<sup>32</sup> The Buddha himself was described by Ānanda as one who had abandoned all unwholesome (Pāli: *akusala*; Sanskrit: *akuśala*) states and possessed all wholesome states.<sup>33</sup>

Of crucial interest here are the definitions of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness. What is first of all notable is that, in the *Nikāya* texts, the words wholesome and unwholesome are used to describe bodily, verbal, and mental actions. That is, the referents of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness include what are conventionally considered “external” and what are conventionally considered “internal.” For instance, the standard list of ten wholesome things

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<sup>29</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.271 (*Sangīti Sutta*).

<sup>30</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.81-3 (*Aggañña Sutta*).

<sup>31</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* V.2. For passages of the same effect, see also *Majjhima Nikāya* i.125 (*Kakacūpama Sutta*), ii.11 (*Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.312 (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*); *Anguttara Nikāya* I.58, I.204, V.96, and X.51.

<sup>32</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.25 (*Samañamañdikā Sutta*).

<sup>33</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.115-116 (*Bāhitika Sutta*).

and ten unwholesome things include three kinds of bodily actions, four kinds of verbal actions, and three kinds of mental actions:

Killing living beings is unwholesome, abstention from killing living beings is wholesome; taking what is not given is unwholesome, abstention from taking what is not given is wholesome; misconduct in sensual pleasures is unwholesome, abstention from misconduct in sensual pleasures is wholesome; false speech is unwholesome, abstention from false speech is wholesome; malicious speech is unwholesome, abstention from malicious speech is wholesome; harsh speech is unwholesome, abstention from harsh speech is wholesome; gossip is unwholesome, abstention from gossip is wholesome; covetousness [or greed] is unwholesome, abstention from covetousness is wholesome; ill will [or hatred] is unwholesome, abstention from ill will is wholesome; wrong view [i.e. delusion] is unwholesome, right view is wholesome.<sup>34</sup>

When the referents are mental actions, it seems that what is wholesome is some state or quality that is good and praiseworthy in and of itself, and what is unwholesome is some state or quality that is evil and blameworthy in and of itself. In other words, virtues such as generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom are wholesome, and vices such as greed, ill will, and delusion are unwholesome.<sup>35</sup> In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, in addition to greed and ill will, eight other qualities or mental states are identified as unwholesome: sloth and torpor, excitement, doubt, anger, defiled mind, restless body, laziness, and lack of concentration. The opposites of these vices are wholesome and should be cultivated.<sup>36</sup>

When the referents of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness are bodily and verbal actions, the criteria are more complicated. Sometimes it seems that some bodily and verbal actions, like the mental actions discussed above, are by nature blameworthy or praiseworthy.

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<sup>34</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.489-490 (*Mahāvaccagotta Sutta*). See also *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.46-50 (*Sevitabbāsevitabba Sutta*).

<sup>35</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.489 (*Mahāvaccagotta Sutta*).

<sup>36</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* X.51.

Sometimes it seems that conventional wisdom is to be followed: what is unwholesome is sometimes equated with what is “censured by the wise,” and what is wholesome with what is “praised by the wise.”<sup>37</sup> Sometimes the consideration is whether or not the action in question will lead to painful results for the self and/or for others. For instance, the Buddha instructed his son Rāhula, who had been ordained as a *bhikkhu*, to repeatedly reflect before, during, and after taking every action thus: “Does this action ... lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both?”<sup>38</sup> More often than not, the Buddha’s advice was to consider, simultaneously, the nature of the actions/states, the conventional wisdom, and the consequences for both the self and others.<sup>39</sup>

Abraham Velez de Cea characterizes Buddhist ethics to be a combination of moral realism, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism:

In the Pāli Nikāyas, the consideration of the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of external bodily and verbal actions (moral realism) and internal mental actions (virtue ethics) is to be supplemented by the consideration of the consequences of actions for the happiness of oneself and others (utilitarianism).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For examples see *Majjhima Nikāya* i.114 (*Bāhitika Sutta*) and *Samyutta Nikāya* V.188 (*Satipaṭṭhānasamyutta*).

<sup>38</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.415-419 (*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta*). See also *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.115 (*Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*).

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 1 of Chapter One.

<sup>40</sup> Abraham Velez de Cea, “The Criteria of Goodness in the Pāli Nikāyas and the Nature of Buddhist Ethics,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004): 134-5. In a similar but not entirely the same way, David Loy considers Buddhist ethics a combination of deontology, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism. Loy, “The Karma of Women,” 60-1. Despite the slight difference over deontology or moral realism, both de Cea and Loy recognize virtue ethics and utilitarianism to be components of Buddhist ethics, and both recognize Buddhist ethics to be composed of aspects that can neither be collapsed into each other nor separated from each other.

In the rubric of Buddhist ethics, an action is worth undertaking not just because it is supposed to be virtuous, or just because it is considered good by others, or just because it brings pleasant results for the self, or just because it brings pleasant results for others. That is, early Buddhist ethics cannot be collapsed, as Peter Harvey puts it, into only one of the Kantian, Aristotelian, or Utilitarian models.<sup>41</sup> Whether an action should be undertaken (or cultivated, if it is a mental action) or abandoned cannot be determined by only one criterion. Therefore, David J.

Kalupahana states in *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*,

For the Buddha, the rightness or wrongness of an action or a rule does not consist in its situational or contextual validity alone, but rather in what it does to the person or the group of people in the particular context or situation. Thus simply performing an act or adopting a rule because it is viewed as right does not constitute morality. It is the impact of the action or rule on the total personality or the group involved that gives it a moral character — hence the Buddha’s statement, ‘Be moral or virtuous without being made of morals or virtues’ (*sīlavā no ca sīlamayo*).<sup>42</sup>

Being “wholesome” involves comprehensively considering things from all angles in the web of interconditionality, including one’s own motivations, the various perspectives of the people involved, and the reverberations of the action in its particular context.

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<sup>41</sup> Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 51. Fitting Buddhist ethics into existing Western categories, however, is what many Buddhist scholars have been trying to do. Both Damien Keown and John Ross Carter, for example, align Buddhist ethics with Aristotelian virtue ethics, while Charles Hallisey considers it a system of moral realism. Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 21; John Ross Carter, “Buddhist Ethics?” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, edited by William Schweiker (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 279-80 and 283-4; Charles Hallisey, “Buddhist Ethics: Trajectories,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, 320-1; also see Maria Heim, “Toward a ‘Wider and Juster Initiative’: Recent Comparative Work in Buddhist Ethics,” *Religion Compass* 1, no. 1 (2007): 109-10.

<sup>42</sup> Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 102.

Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg term this type of ethics “contextual pragmatism,” for in this ethical system knowing the right thing to do at any given moment entails knowing the “causal web of existence” in which one finds oneself, being keenly aware of the effects of one’s actions on both oneself and others, and practically grasping “what is appropriate and what is fitting” for both oneself and one’s surroundings without being tangled by egoistic attachments.<sup>43</sup> It is not a coincidence that each of the eight folds of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path starts with the Pāli prefix *sammā* (*samyak* in Sanskrit), which is often translated as “right” but in fact denotes comprehensiveness and completeness. The rightness or properness is predicated on being comprehensive and covering all grounds, not on being in accordance with absolute truth.<sup>44</sup> In this “contextual pragmatism” of Buddhism, a noble person is one who is reflective of the nature of any bodily, verbal, and mental action, watchful of one’s habits and intentions,<sup>45</sup> and mindful of both conventional wisdom and the potential consequences for the self and others, so that his/her conduct is wholesome.

With respect to the thesis of this dissertation, what is particularly noteworthy in the Buddha’s formula of wholesomeness is the consideration for others, both in terms of the moral judgments shared by “the wise” and of what others may experience as a result of one’s deeds, words, and thoughts. The Buddha did not emphasize individual effort to the extent of disregarding the sociality of human existence. An action was not to be taken simply because it might help oneself in one’s individualistic pursuit of spiritual attainment. It is therefore

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<sup>43</sup> Gier and Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will,” 284.

<sup>44</sup> See footnote 15 of Chapter One.

<sup>45</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, ii.25-28 (*Samaṇamaṇḍikā Sutta*).

inappropriate to describe Buddhist ethics as “a form of enlightened egoism.”<sup>46</sup> Not only do the central teachings of the Buddha carried in the early and foundational *Nikāya* texts, such as Interdependent Co-Arising, Non-Self, and Five Aggregates, deny the possibility of purely individualistic spiritual advancement, but the instructions with regard to “good friends” and the very establishment of the Buddhist *Saṅgha* indicate the Buddha’s recognition of the sociality of human existence and testify his unconventional social visions.

## 2.2 Good Friends: The Entire Holy Life

Contrary to some later misunderstandings, the Buddha himself did not unconditionally praise physical seclusion and did not teach that *nibbāna* was an outcome of solitude. In fact, seclusion was listed alongside extreme ascetic practices that the Buddha said he had experimented with but eventually rejected after his enlightenment.<sup>47</sup> Solitary practice of purification was by no means the “authentic” Buddhist teachings. Rather, the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising indicated that the Buddha was aware that human existence was fundamentally social, and the Buddha often instructed his followers, renunciant and lay, to associate with “good friends,” who could be either lay people or renunciates.<sup>48</sup> The criteria of good friends do not include celibacy or other monastic disciplines, though it is conceivably

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<sup>46</sup> K. N. Jayatilleke, “The Ethical Theory of Buddhism,” *The Mahābodhi* 78 (July 1970): 192-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.77-9 (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*).

<sup>48</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.64 (*Cūlaīhanāda Sutta*).

easier for people who have renounced the conventional ways of life to match up with the criteria of good friends.

The Buddha taught that association with “good friends,” otherwise called “noble friends,” “spiritual friends,” “virtuous companions,” or “companions in the holy life,” was crucial in walking the Buddhist path and reaching the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*, the complete cessation of *dukkha*. In a conversation with a non-Buddhist renunciate named Māgandiya, the Buddha said that association with good friends would bring one to hear the *Dhamma*, would prompt one to practice accordingly, and would allow one to know for oneself the formation and cessation of *dukkha* (i.e. Co-Arising).<sup>49</sup> In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, good friendship and ethical discipline were identified as the “forerunner and precursor” for the arising of the Noble Eightfold Path as well as the arising of the “seven factors of enlightenment,”<sup>50</sup> and they were praised as the most effective in bringing forth the fulfillment of the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>51</sup> That is, good friendship is important not only in that it prompts one to make the effort and engage oneself in Buddhist practices, but also in that it brings those practices to fruition, i.e. *nibbāna*. Therefore, when Ānanda, traditionally held to be the disciple with extraordinary memory who had served as the Buddha’s personal attendant and had memorized every single one of the Buddha’s discourses, reported his understanding to the Buddha and said that good friendship constituted half of the

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<sup>49</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.512 (*Māgandiya Sutta*).

<sup>50</sup> The seven factors of enlightenment are mindfulness, discrimination of states, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. See *Samyutta Nikāya* V.29, 31, 32 (*Maggasamyutta*), and V.78, 101 (*Bojjhangesamyutta*).

<sup>51</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* V.35 and 37 (*Maggasamyutta*).

holy life taught by the Buddha, the Buddha corrected him and instructed that good friendship was the *entire* holy life.<sup>52</sup>

It is significant that the following passage with regard to the importance of association with good friends is found in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the collection that was oriented toward personal edification and therefore was more individualistic in orientation than all other *Nikāyas*:

The first thing...for making the immature mind mature for liberation is to have a noble friend, a noble companion, a noble associate. ... When...a monk has a noble friend, a noble companion and associate, it can be expected that he will be virtuous...that he will engage in talk befitting the austere life and helpful to mental clarity...that his energy will be set upon the abandoning of everything unwholesome and the acquiring of everything wholesome...that he will be equipped with the wisdom that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.<sup>53</sup>

The pre-condition for the maturity of mind, for being virtuous, for being energetic in the cultivation of wholesomeness, and for developing mental clarity and wisdom, is association with good friends. Sulak Sivaraksa explains the importance of good friends in the Buddhist path thus:

*Kalyanamittas*, or virtuous companions, are crucial to spiritual growth. Friends are the only people who can give us the criticism and the support that we need to transcend our own limitations and can comfort us if we fail. If we become so self-absorbed that we do not have *kalyanamittas* in our lives, we stagnate in complacency and self-righteousness.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.87 (*Kosalasamyutta*) and V.2 (*Maggasamyutta*).

<sup>53</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* IX.3.

<sup>54</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, "The Virtuous Friends of Christianity and Buddhism," in *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 52.

As aforementioned, in the Buddhist path spiritual advancement is inseparable from ethical conduct, and whether or not a conduct is ethical and wholesome can only be decided after all dimensions and ramifications of that conduct have been considered, and “good friends” prevent purely egoistic considerations by supplementing different perspectives. They point out our “evil conducts”<sup>55</sup> and they “raise embarrassing issues that we may not want to hear and remind us of the benefits of selflessness and goodness.”<sup>56</sup> Positively, they provide support and inspiration, and sometimes serve as role models, in our cultivation of wholesomeness and wisdom.

The functions that good friends are supposed to serve at the same time denote the criteria of good friends. They are supposed to inspire and support one to be ethical, so they need to be either accomplished in virtues or dedicated to the cultivation of wholesome bodily, verbal, and mental actions. They are supposed to inspire and help one acquire wisdom, which in the Buddhist discourses means seeing Co-Arising and taking the best actions, so they need to be capable of considering things from different angles or to be having a very different perspective than one’s own. The passage from the *Anguttara Nikāya* quoted above was directed toward Buddhist renunciates, and the following passage, also from the *Anguttara Nikāya*, was directed toward lay followers:

And what is good friendship? ... in whatever village or town a family man dwells, he associates with householders or their sons, whether young or old, who are of mature virtue, accomplished in faith, virtue, generosity and wisdom; he converses with them and

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<sup>55</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.11 (*Sabbāsava Sutta*).

<sup>56</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, “Blessings and Courage,” in *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 68.

engages in discussions with them. He emulates them in regard to their accomplishment in faith, virtue, generosity and wisdom. This is called good friendship.<sup>57</sup>

Noteworthy is that the good friends recommended to Buddhist renunciates are not qualitatively different from those recommended to lay followers of the Buddha. Both groups are encouraged to associate with people who are mature in virtue as well as in wisdom, and for both groups the association with good friends is recommended because it is conducive to the development of virtue and wisdom in oneself.

It is undeniable that, while good friendship was considered most effective in prompting people to walk the Buddhist path and bringing Buddhist practices to fulfillment, in the *Nikāyas* seclusion was also presented as one of the bases of the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>58</sup> On occasions the Buddha explicitly told the Buddhist renunciates to “make an exertion in seclusion” so that they might develop the wisdom to see things as they really are.<sup>59</sup> Very often it seemed that seclusion was a pre-condition for those advanced meditative states (Pāli: *jhāna*-s; Sanskrit: *dhyāna*-s)<sup>60</sup> that usually preceded, but did not necessarily lead to, the experience of enlightenment.

The seclusion that the Buddha recommended, however, was not physical isolation. For instances, when seclusion was mentioned as one of the bases of the Noble Eightfold Path, it was

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<sup>57</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* VIII.54. Also see Carter, “Buddhist Ethics?” note 1.

<sup>58</sup> For examples, see *Samyutta Nikāya* V. 2, 30-32, 35-36, 38 (*Maggasamyutta*).

<sup>59</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.15 (*Khandhasamyutta*), IV.80, 144 (*Salāyatanasamyutta*), and V.414 (*Saccasamyutta*).

<sup>60</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* II.210-1 (*Kassapasamyutta*), IV.225, 236 (*Vedanāsamyyutta*), V.198, 213 (*Indriyasamyutta*), and V.307 (*Jhānasamyutta*); *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.40 (*Sallekha Sutta*), i.89 (*Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*), i.117 (*Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*), i.246-7 (*Mahāsaccaka Sutta*), iii.4 (*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.131 (*Pāsādika Sutta*); *Anguttara Nikāya* IX.36.

invariably listed alongside dispassion and cessation, and the injunction “make an exertion in seclusion” was always accompanied by the injunction “develop concentration.” The pre-condition of advanced meditative states was not solitude in the physical sense, but rather seclusion from sensual desires and from unwholesome states such as greed and hate, anger and resentment, contempt and insolence, envy and avarice, deceit and fraud, obstinacy, rivalry, conceit and arrogance, vanity and negligence.<sup>61</sup> That is, the seclusion presented to be one of the bases of the Noble Eightfold Path and the pre-condition of advanced meditative states was not avoidance of human contact, but disassociation from the desires and emotions that would impede concentration as well as cause afflictions to self and others.<sup>62</sup> In fact, without seclusion from sensual desires and unwholesome states, the Buddha instructed, physical seclusion is futile.<sup>63</sup>

Physical solitude is not entirely without benefits, however. One of the obvious benefits of “going forth from the household life into homelessness,” i.e. becoming a renunciate, is seclusion and distance from the kinds of social situations, interpersonal dynamics, and behavioral patterns that incur or reinforce egocentric oppositions and generate unwholesome thoughts, words, and deeds. It may allow them the psychological space to develop concentration, work through their deeply seated emotions, desires, and tendencies, and perhaps develop some insights and moral strengths for dealing with troubling situations that they could not properly deal with

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<sup>61</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.14-16 (*Dhammadāyāda Sutta*).

<sup>62</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.90 (*Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*).

<sup>63</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.197 (*Vanasamyutta*),

before.<sup>64</sup> For this reason, physical seclusion was recommended by the Buddha to some of his followers for it may be conducive to the seclusion from unwholesomeness for some people.

Nonetheless, the Buddha did not recommend physical solitude for everyone. It may generate fear and dread, which are considered unwholesome,<sup>65</sup> or it may indulge self-centered, “unpurified” thoughts, which are also unwholesome. Besides, physical seclusion is not remotely as important as seclusion from unwholesome states and behaviors, and by no means was it a *sine qua non* of Buddhist practices. If the purpose of leaving the household life were simply to terminate all of one’s social relations so that one could pursue mental quietude with no regard of other people, the Buddha would not have recommended the association with good friends, nor would he have established a community for his renunciant followers while the norm amongst the anti-brāhmanical movements at the time was for renunciates to dwell in forests in isolation and to wander about individually. One of the attributes of *arahant-s* (Sanskrit: *arhat*; “worthy one,” referring to one who has attained enlightenment) in general and the Buddha in particular, after all, was dwelling in a friendly and compassionate way among all living beings and existing for the welfare and happiness of many.<sup>66</sup> Neither the central Buddhist concepts nor the Buddhist institution supports an individualistic, quietist interpretation of the Buddhist *Dhamma*.

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<sup>64</sup> After one meditation retreat in the countryside, Sangharakshita reports that all of the retreatants “discovered that simply being away from the city, away from the daily grind of work and home life, and being in the company of other Buddhists, with nothing to think about except the Dharma, was sufficient to raise their level of consciousness.” Sangharakshita, *What Is the Sangha: The Nature of Spiritual Community* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2000), 244.

<sup>65</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.21 (*Bhayabherava Sutta*).

### 2.3 Four Assemblies of the *Sangha*: De-Essentializing Social Hierarchies

Those who interpret Buddhism as individualistic pursuit of mystical experiences generally disregard the fact that the *Sangha* is listed alongside the Buddha and the *Dhamma* as one of the Three Gems/Jewels/Treasures (Pāli: *tiratna*; Sanskrit: *triratna*), also referred to as the Three Refuges (Pāli: *tisaraṇa*; Sanskrit: *triśaraṇa*). That is, the Buddhist assembly or community is, or should be, of as much importance as the Teacher and the Teaching. The fact that the *Sangha* is one of the Three Gems reflects the emphasis placed on companionship and community in Buddhism.

This being recognized, the role of the *Sangha* is still subject to various misunderstandings on the part of outsiders, as well as abuses on the part of insiders. Some, in the spirit of considering Buddhism a world-fleeing religion, misunderstand the *Sangha* to be a collective term for the irresponsible individuals who were unwilling to take up social obligations and who loved to wander around.<sup>67</sup> Others, perceiving the goal of Buddhism to be an other-worldly mystical state of bliss, misrepresent the *Sangha* as a group of elite mystics under the control of the Buddha, the “king of *Dharma*,” and who, by means of monastic rules, maintain their spiritual purity and claim superiority to the laity.<sup>68</sup> To be sure, in the long history of Buddhism it has happened that some people would join the Buddhist monastic orders for reasons other than

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<sup>66</sup> See *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.83 (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*) and *Anguttara Nikāya*, I.211.

<sup>67</sup> Liz Wilson made this suggestion in “Celibacy and the Social World,” in *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19-20.

pursuing *nibbāna*. It has been known that some had joined the orders to avoid taxes and to shun legal responsibilities. In addition, for underprivileged people who had no other access to educational resources or who were systematically subject to inhumane treatments that were not uncommon in highly stratified societies, becoming renunciates could be their only means of acquiring education and shelter. Women, in particular, had few escapes in patriarchal societies in which their nature was defined as bearing children and serving their husband's family. Some might have found it much more preferable to become *bhikkhunīs* than functioning as baby-making machines and household servants. There have also been times when not only great reverence would be paid to *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* but great wealth would also flow into their hands and make them appear to be the elites in the society. However, an examination of the *Nikāya* texts will reveal that, despite the later developments in some Buddhist societies, the *Sangha* was originally not established to be a group of elite mystics who were to pursue their spiritual advancement individualistically. Furthermore, the demarcation and opposition between the spiritual order and the secular society were neither posited by the Buddha nor justifiable when viewed against the Buddha's teachings.

### 2.3.1 *Renunciates and Laity*

Perhaps due to the widely adopted translation of the word *Sangha* as "monastic order," the Buddhist *Sangha* is often misunderstood or misrepresented as a hermitage where the

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<sup>68</sup> Chai-Shin Yu, *Early Buddhism and Christianity: A Comparative Study of the Founders' Authority, the Community, and the Discipline* (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 44-62.

“ultimate ethic of world-rejection”<sup>69</sup> prevails and from which laymen and laywomen are excluded.<sup>70</sup> From quite a different perspective, those fascinated with the egalitarian and democratic aspects of Buddhism assert the complete equality of those who renounce and those who stay in the household life. In the former understanding, the meaning of renunciation is misconstrued as a complete rejection of not only social conventions but also social relations. As a result, an opposition between the renunciant life and the household life is exaggerated. In the latter understanding, the significance of renunciation is downplayed, and those who do not renounce the conventional ways of life are idealized as people with stronger willpower who can overcome the impediments brought by the household life, without having to resort to renunciation.<sup>71</sup>

According to the *Nikāya* texts in the Pāli Canon, however, even though the Buddha manifestly showed his willingness to instruct the *Dhamma* to all those who were willing to learn,<sup>72</sup> he was mainly addressing those who had in fact renounced the conventional ways of life. At the same time, the importance attached to renunciation indicated neither a complete rejection of social relations, nor any intrinsic superiority of homelessness or isolation *per se*. In fact, the teaching of Co-Arising both provides the reason for *Dhamma* pursuers to give up the householder’s life and repudiates the efficacy of cutting off all social connections with people in the larger society.

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<sup>69</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, translated by Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1993), 266.

<sup>70</sup> Yu, *Early Buddhism and Christianity*, 47, 49, and 54.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> For instances, see *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.44 (*Vekhanassa Sutta*) and *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.55 (*Udumbarika-Sīhanāda Sutta*).

“In Pali usage,” Richard H. Robinson, Willard L. Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu explain the meaning of the word *Sangha* in *Buddhist Religions*:

The Sangha in its ārya (ideal) sense consists of all people, lay or ordained, who have acquired the pure Dharma-eye, gaining at least a glimpse of the Deathless. In a conventional sense, Sangha denotes the communities of monks and nuns. The two meanings overlap but are not necessarily identical. Some members of the ideal Sangha are not ordained; some monastics have yet to acquire the Dharma-eye.<sup>73</sup>

The full Buddhist *Sangha* as established by the Buddha consists of four assemblies: the *bhikkhu*-s (male renunciates), *bhikkhunī*-s (female renunciates), *upāsaka*-s (male lay followers), and *upāsika*-s (female lay followers). In the ārya sense, the *Sangha* includes all those who have acquired the “pure Dharma-eye,” otherwise designated as “stream-enterers” (*sotāpanna*-s).<sup>74</sup> The stream-enterers have practiced steadfastly and been virtuous, and they understand “the origin and the passing away” enough to have gained a first glimpse of *nibbāna*, meaning they will reach enlightenment within seven lifetimes at maximum.<sup>75</sup>

It seems that the all too common equation of modern-day Theravāda Buddhism with early Buddhism has prescribed to laity a role to which lay people in early Buddhism were not confined. For example, Damien Keown explains the role of laity in the (early) Buddhist *Sangha* as such:

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<sup>73</sup> Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> In the Buddhist discourses, the “stream-enterers” are those who have known the *Dhamma* directly for themselves. By contrast, the “Dhamma-followers” (*dhammānusārī*) are those who are still investigating the *Dhamma* intellectually and experientially, and the “faith-followers” (*saddhānusārī*) are those who accept the *Dhamma* based on trust, with limited understanding.

<sup>75</sup> See *Samyutta Nikāya* III.160-161 (*Khandhasamyutta*); III.203-216 (*Diṭṭhisamyutta*); III.225 (*Okkantisamyutta*); V.193-194, 205, 207 (*Indriyasamyutta*); V.357 (*Sotāpattisamyutta*); *Anguttara Nikāya* I.235.

In the early tradition... Lay practice centres on moral conduct and providing material support for the Samgha through offerings of food and robes... Through the performance of good deeds of this kind it is hoped that merit (puṇya) will be gained which will secure improved material conditions in this life and the next, with the hope that at a more remote future time the opportunity will arise to renounce the world and become a monk. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the role of the laity is more prominent...<sup>76</sup>

The passage above assumes that, before the arising of Mahāyāna Buddhism, what was practiced by renunciates was categorically different from what was practiced by the laity, who had to accumulate enough merit over many lifetimes and be reborn with the opportunity to become renunciates, before they could get access to the practices pertinent to the attainment of enlightenment. Thus, the above quote suggests that, in the pre-Mahāyāna era, those who entered the monastic orders were necessarily superior to those who remained in the household life in the sense that the former must have had accumulated much more merit in past lives to be on the path to enlightenment, while the latter had no chance in becoming *arahants*.

However, as Hammalawa Saddhatissa points out, “The view that the householder cannot attain to arahathood is, however, not supported by the early scriptures. Hence, it may be a postulated view which crept into Buddhist scholarship.”<sup>77</sup> The *Dhamma* is taught to both renunciant and lay followers, both men and women, and it is said that any person who is willing

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<sup>76</sup> Damien Keown, “upāsaka,” in *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, 317. However, in the Mahāyāna usage the word *Sangha* does not necessarily include lay followers. In the Chinese language, for example, the word used to translate *Sangha*, “*seng*,” is also used to refer to *bhikkhus* or, on occasion, the monastic order as a whole. That is to say, more often than not, the word “*seng*” only invokes male renunciates; neither female renunciates nor lay practitioners are included. Compounded by the traditional deference paid to teachers, for many Chinese Buddhists “taking refuge in the *Sangha*” translates to unconditional respect for monastic members of the *Sangha*, especially the *bhikkhus*.

<sup>77</sup> Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1997), 86. See also Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), 212.

to practice as instructed “will soon know and see for himself [or herself].”<sup>78</sup> That is, “the possibility of realization which is accessible to the monk is also accessible to the layman.”<sup>79</sup> As a matter of fact, as many as twenty-one lay *arahant*-s were mentioned in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. Robinson et al. observe,

All the early lineages agreed that the laity could attain the first three degrees of Awakening and remain in the household life. Some lineages, such as the Theravāda, maintained that, although lay people could attain arhatship, lay arhats had to ordain or else die within seven days after their attainment, for the lay state could not support an arhat’s purity.<sup>80</sup>

This view that the household life was too impure to sustain enlightenment and so a lay *arahant* had to enter a monastic order or die, as Saddhatissa points out, is not sanctioned by the early

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<sup>78</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.44 (*Vekhanassa Sutta*).

<sup>79</sup> Edmund F. Perry and Shanta Ratnayaka, “The Sangha as Refuge: in the Theravāda Buddhist Tradition,” in *The Threefold Refuge in the Theravāda Buddhist Tradition*, edited by John Ross Carter, George Doherty Bond, Edmund F. Perry, and Shanta Ratnayaka (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1982), 51. In the *Nidānasamyutta*, the Buddha narrated that after his own enlightenment he had explained the *Dhamma* to the *bhikkhu*-s, the *bhikkhunī*-s, the *upāsaka*-s, and the *upāsika*-s. See *Samyutta Nikāya* II.107 (*Nidānasamyutta*). See also *Samyutta Nikāya* V.357 (*Sotāpattisamyutta*), *Majjhima Nikāya* i.491 (*Mahāvaccagotta Sutta*), and *Anguttara Nikāya* III.211.

<sup>80</sup> Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 58. The “first three degrees of Awakening” are stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), once-returning (*sakadāgāmitā*), and non-returning (*anāgāmitā*). A once-returner is one who will come back to this world only one more time before reaching enlightenment, and a non-returner is one who is about to reach enlightenment but still has residues of clinging so that s/he cannot reach enlightenment in this lifetime as *arahant*-s do — after the end of this life, s/he will not come back to this world but will attain enlightenment at the time of death, or after death and before s/he is reborn in one of the “Pure Abodes,” (*suddhāvāsa*) or sometime after being reborn in one of the “Pure Abodes.” The Buddhist cosmos is divided into three realms: the Sense-Sphere Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm. The Pure Abodes are the five highest planes in the Form Realm to which only non-returners are reborn. For a succinct account of the characteristics of the degrees of Awakening, see Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 39-40.

texts, either.<sup>81</sup> In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, it is recorded that the Buddha, in a hall full of *bhikkhu*-s, praised a householder named Ugga for having eight “wonderful and marvellous qualities,” one of which was, significantly, preaching the *Dhamma* to the *bhikkhu*-s.<sup>82</sup> This passage acknowledges the possibility that a lay person might exceed the renunciates in understanding and/or conveying the *Dhamma*. The fact that the majority of laity might prefer merit-making to subjecting themselves to the rigorous systematic disciplines taught by the Buddha did not prove that the laity were excluded from learning the *Dhamma* on the advanced levels or confined to merit-making by providing material support to the renunciates. Nor did it prove that the laity were relegated to the periphery of the Buddhist *Sangha* as a whole and excluded from the *Sangha* of stream-enterers.

In addition, lay people were by no means peripheral in the formation and operation of the early Buddhist *Sangha*. As Ian J. Coghlan argues in “A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics”:

Although the laity formally took a minor role in religious activities, it is clear they were influential during the period of the formation of the rules. The laity held strong opinions concerning what recluses could or should do, because they formed the economic support of the mendicants. By freeing them from the harvest and other economic activities, they granted the ordained *sangha* a privileged social position. However, their recognition of this status depended on the way the mendicants behaved and whether they properly represented the religious ideal held by society. In return for economic support, the laity were seen to benefit by their accumulation of merit (*puñña*). However, the theory of merit depended on the actual ethical status of the *sangha* in relation to whom merit was accumulated. Therefore, the laity had a vested interest in the *sangha* maintaining high religious and social standards.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, 87.

<sup>82</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* VIII.21.

<sup>83</sup> Coghlan, “A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics,” 152-153.

Granted, the majority of the laity was probably more concerned with merit-making. The concern with merit-making itself, however, prompted the lay people to expect and even demand high ethical standards of the renunciates in the *Sangha*, for it was believed that the more ethical the recipients were, the more merit the benefactors would have made. Given the fact that the renunciates in the early *Sangha* did depend on the voluntary material contributions from the laity for life subsistence, the merit-making laity actually had considerable influence over the behavioral codes of the renunciates: “When standards of behavior slipped, so did respect and donations. ...Enforcing careful observation of the precepts ensured that high standards of conduct were kept, which would inspire the laity and, consequentially, garner sufficient material support for the Sangha.”<sup>84</sup>

As evidenced in the early texts of the Pāli Canon, the Buddha, while urging the lay followers to respect the renunciates, took the criticisms from the laity quite seriously and changed the monastic rules accordingly from time to time. That is, contrary to the belief of some Buddhists nowadays, the respect that the laity were supposed to pay to the renunciates in the *Sangha* did not include unconditional acceptance of the latter’s behavior. One does not instantaneously become wholesome and noble simply by joining a monastic order, and therefore a monastic person is not off-limits for criticism.

Nonetheless, the renunciates remain the center of the Buddhist *Sangha*. *Bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* are expected to teach the *Dhamma* to the laity and/or respond to their inquiry on a

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<sup>84</sup> Tsomo, “Is The Bhiksuni Vinaya Sexist?” 63. Also see Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 62.

daily basis.<sup>85</sup> They are also expected to exemplify ethical and peaceful behavior and thereby bring positive influences to the larger society.<sup>86</sup> In terms of what they are expected to do as well as what they are recorded to have achieved, it seems, as Daniel B. Stevenson puts it, that there is a “gulf between lay and monastic roles.”<sup>87</sup> The gulf, however, does not result from merit-making in past lives on the part of the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. Buddhist renunciates, in general, have parted with the conventional ways of life that centers around self-interests and committed themselves to the alternative ways of living. A person reflective enough would understand the difficulty of giving up the various kinds of sensual pleasures (or the difficulty of getting rid of the *longing* for sensual pleasures, particularly in the case of the underprivileged people) in the conventional ways of life in the household, just as an alcoholic who intends to quit knows how difficult it is to fight his/her craving for, and dependency on, alcohol. That is, lay people who are introspective enough to know that they are yet to be able to part with what the renunciates have determined to give up, would learn to admire the extraordinary determination of the latter.

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<sup>85</sup> See *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.44 (*Vekhanassa Sutta*); Rājavaramuni, “Foundations of Buddhist Social Ethics, 29.

<sup>86</sup> In the *Cūḷagosinga Sutta* it was exclaimed by gods of different realms that it was “a great gain for the Vajjians” to have among them the mini-*sangha* of Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila, for they demonstrated the possibility of moral achievement and served as the model of harmonious co-existence. *Majjhima Nikāya* i.210 (*Cūḷagosinga Sutta*).

<sup>87</sup> Daniel B. Stevenson, “Tradition and Change in the *Sangha*: A Buddhist Historian Looks at Buddhism in America,” in *Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society: An International Symposium*, eds. Charles Wei-hsün Fu and Sandra A. Wawrytko (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1991), 255.

Moreover, after being admitted to a monastic order, a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī* is circumscribed by hundreds of precepts and scriptural and mental trainings that help induce wholesome bodily, verbal, mental states. Peter D. Hershock puts it this way:

Members of the ordained community are at the ‘center’ of Buddhist community, not because of their homelessness as such, but because of the strength of their vow — the strength of their expressed commitment to cultivating *bodhicitta* or relationships intent on enlightenment.<sup>88</sup>

Sangharakshita, founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, states that the Buddhist life is a committed life.<sup>89</sup> The renunciates’ commitment to that training understandably would earn respect from the laity, and senior renunciates who have undergone that training for a long time and have successfully developed wholesome states would be revered by novices who are only at the beginning stages. It is however erroneous to confuse the effect with the cause and demand respect purely on the basis of seniority in the monastic orders, or purely on the basis of being in the monastic orders as such. A novice renunciate who has been diligent in cultivating wholesomeness may be more respectful than a senior in lack of cultivation, and a committed practicing lay person, such as Uggā mentioned above, may prove to be nobler and more worthy of respect than a lax *bhikkhu*. The reason that the *Sangha* is one of the Three Gems, as Perry and Ratnayaka argue, is and should be the “spiritual attainment” of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*,<sup>90</sup> which is acquired through long-term, rigorous, systematic moral and mental disciplines. The

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<sup>88</sup> Peter D. Hershock, “Family Matters: Dramatic Interdependence and the Intimate Realization of Buddhist Liberation,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 (2000): 103.

<sup>89</sup> Sangharakshita, *What Is the Sangha*, 16.

<sup>90</sup> Perry and Ratnayaka, “The Sangha as Refuge,” 49.

commitment to Buddhist training and development of wholesomeness should be the true criterion of worthiness of respect.

Generally speaking, though, the Buddhist monastic orders do provide an environment in which behavioral and mental transformation are far more likely to happen.<sup>91</sup> The larger society, David J. Kalupahana points out, more often than not generates “possessive individualism”<sup>92</sup> and makes one attached to things (or persons<sup>93</sup>) one owns, caring for nothing but the interests of oneself or one’s own group. The “homeless life” allows one to rethink and eventually renounce that possessive individualism nurtured by the conventional way of life.

At the Buddha’s time, in particular, with the military expansion of monarchies (which were rapidly destroying the republics at the foothills of the Himālayas, including the Śākya tribe of the Buddha<sup>94</sup>) and the extension of agriculture (which were replacing the older pastoral

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<sup>91</sup> See section 2.2 above.

<sup>92</sup> Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> In the ancient patriarchal society at the time of the Buddha, a man was supposed to “own” his wife (or wives) and children, and an upper-class man was supposed to “own” some slaves in addition to his family.

<sup>94</sup> The Buddha, Siddhāttha Gotama (Sanskrit: Siddhārtha Gautama), was born of the Śākya tribe, hence often given the epithet *Śākyamuni*, “the sage of the Śākyas.” In the accounts of the Buddha’s life that first appeared in the first century C.E., long after monarchies had become the norm in the Indian political scene, the Buddha-to-be Siddhārtha was depicted as a prince who was to take the throne and inherit the Śākya Kingdom from his father King Śuddhodana. The polity of the Śākya tribe at the time of the Buddha, however, was republic (*gana-sangha*), in which economic resources were held communally and political decisions were made collectively by an assembly of (male) elders. Siddhārtha’s father Śuddhodana, therefore, was not the King. He was probably one of the elders who held a seat at the assembly of the Śākyan republic. Toward the end of the Buddha’s life, the Śākyan republic was annexed by the monarchy of Kosala (Sanskrit: Kośala), which then was absorbed into the monarchical empire of Magadha. See Uma Chakravarti, “The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality,” *Social Compass* 33 (1986): 200-2 and 214-5; Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 5; Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, 244-5; Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 25-6; Harvey, *An*

economy, changing the landholding patterns, and creating a new group of people who were exploited and left in destitution),<sup>95</sup> “householders” (Pāli: *gahapati-s*; Sanskrit: *gṛhapati-s*) were in fact a status term for those who owned property, headed agricultural productions, employed and exploited servile labors, accumulated capital, invested in trades, and were primary taxpayers in the monarchical kingdoms.<sup>96</sup> That is, a “householder” was not any lay person but a male who had benefited from the changing social situations and thus might find it especially difficult to part with the possessive “household life” of production and reproduction. Uma Chakravarti notes that “even though the *gahapatis* dominate the pages of the Buddhist texts for their material support to the *sangha* not even one *gahapati* actually renounced the householder status and became a *bhikkhu*.”<sup>97</sup> Contrary to the “household life” that was likely to generate and reinforce possessive individualism and social stratification, the homeless life in the Buddhist monastic order was communal, egalitarian, and without private property. It is for this reason that one of the stock phrases in the early texts was: “The household life is close and dusty, the homeless life is free as air. It is not easy, living the household life, to live the fully-perfected holy life, purified and polished like a conch-shell.”<sup>98</sup>

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*Introduction to Buddhism*, 11 and 14-5; William Theodore de Bary, ed., *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 4-5.

<sup>95</sup> Chakravarti, “The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality,” 202-6; also see Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 7-16; Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Chakravarti, “The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality,” 204 and 206; also in *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 16-29 and 67-71.

<sup>97</sup> Chakravarti, “The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality,” 216.

<sup>98</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* i.63 (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*). Also in *Majjhima Nikāya* i.345 (*Kandaraka Sutta*) and i.240 (*Mahāsaccaka Sutta*).

The homeless life is conducive to significant transformation in that it removes one from the life defined by individual interests and possessions. Chakravarti asserts that “The *sangha* was devised as a parallel society where one could construct, with immediate effect, a new structure of relations.”<sup>99</sup> The point of renouncing the household life is not to separate oneself from the world, but to abandon the narrowly-defined self-identity so that one’s action, speech, and thoughts are no longer dictated by egocentric impulses and selfish considerations. When the inputs one receives are no longer self-interests and conflicts, the outputs are less likely to be hot temper and self-centered behaviors. Factoring in the rigorous systematic training, renunciates in the *Sangha* are much more likely to develop wholesome behavior and wholesome states, much more likely to acquire an advanced understanding of the Buddhist *Dhamma*, and much more likely to reach enlightenment than lay followers of the Buddha, even though they may have equal potential and may have access to the same *Dhamma*. Letting go of the restrained concept of self and undergoing monastic trainings, gradually the renunciate is able to view things with a less biased mind, to take into consideration the welfare of more and more beings in this world, and to manifest more wholesome states and behaviors.

Thus viewed, renunciation in the Buddhist *Sangha* is neither outright self-denial nor complete rejection of, and separation from, the world of the laity. For one thing, *bhikkhu*-s and *bhikkhunī*-s are required to “maintain an appropriate degree of social responsibility”<sup>100</sup> by way of associating with lay people on a daily basis. Even a forest-dwelling *bhikkhu* (who does not

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<sup>99</sup> Chakravarti, “The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality,” 213.

<sup>100</sup> Rājavaramuni, “Foundations of Buddhist Social Ethics, 31.

live in the monastic community) is supposed to have this social responsibility.<sup>101</sup> For another, the *Dhamma* is open to all those who are willing to learn and practice. While the moral rules generally expected of the laity and renunciates are different, they differ in degree, with the rules for renunciates being much more numerous and strict. For example, while the renunciates are required to keep celibacy, lay people are only told to refrain from sexual misconduct. Yet the principle of non-attachment to sensual pleasures is the same for both groups; the difference lies in degree. Likewise, the basic principle of non-harming and watching carefully one's own actions, speeches, and thoughts is the same regardless of the number of precepts that one vows to take. What the laity need to do and can do is not categorically different from what the renunciates need to do and can do, nor are they unconnected or unbridgeable. Despite the later developments in some schools, the Buddhist monastic order was not established to replace the male brāhmins in their monopoly of religious matters and in their claim of inherent superiority to the rest of society. It was established to provide an environment that allowed men and women from all social backgrounds to reorient themselves and learn to relate to each other in non-exploitive, non-hierarchical ways.

### 2.3.2 *Class and Gender*

Ancient India at the Buddha's time was increasingly stratified. It was a time when social hierarchies were crystallized along religious, economic, and political lines, with women pushed further down the social ladder. Religiously, male brāhmins continued to monopolize

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<sup>101</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.472 (*Gulissāni Sutta*).

religious rituals and sought to legitimize caste and gender hierarchy by claiming the innate superiority of the brāhmin caste on the one hand, and male brāhmins' exclusive efficacy in performing rituals on the other. Economically, the expansion of agriculture accelerated the breaking down of the older communal control of the land and created a new economic category of landowners and taxpayers who would use (and frequently exploit) hired laborers, accumulate capital, and engage in trade. Politically, the formation and expansion of monarchical kingdoms encroached upon the relatively democratic communal life in clan republics, heralded in the normalcy of hereditary despotic kingship and the use of military power.

The rampage of military antagonisms among kingdoms and/or clans and the increase of private property, together with the patrilineal descent system, further resulted in women's low social status and the treatment of women as property. No longer needed in production due to the use of servile laborers, women in wealthier families were now confined to home and their main function was to produce legitimate male heirs and serve their menfolk. Destitute women had to spend their whole lives in menial labor.<sup>102</sup> Women were considered service-providing and heir-bearing property of men, frequently acquired through violence regardless of class origins. Tighter control of women's chastity was therefore enforced in order to ensure legitimate patrilineal succession. This androcentric and sexist bias took a different form amongst various anti-brāhmanical wandering ascetics. Instead of seeing women as servants and

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<sup>102</sup> See Chakravarti, "The Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Environment at the Time of Buddha," in *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 7-64; Chakravarti, "The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality," 200-8; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 354-5.

heir-bearers, the wandering ascetics generally saw them as temptresses since asceticism was seen as a prerogative of males and celibacy was the norm amongst the male ascetics.<sup>103</sup>

As shown in previous sections, in addition to directly refuting the brāhmins' claim of inherent superiority, the Buddha also gave the terms *brāhmaṇas* and *ariyan* a moral thrust and demanded the self-proclaimed nobilities that they demonstrate noble behaviors. Furthermore, the Buddha instructed the well-to-do "householders" such as Sigālaka to be kind and respectful not only to those who were supposedly superior to them, but also those who were generally considered inferior.<sup>104</sup> Most significant of all, the Buddha established an alternative society that was open to men and women all castes and made it clear that, in the *Sangha* of renunciates, caste distinction was no longer relevant:

Just as the mighty rivers on reaching the great ocean lose their former names and designations and are just reckoned as the great ocean; even so, when members of the four castes — nobles, Brahmins, commoners and menials — go forth from home into the homeless life in this Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata [another designation for the Buddha], they lose their former names and lineage and are reckoned only as renunciants following the Son of the Sakyans [i.e. the Buddha himself].<sup>105</sup>

In the larger society, people's social and economic standing was determined by their roles in production and reproduction. In the *Sangha*, the male and female renunciates abstained from both production and reproduction, and therefore they were not defined or stratified as they would have been in the larger society. There were no caste lineages, no noble clan names or the lack thereof, and no privileges accompanying wealth.

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<sup>103</sup> Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 355.

<sup>104</sup> See page 35 of Chapter One.

<sup>105</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* VIII.19 and IV.202.

The very term “*sangha*,” in fact, invoked an older political ideal. The Śākya tribe that the Buddha was born into was one of the republics at the hills of the Himālayas. In those clan republics the means of production was held communally, and the political decisions were made collectively by the political assembly called “*sangha*.”<sup>106</sup> While his teachings to his lay followers commanded more equity and more humaneness on the part of the men of high social status, the institution he established for his renunciant followers conveyed the principle of sharing and collective decision-making. Thus considered, the Buddha may not have been a social activist in the modern sense since he did not lead any public protests or instigate rebellions, but he held unconventional views with regard to the ways in which individual persons should have related to each other, and he was pushing for a more egalitarian society through non-adversarial means.

The *Sangha* of the Buddhist renunciates in history was not completely egalitarian, though, and it is still not in most Buddhist schools. Hierarchies generally exist along the lines of seniority and gender. The “eight special rules” required of female renunciates, in particular, seem to have reflected the misogyny of the Buddha, or of the early male Buddhist renunciates who were responsible for the compilation of the Pāli Canon. These eight special rules relegate the *bhikkhunī*-s to a secondary status in the *Sangha* and stipulate their dependence on the *bhikkhu*-s. Under the rules, a *bhikkhunī* must pay respect to *bhikkhu*-s (fully ordained male renunciates, not including novices), irrespective of her seniority in the *Sangha*. She may not

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<sup>106</sup> See footnote 94 of this chapter; also see Sukumar Dutt, *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1978), 62-5; Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, 124-5; de Bary, ed., *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan*, 46 and 48-9; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 25. Other such republican self-governments include the Vajjis, the Mallas, and the Licchavis.

criticize or reprimand *bhikkhu*-s, while *bhikkhu*-s may reprimand *bhikkhunī*-s, and *bhikkhunī*-s are to invite a *bhikkhu* twice a month to give an exhortation. A *bhikkhunī* must be ordained by both the *Bhikkhu Sangha* and the *Bhikkhunī Sangha*, whereas a *bhikkhu* only needs to be ordained by the *Bhikkhu Sangha*. In the case of grievous offense, a *bhikkhunī* must be disciplined and reinstated by both *Sanghas*. And the *Bhikkhunī Sangha* must hold their rain retreat where a *bhikkhu* is present.<sup>107</sup> If these rules had been prescribed by the Buddha from the beginning of the Buddhist *Sangha*, it seems, they would have considerably curtailed the Buddhist women's activities and their spiritual achievement.

However, textual and archaeological evidence shows that, in the first few centuries of Buddhism, both female renunciates and lay women were quite active, reputable, and advanced in understanding, preaching, practicing, and realizing the Buddhist *Dhamma*, which suggests a much later origin of the eight special rules. Aside from the *Therīgāthā* that recorded and celebrated the spiritual attainments of one hundred and two *bhikkhunī arahants*, the *Nikāya* texts themselves witnessed the importance and eminence of a number of *bhikkhunī*-s and lay women followers in early Buddhism. In the *Mahāvaccagotta Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha said there were far more than five hundred in number in each of the following categories: *bhikkhu*-s who attained arahantship, *bhikkhunī*-s who attained arahantship, male celibate lay followers who became "non-returners," female celibate lay followers who became non-returners,

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<sup>107</sup> For the specifics and ramifications of, and possible reasons for, these eight special rules, see Tsomo, "Is The Bhiksuni Vinaya Sexist?" 48-56; Ellison Banks Findly, "Women Teachers of Women: Early Nuns 'Worthy of My Confidence'," in *Women's Buddhism, Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, edited by Ellison Banks Findly (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 135-40; Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 36-8; and Horner, "The Eight Chief Rules for Almswomen," in *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, 118-61.

male lay followers who won “stream-entry,” and female lay followers who won stream-entry.<sup>108</sup>

*Bhikkhunī* Khemā had the reputation of being “wise, competent, intelligent, learned, a splendid speaker, and ingenious;” she was recorded as having expounded the subtlety of liberated existence to King Pasēnadi of Kosala in the exact same way that the Buddha would have, and her exposition had delighted the King so much that he paid homage to her.<sup>109</sup> *Bhikkhunī*

Dhammadinnā, likewise, was praised by the Buddha as being wise for having expounded the subtle points of the Buddhist *Dhamma* in the exact same way that he would have.<sup>110</sup> Lay

woman Kādīgodhā became a stream-enterer after hearing just one *dhamma* talk by the Buddha.<sup>111</sup> Some lay women were depicted as having recognized the virtue and wisdom of the Buddha before their male counterparts had, and in fact were responsible for bringing the latter to the Buddhist Path.<sup>112</sup>

Nancy J. Barnes’s study of the inscriptions at the ancient Buddhist site of Sanchi in north-central India, dated from the second to first centuries B.C.E., indicates that lay and renunciant Buddhist women remained quite active and prominent for a few centuries after the

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<sup>108</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.490-491 (*Mahāvaccagotta Sutta*). For the definitions of “non-returners” and “stream-entry,” see footnotes 74 and 80 of this chapter. The *Nandakovāda Sutta* recorded that five hundred *bhikkhunī*-s attained at least stream-entry after one *dhamma* talk. See *Majjhima Nikāya*, iii.277 (*Nandakovāda Sutta*). Also see Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 357-8.

<sup>109</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, IV.374-380 (*Abyākatasamyutta*).

<sup>110</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.299-305 (*Cūlavedalla Sutta*).

<sup>111</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, V.396-397 (*Sotāpattisamyutta*).

<sup>112</sup> For example, see *Majjhima Nikāya*, ii.209-213 (*Sangārava Sutta*); similar passage to be found in *Samyutta Nikāya*, I.160-161 (*Brāhmaṇasamyutta*). See also Findly, “Women Teachers of Women,” 147. In addition, Harvey observes that the donors and supporters were generally women; see *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 380-1.

Buddha's passing. In fact, it seemed that women supporters of Buddhism outnumbered men by three to one.<sup>113</sup> *Bhikkhunī*-s were highly visible in these inscriptions as well, though it seemed that they either did not hold titles equal to those of the *bhikkhu*-s, or they were not remembered by their titles. After the first century B.C.E., however, inscriptions about and by *bhikkhunī*-s became rarer, which indicated a significant change in their situations.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, scholars located the interpolation of the eight special rules into the orally transmitted Canon during this time.<sup>115</sup> Barnes thinks that the formulations of rules against the *bhikkhunī*-s in the first century B.C.E. both indicated the prominence of the *bhikkhunī*-s prior to that time and explained the decline of the *Bhikkhunī Sangha* afterwards:

Nuns were so prominent that monks kept promulgating rules to keep them in check... Monks would have had no need to make special rules to limit nuns' actions and rights if nuns hadn't already shown monks how independent they could be. ... It seems likely that the nuns lost their impact because the monks asserted their own primacy in the Sangha, and created regulations that would keep the women permanently in their place.<sup>116</sup>

The appearance of the eight special rules for the *bhikkhunī*-s in the first century B.C.E. was therefore probably the *bhikkhu*-s' reaction to the active and independent roles that the *bhikkhunī*-s had played in the first few hundred years of Buddhism.

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<sup>113</sup> Barnes, "The Nuns at the Stūpa," 28.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, and endnote 15 on 32-33. See also Nancy Auer Falk, "The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism," in *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures*, edited by Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 207-24.

<sup>115</sup> Tsomo "Is the Bhiksunī Vinaya Sexist?" 48-9; Puntarigvivat, "A Thai Buddhist Perspective," 217; Bhikkhunī Kusuma, "Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women's History," 5-12; Barnes, "The Nuns at the Stūpa," 19; Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 33-8; Kajiyama, "Women in Buddhism," 53-70; Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns*, 47-98.

<sup>116</sup> Barnes, "The Nuns at the Stūpa," 29.

One cannot conclusively attribute all of the discriminatory regulations against women to the male compilers in the first century B.C.E., though. The Buddha parted with the self-mortifying asceticism that was the norm amongst wandering renunciates at the time, and taught the “middle way” of neither indulgence nor asceticism. This incurred accusations of laxity in discipline from other wandering ascetics as well as from the laity who equated sanctity with the severity of practices.<sup>117</sup> The admission of women among male renunciates would have further subjected the Buddhist *Sangha* to criticisms and attacks, considering that celibacy was the norm amongst the anti-Brāhmanic renunciates at the time of the Buddha, and renunciation was generally seen as a men’s preserve. It was therefore possible that the Buddha himself might have chosen to respond to those criticisms by complying with the patriarchal norms and putting more restrictions on women. That is, in his dealings with criticisms, the Buddha himself might have been androcentric and patriarchal in that he followed the patriarchal norms of his time that reflected mainly male concerns and male biases. Being androcentric and patriarchal, however, is not the same as being misogynist, and the Buddha was not misogynist even if one takes the Pāli Canon to be his exact words. To say the least, he did unequivocally affirm the equal potentials of women in reaching *nibbāna*, and he did establish the *Bhikkhunī Sangha*.<sup>118</sup>

Regardless of the Buddha’s own stance, which remains unverifiable, it seems that the requirement of celibacy was the main reason for many of the regulations about and against women. Aside from guarding the reputation of the Buddhist *Sangha* consisting of both male and female renunciates, the male compilers of the Canon were also preoccupied with keeping

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<sup>117</sup> Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, 50-1.

<sup>118</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 34.

their own sexual desires contained, which was evinced in the numerous cautions against women's power over men in the *Nikāya* texts.<sup>119</sup> On occasions the caution took a misogynist tone and womankind was compared to a black snake: "she is unclean, bad-smelling, timid, fearful and betrays friends."<sup>120</sup> Noteworthy is that these misogynist tones are found in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the collection that focused on personal edification and appealed to the upper-class males who were most concerned with self-purification.<sup>121</sup>

More importantly, the *bhikkhunī*-s were instructed to be wary of the sight, sound, scent, taste or touch of a man as well. Likewise, there were accounts of men seducing or raping *bhikkhunī*-s, just as there were accounts of women tempting *bhikkhu*-s. What was expressed in these passages, then, was not so much that women by nature were temptresses, but that sexual desires could be dangerously powerful. As a result, celibates of both sexes would need repeated cautions and warnings.<sup>122</sup> The fact that the cautions against feminine wiles exceeded the cautions against male temptations both in number and in the severity of language does not prove that the whole of early Buddhism was misogynist. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter One, the Canon was compiled mostly in male hands and intended mainly for a male audience, and so the messages unsurprisingly betrayed androcentrism. Secondly, there were (and still are) far more women lay followers than men, and as such the *bhikkhu*-s might have experienced more

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<sup>119</sup> For instance, it was recorded that the Buddha instructed the *bhikkhu*-s to be wary of the sight, sound, scent, taste or touch of a woman. *Anguttara Nikāya* I.1-2.

<sup>120</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* III.260-261. See also Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 380.

<sup>121</sup> See page 15 of Chapter One.

<sup>122</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 44-5; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 379.

temptations than the *bhikkhunī*-s in fulfilling their requirement of maintaining contact with the laity on a daily basis.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, pro-women and egalitarian statements also existed in the same *Nikāya* texts where anti-women statements appeared. The Buddha was recorded to have assured King Pasēnadi of Kosala, who was dejected over the news of his queen giving birth to a female child, that a girl might turn out to be better than a boy in wisdom and virtue.<sup>124</sup> The *Bhikkhunīsamyutta* recorded ten *bhikkhunī*-s who stood firm in their cultivation of concentration and their pursuit of *nibbāna*; they could not be tempted, distracted, confused, discouraged, intimidated, or terrified by Māra, the delusion personified.<sup>125</sup> Among the ten *bhikkhunī*-s was Somā, who was told by Māra that women were too dim-witted to attain arahantship. She responded that what mattered was concentrated practice and wisdom, not gender.<sup>126</sup> The Buddha was said to have won enlightenment for the sake of both *bhikkhu*-s and *bhikkhunī*-s,<sup>127</sup> and the holy life in the *Sangha* was not considered perfected without all of the four assemblies of male renunciates, female renunciates, lay men, and lay women.<sup>128</sup> Even amidst the later

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<sup>123</sup> In addition, it seems that the *bhikkhu*-s generally experience more difficulty with celibacy than the *bhikkhunī*-s and may have needed extra help in combating their desires, such as by conjuring negative images about women. This point is mentioned in Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 46-7. *Bhikkhunī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo made the same observation in an oral presentation.

<sup>124</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, I.86 (*Kosalasamyutta*).

<sup>125</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, I.128-135 (*Bhikkhunīsamyutta*).

<sup>126</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, I.129 (*Bhikkhunīsamyutta*).

<sup>127</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, I.196 (*Vangīsasamyutta*).

<sup>128</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, iii.123-124 (*Pāsādika Sutta*).

formulation of the eight special rules in the Vinaya text, the Buddha was said to have affirmed that women had equal potential to reach *nibbāna* as men.<sup>129</sup>

With the prevalence of sexist values in that society and the concomitant androcentric editing of the Canon, what begs for explanation is not the existence of misogynist passages, but the existence and preservation of the *Therīgāthā*<sup>130</sup> and the pro-women or egalitarian statements in the *Nikāya*-s. Similarly, with the norm among anti-brāhmanical movements being male ascetics wandering about in isolation and avoiding contact with society, what is puzzling is not the praise and practice of seclusion, but the fact that the Buddha did not recommend it to every renunciant followers of his. Instead, he instituted communal existence for the renunciates, required them to maintain daily contact with the laity, and encouraged both renunciates and the lay followers to associate with “good friends” who were noble not by birth but by being wholesome. Contradicting the societal norms of the time as these teachings might be, they could not easily be edited away by the compilers of the Canon, for all of these teachings are grounded in the core teachings of the Buddha such as Non-Self and *kamma*, both of which have Interdependent Co-Arising as the rationale. Chapters Three and Four will delve into the meanings and implications of these core teachings of Buddhism.

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<sup>129</sup> *Vinaya* II.255; IV.52-53; Horner, “The Eight Chief Rules for Almswomen,” 103-4.

<sup>130</sup> *Therīgāthā* is the collection of songs and poems attributed to the early *bhikkhuni*-s. For studies on the *Therīgāthā*, see Kathryn R. Blackstone, *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therīgāthā* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1998), and Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therīgāthā* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1991), and Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, 162-210.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**A FEMINIST EXEGESIS OF NON-SELF:**  
**CONSTITUTION OF PERSONHOOD AND IDENTITY**

Buddhism and feminism appear to be two very different strains of thought. One originated in ancient Northeast India and the other gained momentum in the modern West. Traditional Buddhist discourses have rarely tended to the issue of gender except in a handful of Mahāyāna scriptures<sup>1</sup> whose authenticity is questioned by some Theravādins, while modern Western feminists often too easily label Buddhism as just another patriarchal religion that is inevitably sexist and oppressive to women. More than twenty years ago, however, Rita M. Gross pointed out three similarities between Buddhism and feminism: both begin with life experiences and stress experiential understanding, both evince the will and courage to go against the grain and see beyond the conventional points of view, and both explore the ways in which habitual and conventional patterns of thinking and behaving operate to block basic well-being of

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, see Bernard Faure in *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 119-42; Lucinda Joy Peach, "Social Responsibility, Sex Change, and Salvation: Gender Justice in the *Lotus Sūtra*," *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 1 (January 2002): 50-74; Miriam L. Levering, "The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-Shan: Gender and Status in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 19-35; and Nancy Schuster, "Changing the Female Body: Wise Women and the Bodhisattva Career in Some *Mahāratnakūtasūtras*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4, no. 1 (1981): 24-69. Also see Gross' discussion of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* in "The Dharma of Gender," 5-7.

people and cause great suffering.<sup>2</sup> A fourth similarity was added some years later: both speak of liberation, albeit the definitions of liberation may seem different.<sup>3</sup>

Classical Buddhist teachings and recent poststructuralist feminist theories further converge on the constructedness of individual persons. One of the most widely known and possibly the most perplexing teachings of Buddhism is the teaching of Non-Self (Pāli: *anattā*; Sanskrit: *anātman*), which seems to categorically negate the existence of individuals and thereby deny the efficacy or necessity of moral actions taken by individuals. Coincidentally, the theory of socio-cultural constructedness of the subject with its concomitant negation of autonomy has drawn much critical attention to poststructuralist theorists such as Judith Butler. Yet Buddhism, especially early Buddhism and Theravāda Buddhism, places much emphasis on *self*-control and individual moral responsibility, which is reflected in the Buddhist teachings regarding *kamma*. And poststructuralist feminist theorists argue the lack of autonomy does not dissolve moral agency. The consonance between these two strains of thought is more than just intellectually stimulating. They provide an exegetical framework as well as a basis of critique for one another. The Buddhist teaching of Non-Self may be easier to comprehend with the assistance of the feminist analysis of the constructedness of gender identity, which has been curiously overlooked in the traditional discourses of Buddhism, a tradition “so dedicated to noticing and reflecting on habitual patterns of conventional ego.”<sup>4</sup> The classical Buddhist analysis with regard to the relations between person construction, attachment, identity, and *dukkha* (Sanskrit:

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<sup>2</sup> Gross, “Buddhism and Feminism,” 47-9; Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 157.

<sup>3</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 130-2.

<sup>4</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 128 and 158; “Buddhism and Feminism,” 49-50; “The Dharma of Gender,” 6.

*dukkha*; unsatisfactoriness, existential anguish, suffering), along with its emphasis on moral discipline and mental training, in return, may provide different perspectives and contribute much to contemporary feminist theories and social practices. This chapter expounds the teaching of Non-Self by employing the analysis of the Five Aggregates on the one hand, and the feminist analysis of gender identity and subject formation on the other.

### 3.1 Five Aggregates: The Constitution of Individual “Self”

Buddhism is well known for its radical assertion of *anattā*, the negation (“an-”) of “*attā*” (Sanskrit: *ātman*). With the word “*attā*” commonly translated as “self” or “soul” in English, this core Buddhist teaching, it seems, reads “No Self” or “No Soul.” The translation of “*attā*” as “self” or “soul,” though not completely incorrect, is highly misleading. In the ancient Indian usage, “*attā*” means neither “self” in the sense of an individual person with his/her unique combination of life experiences and characteristics, nor “soul” in the sense of mental-spiritual functioning of an individual person. *Anattā* thus does not mean that no being exists, or that all beings exist only as bodies with no mental-spiritual dimension left after bodily death. As a matter of fact, both nihilism (*natthika-vāda* or *natthika-diṭṭhi*; the view that no being exists) and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda* or *uccheda-diṭṭhi*; the view that a being exists only as a body and perishes completely at the breakup of the body) are rejected by the Buddha. Such views deny the validity of ethics and are called “pernicious views” in the *Nikāya* texts.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For examples, see *Samyutta Nikāya* III.99, 109 (*Khandhasamyutta*) and III.206-207 (*Diṭṭhisamyutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* i.55-57 (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*). See also *Majjhima Nikāya* i.402 (*Apaṇṇaka Sutta*) and i.515-518 (*Sandaka Sutta*).

The Buddhist teaching of *anattā* negates “*Attā*” (or, in Sanskrit, “*Ātman*”) only in the sense of eternal, never-changing, independently-existing innermost “Self-Essence” of all beings. In the *Upaniṣads* this is identical with *Brāhman*, the permanently existing Ultimate Reality (Sanskrit: *sat*), Pure Consciousness (Sanskrit: *chit*) and Bliss (Sanskrit: *ananda*). This eternalist view of “Self” is also called a “pernicious view”<sup>6</sup> in the *Nikāya* texts, and it is this peculiar definition of “Self” — “permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change”<sup>7</sup> — that the Buddha refutes. Thus the teaching of Non-Self is frequently summarized in the *Nikāya*-s in these two succinct sentences: “What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not *attā*.”<sup>8</sup> “Self” (*Ātman*), by the *Upaniṣadic* definition, is eternal bliss, and individual existence, being subject to change and subject to suffering, simply does not match this definition. Instead, Buddhism teaches that a person and his/her consciousness interdependently co-arises with the given phenomena in the world and therefore cannot be unchanging or stay uninfluenced by life experience.

The twin central teachings of Buddhism, Non-Self and Interdependent Co-Arising, are actually the same concept stated from two different angles. In response to “the eternalist view” (*sassatavāda*) of “Self,” Non-Self is taught, and in response to nihilism and annihilationism, Interdependent Co-Arising is emphasized. Individual persons and their consciousness do arise and therefore are not entirely non-existent, but they exist only in relation to their bodies, to other

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<sup>6</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.99 and 182-183 (*Khandhasamyutta*), 204-205 (*Diṭṭhisamyutta*). See also *Majjhima Nikāya* i.130-131 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*) and i.256-257 (*Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta*).

<sup>7</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.204-205 (*Diṭṭhisamyutta*).

<sup>8</sup> For examples, see *Samyutta Nikāya* III.22 and 45 (*Khandhasamyutta*).

individuals, and to all non-self entities in their surroundings.<sup>9</sup> Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg put it this way: “You wouldn’t be the person you are if your family, friends, and acquaintances all weren’t the people they are, if you hadn’t had the experiences you’ve had, lived in the society you live in, and so on.”<sup>10</sup> This relational existence is subject to change: “the physical bodies change; feelings, beliefs, desires, and intentions all change; consciousness is intermittent; and our selfconceptions change over time. None of the things we can point to as the

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter Harvey, “The Mind-Body Relationship in Pali Buddhism: A Philosophical Investigation,” *Asian Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (March 1993): 31. Also see Gier and Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will,” 288-9. This view that an individual self depends on non-self entities in the surrounding to exist supports an environmental ethic, and much has been written on the concept of interconnectedness and Buddhist ecology. For instances, see Allan Hunt Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1990); Venerable Sunyana Graef, “The Foundations of Ecology in Zen Buddhism,” *Religious Education* 85, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 42-8; Ian Harris, “Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of ecoBuddhism,” *Religion* 25, no. 3 (July 1995): 199-211; Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997); Rita M. Gross, “Interdependence and Detachment: Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic,” in *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 75-93; Padmasiri de Silva, *Environmental Philosophy and Ethics in Buddhism* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1998); Lambert Schmithausen, “Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature—Some Remarks,” *Eastern Buddhist* 32, no. 2 (2000): 26-78; Simon P. James, “‘Thing-Centered’ Holism in Buddhism, Heidegger, and Deep Ecology,” *Environmental Ethics* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 359-75; Simon P. James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004); Brian Edward Brown, “Environmental Ethics and Cosmology: A Buddhist Perspective,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 39, no. 4 (December 2004): 885-900; David Edward Cooper and Simon P. James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005); Donald K. Swearer, “An Assessment of Buddhist Eco-Philosophy,” *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (April 2006): 123-37; Barbara Paterson, “Ethics for Wildlife Conservation: Overcoming the Human-Nature Dualism,” *Bioscience* 56, no. 2 (February 2006): 144-50; Peter Harvey, “Avoiding Unintended Harm to the Environment and the Buddhist Ethic of Intention,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 14 (2007): 1-34; Dana Anderson, “Ethical Sight,” *Environmental Ethics* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 115-30.

<sup>10</sup> Gier and Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will,” 291.

self remains the same.”<sup>11</sup> Individual persons co-arise with, and are contingent on, their surroundings, and therefore do not exist as unchanging, permanent, blissful pure consciousness that is separate from, and independent of, worldly phenomena.

While rejecting both of the extremes of nihilism and eternalism, in the early texts the Buddha seemed to be more concerned with refuting the eternalist view than the nihilist view. The eternalist “Self” was compared to a lump of foam on a river, a water bubble during rain, a mirage, a plantain trunk, and a magical illusion.<sup>12</sup> The counter-eternalist teaching of Non-Self is further elaborated through breaking personhood down to the Five Aggregates and then stating that a person is neither identical with any one of the Five Aggregates, nor an independent spiritual entity possessing the Five Aggregates, nor containing the Five Aggregates, nor being contained by any one of the Five Aggregates.<sup>13</sup> All of these views are called “identity views” because they are considered conducive to, and reinforcing, egocentric clinging. They lead to unsatisfactoriness or outright suffering (Pāli: *dukkha*; Sanskrit: *duhkha*).

The meaning and scope of the Five Aggregates have to be understood to see the subtleties of the teaching of Non-Self and the ways in which this teaching is highly morally demanding. In the classical Buddhist understanding, an individual person is understood in terms of the Five Aggregates: the entity we consider “self” is a psycho-physical compound of material forms (Pāli/Sanskrit: *rūpa*), sensations (Pāli/Sanskrit: *vedanā*), perceptions (Pāli: *saññā*; Sanskrit:

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.140-143 (*Khandhasamyutta*).

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see *Samyutta Nikāya* III.3-5, 16-18, 20-21, 46, 96-99, 102 (*Khandhasamyutta*); and III.196 (*Rādhasamyutta*).

*samjñā*), volitional constructions (Pāli: *saṅkhāra*; Sanskrit: *samskāra*), and consciousness (Pāli: *viññāṇa*; Sanskrit: *viññāṇa*).

What is noteworthy is that in the ancient Indian perspective (orthodox teaching of Brāhmanism as well as the “heterodox” teachings of Buddhism and Jainism) there are six senses, and the term *rūpa* refers to both of the sense organs and their respective sense-objects. Mind is treated as one of the sense organs alongside the ordinary five sense organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. Serving as the objects of these six sense organs, otherwise termed “internal sense bases,” are the six classes of “external sense bases”<sup>14</sup>: that which can be seen, that which can be heard, that which can be smelled, that which can be tasted, that which can be touched and felt, and that which can be cognized. With mind being considered a sense organ, virtually all phenomena in the world can be considered the “external sense bases” for the mind. Virtually all phenomena in the world can be considered mind-objects since they can all be processed in one way or another by the mind. Colors, for example, are objects for the eyes, and yet the difference between two colors may be an object for the mind. Thus considered, “external sense bases” encompasses not only concrete objects with physical dimensions, but also abstract entities without physical dimensions, such as languages, philosophies, histories, social conventions, cultural norms, political institutions, and the sentiments involved in interpersonal relationships in

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<sup>14</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* IV.7-15 (*Salāyatana-samyutta*), and V.426 (*Saccasamyutta*). The words “external” and “internal” here obviously do not indicate absolute demarcation, for they are expediently used only to explain the function of senses, which only occur when the “external sense bases” and the “internal sense bases” are in contact or, in Gier and Kjellberg’s words, when “the inner flows into the outer and the outer flows into the inner.” See Gier and Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will,” 282.

the past, the present, or the future.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, the Pāli/Sanskrit word *rūpa* is better rendered “material and socio-cultural forms” or “material and symbolic forces” than simply “material forms,” given that the word *rūpa* actually encompasses both the abstract and the concrete, the mental and the physical, the internal and the external, while the word “material” in quotidian English usage does not usually include mind or mind-objects.

Another one of the Five Aggregates whose complexity is not readily discernible in its English translation is *saṅkhāra*. This term is variously translated as “mental formations,” “mental proliferations,” “dispositions,” “volitions,” or “volitional constructions.” The various translations themselves are puzzling since in English it is difficult to consider mental formations, dispositions, and volitions to be in the same category. Etymologically, the word *saṅkhāra* means “put together,” and Pāli scholar Bhikkhu Bodhi explains, “*saṅkhāras* are both things which put together, construct, and compound other things, *and* the things that are put together, constructed, and compounded.”<sup>16</sup> On account of the references to “things that are put together, constructed, and compounded,” *saṅkhāra* is translated as “mental formations” or “mental proliferations;” on account of the references to “things which put together, construct, and

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<sup>15</sup> In the Pāli Abhidhamma, six kinds of objects are considered mental objects: sensitive matter, subtle matter, consciousness, mental factors, Nibbāna, and concepts. While the consciousnesses of the other five sense organs pertain only to the present, the mind-consciousness can cognize an object of the past, the present, or the future. See *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: Pāli Text, Translation and Explanatory Guide of the Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*, 1<sup>st</sup> BPS Pariyatti edition, Pāli text originally edited and translated by Mahāthera Nārada, translation revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi, introduction and explanatory guide by U Rewata Dhamma and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Abhidhamma tables by U Sīlānanda (Onalaska, Washington: Pariyatti Press, 2000), 135-7.

<sup>16</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, “General Introduction,” in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 45.

compound other things,” the same word is rendered “dispositions” or “volitions.” A person’s disposition and volition both result from the things that have been put together and affect the ways in which things are being put together. In other words, one’s dispositions and volition shape the ways in which one’s thoughts are formed, and the thoughts formed in turn mold one’s dispositions and volition.

Corresponding to, and co-arising with, the six senses and their respective sense-objects are six classes of sensation, six classes of perception, six classes of volitional constructions, and six classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness.<sup>17</sup> As fire always burns on fuel, consciousness is always consciousness of some material or symbolic forms. The fire that burns on gasoline is not identical with the fire that burns on a match — they may differ in temperature and color and duration and extension, albeit they are both fire and both burning. In the same way, consciousness varies from one class of *rūpa* to another, from one event to another, from one round of “mental formations” to another, from one individual person to another, albeit different kinds of consciousness are all abstract mental functioning of individual persons.

It says in the *Samyutta Nikāya*: “When there is name-and-form (Pāli/Sanskrit: *nāma-rūpa*), consciousness comes to be; consciousness has name-and-form as its condition.”<sup>18</sup> In this passage the term *nāma* is used to refer to the Aggregates other than *rūpa* and consciousness, i.e. sensations, perceptions, and volitional constructions. Sometimes, however, it seems that *nāma* encompasses only sensations and perceptions, for in the “Twelve Links of

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<sup>17</sup> For examples, see *Samyutta Nikāya* III.60-61, 63-64, 102-103 (*Khandhasamyutta*).

<sup>18</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.104 (*Khandhasamyutta*).

Interdependent Origination” volitional constructions are discussed separately from *nāma-rūpa*: “With ignorance as condition, volitional constructions come to be; with volitional constructions as condition, consciousness comes to be; with consciousness as condition, *nāma-rūpa* comes to be...”<sup>19</sup> The discrepancy between the above two usages of *nāma* shows *saṅkhāra*’s affinity with sensations and perceptions but at the same time indicates that it functions in a different way and is far more important.

Like sensations and perceptions, *saṅkhāra* is a kind of *nāma*. It is a kind of “internal” mental functioning that depends on the “external” sense-objects to exist. Yet *saṅkhāra*, being constructive as well as constructed, is much more complex. In fact, among the fifty-two “mental factors” (*cetasikas*) enumerated in the Pāli Abhidhamma, the aggregates of sensations and perceptions each count as one mental factor, and yet the aggregate of *saṅkhāra* is further divided into fifty mental factors, including greed, delusion, hatred, mindfulness, malleability of consciousness, compassion, appreciative joy, and so on.<sup>20</sup> *Saṅkhāra* can put together existing sense-objects to form new mind-objects that are prior-to-now non-existent in the socio-cultural realm, and then the newly formed mind-objects are fed to consciousness just as the existing

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<sup>19</sup> For examples, see *Samyutta Nikāya* II.28, 70, 78, and 95 (*Nidānasamyutta*). Bhikkhu Bodhi explains, “only when consciousness is present can a compound of material elements function as a sentient body and the mental concomitants participate in cognition.” Bhikkhu Bodhi, “General Introduction,” in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 48. Alternatively, *nāma* is understood by some to include consciousness as well. For example, Therāvaadin scholar Hammalawa Saddhatissa asserts, “*nāma-rūpa* should be understood as the particularity or determinate character of individual things” and can be used as a synonym for individual beings. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, 5-6. In the early *Upaniṣads*, the term *nāma-rūpa* is used to refer to the things of common experiences, as opposed to the Absolute Reality of *Brāhman*.

<sup>20</sup> *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, 26. For a list of the fifty-two mental factors, see *ibid.*, 79.

mind-objects are. One's consciousness, in turn, affects the ways in which s/he senses and perceives *rūpa*, thereby also affecting the mental formations to come. That is, besides the material and symbolic forces that one is exposed to (*rūpa*), one's consciousness is also influenced by the functioning of one's *nāma*, especially *saṅkhāra*. David J. Kalupahana expounds,

*Rūpa* or material form accounts for the function of identification; *vedanā* or feeling and *saññā* or perception represent the function of experience, emotive as well as cognitive; *saṅkhāra* or disposition stands for the function of individuation; *viññāṇa* or consciousness explains the function of continuity in experience.<sup>21</sup>

The constructive aspect of *saṅkhāra* accounts for individuation. It accounts for the fact that people exposed to the same *rūpa* do not necessarily have the same personality or consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

Let me employ a real-life incident as a vehicle to explicate the working of the Five Aggregates, especially the rather complicated aggregate of *saṅkhāra* that can be variously rendered “dispositions,” “volitions,” and “mental formations.” My older brother is fairly tall and heavy and, according to my parents, he has been bigger than boys of the same age for his whole life. Yet, for a man who may be physically intimidating, he is, as both of my friends and his own friends put it, “surprisingly gentle with his bodily motions and incredibly considerate.” One may describe his “disposition” as gentle and considerate, which one may attribute to his

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<sup>21</sup> David J. Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 20-1.

<sup>22</sup> It is doubtful that any two persons are ever exposed to the exact same *rūpa*. Two siblings growing up in the same family, for example, are not necessarily treated in the same way by their parents, and they certainly do not treat each other in the same way they are treated by each other. This goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

“volition” — he is gentle and considerate because he had made a conscious choice to be so. His “disposition” and “volition” as such may have something to do with the “mental constructions” surrounding a childhood experience that happened when he was five and a half years old.

One day he was dragging me upstairs to find my mother, at a rather fast pace, due to something urgent that neither of us can recall now. Being an extraordinarily tall boy for his age, he was at least one and a half feet taller than me even though he was only one and a half years older. As a result of the significant difference in height, I could not catch up with him and fell on the stairs. The upper part of my nose hit the angular edge of a step. Blood immediately gushed out from my face and I was screaming and crying. My mother was not far away and, upon hearing my voice, she rushed over and took me to the hospital, without neglecting to yell at my brother at the same time, mainly for not realizing his steps were much wider than mine and causing me the injury.

In this incident, the color of blood was an “external sense base” for the “internal sense base” of my brother’s eyes, and upon the contact of the two a “sensation” (*vedanā*) of seeing was caused, followed by the “perception” (*saññā*) of seeing red. My screaming and crying was an “external sense base” for the “internal sense base” of his ears, and upon the contact of the two a sensation of hearing was caused, followed by the perception of hearing a loud and high-pitched voice. The smell of blood was an “external sense base” for the “internal sense base” of his nose, and upon the contact of the two a sensation of smelling was caused, followed by the perception of smelling something pungent. The three perceptions were “put together” (*saṅkhāra*) to cause the “mental formation” (also *saṅkhāra*): “My little sister is hurt.” My mother’s yelling was an “external sense base” for the “internal sense base” of his ears, and upon the contact of the two a

sensation of hearing was caused, followed by the perception of hearing a reprimanding voice, which contributed to the mental formation: “It is my fault.” The content of my mother’s yelling was an “external sense base” for the “internal sense base” of his mind, which caused another mental formation, “It is because of my size.” Put together, the three mental formations led to the conclusion that “I have to be really careful because I am bigger than others; if I am not careful, someone may get hurt.”

This particular way in which he put those perceptions and mental formations together might have resulted from the life experiences of his infancy (or of past lives, if one believes in past lives). That is, his disposition and volition was a consequence of his mental formations in the near or distant past, and his existing disposition and volition affected his mental formations at the moment and led him to form that particular thought. What led to his existing disposition and volition at that moment remains unknown to me, yet it is clear that as a result of the incident a new volition was formed, which has affected the ways in which he has been interacting with the “external sense bases” with which he is in contact. (To this date, from time to time I still find him staring at the dent on my face, which is invariably followed by some caring gestures and/or words on his part.) And the ways in which he has chosen to respond to people and situations have contributed to his current disposition of being gentle and considerate as well as having become part of his self-identity as a big but considerate man.

A person’s consciousness does not exist independently or eternally and is subject to change when new phenomena are experienced. Moreover, it is not unified or monolithic, for in response to every situation multiple consciousnesses would co-arise. In the example given above, besides the eye-consciousness and nose-consciousness that co-arose with the blood and the ear-consciousnesses that co-arose with my crying and my mother’s yelling, there were

multiple mind-consciousnesses that arose in response to the incident: the mind-consciousness of me being hurt, the mind-consciousness of him being blamed, and the mind-consciousness of his size. His mental formations further gave rise to the mind-consciousness of taking responsibility and the mind-consciousness of demanding himself to be careful. At the same time, he might also have the mind-consciousness of the fact that he could not change his size and, consequently, the mind-consciousness that the difference in size would always be a factor and he could not be trusted with his sister's safety.

Multiple mind-consciousnesses co-exist at the same time, and the outlook of one's personality depends on which consciousness is most consistently prompted to him/her by the things and people in his/her surroundings, as well as by his/her own "mental formations" and "dispositions." The preceding and ensuing experiences, together with the concomitant mental formations, may consistently prompt a person to choose to identify with one particular consciousness, or they may support the choice for a while and then lean toward a different choice, or they may feed into multiple possibilities at the same time and allow them to compete with each other. At any rate, it is possible that the choice changes frequently and rapidly, for consciousnesses are constantly arising with every single contact between the "external sense bases" and "internal sense bases" as well as every single "mental formation." "Just as monkey roaming through a forest grabs hold of one branch, lets that go and grabs another, then lets that go and grabs still another, so too that which is called 'mind' and 'mentality' and 'consciousness' arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night."<sup>23</sup> A person may be consistently prompted with a certain consciousness and identify with it for a certain period of time, and then

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<sup>23</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* II.95 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

may choose, or be prompted by further life experiences, to identify with a different consciousness some time later. When my brother was younger, for instance, the consciousness that he could not be trusted with his sister's safety seemed to be held onto more than the consciousness of demanding himself to be careful — for several years he would avoid taking me anywhere by himself.

This Buddhist analysis of the Five Aggregates points to the conditionality of personhood. An individual person is, and continues to be, a product of socio-cultural conditionings and his/her life experiences, the latter being affected by his/her own dispositions/volition/mental formations. A person as such is socially constructed as well as mentally constructed. Traditional Buddhist discourses elaborate abundantly on the process of mental construction but somehow come short in explicating the sociality of existence and its implications. Human existence is always social, and to be a person is to become a person in a matrix of social forces. What one holds onto as the identity of the self does not come into existence without the material and symbolic forces that have been suggesting and reinforcing it. An identity as such is not permanent and does not stay static. It is subject to change, and it changes when new experiences arise or when new situations prompt new ways of putting together old experiences. The Buddhist teaching of Non-Self, at least in its classical sense, merely denies the idea of permanently-existing, never-changing individual self-essence that is abstractly defined (by the most privileged stratum in society) and uninfluenced by worldly phenomena or day-to-day experiences. It does not negate individual existence, nor does it dismiss social relations and interactions as utterly unimportant. Quite the contrary, it indicates that an individual self is continually being conditioned and reconditioned by social surroundings as well as mental factors. In the next section, I will further illustrate the meaning and social implications of the

Buddhist teaching of Non-Self, of seeing an individual person as a process, by looking at the constructedness of gender identity.

### 3.2 Seeing “Non-Self” through the Making of Gender Identity

As Gross observes, there is something curiously illogical in many Buddhists’ understanding and acceptance of the central Buddhist teaching of Non-Self: “while most Buddhist do not believe in the existence of a permanent, abiding self, their attitudes and actions nevertheless indicate that they do believe in the real existence of gender.”<sup>24</sup> When the issue of gender is raised in Buddhist communities, people often appeal to the idea that the Buddhist *Dhamma* transcends gender, thereby either dismissing gender justice as a petty *samsāric* concern that is irrelevant to the ultimate Buddhist goal of *nibbāna* and “unfettered mind,”<sup>25</sup> or defensively denying and willfully ignoring the persistent gender discrimination, gender stereotypes, and rigid assignment of gender roles in both of the voluminous traditional Buddhist texts and the day-to-day operation of Buddhist institutions.<sup>26</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo also

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<sup>24</sup> Gross, “The Dharma of Gender,” 4.

<sup>25</sup> Gross, “The Dharma of Gender,” 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. It is not uncommon for Buddhist communities to divide needed labor and volunteer work along gender lines and, in effect, impose and reinforce stereotypical gender attributes. Alan Sponberg finds that the “soteriological inclusiveness” in early Buddhism is compounded with “institutional androcentrism” and “ascetic misogyny.” Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 3-36. Susanne Mrozik also notes that in the South Asian Buddhist traditions virtues are still strongly associated with the male body, despite the talk about the “ultimate” irrelevance of bodily distinctions. Susanne Mrozik, “Materialization of Virtue: Buddhist Discourses on

observes that in modern Buddhism when the issue of gender inequality arises, “The most common attitude is to ignore the problem altogether, dismiss it, deny it, and trivialize it.”<sup>27</sup> The central teaching of Non-Self, the lack of eternal, unchanging, self-existing essence, is invoked from time to time in response to various kinds of contentions and disputes, but it is rarely remembered when conventional gender roles are described, expected, and even imposed.<sup>28</sup>

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Bodies,” in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, edited by Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 34-5.

<sup>27</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Family, Monastery, and Gender Justice: Reenvisioning Buddhist Institutions,” in *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> This is true not only of average Buddhists who are not particularly educated in Buddhist thoughts and theories, but also of some Buddhist masters who are respected for their knowledge of the *Dhamma*. Consider, for example, the three most prominent Buddhist masters in Taiwan, each leading an international organization comprised of one million to four million members, two-thirds to 88.5 percent of which are women. When asked about why there have been many more women than men followers in Buddhism, a male *Dhamma* master said,

Women are gentler and more fragile... Men are tougher and stronger; they think highly of themselves, try to solve everything by themselves, and are unwilling to take advice. ... Women by nature are not as tough or strong, so they are more likely to accept religious teachings and more in need of consolations provided by religion. In addition, women are not as fit and energetic as men, so upon encountering difficulties they get scared and would turn to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for protection and blessing. ... Women are more willing to take religion because it can positively influence their family life.”

Another of the most renown male Buddhist masters in Taiwan also often typecasts women as soft, nurturing, considerate, patient, compromising, and *helpful to men’s careers*. He exhorts them to exert these positive traits of their feminine *nature*. The female Buddhist master that is leading the largest Taiwan-based philanthropic organization, idealizes the traditional feminine roles in Chinese society as wives and mothers and essentializes women by stating, “consideration, kind-heartedness, and compassion can be seen as being symbolic of women. Steering the husband down a good path is the wife’s responsibility. This will benefit humanity, enrich human life, and is also the responsibility of the mother.” Scott Pacey observes that the three most influential Buddhist masters in Taiwan, despite their different interpretations of “Buddhism for the Human World,” are quite similar in that they take stereotypical gender attributes for granted and expect women to fulfill their traditional feminine roles. See *Dharma Drum Monthly*, June 1, 2004; *Pu-Men Journal*, November 2003 (<http://www.fgs.org.tw/master/mastera/library/discussion/003.htm>); Chengyen Shih, *Master*

That is, theoretically, the Buddhist *Dhamma* transcends gender. In everyday life, however, it often seems it is gender that transcends the *Dhamma*, for the *Dhamma* is supposed to cover every aspect of Reality/Existence but somehow is hardly ever applied to gender. This reluctance to acknowledging the existence of gender discrimination within the Buddhist traditions, Gross rightly notes, “is a more destructive and dangerous form of opposition to gender equality than outright opposition to egalitarian reforms,”<sup>29</sup> for it precludes the possibility of reform by making it impossible to even bring up the topic of reform.

Most Buddhists seem to be familiar with the theory of the Five Aggregates and its relation to the teaching of Non-Self: a person is impermanent and subject to change because s/he is constituted of material forms (*rūpa*), sensations, perceptions, volitional constructions, and consciousness. Many also seem to be familiar with the notion that there are six sense organs and mind is considered one of them. Few, however, grasp how much is encompassed within the term *rūpa*, especially when it comes to the sense-objects for the mind. This lack of understanding may have resulted from the common but rather misleading rendering of the term *rūpa* as “material forms” on the one hand, and on the other hand from the unfamiliarity with ancient Indian thought from which Buddhism sprang. Should the scope of the aggregate *rūpa* be properly understood, there would be no justification for excluding gender from the

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*Chengyen's Still Thoughts*, Vol. 2, (Taipei: Tzu-Chi Cultural Publishing, 1994), 24 and 162; and Scott Pacey, “A Buddhism for the Human World: Interpretations of *Renjian Fojiao* in Contemporary Taiwan,” *Asian Studies Review* 29 (March 2005): 70-1.

<sup>29</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 117; Gross, “The Dharma of Gender,” 11. Similar concerns are shown by Mrozik in “Materialization of Virtue,” 35; Tsomo in “Family, Monastery, and Gender Justice,” 2; Sara McClintock in “Gendered Bodies of Illusion: Finding a Somatic Method in the Ontic Madness of Emptiness,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, edited by Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 261; and Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 119-42.

consideration of identity construction and the concomitant attachment to the identity constructed. After all, the aggregate *rūpa* does include the sense organ of the mind and the sense-objects for the mind, and what, if not sense-objects for the mind, are the social conventions and prescriptions that strongly suggest, support, impose, and reinforce gendered identities and gendered behaviors through gendered colors, toys, chores, career ambitions, postures, uses of language, etc.?

The cultural scripts about genders are certainly a form of *rūpa*, and the Buddhist teaching of an individual identity being constructed and subject to change is consonant with constructivist feminist analysis of gender formation. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's claim that one is not born but rather *becomes* a woman under cultural compulsion, poststructuralist feminist Judith Butler observes:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.<sup>30</sup>

Gender is produced through repeated bodily performances of the cultural scripts that define masculinity and femininity. Since the beginning of their existence in human societies, people are systematically inculcated with, and disciplined to perform, certain behaviors and roles that are supposedly appropriate for their anatomical characteristics. The compulsory repetition of bodily performances of gender norms has a materializing effect and “congeal[s] over time,” for the gender norms repeatedly performed by the body are thereby inscribed on the body, which is

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<sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 43-4.

an integral part of a person's self-identity. Since gender norms are inscribed on the body and thus become part of the person, gender is not like an outfit that can be taken off at will. That is, gender is not something that can be undone or changed with just one alternative performance because it is not created once and for all with one socially-prescribed performance. Still, gender "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality,"<sup>31</sup> nor is it a "substance" that is necessitated by anatomical characteristics. It appears to be substantive and "natural" because the body has been compelled by social expectations and cultural conventions to perform the various gender-specific acts over and over again, and the very repetition results in the illusion of an abiding "gender core."<sup>32</sup>

Some colors are associated with, and used on, girls, while some other colors are associated with and used on boys. It is very common, in the United States at least, for people to put baby boys in blue clothes and bassinets, and baby girls, in pink. When I was a child in Taiwan, the colors red, pink, and orange were commonly considered as "girly colors," while the colors green and blue were called "boyish colors."

Children learn their gendered identities through toys as well. Girls are still commonly given dolls or items of sedentary and domestic nature to play with, while boys are often encouraged to play with toy cars, trains, airplanes, tanks, guns, robots equipped with weapons, and generally items that are mobile and/or destructive. Supposedly girls do not like to move

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>32</sup> The idea "gender core" was discussed by Robert Stoller in *Presentations of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 11-4, and was referenced by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, 32.

about, and supposedly they *like* to play house, imagining being wives and mothers and *enjoying* the imaginary cleaning, cooking, and taking care of other members in the family.

The assignment of household chores is frequently gendered as well, if boys are expected to do chores at all. In Taiwan and other Chinese societies, some parents expect only girls to help out with chores, while some others train their boys to perform tasks that require a little more physical strength, such as mopping the floor. In the United States, in families that do expect both boys and girls to do household chores, girls are more likely to be assigned more “domestic” chores such as tasks in the kitchen or tasks related to caring and nurturing, while boys are more likely to be expected to take on chores of higher mobility such as taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, shoveling the snow, etc.<sup>33</sup>

As an extension of the gendered assignment of household chores, jobs are frequently gendered, and boys and girls are often encouraged to envision their future careers according to cultural conventions. Some occupations are still strongly associated with the female gender, such as nurses and teachers for the very young, although the male monopoly of certain occupations, such as doctors, scientists, and politicians, is gradually breaking down.

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<sup>33</sup> The gendered assignment of household chores not only suggests the *division* of genders and reinforces gender roles, but also affords the male gender more physical mobility and financial resources since childhood: boys can earn some pocket money by mowing the lawn or shoveling the snow for their neighbors, but no one would really hire girls in the neighborhood to do the dishes. Even when girls and women are hired as maids for household maintenance, their contributions are commonly deemed less valuable and, as a result, they may work longer hours and still earn less money. “A sexual division of labor,” Zillah Eisenstein observes, “...divides men and women into their respective hierarchical sex roles and structures their related duties in the family domain and within the economy.” Zillah Eisenstein, “Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism,” in *Capitalist Patriarchy: The Case for Socialist Feminism*, edited by Zillah R. Eisenstein (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 27.

Boys are encouraged to take up physical space, running around and sitting with their arms stretching out and legs wide open. If, in the process of using their bodies, they are a little disruptive and destructive, they are “just being boys.” Their postures are rarely corrected except when their parents grow concerned with their spinal formation and tell them not to slouch. Girls, on the other hand, are allowed a lesser range of postures and bodily movements, especially in areas where population density has been high for many centuries and space has been quite limited, such as coastal cities in China and Taiwan. They are taught “lady-like” behaviors from very early on, such as sitting with their legs together or crossed.<sup>34</sup>

“Lady-like” behavior commonly includes using soft voice and polite wording. Popular books in the field of gender communication, such as *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, while having the effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes, are indicative of the extent to which men and women have been socially conditioned to use language differently. Women have generally been socialized to be more polite by using more words and in less direct forms, while men have generally been socialized to use short, direct imperatives. This gendered expectation with respect to language is particularly salient in Japanese-speaking environment, where for each sentence there are several different forms showing different levels of respect. People of lower status have to use the form(s) showing greater respect, which means that, to be recognized as a person capable of using the Japanese language, one has to accept one’s social status in relation to one’s interlocutor. Women are generally expected to use the form(s) of the higher respect level(s), no matter who their interlocutors may be. The forms showing higher respect levels

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<sup>34</sup> Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophers*, edited by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), 53-6.

typically involves longer sentence constructions and therefore more syllables, which indirectly forces women to articulate. In many cultures, women have also been socialized to use a wider range of tones and be more dramatic with their intonations. In tonal languages the social expectation of “feminine tones” generally translates to soft and high voices. In general, a girl is expected to completely steer away from foul language, and yet a boy is “just being a boy” if he curses or makes a reference to some bodily functions that are conventionally considered “gross.” The common tolerance of boys’ being “gross” with language and activities is extended to their hygiene and appearances. Boys who are neat and clean may even be teased for being “feminine.” By contrast, girls are more likely to be expected to maintain a higher level of physical cleanness.

The cultural scripts of gender as discussed above are objects for the sense organ of mind and therefore are encompassed by the term *rūpa*. These *rūpa* as discussed above may be “put together” (*saṅkhāra*) and become part of one’s “disposition” (*saṅkhāra*), and, further, that which has been put together becomes the fuel for one’s mind-consciousness. Through the mind-objects in the forms of subtle hints and explicit injunctions about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, one learns what it means to be of a certain gender and is socialized to *act* out a certain gender according to the norms in a certain society, such as wearing “feminine” clothes and using courteous language. If these mind-objects are consistently presented to a person, the mind-consciousness of a gendered identity would repeatedly arise and, overtime, s/he is likely to take it for granted and identify with it. Through repetition, the performance of gender norms congeals, resulting in the illusion of substance and becoming a part of the person’s identity. Cultural scripts of genders, being everywhere and repeatedly presented, shape the ways in which people behave and see themselves.

However, as mentioned above, with every situation, multiple consciousnesses may co-arise, some of which may be clashing with each other or dissonant with one's gender identity under cultural conventions. It is possible that, upon detecting the incoherence, one would choose to identify with something different and, concomitantly, behave differently. A girl may have been socialized to accept the gendered assignment of chores in the household, but she may also have been inculcated with the modern ideology of equal rights. The common dependence on "women's work" and the simultaneous devaluation of it, once perceived, may ferment doubt about the unequal workload in the family and even stimulate resistance to the gendered division of labor in general. A girl may have learned more dramatic intonation through imitation and on account of the social expectation and encouragement she experienced, and yet she may also have detected the occasional contempt or ridicule for the "girly" tones coming from boys and adult men. She may decide to continue using the tones that she is familiar with, or she may become more monotonal in the hope of avoiding ridicule or placing herself on equal footing with the boys around her. It is at moments like this that one can see that gender, as a part of a person's self-identity, is socially conditioned rather than an innate precondition. It is a process rather than a substance, a *becoming* through a sequence of culturally sanctioned behaviors rather than a predetermined "natural" state of *being* that one is born with and that stays unaffected by life experiences.

That gender is not "natural" can be seen when one considers the cultural variations of the societal prescriptions for the ways in which genders should be performed.<sup>35</sup> The association

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<sup>35</sup> In as early as 1935, Margaret Mead's anthropological work finds that the temperaments between and among sexes to be malleable and culturally variable. See Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Morrow, 1935). Recent European studies show that, even in a comparatively homogeneous part of the world as Europe,

between a certain gender and a certain group of colors, for example, is culturally and historically variable. At earlier times in Chinese culture, the color red was associated with good fortune and was certainly used on wealthy men. My mother, however, gets intensely uncomfortable with my brother wearing red, and so do most of the Taiwanese and Chinese people of her and her parents' generations because the color red had been associated with the female gender. In fact, once in a Buddhist temple in Philadelphia I was lectured by a Chinese woman somewhat older than my mother that I should wear more pink and red instead of black. "Wearing black makes one look like a boy, and wearing red makes one look like a girl," she said, completely oblivious to the fact that, at that moment, I was sitting right next to a Tibetan monk who, like most Tibetans, favors the color red and wears red all the time. Among the colors that were called "girly colors" when I was little, my brother is comfortable with red and orange, but not pink. The Taiwanese men of an even younger generation, by contrast, no longer consider the color pink off-limits.

The perceptions of "lady-like" postures vary across cultures and generations, too. For instance, Chinese and Taiwanese girls have also been taught to be "lady-like," but people of older generations consider it impolite, for both males and females, to sit with their legs crossed.<sup>36</sup>

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gender constructions and gender relations vary from locality to locality, intertwining with the local community's economy, politics, religion, culture, and even space. See, for example, Gunnel Forsberg, "The Difference That Space Makes: A Way to Describe the Construction of Local and Regional Gender Contracts," *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift-Norwegian Journal of Geography* 55: 161-5; Simon Duncan and B. Pfau-Effinger, eds, *Gender, Economy and Culture in the European Union* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> In fact, one of the unwritten but much reinforced internal rules of the Taiwan-based International Tzu-Chi (Compassionate Relief) Foundation is that no volunteer, male or female, may sit with their legs crossed if they are wearing the Tzu-Chi uniform. That unwritten rule was laid down by Master Chengyen herself.

More Westernized younger generations commonly take sitting with legs crossed to be “lady-like.”

That gender is a set of conditioned acts becomes especially salient when two persons of the same biological gender in the same society can be conditioned to perceive and act out their gender in different ways due to their different economic or social stations. Some of my better-to-do female friends in Taiwan habitually buy clothes that are pleasing to their eyes but may be inconvenient for their everyday bodily movements, and they attribute that habit of choosing beauty over functionality to the “natural” dictates of their female gender. My mother and some other women who have had to perform physical labor to make a living, by contrast, do not appreciate the kind of clothes that would limit their bodily movements or make them too self-conscious when they toil. Besides, their limited resources have accustomed them to opt for the type of clothes that allow them to function in various situations throughout the whole day. That is, they do not really pay much attention to separating work clothes from fun clothes, or sportswear from sleepwear, for they have neither the money nor the energy to buy and maintain all those different clothes for such different occasions.

Like upper-class women, lower-class women may attempt to mimic what they see in mass media, which all too often broadcast Euro-American beauty standards, including fashions and the body type that is used to demonstrate those fashions. As a result, along with trendy attires, they may consider white skin to be more feminine and more beautiful, which is reflected in the plethora of skin-whitening cosmetic products on the market throughout East Asia. For women laborers, however, the demand of functionality and low maintenance usually outweighs the concern for the “feminine beauty” defined by the Western-dominated global market culture.

After all, for women who live in subtropical areas and yet do not work indoors, Caucasian-like white skin is extremely high maintenance, if not utterly unattainable.

Likewise, women laborers may conform to other societal gender expectations for females in Taiwan, such as being soft and yielding to (male) authority figures. But the reality of their working-class life has generally trained them to be tough and to tackle most tasks by themselves, including lifting heavy objects, for which most of my better-to-do female friends would predictably enlist help from men. Interestingly, in an ethnographical study on moving in Montréal that deliberately leaves out the factor of social class, Jean-Sébastien Marcoux finds that handling heavy objects is often done by men in a paternalistic manner and so in effect becomes a privilege of men and boys, while most of the work relegated to women, such as sorting, packing, and cleaning, is unappreciated. He also finds that this gendered division of tasks is developed and reinforced relationally — while women tend to either voluntarily stay away from, or be intimidated out of, physical tasks in the presence of men, they, especially younger ones, do not hesitate to handle heavy objects in the absence of men.<sup>37</sup>

Neither the choice of “feminine” clothes nor the habitual recourse to men’s help is the inalterable substance of the female gender. Females who do not perform these acts may be judged less “feminine” by those whose material surroundings and social upbringing have systematically created a narrow way of perceiving “femininity.” For example, a Taiwanese friend of mine, who is from a wealthy, well-connected, and highly Westernized family with both parents speaking fluent English, once expressed her conviction that it was “not feminine” for women to own no pajamas and sleep in T-shirts. She did not put into consideration that, for one

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<sup>37</sup> Jean-Sébastien Marcoux, “Body Exchanges: Material Culture, Gender and Stereotypes in the Making,” *Home Cultures* 1, issue 1 (2004): 51-60.

thing, women of poor families do not deem it worthwhile to buy clothes made especially for sleep, and for another, the idea of pajamas is a Western import. Social stations affect one's cultural exposures, which affect one's perception and definition of gender-appropriate behaviors. Gender consciousnesses, like any other kind of consciousnesses, depend on the material and socio-cultural *rūpa* to arise.

The Buddhist teachings of Interdependent Co-Arising and Non-Self reject the notion of a permanent "Pure Consciousness" completely detached from worldly phenomena. An individual's ways of perceiving and conducting oneself are shaped by one's life experiences, which are composed of and conditioned by one's socio-cultural surroundings, as well as by one's *saṅkhāra*. As such, Buddhist thinking does not, and logically cannot, support any claim of inherent superiority. With regard to the purported inherent caste distinctions related in the last chapter, for example, the Buddha taught that brāhmins were not born superior to all other social classes. It was by means of their definition of nobility, their propaganda of their naturally endowed characteristics, and their privileged upbringings, that they appeared to be superior. The superiority is the work of their socio-cultural *becoming*, not the inherent state of their *being*. Contained in the Buddha's teaching is a call to critically reexamine the assumptions about the self-existent, unchanging qualities of social groups, especially when those qualities have been defined, prescribed, and propagated by the social group that is currently occupying the uppermost rung of the social hierarchy. The same kind of critical reexamination can and should be applied to the social grouping of genders. Gendered identity, like class identity, is conditioned, subject to change, and in lack of self-essence.

### 3.3 Subject Formation and Cultural Delimitation

It is worthy reiterating that the word *rūpa*, besides denoting mind and mind-objects, does refer to the material circumstances and the physical makeup of individual persons. Societal norms and cultural conventions surely provide abundant sense-objects for the mind, which is probably the most powerful amongst the six sense organs. Yet a person cannot relate to the world without a physical body (part of *rūpa*), and the matrix of socio-cultural norms and conventions (also part of *rūpa*) have already prescribed the proper ways of interacting with a body. They have in fact circumscribed the meanings of a body. That is, as much as a person's contact with his/her socio-cultural world is mediated through his/her body, his/her body can play a crucial role in forming his/her consciousness and self-identity. In addition, the bodily features and functions themselves may also serve as objects for the mind, which means that, according to the analysis of the Five Aggregates, the physical makeup of a person may affect his/her personality and consciousness (or, more precisely, consciousness-es). At the same time, though, each person has developed his/her own way of putting things together (*saṅkhāra*) and therefore the same bodily functions do not necessarily fuel the same consciousnesses (and different bodily functions do not necessarily fuel different consciousnesses). In other words, it is the co-arising and interconditionality of physical existence, social constructs, and mental constructs that accounts for an individual.

One must live in society dependent on a physical body, and one can only apprehend body and materiality through the conventions in one's society, particularly the conventional treatments of the type of body one has. One learns through societal views and expectations how to perceive one's body, and to like it, or hate it, or attach meanings to it, or alter the appearance of it,

in the hope of measuring up to societal standards. In the framework of the Five Aggregates, the body is acknowledged as a constituent of a person, although it does not necessarily determine a person. It is because of a body that one can live and think and function in a society, and it is because of this particular body that exists in this particular socio-cultural environment at this particular time that one is conditioned to live and think and function in these particular ways.

The values and norms of a society often seem natural or normal to its subjects precisely because those values and norms have been inscribed on the bodies of the subjects. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault draws on Jeremy Bentham's concept of panopticon and delineates the ways in which the socio-cultural norms, which vary from culture to culture and greatly depend on the dominating power, become such a seemingly integral part of a person that they are simply considered normal or even "natural." Through a series of apparently innocent subtle arrangements concerning details in life,<sup>38</sup> people's minds as well as bodies are trained to act in conformity with the existing norms in society. Foucault observes that schools, through activities that have to be taken in a certain sequence and through grouping students into different grades, are clearly marking the direction of progress and hence elevating a certain set of norms. School teachers, by making students do seriated exercises repetitively according to a minutely partitioned time-table, by examining their progress and ranking their performances up against one another's, and by punishing them for not moving towards the pre-designated direction in a pre-assigned pace, are serving as the disciplinarians who make the students' bodies accustomed to the regulations imposed, make those imposed regulations appear to be normal and natural, and thereby make students voluntarily continue to

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<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 139.

be disciplined by the normalized regulations. Students' bodies and minds are thus meticulously programmed, disciplined, and contained in a pre-drawn frame so that they are useful to the administrative power and can be used by it. Social workers, doctors and nurses, factory supervisors and company managers, and police and soldiers, are all similarly using the instruments of hierarchical observations, normalizing judgments, and examinations<sup>39</sup> to exert their disciplinary powers in different aspects of people's lives. Individuals are incessantly watched and disciplined to conform to the norms that, once recognized as such, make further societal disciplines easy and invisible. Thus the gazes of power are internalized, social norms are inscribed on the bodies, "automatic docility"<sup>40</sup> is achieved, and possibilities of rebellions and dissent are largely checked before they can even emerge. The network of disciplinarians, which Foucault associates with modern states, domesticates the masses and hides domination behind the pursuit of that which is normal and natural.

According to Judith Butler, however, the uniformity-creating constraints do not start with modern state, and people have been conditioned to unreflectively discipline themselves long before the emergence of what Foucault sees as modern disciplinary institutions. Rather, social living itself exerts the conditioning and disciplinary effects upon any individual born into it. Various cultural discourses and tropes have conditioned individual subjects to think, speak, and act in certain ways. Take language for example, "the subject has its own 'existence' implicated in a language that precedes and exceeds the subject, a language whose historicity includes a past

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<sup>39</sup> Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training," in *Discipline and Punish*, 170-94.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 169.

and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks.”<sup>41</sup> Any individual, from the beginning of his/her life, is configured by the language that carries conventionally-established concepts and collectively-recognized meanings, by the historical usages of that language, and by the socio-cultural circumstances in which that language has been used.

The concepts, meanings, usages, and socio-cultural circumstances reflected in that language are formed as a result of, in Butler’s word, sedimentation. In the same way that sediments of earth are formed because a large amount of sand is repeatedly brought over by water to the same place and allowed to accumulate and solidify, socio-cultural conventions are formed because people are acting and reacting in certain ways over and over again. A particular social convention, such as dressing baby girls in pink or allowing boys to be disruptive and aggressive, is in place because people repeat it, generation after generation, though not entirely without variation. Being able to function and be recognized as a functioning subject in any society necessarily means carrying the weight of the tradition and internalizing to a large extent those sedimentations of that society.<sup>42</sup> By the same token, cultural contours and social institutions, as sedimentations of what people have spoken and done prior to the present moment, also precede, exceed, constitute and condition the subject.

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<sup>41</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 28.

<sup>42</sup> Coincidentally, in explaining the “grammar” of the market, Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr. also make a similar reference to language: “Individuals are free to try to communicate in whatever ways they wish. But to succeed they have to conform to certain community conventions. The result is not a Tower of Babel, but an amazingly well-ordered structure, as is evident in the grammar of any language. No one designed a language, not even the French Academy. Yet language has an order and logic that would appear to have been the product of rational planning.” See Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1989), 44.

As a means of appreciating and further unpacking Butler's insight with regard to social sedimentations, I would like to provide some observations on the differences between the conventions of the English language and those of the Chinese language, in conjunction with the manifested differences in assumptions and behaviors in the respective social groups. To denote a time or a place in the English language, one moves from the smaller units to the larger ones. The building that houses the Religion Department of Temple University, for example, is located in 1114 West Berks Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. In this sequence, one first identifies the smallest unit, i.e. the street number "1114," and then moves up to the next smallest unit, the "west" segment of the street, which is a part of a bigger unit, i.e. the whole "Berks Street." One then identifies the city of Philadelphia, in which the street is located, and then the state of Pennsylvania, in which the city is located, and then finally reaches the largest unit in this sequence, the country in which the state is located. In the Chinese language (in fact, in most East Asian languages), to denote the same location one would identify the country first, and then the state, and move down to the city, the street name, the segment of the street, and finally the street number. That is, one moves from the largest units to the smaller ones. The contrast also appears in personal names: in East Asian cultures the family name, which encompasses the larger unit, takes precedence over the individual given name, whereas in English-speaking societies the individual given name is the "first name."

The linguistic conventions in Chinese and other East Asian cultures embed an individual person (smaller unit) in a larger social unit and encourage a certain level of self-effacement vis-à-vis that larger social unit in question. By contrast, the conventions of the English language suggest the importance of individuals as the fundamental unit that requires attention. Individual subjects are so important in the English-speaking environment that they form an

indispensable part of sentences, and situations are created for their names to be repeated by as many people as possible. A common way to honor someone in the English language, for example, is to name a thing or a person after him/her. To show respect for someone in the Chinese language, one avoids directly speaking his/her name. Most Chinese people do not name their children after their parents, contrary to the common practice of English-speaking people. Most streets and shops in the United States are named after individuals. In conventional Chinese usage (in fact, in the usage of most East Asian countries), by contrast, only a minority of streets and shops are named after individuals. With the exception of modern-day dictators, sycophantic politicians, and some self-absorbed individuals, Chinese people generally do not find it favorable for individual names to be repeated over and over, and the proper names that bear significance for the larger units (the whole town, the whole village, the whole clan, etc.) are preferred over the given names of individuals. The majority of streets and shops are so named that they either signal some common goals (such as “success,” “peace,” “universal love,” etc.), or describe the features of the locality (such as its historical significance, its natural attraction, or its most well-known produce), or commemorate the shop owner’s ancestry or the common origin of the people on the same street.

In the Chinese language the subjects, especially in the forms of pronouns, are often dropped; in the English language the subjects cannot be dropped, and the first person singular pronoun “I” even has to be capitalized. By contrast, many Chinese do not use the pronoun “you” at all when speaking to people of higher social status. In the late imperial period, one would even have had to drop a stroke from a character if that character was also part of the name of an honorable person. Namelessness, however, does not necessarily signify high social status. It simply indicates that the individual is identified through his/her position in the larger social

unit or completely absorbable to the larger social unit. Before modern times, for example, Chinese girls were generally not given individual names but were simply referred to by their family names. My grandmother on my father's side was simply referred to as "[the one] of the family name Yao" in official documents as well as on my (paternal) family's ancestral tablet. Honorable persons were not directly named because they *were* their larger social units — the emperor represented the whole state, and the patriarch represented his whole family. Individuals at the very top and the very bottom were both absorbed into their larger social units and rendered nameless.

Positional and relational terms, rather than individual names, are often used to address relatives in the Chinese language. In some less urbanized and less Westernized areas in China, people still conventionally refer to individual children and their own siblings ("smaller units") by their positions in their respective families ("larger units"), such as "the third boy of the Yang family," "the second one in my family," and "my oldest sister." There are at least twelve different Chinese terms for the English word "cousin." A cousin on one's maternal side of the family is different from a cousin on one's paternal side, and a cousin born to a brother of one's father is termed differently from a cousin born to a sister of one's father. One would also need to know if the cousin is male or female, younger or older than oneself. One needs to correctly identify a cousin's age, gender, and position in the extended family before one can correctly address him/her. And by being told to address any cousin in a particular way, a child is also learning to position oneself in relation to that cousin. Knowing the relation and position is far more important than knowing the individual name.

With the linguistic conventions mentioned above, it is not difficult to understand why (individual) humility is often extolled as a virtue in Chinese cultures, while (individual) pride

seems to be very important part of life in the modern-day English-speaking cultures, as reflected in the frequently used expressions, “I am proud of you” or “you must be proud.” Also, instead of being told to “Be yourself” as in an English-speaking environment, Chinese youngsters are much more likely to be advised to consider what the larger social unit may need and not to be peculiar when entering an unfamiliar social circle.

Language constitutes the persons who use it in the sense that it suggests and promotes a certain way of thinking of the self and relating to each other as well as to the larger society. The East Asian linguistic principle of larger units enveloping and taking precedence over smaller units is also mirrored people’s communication patterns. Researchers of speech communication and business negotiation have long described East Asian communication pattern as “high-context,” “collectivist,” characterized by the interdependent view of the self, and oriented toward social relationships and nebulous general atmosphere. American business negotiation, by comparison, is “low-context,” “individualistic,” characterized by the independent view of the self, and focusing on specific personal goals.<sup>43</sup> Scholars of business communication Kam-hon Lee, Guang Yang, and John L. Graham. observe,

Americans tend to reduce a complex negotiation problem into its several parts or issues, then discuss one at a time, settling each before moving on to the next. ... Alternatively, the normative Chinese approach is to discuss all issues at once without apparent focus or order.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rajesh Kumar, “Communicative Conflict in Intercultural Negotiations: The Case of American and Japanese Business Negotiations,” *International Negotiation* 4, no. 1 (1999): 63-78; Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, “Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion and Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 98, no. 2 (1991): 224-53; Edward Twitchell Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1976).

<sup>44</sup> Kam-hon Lee, Guang Yang, and John L. Graham, “Tension and Trust in International Business Negotiations: American Executives Negotiating with Chinese Executives,” *Journal of International Business Studies* 37 (2006): 626. See also Prue Holmes, “Problematising Intercultural Communication Competence in the Pluricultural Classroom: Chinese Students in a

Literature abounds in the correlation between cultural values and communication patterns, but few researchers have specifically link cultural values to linguistic principles.

In Buddhist terms, as the *rūpa* for the mind, socio-cultural conventions supply the raw materials from which the consciousnesses of the individuals embedded in those conventions are made. Different people may “put together” (*saṅkhāra*) the *rūpa* in different ways and thus may have different dispositions and may further choose to continue putting things together in those ways. That is, the *rūpa* do not determine the individual consciousnesses and socio-cultural conventions do not determine the ways in which people think and perceive their environment and relate to each other. Yet the *rūpa* does limit the possibilities of the ways in which individual consciousnesses take shape. With the raw material of iron, one may make a chair or a weapon, but the possibility of making ceramics is precluded. Thus Butler contends, “The one who acts...acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset.”<sup>45</sup> Take language for example

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New Zealand University,” *Language and Intercultural Communication* 6, no. 1 (2006): 18-34; Wendi L. Adair, Tetsushi Okumura, and Jeanne M. Brett, “Negotiation Behavior When Cultures Collide: The United States and Japan,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86, no. 3 (June 2001): 371-85; Vairam Arunachalam, James A. Wall, Jr., and Chris Chan, “Hong Kong Versus U.S. Negotiations: Effects of Culture, Alternatives, Outcome Scales, and Mediation,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 28, no. 14 (1998): 1219-44; Geert Hofstede and Michael Harris Bond, “The Confucius Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth,” *Organizational Dynamics* 16, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 5-21.

<sup>45</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 16. Likewise, feminist scholar Linda Martín Alcoff remarks, “the options available to us are socially constructed, and the practices we engage in cannot be understood as simply the results of autonomous individual choice.” Linda Martín Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” in *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*, edited by Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 101.

again, in order to be understood as a speaker of a certain language, not only does one have to follow the grammatical rules of that language, but one has to conform to the cultural assumptions and values carried in the customary usages of that language. One would not be considered as being able to use the English language if one constantly “forgets” the grammatical subjects in place, and one may appear to be awkward, strange, or even adversarial and rude, if one always uses the subjective nouns and pronouns when speaking Chinese. In the same way, one has to incorporate the conventions and norms in his/her society and manifest them in his/her actions in order to be recognized as a part of that society, to be considered culturally competent. “[T]o become subject to a regulation is also to become subjectivated by it, that is, to be brought into being as a subject precisely through being regulated.”<sup>46</sup> To survive in a certain culture, one has to be socialized with, and constrained by, that which the culture takes for granted and renders normal, which also means that one is never really completely autonomous but has to operate within the parameters of cultural norms. One’s speeches are citations of what has been conventionally said, and one’s actions are performances of what has been conventionally done in the socio-cultural milieu.

Nevertheless, neither society nor culture stands unchanged. “[T]he norm only persists as a norm to the extent that it is acted out in social practice and reidealized and reinstated in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life. The norm has no independent ontological status.”<sup>47</sup> For example, the spreading of English as the most widely acquired second language in the world has contributed much to the change of cultural contours in East Asian societies. As a result, the

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<sup>46</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 41.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

issue of individual human rights is receiving greater attention. At the same time, the older generations are commonly complaining that the younger generations are growing more self-absorbed and more individualistic. In urban and more Westernized areas in the Chinese societies, people rarely address their siblings by their positions in the family any more, and more and more brands and buildings bear individual names. Soon one will not be able to characterize East Asian cultures in the same way that I just did, for collectively East Asians are acting differently, which will make their cultural contours different. The ways people act are conditioned by the cultures with which they co-arise, and at the same time people's actions are conditioning their cultures and each other.

“In order to understand Buddhist ethics,” David R. Loy asserts, “we must consider its foundation in the Buddhist understanding of the self — or, more precisely, the Buddhist deconstruction of the self.”<sup>48</sup> In line with the logic of Interdependent Arising, Buddhism “does not presuppose a unitary soul or self-determining subject.”<sup>49</sup> A person and a person's identity are constituted through the surrounding material and symbolic forces to which s/he is repeatedly exposed, including gender norms. Likened to food in many early Buddhist texts, the material and socio-cultural reality is not “something ‘out there,’ cleanly and neatly separable from our observing consciousness. Rather it is in us, of us,” shaping and limiting our existence.<sup>50</sup> The ways in which one thinks, speaks and acts are, and always will be, conditioned by the material

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<sup>48</sup> Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 182.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>50</sup> Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, 58.

and symbolic forces,<sup>51</sup> and in this regard one does not have an eternal, changeless “Self” that is above, or operating independently of, the matrix of *rūpa* in which one is embedded. Both personhood and identity are in continuous construction and reconstruction, in interaction with the society and the culture.

With the language of recent feminist theories informed by poststructuralism and Foucault, it can be seen that the classical Buddhist teachings do not categorically negate the existence of individual persons, nor do they deny the efficacy of actions. Rather, with Interdependent Co-Arising as the rationale, classical Buddhist discourses simply point out the extent to which we are social animals: persons co-arise with, and are conditioned and circumscribed by, the material and socio-cultural forces in their surroundings, which have been produced and maintained through people’s repeated actions. Buddhist understanding or deconstruction of “Self” is that all selves are interacting and interconditioning processes in a web of co-existence, each is reflecting and reflected by the actions of others, many of which have been manifested in cultural norms and social structures. At the same time, just as individuals do not have any permanent, independent, unchanging self-essence, cultural norms and social structures are constructed and subject to change as well. The twin teachings of Interdependent Co-Arising and Non-Self thus not only do not negate the efficacy of actions, but they accentuate the primacy of volitional actions, *kamma* (Pāli: *kamma*; Sanskrit: *karma*). Just as individual selves can be consciously reconditioned through repeated volitional actions, so can cultural norms and social structures. Buddhist ethics rests on this perspective of Interdependent Co-Arising and this interconditionality of life: once seeing oneself in others and others in oneself, once seeing

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<sup>51</sup> “Social forces...mold the ways we think, feel, and act.” Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 87.

individuals shaping society and society shaping individuals, the sane and socially responsible response cannot but be volitionally disciplining oneself and dedicating oneself to the transformation of society for the wellbeing of all, oneself included. As both individual transformation and social transformation depend on volitional actions in Buddhist teachings, a Buddhist social ethics has to contain an exposition of *kamma*, which will be the subject of next chapter.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**PERSON-IN-KAMMIC-NETWORK<sup>1</sup>:**  
**MORAL AGENCY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Poststructuralist constructivist feminist analyses on gender construction and subjection formation provide a more nuanced language with which the classical Buddhist teachings of Non-Self and Five Aggregates can be clearly expounded. Judith Butler’s concept of sedimentation, in particular, is useful in explicating the classical Buddhist concept of *kamma*. What people actually do invariably deposits something in the cultural context, and if a large enough number of people, and for a long enough period of time, keep acting the same way, it will gradually be sedimented and become a norm, to which people living in that culture will in turn

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<sup>1</sup> The term “person-in-kammic-network” is inspired by the term “person-in-community” is from Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr. in their book *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1989), in which the term first appeared on page 7. Stating from a theocentric Protestant Christian perspective, Daly and Cobb addressed the inadequacy of taking the abstract concept of *homo economicus* to be the social reality, and they reached a conclusion that is strikingly similar to Non-Self and Interdependent Co-Arising in Buddhism. Rather than a “pure individual” who is entirely independent and self-concerned, they point out, an human being is always a “person-in-community”:

People are constituted by their relationships. We come into being in and through relationships and have no identity apart from them. Our dependence on others is not simply for goods and services. How we think and feel, what we want and dislike, our aspirations and fears — in short, who we are — all come into being socially. ... We are not only members of societies, but what more we are also depends on the character of these societies. The social character of human existence is primary. The classical *Homo economicus* is a radical abstraction from social reality.

In the real world the self-contained individual does not exist.  
Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 161.

be conditioned to conform. That is, what every person chooses to do at every moment has an accumulative effect both on the person's own character and on the culture at large. On the other hand, the choices available to an individual person are already limited by the existing material and socio-cultural *rūpa* that have been constituted by what people have chosen to do prior to the present moment. Understanding the relation between socio-cultural conventions and people's actions, one can see one's role in constituting and reconstituting oneself, as well as in constituting and reconstituting the socio-cultural conventions. At the same time that one owes one's very existence to the sedimentations in the society, one's actions can perpetuate the socio-cultural conditions or effect changes. The Buddha therefore repeatedly urged that his followers be careful with and take responsibility for their *kamma*. The teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising thus conveys the interdependence of all beings on a profound level. What we are and what we do are conditioned by and conditioning each other's being and doing.

In Buddhism, this concept of the interconditionality between all beings and their actions is best depicted by the image of the Indra's Net in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, even though it is a Mahāyāna text and not a text of early Buddhism. Indra, one of the supreme gods in the Vedic pantheon, has a net that stretches infinitely in all directions. At each node of the Net there is a jewel that reflects all the other jewels in the Net, and if one looks closely, one can see that any of the jewels is reflected on all other jewels that are reflecting and reflected in one another. Loy succinctly expounds the significance of the imagery as such: "In this cosmos each phenomenon is at the same time the effect of the whole and the cause of the whole, the totality being a vast, infinite body of members, each sustaining and defining all the others."<sup>2</sup> As Indra's Net

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<sup>2</sup> Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 183. In the past, the interconditionality as implied by the metaphor of the Indra's Net might be difficult to grasp, but it is no longer a difficult concept in

stretches infinitely in all directions, so is the scope of the repercussions of any action. And as the shape and color of one jewel at one node of Indra's Net is reflected by all other jewels on the Net, and then will be reflected back and seen in itself's reflections of other jewels, so is the thinking, feeling, and behavioral patterns that one constructs and evinces.

With the rapid globalization through military, economic, and technological means, now more than ever can we see the extent of the interdependence of all and the extent to which people's actions impact each other. Latin American liberation theologians as well as some economists and social theorists have long attested to the layers of insidious aftermaths of colonialism and imperialism that are still vividly felt today. The capitalistic expansion and the pursuit of material goods in the wealthy countries further take their tolls in the lives of people in the so-called "third world" countries. With the "underdeveloped" countries being "developed" and becoming a part of the capitalistic global economic system that has been established and dominated by the elite of the "first world," the gap between the rich and the poor, and between men and women, widens rapidly, and the Earth is further polluted and getting increasingly uninhabitable, especially in the poverty-stricken areas. Thus viewed, the seemingly "individual" decisions and actions, such as buying bottled water, driving gasoline-guzzling automobiles, reproducing and overindulging one's offspring, or raising one's children to conform

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an age when people at the opposite sides of the world can communicate with one another within seconds through the use of the World Wide Web. An Internet user's day could be ruined given that the user could be the recipient of hundreds of junk emails or even viruses, and yet this recipient is simultaneously a giver and can easily add a flavor to other people's life by sending caring words, happy thoughts, encouraging messages, and useful pieces of information. The difference between the Internet and the net of human relationships is that, one can sign off from the Internet and still has a life, but it is impossible to drop off from the social network of relationships.

to the rigid binary gender roles, are not so “individual” after all. Individual persons are participating in the global co-arising of *dukkha*, whether or not they are aware of it.

#### **4.1 *Kamma* as Taught by the Buddha: Volitional Actions Here and Now**

The word *karma* had been a multivalent word long before the time of the Buddha. In the Vedic texts it was said that by performing sacrificial rituals one would be brought to the heaven in the future. For the sacrificial rituals to have the power to bring the ritual performer to heaven in the afterlife, there had to be something existing between the performing of the sacrificial rituals now and ascent to heaven in the future. As such, in pre-Buddhist Brāhmanical usage, *karma* referred to ritual actions only<sup>3</sup> and the main focus of discussion was the negative leftovers (*karmaphalasesa*) of incorrect ritual actions or imprecise performances of sacrificial rituals. In the *Śatapatha* and *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇas*, for instance, those who were confined to hell were said to be those who killed and ate animals and even herbs without performing the correct rituals.<sup>4</sup> In the pre-Buddhist *Upaniṣads*, such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the *karma* was broadened to refer to all actions, and yet the focus was still the effects of actions (*karmaphalasesa*). In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, for example, it was stated that “A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad

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<sup>3</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 2-3; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

action.”<sup>5</sup> In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the effects of actions were more explicitly linked to the destination of one’s rebirth:

People whose behavior is pleasant can expect to enter a pleasant womb, like that of the Brahmin, the Kṣatriya or Vaiśya class. But people of foul behavior can expect to enter a foul womb, like that of a dog, a pig, or an outcaste woman.<sup>6</sup>

In Jainism, *karma* was conceived as fine material particles that would be accumulated with every bodily, verbal, and mental action, regardless of intentions.<sup>7</sup> It was through exhausting the karmic particles already accumulated by means of severe austerities that one might liberate one’s originally pure soul (*jīva*). In other words, *karma* was considered by Jainas as the consequences of actions instead of actions themselves. In all of these pre-Buddhist usages, *karma* was discussed in the passive sense as the effects of actions, and the actions in question were those already taken instead of those about to be taken.

In analyzing the discourse of *kamma* in Buddhism, James R. Egge contends that, although the Buddha adopted the category of sacrifice from Brahmanism, he however completely dispensed with the word’s original reference of sacrifices. Instead, the Buddha used the word *kamma* to refer to ethically accountable acts,<sup>8</sup> and thereby shifted people’s attention from sacrificial rituals to the actions that have impacts on others and, more broadly, to the actions

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<sup>5</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.12-13. See Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 5.10.8. See Obeyesekere, *Imagining Karma*, 11-2.

<sup>7</sup> Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, 22-4. Also see Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Egge, *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravāda Buddhism*, 41-67.

that have impacts on the mode of co-existence of all beings. More importantly, he consistently discussed *kamma* in the active sense as the actions to be taken here and now.

With regard to the actions that supposedly had been done in past lives, his attitude was consistent with his attitude toward metaphysical speculations.<sup>9</sup> In a conversation with the Nigaṇṭhas (i.e. Jainas), who believed that they had to perform austerities in order to exhaust the bad *kamma* they had accumulated in past lives, the Buddha asked:

But, friends, do you know that you existed in the past...that you did evil actions in the past...that you did such and such evil actions...that so much suffering has already been exhausted, or that so much suffering has still to be exhausted, or that when so much suffering has been exhausted all suffering will have been exhausted?<sup>10</sup>

After the Nigaṇṭhas answered “No” to all of the above questions, the Buddha then asked, “Do you know what the abandoning of unwholesome states is and what the cultivation of wholesome states is here and now?”<sup>11</sup> That is, instead of discussing and speculating about the actions already taken in past lives, which remained unknowable to most people<sup>12</sup> and could not be undone anyway, the Buddha taught it was far more important and urgent to abandon unwholesome states and cultivate wholesome ones right here and right now. In this spirit he

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<sup>9</sup> See Section 2.1.

<sup>10</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.93 (*Cūladukkhakkhandha Sutta*); also ii.214-5 (*Devadaha Sutta*).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> The Buddha did not say past lives were completely unknowable to all people. The *Nikāya* texts indicate that one of the kinds of “direct knowledge” (Pāli: *abhiññā*; Sanskrit: *abhiññā*) accompanying the experience of enlightenment is recollection of past lives. For examples, see *Majjhima Nikāya* i.22 (*Bhayabherava Sutta*), i.278 (*Mahā-Assapura Sutta*), i.347 (*Kandaraka Sutta*), i.357 (*Sekha Sutta*); *Samyutta Nikāya* II.213 (*Kassapasamyutta*), V.265 (*Iddhipādasamyutta*), and V.305 (*Anuruddhasamyutta*).

urged his followers to contemplate their responsibilities for the actions they were about to take.<sup>13</sup>

With the notion of *kamma* discussed in the active sense, the focal point is the intentional undertaking of ethical behaviors here and now, rather than the passive dealing with the consequences of past actions that may or may not be verifiable.

Moreover, in the *Samyutta Nikāya* the Buddha was recorded to have specifically refuted the idea that “whatever a person experiences...is caused by what was done in the past.”<sup>14</sup> He rejected attributing every occurrence to past *kamma* because, in addition to bodily illness, some experiences could be caused by “change of climate...careless behaviour...assault.”<sup>15</sup>

Attributing every experience to *kamma* accumulated in the past not only has the effect of blaming the victims of illness and natural disaster, but also allows people not to take responsibility for their carelessness or even aggressiveness at the present moment.<sup>16</sup> It may even lead to a difficulty for the Nigaṇṭhas/Jainas who voluntarily take on extreme ascetic practices and inflict much pain on themselves: “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by what was done in the past, then the Nigaṇṭhas surely must have done bad deeds in the past, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings.”<sup>17</sup>

This is not to say that in the Buddha’s teachings past actions do not affect the present moment. On occasion, in the *Nikāya* texts the consequences of actions taken in the past,

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<sup>13</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* V.57.

<sup>14</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* IV.230-1 (*Vedanāsamyyutta*). See also *Majjhima Nikāya* i.93 (*Cūladukkhakkhandha Sutta*) and ii.214ff (*Devadaha Sutta*).

<sup>15</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* IV.230-1 (*Vedanāsamyyutta*).

<sup>16</sup> See *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.222 (*Devadaha Sutta*).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

including one's body at the present moment, were referred to as the "old *kamma*," while the actions about to be taken here and now were referred to as the "new *kamma*."<sup>18</sup> As "old *kamma*," past actions do affect the current situation that one is in. One might be prone to misconduct due to the habits of misconduct that one might have formed in past lives. That is, however, by no means an excuse for the current self to continue misconduct now, nor is it an excuse for others to abuse the current self in the name of karmic retribution, for one cannot be certain of what exactly others have done in the past lives. Besides, there is no way of saving people from evil if they continue to find excuses to justify their own evil conduct. The Buddha taught that the way to overcome evil is simply to stop evil conduct:

A person given to cruelty has non-cruelty by which to avoid it.  
One given to killing living beings has abstention from killing living beings by which to avoid it.

...

One given to avarice has non-avarice by which to avoid it.  
One given to fraud has non-fraud by which to avoid it.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, he taught that the way to overcome the influences of past actions is simply to stop taking those actions and stop continuing those behavioral patterns.

Unlike Jainism, however, the Buddha did not teach people to cease all actions for the goal of liberating the soul encased in *kammic* dusts. Seeing *kamma* as material particles and focusing on the passive sense of *kamma* as the consequences of actions, the Jainas upheld the ideal of refraining from all kinds of actions for the fear of the accumulation of new karmic

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<sup>18</sup> See *Samyutta Nikāya* IV.132-3 (*Salāyatana-samyutta*) and II.64-65 (*Nidāna-samyutta*).

<sup>19</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.44 (*Sallekha Sutta*).

particles on the soul (albeit it probably remained an ideal instead of a reality for most Jainas).

The Buddha, by contrast, differentiated between wholesome conduct and unwholesome conduct:

I do teach people to be inactive in regard to evil conduct in deeds, words, and thoughts; I teach inaction in regard to the multitude of evil, unwholesome qualities. But I also teach people to be active by way of good conduct in deeds, words, and thoughts; I teach action in regard to the multitude of wholesome qualities.<sup>20</sup>

Recasting *kamma* into the active sense, the Buddha taught people to be ever reflective and watchful of the actions they were about to take, seeing danger in the slightest faults, and dedicating themselves to ethical behaviors.<sup>21</sup> In accordance with the Buddha's practical and this-worldly concerns, what is important is not what one might or might not have done in the past, but what one needs to do here and now.

The active sense of *kamma* as discussed in previous paragraphs has much to do with the exercise of one's volition (*cetanā*, part of the aggregate *saṅkhāra*<sup>22</sup>), so much so that it is generally understood by scholars of Buddhism that Buddhist *karma* refers to volitional actions only.<sup>23</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* III.415 and VI.63 read, "It is volition (*cetanā*), O monks, that I call *kamma*; having willed, one performs an action through body, speech or mind." Even the aforementioned "old *kamma*" was said to have been "generated and fashioned by volition." U

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<sup>20</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* VIII.12.

<sup>21</sup> For examples, see *Majjhima Nikāya* i.36 (*Ākankheyya Sutta*), i.415 (*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta*), *Anguttara Nikāya* V.7, V.114, VIII.2, IX.3, and X.20, and *Samyutta Nikāya* V.187 (*Satipaṭṭhānasamyutta*).

<sup>22</sup> See Section 3.1.

<sup>23</sup> For examples, see Gier and Kjellberg, "Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will," 287; Luis O. Gómez, "Some Aspects of Free-Will Question in the Nikāyas," *Philosophy East and West* 25, no. 1 (January 1975): 82; Robinson et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 11-2; Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 73-4; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 40.

Rewata Dhamma and Bhikkhu Bodhi explain that volition organizes its associated mental factors in acting upon the object, and as such it determines the ethical quality of the action. It is therefore the most significant mental factor in generating *kamma*.<sup>24</sup>

Truly, *kamma* can be active only when volitions are put into the equation — one cannot be said to have actively taken any action without some qualified kind of “free will;” otherwise one’s actions would be, borrowing Butler’s words, merely citations of existing socio-cultural sedimentations. Without the exercise of volition that makes it possible for things to be done differently, the past would have a determinant hold on the present and the future, both on the individual level and on the socio-political level. Without the factor of volition, what had been done would always be done, how it had been would always determine how it would be, and there would be no way out of the existing *dukkha*-inducing social norms and self-identities. Without volition, that is, all would be predetermined and there would be no possibility of change and no point in trying to make a difference. Contrary to the popular (mis-)understanding that links the concept of *kamma* with determinism or fatalism, then, it is the account of *kamma* in the active sense as volitional actions that makes the Buddhist *Dhamma* non-deterministic. What the Buddhist *kamma* teaches, Rita Gross suggests, is:

[I]n each present moment, no matter how strong habitual patterns and familiar ways of reacting may be, Buddhist teachings about karma claim that I have some tiny opening of freedom. ... Likewise, each person who is implicated in my present matrix has similar freedom.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> Rita M. Gross, “What Buddhists Could Learn from Christians,” in *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Christian-Buddhist Conversation*, by Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2001), 176.

David J. Kalupahana therefore considers the Buddhist *Dhamma* the “middle way” between determinism and indeterminism.<sup>26</sup> The terms “determinism” and “indeterminism” were renderings of the Sanskrit words *kriyāvāda* and *akriyāvāda*, with the former referring to the belief that deeds bear consequences and the latter to the belief that deeds are fruitless. In the early texts, Buddhists referred to the teachings of the Buddha as *kriyāvāda* or *karmavāda* since the Buddha did teach that deeds/actions brought results. The Jainas, however, considered Buddhism *akriyāvāda*, for the Buddha did not teach one-to-one correspondence between act and fruit. Gómez therefore describes Buddhism as “weak” or modified *kriyāvāda*.<sup>27</sup>

While Gómez’s description is appropriate, it is misleading to render “modified *kriyāvāda*” as “qualified determinism” or “soft determinism” as Gier and Kjellberg do, for past deeds only *condition but do not determine* current experiences. Besides, the use of the word “determinism” defeats the purpose of Gier and Kjellberg’s discussion of Kalupahana’s distinction between conditionality and causality:

The language of causality tends to simplify the explanation of an effect, while the language of conditionality makes it much more complex. The doctrine of interdependent coorigination compels the Buddhist to take a much more comprehensive view of causality. ...we are morally responsible for our own character and intentions, which although completely conditioned by antecedent events, are nonetheless what we truly want and should do.<sup>28</sup>

In the Buddha’s teachings, past deeds do condition the present, but it does not determine the present. Besides the material and symbolic forces that one is exposed to and has to operate in,

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<sup>26</sup> David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), Chapter Three.

<sup>27</sup> Gómez, “Some Aspects of Free-Will Question in the Nikāyas”: 81-4.

<sup>28</sup> Gier and Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will,” 285-7.

the exercise of volition is another crucial factor that has been shaping one's consciousnesses and directing one's conduct. People who are subject to the same conditioning do not necessarily think and act in the same way due to the working of their *saṅkhāra*. The aggregate of *saṅkhāra*, which includes mental construction, disposition, and volition, on the one hand accounts for individuation and the reality of individual differences,<sup>29</sup> and on the other hand holds individual persons accountable for what they intend to do. The teaching about *kamma* affirms the possibility for individuals to exercise their volition and make a conscious choice with regard to the ways they act and react under socio-cultural conditioning.

Also contrary to the popular (mis-)understanding that associates the teaching of Non-Self with the negation of moral agency, Non-Self actually affirms the efficacy of volitional actions. It indicates that the individual self is not predestined to be in its current mode of being for eternity. Quite consonant with this implication of the Buddhist teaching of Non-Self, Butler reasons,

Paradoxically, the reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary. ... Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency.<sup>30</sup>

If one's identity is an effect produced through the repetition of certain kinds of performances that have been socially sanctioned, then it can be changed through the repetition of an alternative kind of performances, even though those alternative performances still are delimited and limited by the sedimentations in society. Counterintuitively, it is the assertion of a "Self," an abiding

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<sup>29</sup> Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, 20-1.

<sup>30</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187.

ontological core that exists prior to, and remains outside of, material and socio-cultural forces, that precludes the possibility of change and renders agency in the phenomenal world meaningless.

The Buddhist teaching of Non-Self and the poststructuralist theory on subject formation both point out the constructedness of individual persons. What a person is depends very much on the *rūpa* in which s/he is embedded. A person as such is therefore neither above nor separate from her/his socio-cultural contexts. To say that, however, is not to absolve individuals of responsibilities. For one thing, as argued above, individual persons are only *conditioned* and *constrained*, but *not determined*,<sup>31</sup> by the surrounding material forces and socio-cultural conventions. For another, just as an individual person is socially constructed and not self-existent, a convention is socially constructed and not self-existent, too. Conventions do not just come into existence out of nowhere; they are products of human conduct and they must be repeated in order to work. Social conventions are the precipitates of the repeated actions of the socially-conditioned persons as much as persons are precipitates of social conventions on the one hand, and their own actions, speeches, and thoughts on the other.<sup>32</sup> “People create the social system, but the system creates people.”<sup>33</sup>

Take speech for example again, although “[t]he speaking subject makes his or her decision only in the context of an already circumscribed field of linguistic possibilities,” Butler maintains, “this repetition does not constitute the decision of the speaking subject as a

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<sup>31</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 139. See also Janet R. Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

redundancy. The gap between redundancy and repetition is the space of agency.”<sup>34</sup> Individual persons, albeit socially constrained and operating within limited possibilities, have agency and are responsible because they are making decisions and contributing to the sedimentation process via their actions. Individual persons can cite the conventions in the same way, or they can exercise their volition in such ways that their citation breaks away from ordinary usage and leads to the reconfiguration of the conventions. For example, not very long ago it was the norm in the English language to use masculine nouns and pronouns to represent all of humanity, and the practice reflected both male dominance in society and naturalized androcentrism. With the word “man” standing for “human,” the respect that supposedly to be paid to all humans was only paid to man. When more and more people exercise their volition in such a way that they use gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language, gradually the use of the masculine-generic may incur suspicion and criticism because it excludes more than a half of the human population in the world. “To the extent that gender norms are *reproduced*, they are invoked and cited by bodily practices that also have the capacity to alter norms in the course of their citation.”<sup>35</sup> Individual persons can reinforce and perpetuate what has become normalized and naturalized, or they can unsettle or even subvert it. The effects of one single action may not be discernible, but the existing *rūpa* will change when enough people take the same or similar actions for long enough a time. People’s volitional actions will condition the people embedded in those conventions they have repeated.

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<sup>34</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 129.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 52.

It is worth bearing in mind that volition is one aspect of the Aggregate *saṅkhāra*. Like the rest of the Five Aggregates, *saṅkhāra* is culturally conditioned and circumscribed, and like the rest of the Five Aggregates, *saṅkhāra* is not substantive and does not have an eternal “Self” that is above and unaffected by the material and socio-cultural *rūpa*. The word *saṅkhāra* denotes the *constructed* as well as the *constructing*, but it does not denote an abiding, self-existing, unchanging *constructor*. Volition, as a part of *saṅkhāra*, is constructed, though it also constructs; it can be exercised and is a crucial factor in the Buddhist ethical discipline, but it is still embedded in the matrix of material and socio-cultural forces and confined by them. Thus, though Buddhist teachings do value the function of volition and demand the exercise of it, Walpola Rahula points out that “free will” in Buddhism is conditioned and only relatively “free.” In Buddhist thinking, “There can be nothing absolutely free, physical or mental, as everything is interdependent and relative.”<sup>36</sup> Volition is not predetermined. It is relatively free, but it is still interdependently co-arisen and is still constrained and confined by that with which it co-arises.

If volition is conditioned by the *rūpa* that have been constructed and maintained by people other than the self, it follows that *kamma*, being *volitional* actions, cannot possibly be a “single-channel, closed circuit course” as some Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism make it out to be.<sup>37</sup> In a conversation with a disciple named Kassapa in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha taught,

Kassapa, [if one thinks,] “The one who acts is the same as the one who experiences [the result,]” [then one asserts] with reference to one existing from the

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<sup>36</sup> Walpola Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught*, revised and expanded edition with texts from Suttas and Dhammapada (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 54.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Winston L. King, “A Buddhist Ethic without Karmic Rebirth?” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994): 35.

beginning: “Suffering is created by oneself.” When one asserts thus, this amounts to eternalism. But, Kassapa, [if one thinks,] “The one who acts is one, the one who experiences [the result] is another,” [then one asserts] with reference to one stricken by feeling: “Suffering is created by another.” When one asserts thus, this amounts to annihilationism. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the middle.<sup>38</sup>

To assert that a person is *fully* responsible for his/her own actions is to neglect that the *rūpa* (with which a person’s consciousnesses and self-identities co-arise) includes the socio-cultural conventions that have not been made by oneself alone. To assert that a person is responsible *only* for his/her own actions (and not for other people’s actions) is to neglect that one’s actions create new *rūpa* with which other people’s consciousnesses and self-identities co-arise. Either assertion presumes complete autonomy, as if volition has a “Self” that can exist independently above the matrix of material and socio-cultural forces. That is tantamount to asserting a form of eternalism that contradicts the core Buddhist teachings of Non-Self and Interdependent Co-Arising.<sup>39</sup> To say that one is neither fully nor solely responsible for one’s actions, however, is not the same as saying that one is innocently bearing the consequences of others’ actions or that one does not need to take responsibility for one’s own actions. To make either of the two statements above, in the eyes of the Buddha, is to assert a form of annihilationism. Neither eternalism nor annihilationism was countenanced by the Buddha.

Kalupahana is right in considering that the Buddhist *Dhamma*, generally referred to as the “Middle Way,” is, *inter alia*, the middle way between determinism and “free will.” It is also the

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<sup>38</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* II.20 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

<sup>39</sup> “[T]o claim that how well or poorly I manifest myself as a human being,” Rita Gross also points out, “is completely independent of the matrix or container within which I find myself, is to come dangerously close to positing the independent self that Buddhism so carefully dismantles.” Gross, “What Buddhists Could Learn from Christians,” 173.

middle way between placing moral responsibility entirely on each individual and placing it entirely on society, seeing individuals as either helpless victims under social institutions or self-made heroes who rise above them. Considering that persons co-arise with the existing *rūpa*, that subjects are constructed through the socio-cultural conventions, society as a whole is at least partially responsible for the misdeeds and crimes that are seemingly committed by its individual subjects. For this reason, Judith Butler considers the culpable subject to be retrospectively “resurrected” in order to meet the legal demand of accountability.<sup>40</sup> And David Loy comments that “there is the uncomfortable possibility that offenders today have become our scapegoats for larger social problems.”<sup>41</sup>

Some Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism attribute the “invention” of the social dimension of *kamma* to the great Mahāyāna theorist and synthesizer Nāgārjuna.<sup>42</sup> Some others believe the concept of social *kamma* is influenced by Western Protestant values and brought about by Western Buddhists. Based on the discussion above, it is inaccurate to attribute the “invention” of the concept of social *kamma* to either Mahāyānists or Western Buddhists, for the Buddha specifically refuted the understanding of *kamma* as a mechanism of retribution in which each person stands alone and is responsible fully, and solely, for his/her own actions.<sup>43</sup> It is true that the Buddha taught his disciples to watch and take responsibility for their volitional actions, and it is true that he was recorded to have said,

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<sup>40</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 78-80.

<sup>41</sup> Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory*, 121.

<sup>42</sup> King, “A Buddhist Ethic without Karmic Rebirth?”: 36.

<sup>43</sup> Gross differentiates “vertical karma,” the individualistic, linear, and past-tense aspect of karma, from “horizontal karma,” the karma that is being produced socially, reticularly, and contemporarily. Gross, “What Buddhists Could Learn from Christians,” 173-9.

The killer begets a killer  
One who conquers, a conqueror  
The abuser begets abuse  
The reviler, one who reviles  
Thus by the unfolding of kamma  
The plunderer is plundered.<sup>44</sup>

However, considering the interconditionality of people embedded in the same socio-cultural context, the phrase “The abuser begets abuse” does not necessarily mean that the abuser himself/herself will be the very next receiver of abuse. Rather, it means that, with his/her abusive behaviors, s/he deposits something to the social context and makes it a little more acceptable, in some people’s minds, to abuse others. And it gets more and more acceptable with every action of abuse, with every person who initiates or imitates abusive behaviors. The same holds true for all forms of discrimination, domination, aggression, and violence. It is therefore “by the *unfolding* of kamma” (italics added) that “the plunderer is plundered.”

Thus regarded, it is not just by the suggestive power of sympathy that others’ feelings and thoughts “may be regarded” as those of oneself as Thai Buddhist scholar Roongraung Boonyoros comments<sup>45</sup> (as if others’ feelings and thoughts cannot influence oneself at all if one has no sympathy). Rather, others’ feelings and thoughts, through their actions, will find their ways to be the constituents of the feelings and thoughts of the self. And the feelings and thoughts of the self, through their manifestations in actions, are becoming the constituents of those of others, which will in turn come back at oneself

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<sup>44</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.85 (*Kosalasamyutta*).

<sup>45</sup> Roongraung Boonyoros, “Householders and the Five Precepts,” in *Buddhist Behavioral Codes and the Modern World: An International Symposium*, edited by Charles Wei-hsün Fu and Sandra A. Wawrytko (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 173.

through the socio-cultural sedimentations. Individual persons' interconnections with one another are by no means external, dispensable, or propped up only by the suggestive power of sympathy. Rather, they are *internally* related to one another.<sup>46</sup> It is one thing that many traditional Buddhists have misunderstood and misused the concept of *kamma* to the effect of upholding the *status quo* and blaming individual victims, particularly women, for their own sufferings. But it is quite another to equate that misunderstanding and misuse with “authentic” Buddhism or early Buddhism.

Following the logic of Interdependent Co-Arising, each mental formation/volition, though individuated and not predetermined, is socially conditioned and constrained. At the same time, each *kamma*, i.e. each volitional action that a person takes, has a social and political dimension. To say that we interdependently co-arise is also to acknowledge that our actions condition each other's actions and that we make and remake ourselves as well as our world together. It is the sedimentation of people's actions that makes the culture the way it is, and it is due to people's repeated conformity and participation that conventions are naturalized and normalized. Peter D. Hershock asserts,

In combination, the teaching of karma and no-self direct us to see ourselves — and so what is happening in our worlds — as an ever-dynamic expression of dramatic interdependence. In such worlds, causation is not a linear process, but a coalescent one. It is not that our intentions literally influence the world, but rather that they are an occasion for revised confluence or “flowing together” with it. As we revise our intentional activity, we effectively elicit new lived worlds, new patterns of dramatic affinity, aligning ourselves with different constellations of meaning, different patterns of narration. But because persons are understood in a Buddhist context as functions of patterned relationship, neither “you” nor “I” can remain the same in doing so. We are not fundamentally individuals remaining self-identical over time, but *characters* in continuous development.

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<sup>46</sup> This statement drawn from Buddhist view of Dependent Origination again coincides with Daly and Cobb's “basic conviction.” See Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 169.

... That is, karma is not a projection or transmission of effects of information from life to life. ...

... Our past lives are *ours*, not because we are abiding entities or souls that possess or link them, but because the narrative movements — the patterns of conduct — evident within them are most meaningfully aligned with who we have been and are becoming. The continuity among lives is not a result of material or spiritual permanence, but a matter of dramatic affinities among patterns of narrative movement.<sup>47</sup>

The Buddhist discourse on *kamma* is a discourse on the fundamental sociality of human existence and the interconditionality of individual beings. Being fundamentally social and interdependently co-arisen, in Joanna Macy's words, "we are, quite literally, part of each other — free neither from indebtedness to our fellow-beings nor responsibility for them."<sup>48</sup> One comes into being in the matrix of material and socio-cultural forces and has been conditioned by them, and those material and socio-cultural forces are in place as a result of people's actions up to this moment.

Together, the Buddhist teachings of Non-Self and *kamma* as volitional actions can be empowering to individuals as they are morally demanding. Recognizing that no one and nothing is predetermined to exist in a certain way and stay unchanged for eternity, one knows that one does not have to accept the kind of existence defined by culture (or by oneself, for that matter). Then one can take one's volitional actions seriously and remake oneself (and remake the culture, if a large enough number of people are repeatedly acting the same way for a long enough period of time) by taking courses of actions that are as wholesome as possible, albeit not necessarily in accordance with socio-cultural conventions or with one's own habitual patterns of acting and reacting. Community psychologist Kathleen H. Dockett finds that understanding

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<sup>47</sup> Hershock, "Family Matters," 93-94.

<sup>48</sup> Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, 194.

*kamma* as an ongoing process is enough to empower people to locate the “locus of control” internally and to motivate them to actively make changes.<sup>49</sup> No matter what may or may not have been done in the past, here and now one can start a series of trainings that can, through repetition, change the outlook of one’s personality, the course of one’s life, and the socio-cultural norms.

In terms of gender roles and gender stereotypes, the teaching of Non-Self can enable a woman to see, for example, that it is not her essence or her inherent nature or her permanent “Self” to be subordinated and treated as mere appendages to men. Neither is it the essence or nature or “Self” of the culture, or the whole human society for that matter, to sanction or demand such subordination and mistreatment. It may seem “natural” for women to act weak and subservient, and for men to seek dominance even if that means resorting to violence, but it is largely because generation after generation of women and men have been socialized to act in those ways and, in turn, expect and even demand others to act in the same ways. What has been done collectively and contingently, then, appears to be the permanent “Self” of things.

The concept of *kamma* as taught by the Buddha, however, urges people to take responsibility for their actions and exercise their volition in order to recondition themselves for the wellbeing of all in the interconnected web of life, instead of passively allowing what has been done to determine what will happen. Women can exercise their volition in such ways that they do not act out the culturally-prescribed role whose only concern is to please the men in their lives by beautifying themselves and yielding to the latter’s authority. Men can exercise their

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<sup>49</sup> Kathleen H. Dockett, “Buddhist Empowerment: Individual, Organizational, and Societal Transformation,” in *Psychology and Buddhism: From Individual to Global Community*, edited by Kathleen H. Dockett, et al (New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, 2003), 178-9.

volition in such ways that they do not act out the culturally-prescribed role who are tough, aggressive, and seeking domination, if not over other men then at least over “their” women.<sup>50</sup> By exercising their volition as such, women and men are liberating themselves from stereotypes that have been causing *dukkha*. Simultaneously, by doing so they are reconfiguring the cultural norms that define masculinity and femininity, or at least resetting the cultural parameters that delimit what is acceptable and what is not. By performing and expecting conventional rigid binary gender roles, as argued above, individual men and women are indirectly normalizing the pursuit of domination and vanity, which creates and perpetuates *dukkha* on many levels, for others as well as for themselves. The Buddhist goal of the cessation of *dukkha* demands that people carefully examine what they have been conditioned to take as their “selves,” to actively monitor their actions and reactions, to exercise their volition to reconstruct themselves and the *dukkha*-producing social norms.

In the “interlocking system” of Buddhism, Herbert Guenther writes, “[i]t is he who as ‘causal agent’ creates his world which, in turn, is a ‘causal agent’ creating him.”<sup>51</sup> No one lives without taking actions, and the actions one takes in turn become part of the socio-cultural forces that condition all people in that matrix, including oneself. As the feminist slogan puts it, the

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<sup>50</sup> One of the troubling effects of masculinity being culturally hinged on domination is violence against women. Statistics show that, in the United States, domestic violence and rape happen predominantly among poor families and minority communities, where the men are institutionally debased and not enjoying the dominant status that they have been socialized to believe all men should be having. Margaret Miles, “Violence against Women in the Historical Christian West and in North American Secular Culture,” in *Women’s Studies in Religion: A Multicultural Reader*, edited by Kate Bagley and Kathleen McIntosh (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2007), 114.

<sup>51</sup> Herbert Guenther, *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), 75-6.

personal is political. Individual feelings and thoughts and actions have ramification on the political level. And based on the teaching of Non-Self and Five Aggregates, what is political will eventually become personal, too. Through our actions, we make meanings together, write our cultural scripts together, and make and remake ourselves in the process. Paradoxically, the Buddhist *Dhamma* that is known for its teaching of Non-Self also emphasizes individuals' moral agency and teaches individual "selves" to take social responsibility. We have responsibility for each other and need to be mindful with the actions we take because, with our actions, we are constructing and reconstructing our world and conditioning people within it. The human society, as a whole, reaps what people sow. We are all implicated in the *kammic* network.

#### 4.2 Global Co-Arising of *Dukkha*

As the rationale behind the teachings of Non-Self and *kamma*, Co-Arising or interdependence is a pragmatic view of the reality of human existence and has tremendous socio-ethical implications. It reveals the intricate interrelations among individual persons, as well as between individuals and society. It also highlights the social dimension of *kamma*, demanding individual persons exercise their volitions in socially conscionable ways to reduce and alleviate *dukkha*.

Following the perspective and reasoning provided by Interdependent Co-Arising, to state that existence is fraught with *dukkha*, as the First Noble Truth in Buddhism does, is also to say that all on the interconnected web of life are complicit in the production and perpetuation of the *dukkha* in the world with their *kamma*, whether directly or indirectly. That, however, does not mean everyone is equally responsible. Interdependent Co-Arising does not mean that all factors,

though interconnected, contributed equally to the arising of something. Some factors are direct, primary causes while others are mere conditions, i.e. indirect and auxiliary factors. Given different positions on the interconnected web, some people's *kamma* carry more weight in the generation and maintenance of certain *dukkha*-inducing situations than others'.

Wars, for example, are fought due to a number of factors: able-bodied persons who have the propensity or ability to fight and are willing or compelled to follow orders, inventors and scientists that design and improve weapons, manufacturers and businesspeople that produce and sell weapons for monetary gain, uneven and/or unfair distribution of social resources, concentration of natural resources in certain geographical areas that incurs covetousness from people not living in those areas, greed and aggression on the part of political and/or military leaders, propagated theories and beliefs about the righteousness of the self-group and the evil of the other-group, ideological conflicts that are more often than not rooted in egocentric assessments of situations and in the attachments to those assessments, anger and hostility on the part of perhaps all parties involved, and so forth. All of the above are conducive to the arising and continuing of wars, and all of the above are responsible. Yet all are not equally so. A soldier does not play the same role in initiating and continuing a war as the political and/or military leaders. A truck driver who transports weapons from the factory to the battlefield is not equally responsible as the Chief Executive Officer of a weapon-manufacturing corporation who reaps profits from the prolongation of wars.

In classical Buddhist discourses, the currently more privileged and more powerful were clearly considered to be more responsible for the arising of *dukkha*. For this reason, historically Buddhism has been rather close to the elite. Aside from the fact that the upper-class men were more likely to have the leisure and access to receive education of the highly complicated

Buddhist texts and philosophies, Buddhism is also close to the elite in the sense that it is dedicated to “conscientize”<sup>52</sup> rulers, urging them to play the role of *cakkavatti* (Sanskrit: *cakravarti*) who implements policies in accordance with the Buddhist *Dhamma* in order to safeguard the wellbeing of all subjects and prevent *dukkha* from arising. In the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, the king was said to be responsible for the arising of theft: it was after the king failed to lay down conditions for *all* people to prosper that life became difficult for some; it was after the king failed to meet the basic welfare needs of the less privileged people that poverty became rampant; and it was after the king did not remedy the situation that some in dire poverty were driven to theft.<sup>53</sup> This text demonstrates that the Buddha recognized a comfortable material life to be “an important factor contributing toward a harmonious social life”<sup>54</sup> and considered the state to be responsible in safeguarding and maintaining the welfare of its individual subjects.

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<sup>52</sup> In Latin American Liberation Theology, it is the poor that need to be conscientized, that is, to be educated to be critically aware of the structural injustice imposed on them, of their right to life and dignity, and of their agency in liberating themselves. Here I am borrowing the term but using it slightly differently: in the classical Buddhism tradition, it is the privileged that need to be educated so that they would be conscious and conscientious when they enact their decisions that inevitably have tremendous social ramifications. Regarding the Latin American liberation theologians’ usage of the word “conscientization,” see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy for the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); 18-9; Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 35-7; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), xxiv, xxix, 57, 70; Ernani Fiori, “Education and Conscientization,” in *Conscientization for Liberation*, edited by Louis M. Colonnese (Washington, D.C.: Division for Latin America-USCC, 1971), 123-44; Nigel W. Oakley, “Base Ecclesial Communities and Community Ministry: Some Freirean Points of Comparison and Difference,” *Political Theology* 5, no. 4 (2004): 447-8 and 451.

<sup>53</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.65 (*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*).

<sup>54</sup> Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, 120-1.

Besides recognizing the “external” factor of social structures, classical Buddhist discourses also identified “internal” mental/emotive factors that accounted for the arising of crime and suffering. In the *Aggañña Sutta*, greed was depicted as *the* reason that possessive individualism, crimes and punishments, and differentiation of social classes came into being.<sup>55</sup> David Kalupahana points out that the Buddha “carefully distinguished between human need and human greed.”<sup>56</sup> While the Buddha did consider it the responsibility of the incumbent ruler to implement fair social policies to fulfill the need of the masses because “There cannot be harmony when the belly is empty,”<sup>57</sup> he also saw greed and egocentric concerns as the propeller of unjust social structures.

Greed on the part of those who are currently powerful and privileged, in particular, is detrimental to social wellbeing, for they are far more likely to influence social policies and further develop theories based on the privileged life in their elite enclave. They are far more likely to have the administrative, financial, and educational resources to propagate ideologies that justify their imposition of unfair structures and regulations. Therefore, since its inception Buddhism has maintained a tradition of preaching to the dominant classes. The *Sigālaka Sutta*, commonly (mis-)taken to be a discourse conveying Buddhist expectations of *all* lay people, was mainly directed at the privileged, property-owning, slaves-holding male “householders,” urging them to be humane, generous, and socially responsible.<sup>58</sup> While some may take all this talk directed at kings, male brāhmins, and rich male householders, to be evident of the elitist and

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<sup>55</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.86-94 (*Aggañña Sutta*).

<sup>56</sup> Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, 121.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See page 35 of Chapter One and pages 78 and 82 of Chapter Two.

androcentric orientation of Buddhism as a whole, I would like to contend that classical Buddhist scriptures addressed mainly upper-class men partly because it was the upper-class men who needed to be “conscientized” the most, given their greater social power over so many others.

Keeping in mind the impacts of colonialism and neo-colonialism, it is certainly not untrue that it is the greed and aggression on the part of the currently powerful that has been creating tremendous *dukkha* for many. Quite a few social critics, economists, and Latin American liberation theologians have related the ways in which the colonial and neo-colonial policies and ideologies, which were first formulated by the (male) elite of the “first world” countries, have undermined the basic welfare of women and men in the formerly colonized areas. Rebecca Todd Peters’ account is one of the most succinct:

First, the colonial governments and their corporations had used their colonies as sources of raw materials, labor, and trade. These policies and practices served an extractive function for the colonial governments and as such they did not emphasize or enable a productive independent economy to develop in most of these countries. Second, decades of “foreign” political control and the imbalance of trade in the direction of selling raw materials and buying goods from the colonial master had prevented indigenous development of industry or trade that was capable of facilitating the move to self-determination and independent statehood. Consequently, these former colonial states now had formal political recognition of their independence by the international community but were unable to interact on a par with their former colonizers in the political and economic realm.

In the 1950s and ’60s “development” became the name of the game in international finance, and billions of dollars were lent to countries in African, Asia, and Latin America to assist them in becoming more “like” Western Economies. ... The perspectives of capitalist economic activity that shaped the practices of business and industries developed during this period of global economic integration made them unable to ignore the trade potential (and billions of consumers) represented by the “two-thirds” world. To the neoclassically trained economic mind, the continued economic dependence of many of these countries on their formal colonizers could most readily be “solved” by helping these countries develop market economies, like the economies of the nations that colonized them, that could ensure their prosperity.

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In the early Reagan years, there was often talk of “trickle down” economics as a way of justifying continued economic benefits for the wealthy. The new ideology coincided with increased direct foreign investment from the corporate world and a growing capitalist elite within countries now drawn into this growing global network of transnational capitalism. ... To these folks the profitability of the market was sufficient

proof that neoliberalism was working. In contrast, those who had only their labor to sell in the economic arena were to discover that what had actually trickled down was a longer work week for less real wages for many of the world's workers. ... Simultaneously in the 1980s the IMF and the World Bank imposed strict structural adjustment policies on debtor nations in the "two-thirds" world... These structural adjustments were aimed towards making these economies more "efficient," which translated into cutting back on expenditures in the social service and educational sectors as a way to "trim fat" out of budgets and promoting export-oriented programs of growth.<sup>59</sup>

With the design and manufacture of superior weaponry, the wealthy and powerful from the "first world" countries conquered and colonized much of the rest of the world, stole and exported the latter's natural resources as well as cultural artifacts, and implemented exploitive rules that resulted in the colonized countries' dependency on their colonizers, both economically<sup>60</sup> and culturally.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the wealth furnished and fueled by the colonized countries further

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<sup>59</sup> Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 43-5.

<sup>60</sup> See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 17, 50-3, and 64; Gutiérrez, *The Density of the Present: Selected Writings* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 73, 75-6, and 159-60; Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 19-20, 88-91, 123, and 181-2; Michael D. Yates, *Naming the System: Inequality and Work in the Global Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 34-5 and 155. David R. Loy termed the royally chartered corporations, self-aggrandizing nation-states, and modern militaries, the "unholy trinity" that has fed on colonial exploitations. Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> As Joseph M. Kitagawa states in his introduction to *The Religious Traditions of Asia*, the presence of the overwhelming power of the "West" in Asia during colonialism prompted many intellectuals in Asia to naively accept Western interpretations of their own cultures and Western scholars' claims of objectivity, neutrality, and universality. "In those days, it was fairly fashionable to appropriate things Western in conformity with the program of westernization of Asia promoted by colonial regimes. To adopt Western modes of scholarship, moreover, was the only *entrée* into the global academy." Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Introduction," in *The Religious Traditions of Asia: Religion, History, and Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), viii. More generally, Western culture is deemed superior and traditional non-western cultures are considered impediment to "development." The later are therefore supposed to abandon their traditions and westernize themselves. Rokhsana Bahramitash, *Liberation from Liberalization: Gender and Globalization in Southeast Asia* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2005), 24-5. See also Y. Alvin So, *Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency, and World-Systems Theories* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990). The colonial

enhanced the colonizers' dominance of the world economy and lent credence to the economic theories and institutions they constructed and propagated, even though under the system the poor have gotten poorer, both among nations and within nations, and even though most projects of the U.S.-dominated World Bank are failures.<sup>62</sup> The enormous economic inequalities existing in the world today, applied philosophy and public ethics scholar Thomas Pogge points out, "have evolved in the course of *one* historical process that was pervaded by monumental crimes of slavery, colonialism, and genocide — crimes that have devastated the populations, cultures, and

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past has also rendered Latin America dependent on Europe religiously in that most of the Catholic clergy are foreign. Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 11-2.

<sup>62</sup> See David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bloomfield, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2001), 165-6; also 59-92 and 107-20; Yates, *Naming the System*, 41, 47-8, 52, and 55-7; Bahramitash, *Liberation from Liberalization*, 19, 21, 24-5; Peters, *In Search of the Good Life*, 73-5 and 81-4; Ray Kiely and Phil Marfleet, *Globalisation and the Third World* (London: Routledge, 1998), 32-3; Thomas Pogge, "The First United Nations Millennium Development Goal: A Cause for Celebration?" *Journal of Human Development* 5, no. 3 (November 2004): 387-8; Gutiérrez, *The Density of the Present*, 131-2; Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 53; Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 123 and 183; Bruce Cumings, "Still the American Century?" *Review of International Studies* 25, Special Issue (1999): 287; Bruce Rich, *Mortgaging the Earth: The World Bank, Environmental Impoverishment, and the Crisis of Overdevelopment* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994); Catherine Caulfield, *Masters of Illusion: The World Bank and the Poverty of Nations* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1996). By the late 1990s, the one-fifth highest-income population of the world had 86% of world GDP, while the bottom fifth had just 1%; the three wealthiest people had more assets than the combined GNP of the 48 least developed countries, while 1.3 billion people live on less than one U.S. dollar a day. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1999: Globalization with a Human Face*, 2-3, 28, and 37. In its 2007/2008 report, the United Nations Development Programme estimated that the poorest 40 percent of the world's population (approximately 2.6 billion people) lives on less than US\$ 2 a day and accounts for 5 percent of global income, and the richest 20 percent of the world's population accounts for 75 percent of global income. More than 80 percent of the world's population lives in countries where the income gap is widening. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World* ([http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr\\_20072008\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf)), 25.

social institutions of four continents.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, the “underdevelopment” of the poor countries, as Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez puts it, is “the historical by-product of the development of other countries.”<sup>64</sup>

On the global scale, affluent countries and their citizens have been more responsible for the life-threatening poverty<sup>65</sup> in the world than those in the poor or not-as-affluent countries.

Within each country, the ruling, policy-making elite have been more responsible than average citizens. In poor countries, the ruling elite often resort to exploiting and mistreating their workforces in order to compete with other poor countries for foreign investment.<sup>66</sup>

Compounded with the entrenched hierarchical gender relations, moreover, the male-dominated globalized economy has in particular impoverished and exploited women and girls across nations.<sup>67</sup> Of the people living below the poverty line, about seventy percent is women, and the

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<sup>63</sup> Pogge, “The First United Nations Millennium Development Goal,” 389.

<sup>64</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 51 and 64; also in *The Density of the Present*, 76. Economist Michael Yates puts it bluntly: “the poor countries are poor because they have been exploited by the rich nations.” Yates, *Naming the System*, 44; see also 42, 48, and 155.

<sup>65</sup> As of 2003, the United Nations Development Programme estimated that 1 billion people in the world lack access to safe drinking water and 2.4 billion lack basic sanitation. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2003: Millennium Development Goals: A Compact Among Nations to End Human Poverty* ([http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr03\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr03_complete.pdf)), 9. In the 2007/2008 report, it is still estimated that 28 percents of all children are underweight or stunted, 10 million children die of poverty and malnutrition each year before the age of 5, 3 million die of AIDS and 1 million die of malaria every year. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 25 and 45. See also Peters, *In Search of the Good Life*, 206-8.

<sup>66</sup> Pogge, “The First United Nations Millennium Development Goal,” 392.

<sup>67</sup> UNDP *Human Development Report 2003*, 310-30; Bahramitash, *Liberation from Liberalization*, 23-4; Pogge, “The First United Nations Millennium Development Goal,” 386; Yates, *Naming the System*, 60-1; Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 51.

deprivations caused by poverty fall disproportionately on them,<sup>68</sup> both due to global economic inequalities and to local hierarchical gender structures.<sup>69</sup> Without consciously dealing with the existing hierarchies, various Non-Governmental Organizations' programs that seek to empower "the oppressed" or aid the local "community" often end up empowering only the oppressed men and the male community.<sup>70</sup> Even in affluent countries women typically earn only a fraction of what men earn.<sup>71</sup> Women make up the majority of the cheap skilled labor and therefore are the foundation of world economy in a very real sense. Yet they are the ones who are harmed the most in the economic globalization and are hardly among the ones who receive benefits from it.

Modernity has made the co-arising of *dukkha* global and made the fact of interconnectedness readily observable. It is in the area of global ecological crisis that we can most vividly see how the privileged have been far more responsible in creating *dukkha* and yet having the poor and powerless bearing the brunt. While "People in the rich world are increasingly concerned about emissions of greenhouse gases from developing countries," the

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<sup>68</sup> Bahramitash, *Liberation from Liberalization*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> For examples, see Sarah Kindon, "Of Mothers and Men: Questioning Gender and Community Myths in Bali," in *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, edited by Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah, with a foreword by Robert Chambers (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1998), 156-9; Morag Humble, "Assessing PRA for Implementing Gender and Development," in *The Myth of Community*, 35; Ranjani K. Murthy, "Learning About Participation from Gender Relations of Female Infanticide," in *The Myth of Community*, 80-2; Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah, "Waking Up to Power, Conflict and Process," in *The Myth of Community*, 1-23.

<sup>70</sup> See Patricia Maguire, "Proposing a More Feminist Participatory Research: Knowing and Being Embraced Openly," in *Participatory Research in Health: Issues and Experiences*, edited by Korrie de Koning and Marion Martin (London: Zed Books, 1996), 29-30; Bahramitash, *Liberation from Liberalization*, 24.

<sup>71</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2003*, 310-30; UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 326-9.

*UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008* states, “They tend to be less aware of their own place in the global distribution of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.”<sup>72</sup> Yet the 60 million people living in the United Kingdom emit more CO<sub>2</sub> than the 472 million people living in Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Vietnam combined. The 23 million people living in the state of Texas leave a larger CO<sub>2</sub> footprint than the 720 million people in sub-Saharan Africa. The 19 million people in New York generate more carbon emissions than the 766 million people living in the 50 least developed countries. An average air-conditioner in Florida emits more CO<sub>2</sub> in a year than a person in Afghanistan or Cambodia in his/her whole lifetime. The *increase* of per capita carbon emissions in Canada since 1990 (5 tons) is greater than the per capita carbon emissions in China in 2004 (3.8 tons). The poorest 1 billion people leave about 3 percent of the world’s total carbon footprint.<sup>73</sup>

Yet the climate change resulting from the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has been far more life-threatening to the poor than to the rich. Climate disasters such as severe tropical storms and floods, are clearly on the rise. Between 2000 and 2004, an average 326 climate disasters were reported each year, doubling the yearly average between 1980 and 1984. Around 262 million people were affected by such extreme weather events each year, with over 98 percent of them living in developing countries. Countries with high levels of income inequalities experienced the effects of climate disasters more profoundly than more equal societies. Whereas the rich can cope with climate shocks by drawing on savings or selling off assets, the poor may have to cut nutrition and pull children, especially girls, out of school. Malnutrition

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<sup>72</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 43. See also Peters, *In Search of the Good Life*, 85-6.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-4. See also Peters, *In Search of the Good Life*, 114-5.

and educational deprivation have long-term consequences and further lock the already disadvantaged people in poor health and poor earning potential. It is estimated that, by 2080, the climate change could increase the number of people facing acute malnutrition by 600 million, the number of people facing water scarcity by 1.8 billion, and the number of people at risk of malaria by 220-400 million.<sup>74</sup>

Among the poor, women are more likely to be affected by extreme weather events than men. “Women’s historic disadvantages—their limited access to resources, restricted rights, and a muted voice in shaping decisions—make them highly vulnerable to climate change.”<sup>75</sup> In countries where women are the primary producers of staple food, drought and uncertain rainfall mean that women and young girls have to walk further to collect water. Floods typically claim more women’s lives than men’s since women’s mobility is more restricted and they are less likely to have been taught how to swim. When Bangladesh was hit by a cyclone and a flood in 1991, for example, the death rate of women was five times higher than that of men.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, when the poor affected by climate shocks have no alternative but to reduce consumption, it is girls’ nutrition that suffers the most.<sup>77</sup> In the same way that the fathers and mothers are more responsible for the malnutrition of their daughters than the girls themselves, the policy-making elites of the poor countries are more responsible for the plight of their poor citizens than the poor women and men themselves. And those who create, sustain, justify, and benefit from the

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-31 and 73-89.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-2 and 76-7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

current global economic and consumption system are more responsible for the rampant economic injustice and drastic climate change than those in the poor countries.<sup>78</sup>

In Buddhism, the discernment of the more responsible party in the generation and maintenance of *dukkha*, however, does not (or rather, should not) lead to animosity against those who are more responsible. For one thing, wisdom in Buddhist discourses includes seeing things as they really are and taking actions for the welfare of all. Seeing the interconditionality, one is dedicated to cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity<sup>79</sup> towards all and to working for the wellbeing of all. Emotively, naming the oppressors breeds resentment and truncates one's capacity of maintaining loving-kindness and seeking out the solutions that are the most beneficial or least harmful for all involved. Cognitively, identifying the enemy reinforces oppositional thinking and makes it even more difficult to maintain clarity that allows one to see the intricate and dynamic interconditionality of phenomena. Animosity and antagonism easily aggravate the given situation.

For another, given the perspective of Interdependent Co-Arising, no group of people is simply the objects upon which the social forces act. As explicated in the above section on the social dimension of *kamma*, the prevalence of a certain ideology or behavioral pattern is not the doing of a single person or a few persons. And as discussed in the last chapter on the Five Aggregates, the prevalent ideology or behavioral norm, being a form of cultural *rūpa*, can easily find its way into the consciousnesses of all those who live in that socio-cultural context and are being conditioned by it. One may or may not currently occupy a power position to oppress or

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<sup>78</sup> See Peters, *In Search of the Good Life*, 144-50.

<sup>79</sup> This cultivation will be further discussed in the next chapter.

exploit or *own* other people, but it is very likely that s/he has been inculcated with the values of “possessive individualism” so prevalent in the culture that s/he thinks a good life lies in owning property and making others toil for oneself. A man who has been exploited as a farmer by transnational agribusiness may have been so conditioned by the culture that he dreams of one day heading his own agribusiness and living off of the labor of other farmers. He may also have been conditioned to see his wife as a sex provider, a baby maker, a care giver, and a house maintainer. And a woman who has been treated as an object for her whole life may have been treating her children as the only personal property she has, not entitled to any opinion of their own. By taking actions as such, one is not just an innocent victim of injustice, but is simultaneously a perpetuator of the ideology and behavioral pattern of treating others as mere means to one’s self-centered interests and concerns. Being socio-psycho-physical compounds that co-arise and are interconnected, people are hardly ever *mere* victims of the social injustice created by “the oppressors” without being complicit in some way in the values and conventions that make domination possible or even laudable. People co-write the cultural scripts and continue to re-write them together.

Therefore, Vietnamese *bhikṣu* Thích Nhất Hạnh observes, the social system which we consider “imposes itself upon us, and we have become its slaves and victims” is the product of our own doing.<sup>80</sup> If we observe carefully and maintain mindfulness, he believes, we will see that the molding of the social system and the government policies reflects the values we hold in our daily life. With neither being aware of nor working on one’s own thinking and emotions,

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<sup>80</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh, “The Individual, Society, and Nature,” in *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, edited by Fred Eppsteiner, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1988), 42.

no one is automatically above the three poisons of acquisitiveness, aggression, and egocentric attachments.<sup>81</sup> Historically, therefore, Buddhism has put much emphasis on doing the “inner” work of observing and confronting one’s own thoughts and emotions that lead to the arising of *dukkha*-inducing social realities. “You may think that the way to change the world is to elect a new president,” *Nhât Hanh* says, “but a government is only a reflection of society, which is a reflection of our own consciousness. To create fundamental change, we, the members of society, have to transform ourselves.”<sup>82</sup> In the same vein, *Sulak Sivaraksa* comments, “We all have the power to cause suffering in relationships and cannot attribute this only to the social structure. The need for power stems from a desire to feel superior in the vain quest to establish a unique self.”<sup>83</sup> A society that values aggression and worships consumption cannot but produce a government that enacts aggression for material gains.

Nonetheless, as shown in Chapter One, the Buddhist masters’ proximity to power and privilege has much to do with the internalization, individualization, and masculinization of the Buddhist *Dhamma*. With the significant exception of the early Buddhist texts, Buddhism has not provided much direct critique of social structure and its relation to the arising of *dukkha*. Cultivating one’s own mind has often been conceived to be the only task, instead of the first task or one of the indispensable tasks. More often than not, the existence of power and privilege in

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<sup>81</sup> The triad of acquisitiveness, aggressiveness, and egocentric attachment is one rendition of the “three poisons” of greed, hatred, and delusion. See footnote 39 of Chapter One.

<sup>82</sup> *Thích Nhât Hanh*, “Ahimsa: The Path of Harmlessness,” in *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, edited by David W. Chappell (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 156.

<sup>83</sup> *Sulak Sivaraksa*, “The Virtuous Friends of Christianity and Buddhism,” in *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 56.

society is simply explained away by saying that those powerful and privileged are reaping what they sowed in previous lives, in the same way that the suffering of women is often explained away by their bad *kamma* in past lives. The operation of *dukkha*-inflicting social structure and *dukkha*-inducing cultural norms is usually disregarded or neglected, and the here-and-now *kamma* taught by the Buddha and the co-arising of “external” socio-cultural phenomena and the “internal” mental processes of individuals are yet to be sufficiently evoked.

Close to power or not, in accordance with the *Dharma* a Buddhist cannot find justification for violent restructuring of society, nor can s/he easily translate the mission of saving all sentient beings to the “preferential option for the poor,” as one of the slogans of Latin American liberation theology goes. It is in this aspect that engaged Buddhists generally differ from Latin American liberation theologians, to whom they are often compared. While understanding that injustice and hatred “have their origin in human selfishness”<sup>84</sup> and that people do not “automatically become less selfish,”<sup>85</sup> leading Latin American liberation theologians nevertheless call for “an option for one social class against another”<sup>86</sup> and differentiate the “unjust violence of the oppressors” and “*just violence* of the oppressed.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 65.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted by Gutiérrez in *A Theology of Liberation*, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 45.

<sup>87</sup> “Latin America: A Continent of Violence,” a document signed by more than 900 Latin American priests, 1968, in *Between Honesty and Hope*, 84. Quoted by Gutiérrez in *A Theology of Liberation*, 64. Gutiérrez himself equates the poor with the oppressed, who “are member of one social class that is being subtly (or not so subtly) exploited by another social class.” Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 45. See also Gutiérrez, *The Density of the Present*, 32. Even though Gutiérrez clarified elsewhere that the oppressed should not assume any violence on their part is “just,” the dichotomy of, and the opposition between, the two social

Since the exploitative capital owners are the sinning oppressors who “refuse to love one’s neighbor and, therefore, the Lord himself,”<sup>88</sup> redressing the situation entails siding with the righteous opposition, i.e. the poor, and combating the “class enemies”<sup>89</sup> to bring about immediate and radical change of the existing social structure.<sup>90</sup>

Engaged Buddhists agree with Latin American liberation theologians in many regards, such as it is human beings (instead of a supernatural being of evil) that should be responsible for the existence of suffering, and spirituality involves an on-going effort in redressing the social wrongdoings and injustices.<sup>91</sup> With the understanding of Interdependent Co-Arising, however, engaged Buddhists cannot *dhammically* espouse oppositional thinking or violent change.<sup>92</sup> The

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groups, the oppressors and the oppressed, are much emphasized. Gutiérrez, “The Meaning and Scope of Medellín,” first published in 1989 and compiled in *The Density of the Present*, 59-101.

<sup>88</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 48

<sup>90</sup> “Latin American misery and injustice go too deep to be responsive to palliatives. Hence we speak of social revolution, not reform; of liberation, not development; of socialism, not modernization of the prevailing system.” Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 45.

<sup>91</sup> Gutiérrez believes that to be a Christian is to follow Jesus Christ whose work “is presented simultaneously as a liberation from sin and from all its consequences: despoliation, injustice, hatred.” Therefore, “to preach the universal love of the Father is inevitably to go against all injustice, privilege, oppression, or narrow nationalism.” Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 90 and 135.

<sup>92</sup> This is not to say that Buddhists in history have never countenanced violence based on oppositional thinking. In the twentieth century, in particular, the world has witnessed large-scale violence sanctioned or even initiated by Buddhists. In all cases of which I am aware, the Buddhist masters who endorsed or encouraged violent measures also manifested strong attachment to their ethnic or national identity, as if that identity had an intrinsic, permanent, and unchanging value that warranted its preservation at all expenses. However, if one takes seriously the Buddhist deconstruction of self-identity, which is recognized as one of the core teachings in Buddhism across traditions, one has to conclude that those violence-advocating Buddhists were twisting the *Dhamma* and behaving/thinking *undhammically*. This is to be discussed more fully in the final chapter.

*dukkha* in the world will not cease simply by deposing the “class enemies” and placing the downtrodden on top.

That, of course, is not to say that the current structure is to be preserved as it is. Fair social structures are the necessary condition for the alleviation of *dukkha*. They are not the sufficient condition, however. The currently poor and powerless may not be as responsible for the arising of *dukkha* on the large scale as those who have been rich and powerful, but they have the same capability — and very likely the same underlying egocentric tendency, too — to inflict injustice. Seeing sufferings first-hand on a daily basis may prompt the deprived and oppressed to view things differently and develop different ways to relate to one another, but it does not guarantee they will. Once the conditions present themselves, they may soon manifest the same greed and aggression as their exploiters/oppressors and partake in the injustice and coercion that they once resented.<sup>93</sup> That is, they are not necessarily kinder or calmer or wiser than those who have been more responsible in inflicting *dukkha*, and they are not necessarily above seeing other people as property or instruments. All people alike may be conditioned by some socio-cultural norms, through repeated exposures and disciplines, to be acquisitive and aggressive. And all may be driven by deeply-seated defilements, including disturbing emotions of greed and hatred, and the deluded thinking of an independent Self. Without conscious and conscientious dealing with one’s own *dukkha*-producing tendencies, structural change simply changes the identity of

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<sup>93</sup> Gutiérrez makes the assertion that “The poor countries are not interested in modeling themselves after the rich countries, among other reason because they are increasingly more convinced that the status of the latter is the fruit of injustice and coercion.” Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 51 and 64. The ruling elites of the poor countries, however, “are generally in complicity with large interests at the international level” and do want to model themselves after the elites of the rich countries. Gutiérrez, *The Density of the Present*, 76. Very often the poor *are* interested in having the life of the elite.

the inflictors of *dukkha*, but not the socio-cultural patterns of *dukkha* production. Peace scholar Kenneth E. Boulding expresses a similar qualm: “a ‘liberationism’ which operates primarily in the dialectical mode and looks to the solution of human problems by getting rid of top dogs simply produces another set of top dogs, often worse than the last.”<sup>94</sup>

Just as the currently poor and powerless are not inherently righteous, the currently privileged and powerful are not inherently evil, either. Though more responsible, the latter are not necessarily people who consciously and volitionally “refuse” to love their neighbors. While some of them may intend to keep the social structures unjust for their own benefits, others may simply be imperceptive of the co-arising of their own privileges and others’ suffering. Some of the people living in the “first world” may be ignorant of their role in creating *dukkha* in the same way that some of the people living in the “third world” may be ignorant of their agency. Once educated and conscientized, the privileged may strive diligently to utilize the resources at their hands to remedy the injustice they have encountered or possibly have caused. Branding the privileged people as the evil-doers is not only unfair. It is as unbeneficial in changing the *dukkha*-producing socio-cultural norms as romanticizing about the poor who may be longing for the same privileges of their exploiters/oppressors. As pointed out in Section 2.1, the Buddha himself did not associate privileges with evil.<sup>95</sup>

Oppositional thinking and hatred may or may not effect changes faster for certain groups, but they will surely increase and intensify the ill will in others and deepen the roots of conflicts.

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<sup>94</sup> Kenneth E. Boulding, “Twelve Friendly Quarrels with Johan Galtung,” *Journal of Peace Research* 14, no. 1 (1977): 81. He however does not address the “inner” factors of the *dukkha*-producing tendencies of people. Instead, he rests his hope of solving poverty and human misery on economic development and increased productivity.

<sup>95</sup> See pages 53-4 of Chapter Two.

Drawing from the *Dhammapada*, Cambodian engaged Buddhist Venerable Somdech Preah Maha Ghosananda says, “In those who harbor thoughts of blame and vengeance toward others, hatred will never cease. ... For hatred is never appeased by hatred.”<sup>96</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh provides a drastic instance of how oppositional thinking can result in violence or exacerbate conflicts: during the wars between the Northern Communist force based in Hanoi and the Southern anti-Communist government based in Saigon in Vietnam in the 1970’s, Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns, in the spirit of non-violence, promoted peace and protested against military dictatorships. “When others see that we oppose the Saigon government,” Nhất Hạnh relates, “they often think we support Hanoi” and assume that “we cooperate with the Communists in order to destroy anti-Communist elements in the country.” As a result, Buddhist monks and nuns were put in jails or even massacred, by both sides of the antagonism.<sup>97</sup> The oppositional thinking on the part of the Hanoi supporters and Saigon supporters drove them to be violent toward people whose goal was to save lives and alleviate suffering.

Furthermore, in the analysis of the Five Aggregates, the pitfall with opposition and hatred goes deeper than “violence begets violence”. Clinging to the mental construction (*saṅkhāra*) of opposition, one generates the volition (also *saṅkhāra*) of manifesting it in one’s actions, and the repeated exercise of volition in this way congeals to be one’s disposition (*saṅkhāra*), which further affects one’s mental construction and blocks one’s perception of interconnectedness.

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<sup>96</sup> Maha Ghosananda, *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1992), 27.

<sup>97</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh and Daniel Berrigan, *The Raft Is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist-Christian Awareness*, foreword by bell hooks (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001), 75. Nhất Hạnh himself went into exile and was not allowed to return to Vietnam until very recently.

That is, not only do hostilities get sedimented “externally” to be the socio-cultural norms of aggression and violence that will beget more aggression and violence, but they also get sedimented “internally” to be one’s habitual way of mental construction and one’s disposition. Harboring hatred and seeing others as the enemy, one is making oneself a hateful person; opting for violent change and enacting it, one is acculturating oneself to be violent while legitimizing violence. One cannot possibly all of a sudden revert to nonviolence if one has resorted to a series of violent actions (surely age-long social structure cannot be changed with merely one action) to achieve one’s end, nor can s/he possibly convince others not to use violence when they do not agree with her/him, given that s/he has resorted to violence herself/himself.

While acknowledging that all people alike may be acquisitive, aggressive, and egocentric, Buddhism also affirms the possibility of change and teaches that people do have the ability to put an end to the cycles of *dukkha*-production, for others as well as for themselves. In the interconnected web of existence, individual persons are conditioned by the *rūpa* to which they have been exposed, and yet what people do and how people act in turn become the *rūpa* with which new consciousnesses and new behavioral patterns co-arise. The actions people take inevitably reverberate through the web of interconditionality and become part of the culture as well as part of themselves. In this light, benevolence and *dukkha*-alleviating actions can travel on the *kammic* network just as malice and *dukkha*-producing actions do. With repeated exposures and disciplines, generosity and benevolence can become the new sediments on the top of deeply-seated acquisitiveness and aggression. Egalitarianism and cooperation can replace competition and domination as the social norms. Seemingly minor effort, through repetition and accumulation, may change the direction of society. Interconditionality means that beings,

through their repetitive actions, can perpetuate *samsāra* as much as they can transform it into *nibbāna*, the cessation of *dukkha*.

In order to reach *nibbāna* and ceasing *dukkha* for all, Buddhists take refuge in the Three Gems, the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*. That is, besides learning from the Teacher and knowing that it is possible to reach *nibbāna*, Buddhists are supposed to learn and practice his Teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path, as well as building spiritual communities that prompts and facilitates the mental and behavioral transformation for the cessation of *dukkha*. As pointed out in Section 2.2, the “forerunner and precursor” of the arising of the Noble Eightfold Path is the association with “good friends,” the “others” who inspire and/or support one to be “wholesome.” The Three Trainings contained in the Noble Eightfold Path allow one to recondition oneself behaviorally, emotively, and conceptually, while the process of building communities allows the results of this self-reconditioning to travel farther and faster through the *kammic* network in which all are implicated. The following chapter will deal with the Buddhist program of self-reconditioning and community-building.

## CHAPTER 5

### BUDDHIST SELF-RECONDITIONING AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING

In the Buddhist worldview of Interdependent Co-Arising, society and individuals condition one another, and neither one is the uncreated creator of the other. Depending on each other to exist, both are impermanent and subject to change. And both need to be changed, according to the Buddhist *Dhamma*. The First and Second Noble Truths, besides being matter-of-fact statements about the unavoidable existential anguish in life and their causes, are also criticisms of the conventional *dukkha*-filled ways of life, particularly when they are viewed together with other teachings of the Buddha. The Third Noble Truth unequivocally states that the cessation of *dukkha* is possible, and the Fourth Noble Truth provides a program that enables individuals to go beyond their socio-cultural conditionings and transform the ways they live together. What the Buddha taught with the Four Noble Truths, then, was not a pessimistic or fatalistic view of life, but an indication of the Buddha's non-aggressive yet unyielding stance that the *dukkha*-inducing socio-cultural conventions and the *dukkha*-producing individuals, as they were, needed to be changed through the participation of all implicated.

Recognizing that individual persons were conditioned and constrained by their material and socio-cultural surroundings, the Buddha however manifested much confidence in individuals' potential in reconditioning their selves, being wholesome, and stopping the cycle of *dukkha*-production. In addition to tending the "outward" behavior and their ramifications, Buddhists are taught that it is equally important, if not more important, to turn "inward" and to

know and work on their minds and emotions. In the Buddhist analysis of personhood through the Five Aggregates, the way one conducts oneself is not only conditioned by social conventions and norms, but is also a product of one's own mental formations and dispositions (*saṅkhāra*), which are more often than not gravitated toward the ego and tinted with egocentric emotional investments, such as attachment to the extent of greed, and aversion to the extent of hatred. As the path to the cessation of *dukkha*, therefore, the Noble Eightfold Path consists of mental training and wisdom development in addition to ethical discipline. That is, in addition to restructuring interpersonal relationships and behavioral patterns through ethical discipline, the Buddhist *Dhamma* teaches that individuals need to simultaneously work on their inner states through meditative practices and understand the co-arising nature of worldly phenomena through wisdom development.

The global understanding of Interdependent Co-Arising related in Section 4.2 can be discouraging and downright paralyzing. How does one know what to do and what not to do if one is yet to develop the kind of wisdom that sees all ramifications of one's own actions? How does one face oneself when s/he realizes that, more often than not, s/he lapses into the mindless performances of conventions that are perpetuating *dukkha*? Even if one manages to be mindful and take wholesome actions for most of the time, what difference do a few wholesome actions make if unwholesome actions abound in the interconnected web of life? In fact, where does one even begin if all in the *kammic* network are interconnected and correlated?

Ideally, Buddhists are to develop the wisdom to see the reverberations of their actions through the web of interconditionality and take wholesome bodily, verbal, and mental actions for the wellbeing of all, irrespective of their current connections, or their seeming lack of connections, with oneself. Realistically, however, it is impractical to expect someone who is

yet to acquire such wisdom to see their multiple, intricate, and dynamic interconnections with all sentient beings and to care for all of them with equanimity. An average person can only be expected to continually develop and increase her/his social conscience and benevolence while s/he inevitably continues to engage in the world through her/his bodily, verbal, and mental actions.

For a pre-enlightened individual to develop social concerns as such, s/he needs small enough social circles in which s/he can really see the consequences of her/his own actions as well as feel the impact of others' actions. However, in the *samsāric* world, not everyone in one's immediate geographical community inspires or supports wholesome and socially conscionable actions. One therefore needs spiritual communities that guide and reinforce *dukkha*-reducing activities, so that one can be encouraged to continually try his/her best in making positive differences, without being overwhelmed with the pervasiveness of *dukkha* in the world. The latter kind of communities is not necessarily congruent with the former kind, in the same way that the *ārya-sangha* of stream-enterers is not necessarily congruent with the *bhikkhu-sangha* in a certain geographical location.<sup>1</sup>

In whichever way a community is defined, from a Buddhist perspective, it is a social construct and not something that one should cling to as one's permanent identity or as something inherently sacred. To reiterate, clinging to a piece of mental or social construct as if it were the permanent "Self" is at the root of the generation of *dukkha*. Geographical or spiritual communities are indispensable in nurturing the sense of interconnections and socially conscionable actions. In the contemporary globalized world, they are also invaluable in that

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<sup>1</sup> See Section 2.3.

they can provide guidance and hope, preventing their members from feeling alienated under capitalistic values. However, communities are subject to change and are conducive to *dukkha* when being “affected by clinging,” just as individual persons are. Group identity-views can be as *dukkha*-inflicting as individual ones.

### **5.1 The Three Trainings: Socially Conscionable Self-Reconditioning**

As Rita Gross points out, one of the convergences between Buddhism and feminism is both recognize that habitual and conventional patterns of thinking and behaving can operate to block basic well-being of people and cause great suffering. The Buddha’s discourses on the pervasiveness of *dukkha* indicated his criticism of the cultural scripts people had written together and imposed on each other. His teaching of Non-Self further instructed that identity views were *dukkha*-producing. In order to counteract the *dukkha*-producing conventional ways of life, including the identity views they support and reinforce, and in order to volitionally recondition the conventionally constructed individual persons, the Buddha taught the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path can be grouped under three headings: ethical discipline, mental training, and wisdom development. The fact that the Buddhist Path to the cessation of *dukkha* was comprised of these three trainings pointed to the three factors that set the cycle of *dukkha*-production in motion. Lacking the wisdom to see the interconditionality of phenomena, people wrongly identified a social construct or a mental construct to be the unchanging Self, and then sought to real-ize or aggrandize that Self, failing to consider the ramifications of their physical, verbal, and mental actions (*kamma*). The lack of wisdom was closely related to the lack of awareness of one’s mental formations and emotional states, and of how those formations

and states were conditioned by social conventions on the one hand and driven by egocentric desires on the other. The social behavioral norm of “possessive individualism” exacerbated the situation by implicitly legitimating self-centered *dukkha*-producing behaviors, which further conditioned more people to adopt an each-one-for-himself/herself attitude and behave selfishly. The cessation of *dukkha* therefore hinges on counteracting all three factors of the conventional ways of life that nurtured and reinforced *dukkha*-inducing identities and social norms.

Wrongfully perceiving or conceiving a mental or social construct to be the Self, the Buddha taught, was at the root of the generation of *dukkha*. Delusion or ignorance in Buddhism refers to such misapprehension. Wisdom, by contrast, refers to “see as it really is,” to truthfully apprehend the co-arising of phenomena and the concomitant impermanence, dwelling in it without clinging or agitation:

And, bhikkhus, from what are sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair born? How are they produced? Here, bhikkhus, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards *rūpa* as self, or self as possessing *rūpa*, or *rūpa* as in self, or self as in *rūpa*. That *rūpa* of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of *rūpa*, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.

He regards feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness, or feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness as in self, or self as in feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness. That feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.

But, bhikkhus, when one has understood the impermanence of *rūpa*/feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness, its change, fading away, and cessation, and when one sees as it really is with correct wisdom thus: “In the past and also now all *rūpa*/feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change,” then sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair are abandoned. With their abandonment, one does not become agitated. Being unagitated,

one dwells happily. A bhikkhu who dwells happily is said to approximate Nibbāna in that respect.<sup>2</sup>

*Dukkha* arises when one clings to a piece of social construct or mental construct, such as the status of “nobleman,” to be the essence or true nature of the individual self. Having held onto as the Self a piece that is constructed and thus bound to change, one experiences anguish when one detects change and tries in vain to substantialize such unsubstantial identity (*sakkāya*):

“Agitated mental states born of preoccupation with the change of *rūpa*/feeling/perception/volitional formations/consciousness arise together and remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is obsessed, he is anxious, distressed, and concerned, and due to clinging he becomes agitated.”<sup>3</sup>

The delusion or ignorance in the above sense creates *dukkha* not only for the individual self but for others as well. Attempt to create substance out of something that is unsubstantial and to ground permanence in something that is impermanent, one imposes one’s identity view, and all those postulations that would support that identity view, onto the world and others. One deploys all means to create the physical environment, social regulations, and ideological aura in which one’s identity view would seem more real and more grounded. With the self-perceived superiority, for instance, ancient male brāhmins and warrior-nobles devised regulations and justifications to ensure the stratification of society, and the more the society was stratified the

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<sup>2</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.42-4, 102 (*Khandhasamyutta*), IV.287 (*Cittasamyutta*); *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.17-9 (*Mahāpuṇṇama Sutta*), iii.188-9 (*Bhaddekaratta Sutta*), iii.227-8 (*Uddesavibhanga Sutta*). Translation modified from Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*. See also *Samyutta Nikāya* III.158-9 (*Khandhasamyutta*), IV.259 (*Jambukhādakasamyutta*); *Majjhima Nikāya* i.299-300 (*Cūlavedalla Sutta*), iii.284-285 (*Chachakka Sutta*).

<sup>3</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.227-8 (*Uddesavibhanga Sutta*).

more natural or real the superiority claim seemed. With the social situation in which only the upper-class boys had the leisure for, and access to, education, it surely seemed real that upper classes were inherently smarter than lower classes, and men inherently smarter than women. With the upper classes defining etiquettes and civilizations, it surely seemed that lower classes were uncouth and uncivilized. And due to women's and lower-class people's unintelligent and/or uncivilized "nature," their appropriate places in society were defined and confined to providing services for the upper-class men and affording the latter the time and energy to perform their "nature" of religious authority and/or political dominance. Class identity and gender identity on the part of the upper-class men were thus reified in social conventions that prescribed rigid class roles and gender roles, dehumanizing and stunting the development of lower-class men and all women.

As such, mis-identification leads to mis-behavior; an epistemological mistake becomes an ethical problem. The Buddha therefore instructed his monastic followers to abandon identity view "as if smitten by a sword, as if his head were on fire."<sup>4</sup> The abandoning of identity view, however, is not to be mistaken with the "fear and disgust with identity," the latter being an annihilationist view and a manifestation of the craving for non-existence, which still centers around the self.<sup>5</sup> Craving for static non-existence brings forth *dukkha* as much as craving for eternal existence; fear and disgust with identity is as *dukkha*-producing as clinging to an identity.<sup>6</sup> The Five Aggregates, the mental and social constructs, are neither the Self nor not the Self. Even the Buddha himself was said to be neither the same with the Five Aggregates nor

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<sup>4</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* I.13 (*Devatāsamyutta*).

<sup>5</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.232-3 (*Pañcattaya Sutta*) and iii.19-20 (*Mahāpuṇṇama Sutta*).

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.250 (*Saccavibhanga Sutta*).

apart from them.<sup>7</sup> They are not in and of themselves *dukkha*;<sup>8</sup> they become *dukkha* when they are “affected by clinging.”<sup>9</sup> What the Buddha taught, in other words, is abandoning the clinging to a social or mental construct as one’s abiding identity, not denying or hating individual selves in their different identities.

In the same way that wisdom and wholesome actions are positively correlated in classical Buddhist discourse, delusion/ignorance and unwholesome actions are correlated. Yet most people in the world, yet to be enlightened, are not aware of the connection between their identity views and the ways in which they conduct themselves, much less to comprehend the multifarious and multilayered ramifications of their actions. All too often people simply perform that which they have been conditioned to perform and hold the views they have been conditioned to hold, without seeing those ways of behaving and thinking as *dukkha*-inducing. People may hold onto their gender identities, performing and expecting others to perform rigid binary gender roles, without realizing that they are upholding and perpetuating a social system that delimits prematurely the possibilities of individual men and women, reduces each to a half of a whole person, creates unnecessary sense of lack, generates hierarchical and oppressive relationships, and promotes certain kinds of behaviors that are unbeneficial to the wellbeing of human society as a whole.

For example, the conventional expectation of men being strong, powerful, and dominating creates *dukkha* not only for women, but for men themselves, too. Besides justifying the domination and mistreatment of women, the conventional expectation of macho men forces

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<sup>7</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* III.111-2 (*Khandhasamyutta*).

<sup>8</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* ii. 66-8 (*Mahānidāna Sutta*).

<sup>9</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.249 (*Saccavibhanga Sutta*).

men to suppress their emotions, truncates their capacity to relate to others as equals and to be caring and nurturing, and sanctions aggression or even encourages the use of violence in the process of seeking domination, of women or of other men. The conventional expectation of women being subservient and subordinated to men not only renders women appendages that are incapable of sustaining themselves, but also pushes women to vanity. Under the rigid binary gender system, beautifying and commodifying themselves becomes the only means by which women can indirectly secure resources. Individual men and women do not necessarily intend to harm,<sup>10</sup> but harmful effects their performances of conventional binary gender roles have produced.

Unintentional actions generally do not count as *kamma* in the Buddhist discourses, and yet the lack of intention does not always excuse conventional or unconventional actions that produce harmful effects, immediately or in the future.<sup>11</sup> The Buddhist goal is the cessation of *dukkha*, or at least the alleviation of it, and therefore the Buddhist Path does not stop at deterring intentional harmful actions and promoting intentional beneficial ones. It also seeks to reduce the occurrences of unintentional harm. Thus besides ethical discipline and wisdom development, the Noble Eightfold Path is also composed of mental training that deals with deeply-seated emotive states and mental formations, including proper effort, proper mindfulness, and proper concentration. Proper concentration culminates in the four advanced meditative

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<sup>10</sup> As Rita Gross puts it, “it is not really an individual man who wants to cause me suffering by oppressing me or limiting my options, but the male dominated system in which he participates, often without intention to harm.” Gross, “What Buddhists Could Learn from Christians,” 177.

<sup>11</sup> See Harvey, “Avoiding Unintended Harm to the Environment and the Buddhist Ethic of Intention,” 2-4.

states called *jhāna*-s (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*-s), which are marked by happiness, tranquility, clarity, and peacefulness.<sup>12</sup> Deep concentration is conducive to the wisdom of seeing into the arising and cessation of phenomena in the world. Proper mindfulness is complete awareness of one's bodily, verbal, and mental actions, including emotive states and thought formations.

And what, bhikkhus, is proper effort? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu generates desire for the nonarising (*samvara-padhānam*) of unarisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. He generates desire for the abandoning (*pahāna-padhānam*) of arisen evil unwholesome states... He generates desire for the arising (*bhāvanā-padhānam*) of unarisen wholesome states... He generates desire for the maintenance (*anurakkhaṇa-padhānam*) of arisen wholesome states, for their nondecay, increase, expansion, and fulfillment by development; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. This is called proper effort.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth reiterating that wholesomeness involves, *inter alia*, consideration for others.<sup>14</sup> The desire for the development and preservation of wholesome states and restraint and abandonment of unwholesome states are thus closely connected with the desire for the wellbeing of all beings. The “proper” effort is defined as the effort to apply one's mind and energy to carry out such benevolent concerns for all, with one's “outer” bodily and verbal actions as well as one's “inner” mental actions.

Mental training, though far from the entirety of Buddhism, is a crucial and indispensable component of the Buddhist “Three Trainings.” People cannot live a day without performing

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<sup>12</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* II.211 (*Kassapasamyutta*), IV.236 (*Vedanāsamyyutta*), V.198, 213-5 (*Indriyasamyutta*), and V.307 (*Jhānasamyutta*); *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.40-1 (*Sallekha Sutta*), i.89-90 (*Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*), i.117 (*Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*), iii.4 (*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.131 (*Pāsādika Sutta*); *Anguttara Nikāya* IX.36.

<sup>13</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* V.9 (*Maggasamyutta*); *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.251-2 (*Saccavibhanga Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.312-3 (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*), iii.226 (*Sangīti Sutta*).

<sup>14</sup> See Section 2.1.

actions, and actions can be performed to the effect of perpetuating *dukkha*-producing norms and structures, or they can be performed unconventionally to the effect of unsettling or even subverting the existing conventions. However, one may not be aware of the ways in which s/he is performing.<sup>15</sup> Or one may happen to perform the norms unconventionally and subversively without meaning to do it. Or one may be aware of some of the negative consequences of his/her actions but remain indifferent, especially if s/he is currently benefiting from those conventional performances as well as from the existing social structures.<sup>16</sup> Or one may care

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<sup>15</sup> In a rather personal example, when my father passed away, my mother insisted that my brother should get at least one half, preferably more, of everything that my father had owned (and she and I would divide up the rest), even though the current inheritance law in Taiwan stipulates that my father's property should be divided evenly among my mother, my brother, and I. She argued that traditionally the oldest son and the oldest grandson both got a bigger cut, and that meant my brother should get a lot more since there was no grandson yet (that is, she thought my brother should take a bigger share for himself and receive an additional bigger share on behalf of his future oldest son). "Traditionally," I said, "females do not count, so everything should go to Brother." She knew it was true because she suddenly recalled that neither her mother nor any of the four sisters inherited any of her father's property — it was divided into four portions, with her oldest brother claiming two portions and each of the other two brothers having one portion. As "traditional" as she would like to be, she thought that both she and I were still entitled to something. She did not appeal to the tradition again with regard to inheritance after that conversation. In this incident, she was not aware of her trying to carry out a gender-discriminative and age-discriminative cultural convention, even though she had resented that convention herself.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Summers' memorandum to the World Bank regarding industrial pollution in 1991 is a glaring example. Knowing that industrial pollution causes cancerous diseases, deaths, and environmental damages, he however advocated the migration of dirty industries to the so-called "third-world" countries. People in poor countries, he argued, have less earning potential and do not live that long anyway, so it is economically most efficient for rich countries to dump their toxic wastes in poor countries. Lawrence Summers, internal World Bank memorandum dated December 12, 1991, 5. See Yates, *Naming the System*, 151; Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 91. In the *Abhidhamma* analysis, shamelessness of wrongdoing (*ahirika*) and fearlessness of wrongdoing (*anottappa*) are listed as unwholesome mental factors (*cetasika*) that lead to evil doing. U Rewata Dhamma and Bhikkhu Bodhi explain that the proximate cause of shamelessness of wrongdoing is the lack of respect for oneself, and the proximate cause of fearlessness of wrongdoing is the lack of respect for others. The opposites of these two unwholesome mental factors are shame of wrongdoing (*hiri*) and fear of wrongdoing

enough to want to change the existing norms and structures but is not aware of the ways in which s/he is exacerbating the situation and inducing suffering in the process of trying to stop suffering.<sup>17</sup> For people to actively — volitionally — act in ways that would redirect the co-arising from *dukkha*-inflicting to *dukkha*-alleviating, both awareness and benevolent social concerns are needed. Mental training allows practitioners to develop the mental states of full awareness (proper mindfulness) and clarity (proper concentration), as well as the emotive qualities of intending the wellbeing for all (proper effort) while generating happiness and equanimity from within oneself (proper concentration).

One of the most basic kind of mental training along the line of “proper effort” is the development of the “Four Boundless States,” otherwise terms the “Four Immeasurable Deliverances of Mind”: loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity. Through repeated practice, a practitioner consciously recondition oneself, gradually replacing the old habit of “possessive individualism” with the new habit of bearing best intentions for all in the interconnected web of life:

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(*ottappa*). Rooted in the respect for oneself and respect for others, respectively, they protect the world from widespread immorality and thus are called the “guardians of the world” by the Buddha in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. The *Samyutta Nikāya* says that shamelessness and fearlessness of wrongdoing follow ignorance/delusion, while shame and fear of wrongdoing follow wisdom/true knowledge. See *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, 83 and 86; *Anguttara Nikāya* I.51; *Samyutta Nikāya* V.1 (*Maggasamyutta*).

<sup>17</sup> Often times the well-intended Western feminists’ criticisms against the patriarchal practices in non-Western societies have the effect of locking the latter in perpetual backwardness and giving the men in those societies more reasons to tighten up their control of women, in the name of resisting Western imperialism and upholding their traditions. Rita M. Gross, “Introduction,” in *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 19-21. Also see Rey Chow, “‘It’s you, and not me’: Domination and ‘Othering’ in Theorizing the ‘Third World,’” in *American Feminist Thought at Century’s End: A Reader*, edited by Linda S. Kauffman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1993), 95-106; Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 187.

Here a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will. He abides...with a mind imbued with compassion...with altruistic joy...with equanimity, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.<sup>18</sup>

Cultivated and nurtured, the Four Immeasurable Deliverances of Mind supplant the “three poisons” of acquisitiveness, aggressiveness, and self-attachment. To put it simply, this type of mental training reconditions one to be benevolent,<sup>19</sup> wishing the best for others and not wanting anyone to suffer, while not being self-righteously attached to a certain course of actions or a certain mode of being. A variety of volitional actions can be ethical and wholesome; wholesomeness does not require uniformity.<sup>20</sup> What wholesomeness does require is benevolent social concern, which has to be repeatedly cultivated to be developed. The meditative training

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<sup>18</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.297 (*Mahāvedalla Sutta*) and iii.146 (*Anuruddha Sutta*).

<sup>19</sup> Loving-kindness is the wish for others to be happy, while compassion is the wish for others not to suffer. Both, as Sallie B. King states, are concerns for the welfare of others and ways of being benevolent. King, *Being Benevolence*, 6 and 24. In Tibetan Buddhist practices, the cultivation of the “Four Deliverances of Mind” is incorporated into the liturgical routine. Before reciting any scripture, one would routinely recite the following for three times:

May all mother sentient beings, infinite as the sky, have happiness and the cause of happiness.

May they be liberated from suffering and the causes of suffering.

May they never be separated from the happiness which is free from sorrow.

May they rest in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.

<sup>20</sup> “Contrary to the sectarian assumptions of our various sub-traditions past and present,” John Makransky maintains, “the history of Buddhist praxis and doctrine would indicate that there has never been only one narrowly delimited way to waken, and that any means to awaken is also a potential object of clinging.” John J. Makransky, “Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Trans-Historical Buddha,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, edited by Roger Jackson and John Makransky (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2000), 126.

of the Four Immeasurable Deliverances of Mind, through repetition, nurtures good will and enhances social concerns.

Sometimes people do not intend to inflict sufferings or do want to stop sufferings, but are caught up in the compulsory performances of the various norms within the systems, and/or are driven by their emotional turbulences and habitual egocentric ways of thinking and (re-)acting, and/or are not aware of the reverberations of their actions. The Buddha taught his followers to be mindful and fully aware of every single bodily, verbal, and mental action and its consequences. Needless to say, this kind of complete awareness cannot be achieved overnight, just as a gender identity or a social norm is not constituted with one single act. Full awareness, like steady calmness and habitual benevolent concerns for all, requires repetitive practice.

In the early texts, the cultivation of mindfulness usually begins with being aware of one's bodily actions, such as breathing and postures. When one breathes in, s/he strives to be aware of it; when one breathes out, s/he strives to be aware of it; when one walks, stands, sits, and lies down, s/he strives to be aware of it.<sup>21</sup> Gradually one may come to be aware of every action performed by the body: flexing limbs, putting on clothes, consuming food, defecating, urinating, etc. Being aware of the sensuous experiences of the body may sound simple, but probably every beginner of meditation who tries to be aware of his/her own breath for fifteen minutes experiences something similar to this description given by Stephen Batchelor:

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<sup>21</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.56-7 (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.291-2 (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*). Sarah Shaw notes, "The fact that the postures are so often mentioned as a group of four assumes that change of posture in the course of the day and frequent movement between different postures is to be encouraged." Sarah Shaw, comp., *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pāli Canon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.

Then suddenly we are no longer in touch with these experiences. A memory, a fantasy, a fear has snatched us away into the dim, seductive twilight of unawareness. We mentally blink, and the fascinating array of sensations vanishes. A single moment of forgetfulness lets the surge of impulses rush in again and sweep us away. Minutes pass before we even notice that we are distracted. We come back with a shock: our thoughts are racing (although we may have already forgotten why), our heart pumping, our forehead sweating. We return shakily to the breath.

The practice of mindfulness entails patiently returning to the object of meditation again and again...<sup>22</sup>

One is unaware of the level of one's own unawareness until s/he finds out that s/he cannot even stay steadily aware of her/his own breath for a mere fifteen minutes. Even with a relaxed posture and within a quiet environment, minutes will pass before one is even aware that one is not being aware. In the same way, most of the time one acts/reacts in the ways that s/he has been conditioned to act/react, without being aware of the action/reaction itself, let alone the process of being conditioned by multiple material and socio-cultural forces.

To actively recondition the *dukkha*-inducing socio-cultural sedimentations that have been conditioning one's "self," one has to first of all be aware of the subtle ways in which socio-cultural conditioning is taking place; and to be aware of the conditioning, one has to simultaneously be aware of one's feelings and mental formations that co-arise with the socio-cultural *rūpa*. Awareness of mental activities, which are intangible and taking place very fast, is much more difficult than awareness of bodily activities. Therefore the classical Buddhist mindfulness training begins with being mindful of one's own breath, a bodily activity that is crucial in sustaining one's life and is reflective of one's physical and emotive states. Concentrating on the process of breathing and patiently bringing one's attention back to it, one trains oneself to be calm and focused. One then gradually extends that focused awareness to

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Wakening*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 64.

other bodily experiences and activities, expanding the scope and raising the level of one's mindfulness. With sufficient awareness of bodily activities, one moves on to the subtler activities of the mind, striving to be aware of the arising and vanishing of every feeling and every thought, including the arising of acquisitiveness, aggressiveness, and egocentric attachment.<sup>23</sup>

It is significant that “volitions” and “mental formations” are included in the same category of *saṅkhāra* in the Buddhist analysis of the Five Aggregates — the exercise of volition has everything to do with the awareness of mental formations. On the one hand, one has to have volition that is strong and benevolent enough to put oneself through the repetitive mental training, striving to be more mindful and aware. On the other hand, one has to be aware of the ways in which one's actions, feelings, and thoughts co-arise with, and are conditioned by, the existing material environment and socio-cultural conventions, to be willing to recondition oneself as well as to reconstruct the socio-cultural *rūpa*. And one has to be aware of the busy and turbulent “mental formations” that are shaping one's “dispositions,” which further affect one's ways of thinking and acting, to effectively exercise such volition and see into the co-arising of worldly phenomena with clarity. Proper effort, proper mindfulness, and proper concentration support and enhance each other. The three-fold Buddhist mental training calm the practitioner, allow wisdom to arise, and generate or intensify her/his care for others and strengthen her/his volition to discipline herself/himself and work for the wellbeing of all.

Japanese scholar Kenneth K. Inada maintains that mental training is a necessary ingredient in the Buddhist life, for they equip one with the capacity to “sense the natural dynamic bond of the self-other relationship” that is “prevailing at all times” but not graspable with bare

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<sup>23</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.59 (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.298-300 (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*).

reason.<sup>24</sup> Daniel Goleman, based on a review of various neurological studies, finds that meditation enables people to be relaxed and yet highly attentive at the same time,<sup>25</sup> and it has the effect of reorienting one's consciousness.<sup>26</sup> This reoriented consciousness with intuitive understanding of interconnectedness and "reflective awareness (*anupassanā*) in the form of constant mindfulness (*sati*)," Kalupahana asserts, "is the means of discovering an appropriate method of behavior in a world of bewildering variety, richness, and creativity."<sup>27</sup> In other words, mental training is indispensable in Buddhist ethics because it reconditions people to be more aware of their bodily, verbal, and mental actions, while at the same time allowing them to see more directly into the interconnection among all beings, thereby nurturing their care for the wellbeing of others and enabling them to see more clearly the social ramifications of their actions as well as to volitionally take actions that are more socially beneficial.<sup>28</sup> John Ross Carter explains the requirement of awareness and benevolent concern for others in Buddhist ethics,

Given a moral situation demanding a response, being aware of what has been done and is going on, both generally and particularly, responding in a way that is beneficial for one and for others, and also understanding the causal sequences that have

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<sup>24</sup> Kenneth K. Inada, "The Nature of Emptiness and Buddhist Ethics," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 13, no. 2 (May 2000): 256 and 272-3.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience* (New York: Tarcher, 1996), 163-5 and 167.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>27</sup> Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 117.

<sup>28</sup> In the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* it is said that right view, right effort, and right mindfulness run and circle around right intention, which includes renunciation, non-ill will, non-cruelty, and noble and taintless thinking patterns. *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.73 (*Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*).

given rise to this or that particular situation, puts one in a position to reflect with insight on the proper course of action.<sup>29</sup>

Being more aware of the co-arising of one's "self" and others, one is more likely to care for others and less likely to be driven by egocentric concerns. Bearing stronger benevolent social concerns, one is less likely to intentionally take any action that would induce *dukkha*. Being more aware of arising and vanishing of one's own feelings and thoughts, one is less likely to take any action unintentionally. Mental training thus allows one to consistently take wholesome actions volitionally, reducing the frequency of both intentional unwholesome actions and unintentional actions of all kinds.

It is worth reiterating that meditation is not all there is in Buddhism. The "Three Trainings" of the Noble Eightfold Path require each other and fortify each other. Meditation is not the end of the Noble Eightfold Path and, according to the mainstream understanding of the interrelation between the Three Trainings, it is not the beginning, either. Ethical discipline is usually considered the logical first. Ethical discipline, in the form of precepts, enables one to attenuate the egoistic attachment to sensual enjoyments. It also functions to dilute the already-formed excessive concern for the self. The most basic five precepts in Buddhism were formulated so that "immeasurable beings" could be free from fear, hostility, and oppression, which in turn would free oneself from fear, hostility, and oppression:

By abstaining from the destruction of life...By abstaining from taking what is not given...By abstaining from sexual misconduct...By abstaining from false speech...By abstaining from wines, liquors and intoxicants, the noble disciple gives to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, freedom from hostility and freedom from oppression. By

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<sup>29</sup> Carter, "Buddhist Ethics?" 280-1.

giving to immeasurable beings freedom from fear, hostility and oppression, he himself will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, hostility and oppression.<sup>30</sup>

A sociological study conducted by Thai scholar Somsuda Pupatana finds that lay people who observe the five basic precepts are more careful with their own actions and speeches and hold a more positive attitude toward both others and themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Distance from sensual enjoyments is a prerequisite for concentration, the needed component in any type of Buddhist meditation. David Kalupahana argues, “a strong moral life is a prerequisite for mental concentration. Excessive desire (*kāma*) and unwholesome mental tendencies (*akusala dhamma*) naturally obstruct concentration. Therefore, during the initial stage a person is expected to cultivate aloofness from such tendencies.”<sup>32</sup> That one’s ability to concentrate is vitiated by unconstrained sensual desires is also manifested in the fact that, when talking about advanced meditative states, the Buddha always posed as a precondition “being detached from all sense-desires” or “quite secluded from sensual pleasures.”<sup>33</sup> Pupatana’s study also indicates a positive relation between taking basic Buddhist precepts and meditating on the one hand, and on the other having “internal tranquility” and “a focused and still mind.”<sup>34</sup>

Ethical discipline allows the mind to calm and concentrate. Concentrated meditation, then, enables one to attain wisdom and see the dynamic co-arising of phenomena in the world

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<sup>30</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* VIII.39.

<sup>31</sup> Somsuda Pupatana, “The Development of Peace through the Process of Morality,” *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 13, no. 2 (May 2000): 627-8 and 630.

<sup>32</sup> Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> See Section 2.2.

<sup>34</sup> Pupatana, “The Development of Peace through the Process of Morality,” 613-34.

while at the same time fueling one with compassionate volition to continually engage in the world in the effort of alleviating suffering. It is significant that, when the Buddha decided to teach the *Dhamma* and considered “Who will understand this Dhamma quickly?”, the first persons he thought of were his former teachers Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, and the five ascetic friends he had practiced with, all of whom were very advanced in meditation.<sup>35</sup> The *Dhamma* of Co-Arising is “unattainable by mere reasoning”<sup>36</sup> but requires various kinds of meditative practices that help practitioners to recognize, examine, deal with, and eventually transform the conditioned behavioral habits and thinking patterns, emotional turbulences, and deeply-seated egocentric propensities. Repeated meditative practices help one work through her/his “inner” problems and acquire “inner peace.” They also afford one the wisdom to see deeper into the dynamic relationships between self and others, which furthers compassion and fortifies the volition for taking wholesome actions. Advanced meditative states and wisdom, in classical Buddhist discourses, are to be manifested in wholesome ethical behavior that is beneficial to all sentient beings.<sup>37</sup> The fact that traditional Buddhist teachers commonly teach that change *starts* with working on one’s own mind does not indicate that the whole Buddhist *dukkha*-alleviating project also *stops* at creating peaceful mental states.

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<sup>35</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.169-70 and i.164-5 (*Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*).

<sup>36</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.487 (*Aggivacchagotta Sutta*) and i.167 (*Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*). The rash rational-mystical dichotomy, however, employed by Max Weber and taken for granted by many others should be avoided: saying that the *Dhamma* is unattainable by mere reasoning is very different from saying that it is entirely beyond human reasoning, and saying that one needs meditative discipline to truly see dependent origination does not mean that enlightenment is a mystical experience.

<sup>37</sup> See Section 2.1.

In the Five-Aggregate analysis, people are socio-psycho-physical compounds that are conditioning, and conditioned by, each other. Social realities and cultural norms find their ways into people's consciousness and are reflected in their bodily, verbal, and mental actions. Mental constructions and emotive states of people, in turn, may materialize through actions and become part of the social realities that condition people. Greedy, aggressive, egocentric individuals and social injustices and conflicts beget each other, whereas "inner" peace and fair social structures nourish each other. Traditionally, Buddhist ethics places much emphasis on each individual's conscientious effort of working on her/his own mind and behaviors, but that does not negate the importance of reconstructing social structures so that they are humane and conducive to sound mental states and proper behaviors.

If the cessation of *dukkha* can be compared to road safety, it can be understood that, besides infrastructures and traffic laws, road safety also requires each individual on the road to have adequate driving skills, to abide by the traffic laws, to be concerned with others' safety as much as with one's own, and to be fully aware of what is happening around her/him. One is less likely to be law-abiding or fully aware if s/he is self-absorbed and the only thing s/he is concerned with is to get to her/his destination as soon as possible. Self-concern, however, is not categorically negative, for a person may train herself/himself to be a very skillful driver and may be very cautious and law-abiding out of the concern for her/his own safety. However, a skillful, cautious, law-abiding driver may still be involved in accidents because there are drivers who do not care how their driving is going to affect others. Likewise, wide, smooth roads and sound traffic laws, albeit necessary, in and of themselves cannot guarantee road safety. Driving as recklessly as others rarely, if ever, achieves the goal of waking others up to reflect on the damages they have caused or may cause. Implementing more severe punishments has not

effectively made all drivers more mindful. Giving up on others' potentials of changing themselves and giving up driving altogether will not ensure one's own safety, either, for one may still be hit as a pedestrian by someone who is driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. Real road safety depends on finding ways to prompt all, especially those whose driving has been causing the most harm, to improve their driving skills, to observe the laws more closely, and/or to maintain lucidity and be more mindful.

The cessation of *dukkha*, likewise, depends on explicating the interconditionality of human existence to all and convincing each and every person to continually work on their own conduct and be aware of their mental states, while striving for fair and humane social structures out of the concerns for the wellbeing of all. The Buddhist Path to the cessation of *dukkha* seeks to address both the "inner" mental states and tendencies, and the "outer" behaviors and practices.

## **5.2 Person-in-Community: Buddhist Community-Building Ideals**

The view of Interdependent Co-Arising, the view that the effects of any action travels in multiple directions simultaneously and will have layers of repercussions, can be exhausting, frightening, or even downright paralyzing. Considering that any harmful move on anyone's part may be broadcast through the entire web due to the unavoidable inter-relationships, the day may never come when one can congratulate oneself that the job is done. One may not even find the world making enough progress, if in a greater scheme it is making progress at all. To make it worse, in the interconnected web, there is no center to be found, nor is there any clearly defined path that can guarantee one's rightness and/or righteousness. The interconnectedness indicates that moral codes do not have intrinsic value or ontological significance. Rather, in the

“contextual pragmatism” of Buddhism, the right and wrong of an action are determined only when all dimensions of that action are put into consideration, including one’s mentality at the time of taking the action, the concrete results produced by the action, and the impacts on the wellbeing of both self and others.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, with any bodily, verbal, or mental action taken, either by self or by others, one’s “self” may be changed in the sense that one’s ideological or social position may be shifted, one’s inter-relationships with others may be reconstituted, and one’s familiar behavioral patterns may become inadequate (if they are ever adequate). As a result, it becomes exceedingly difficult to console oneself of doing the right thing, or to reckon oneself a good, righteous person without any doubt.<sup>39</sup> It is overwhelming to have to face and respond to the new situations that ever present themselves, to engage in continuous

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<sup>38</sup> See Section 2.1. The Dalai Lama expresses a similar view when he says, “We have no means of discriminating between right and wrong if we do not take into account others’ feelings, other’ suffering. ... ethical conduct is not something we engage in because it is somehow right in itself but because, like ourselves, all others desire to be happy and to avoid suffering.” H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 28. In another passage of the same book, he shifts the focus from others’ feelings to the impact of our actions: “if we cannot at least imagine the potential impact of our actions on others, then we have no means to discriminate between right and wrong, between what is appropriate and what is not, between harming and non-harming.” *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>39</sup> A layer of fear is added when the people around oneself do not see the interconnectedness and keep operating, and even demanding the self to operate, in the same self-centered, dominative, and/or oppressive mode. It is a fear of being alienated, isolated, and rejected by the people one is most familiar with and most close to. In Minnie Bruce Pratt’s words,

This is a fear that can cause us to be hesitant in making fundamental changes or taking drastic actions that differ from how we were raised. We don’t want to lose the love of the first people who knew us; we don’t want to be standing outside the circle of home, with nowhere to go.

Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Identity: Skin Blood Heart,” in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, by Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith (Brooklyn, New York: Long Haul Press, 1984), 47-8.

self-reflection and self-criticism, and to constantly readjust and re-discipline oneself in accordance with the ever-changing-ness of the world.

In light of Interdependent Co-Arising, that is, being ethical is a never-ending challenge, which is why *nibbāna* is better considered a perfection of ethics rather than a state that transcends ethics.<sup>40</sup> To be ethical, one has to be acutely aware of the intricate interconditionality and to reflectively strive for the most wholesome actions possible at every moment, in accordance with any shift of position and inter-relationships. “Wisdom” in the Buddhist sense is the ability to see the interconditionality among people and among things so that one can, at every step, choose the most *dukkha*-alleviating courses of actions possible. The farther and wider one sees on the intricate web of causes and conditions, the more likely one is to discipline oneself and train one’s mind in order to perform the most socially responsible actions possible. And yet it is through self-discipline that one can begin to attenuate egocentric attachment and attune oneself to the kind of mental training that will lead to the wisdom that sees co-arising.

However, the characteristic of *samsāra* is that most people, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, are not enlightened. Most people in *samsāra* are yet to develop the kind of complete awareness that sees all the causes and repercussions of one’s action in the interconnected web of existence. Most people in *samsāra* are yet to forgo the self-centered patterns of thinking and behaving. Considering the phenomena in the world as either for or against themselves, most people in *samsāra* lack the volition/disposition to strive for the wellbeing of all and do not subject themselves to either ethical self-discipline or mental training. Without ethical discipline

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<sup>40</sup> See Section 2.1.

and mental training, it is unlikely that the wisdom that sees interconditionality will be developed. In the same way that ethical discipline, mental training, and wisdom development enhance and reinforce each other, the lack of either one of the three impedes the development and maturation of the other two. In terms of taking actions, the difficulty with the network causality conveyed in Interdependent Co-Arising is not that it is an inaccurate description of the reality of social existence. Rather, the difficulty lies in the fact that too much needs to be reworked in order to transform *samsāra* into *nibbāna*.

Daunting as it may be, the Third Noble Truth in Buddhism teaches that cessation of *dukkha* is possible. It is possible to reach *nibbāna*. In the Buddhist program of reconstructing both of one's self and the world, one begins with tending one's bodily, verbal, and mental actions here and now, which is reflected in the fact that ethical discipline is generally considered the logical first among the Three Trainings, even though there is really no linear "first" in the *kammic* network and the reconstruction can theoretically begin anywhere. As a matter of fact, all continue to act in the world and as such continue to co-construct the world as well as all beings embedded and entangled in it, irrespective of the levels of mental calmness and wisdom attainment. It is therefore urgent that one be prompted, persuaded, or trained, to position oneself among others and consider the repercussions of one's actions. One may still be very far from seeing all directions and all layers of the repercussions of any single action, but one can begin with considering the ways in which one's actions affect others in one's immediate social circles.

This is why, I contend, the *Sangha* is one of the Three Jewels in Buddhism, in which Buddhists take refuge. Recalling the political assembly of the Śākya tribe at the time of the

Buddha, the *sangha* was established to be a non-hierarchical<sup>41</sup> community in which people who held the cessation of *dukkha* as their goal made decisions together and shared resources, keeping in mind their individual actions affected the wellbeing of all. Instead of denoting exclusively the monastic males who pursued enlightenment individually, the *Sangha* was an institutional device that brought the sociality of existence front and center, thereby allowing people to see the co-arising of self and others, motivating them to consciously recondition themselves and to behave in more socially conscionable ways. In the turbulent sea of *samsāra*, Buddhists are taught to take refuge in the Teacher, in his Teachings, and in a community of “good friends” who, in their different personalities and perspectives, inspire and support the development of virtue, benevolence, and wisdom, which are essential in transforming *dukkha*-inducing behaviors to *dukkha*-alleviating ones.

With regard to the ways in which members of the *Sangha* should behave toward each other, the Buddha taught the “six principles of cordiality” (*sārāṇīyā dhammā*). They are: (1) to maintain “bodily acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private” towards one’s companions in the holy life; (2) to maintain “verbal acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private” towards one’s companions in the holy life; (3) to maintain “mental acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private” towards one’s companions in the holy life; (4) to share without reservation “any gain of a kind that accords with the Dhamma and has been obtained in a way that accords with the Dhamma” with one’s companions in the holy life; (5) to dwell both in public and in private possessing in common with one’s companions in the holy life those liberating virtues that are conducive to concentration; and (6) to dwell both in public and in

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<sup>41</sup> See Section 2.3.

private possessing in common with one’s companions in the holy life “that view that is noble and emancipating, and leads one who practices in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering.”<sup>42</sup>

It is illuminating that all of the six principles revolve around sociality. A member is taught to evince loving-kindness towards one’s companions in the *Sangha* through their bodily, verbal, and mental actions. S/he is to maintain that benevolence even in private, which means s/he is to keep the interconditionality with others constantly in mind and to conduct oneself accordingly in deeds, speeches, and thoughts. Always situating oneself among others as such, one shares resources instead of claiming them for oneself or acquiring them through unwholesome means. One nurtures in others as well as in oneself wholesome mental states, and one cultivates and helps others to cultivate the wisdom that sees co-arising while manifesting that wisdom in practices. As shown in Section 2.2, good companions, companions in the effort of ceasing *dukkha*, prompt one to engage in wholesome practices and help bring those practices to fruition. Through maintaining loving-kindness and sharing resources, members of the *Sangha* were to live “in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”<sup>43</sup>

As introduced in Section 2.1, besides good companionship, ethical discipline is another precursor of the Noble Eightfold Path that is effective in bringing Buddhist practices to fruition. The teaching that consciousness depends on the socio-cultural environment to arise suggests the primacy of conduct and directs people’s attention to the roles their own actions play in molding

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<sup>42</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.322 (*Kosambiya Sutta*) and ii.251 (*Sāmagāma Sutta*); *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.80 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).

<sup>43</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.206 (*Cūḷagosinga Sutta*) and iii.156 (*Upakkilesa Sutta*).

one's own "self" as well as the cultural norms. Recognizing people's responsibilities for individual characters as well as for the social realities, from its beginning Buddhism has emphasized ethics.<sup>44</sup> Buddhist ethics is often carried out in the form of moral self-conquest (*dharmavijaya*), which is to be taken up voluntarily by individual persons as a result of seeing the fundamental sociality of human life and realizing that any mental, verbal, and physical behavior has its impacts, on oneself as well as others. Therefore Buddhist ethical discipline takes the form of vows or precepts, rather than regulations or commandments.<sup>45</sup> In Buddhist thought, the need of discipline has to be recognized by the individual self, the practice of it has to be out of a sense of social responsibility, and the methods of discipline have to be agreed upon by the self as well as holding the prospect of initiating positive reactions throughout the network of social living. People cannot "blend like milk and water" if rules are imposed on them instead of being voluntarily taken up by them. The practice of *self*-discipline is to usher in a more just and peaceful mode of coexistence by means of altering people's consciousness and behavioral patterns, starting with oneself.

It is significant that the collective term for the precepts that *Sangha* members voluntarily vow to take is *Vinaya*, which is *vi-naya*, literally meaning "leading in a different direction."<sup>46</sup> Though one is conditioned by the socio-cultural contexts, one can make a difference by leading

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<sup>44</sup> Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 180.

<sup>45</sup> According to Canadian *bhikkhu* Ajahn Tiradhammo, Venerable Ajahn Chah from Thailand "sees Vinaya as a support for spiritual practice, most particularly to help increase mindfulness and encourage communal harmony. For example, it requires a fair degree of wisdom and much awareness of body, speech, and mind in order to keep Vinaya in a relaxed and skilful way rather than through fear or repression." Ajahn Tiradhammo, "The Challenges of Community," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, edited by Martin Baumann and Charles Prebish (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 245-54.

<sup>46</sup> Kalupahana, *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, 131.

the co-arising toward a different direction instead of repeating and reinforcing the currently existing *dukkha*-inducing conditions. Instead of expecting others to perform rigid binary gender norms that have caused *dukkha* of many kinds, one can train oneself to be concerned with “wholesomeness” first and be acceptant when seeing different performances of gender. Instead of justifying aggression or even glorifying war, one can train oneself to adhere to nonviolence in behavior and dissolve from within the emotive and intellectual dregs that lead to aggression. Instead of mindlessly pursuing material gains at the expense of others, one can train oneself to be mindful with one’s consumption and uproot the seeds of acquisitiveness from one’s mentality. Therefore, in explaining the reason for keeping the *Vinaya*, Indian Buddhist scholar G. S. P. Misra notes, “With the help of this [i.e. *Vinaya*], man can bring about a change in the circumstances he has been put in.”<sup>47</sup> Ethical discipline is one of the means by which one changes the socio-cultural *rūpa* as well as oneself.

The *Vinaya* was formulated in the context of the *Sangha* and for the existence and cohesion of the *Sangha*. Therefore, even though the *Vinaya* is a set of monastic precepts that lay people generally do not take, the intentions of its formulation are worth considering in exploring the ideals of Buddhist community building. Buddhist ethicist Charles S. Prebish summarizes from the *Vinaya* literature the ten intentions of having those precepts in the Buddhist monastic community:

1. Protecting the community
2. Insuring the community’s comfort
3. Warding off ill-meaning people
4. Helping well-behaved monks and nuns
5. Destroying present defilements
6. Preventing future defilements

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<sup>47</sup> G. S. P. Misra, *The Age of Vinaya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972), 90.

7. Benefiting non-followers
8. Increasing the number of followers
9. Establishing the discipline
10. Observing the rules of restraint.<sup>48</sup>

As an individual is a socio-psycho-physical compound that interdependently arises with others, s/he is conditioned as well as by conditioning the socio-cultural sediments: what is outside of the individual's skin goes in, and what is inside of the individual's skin comes out. Buddhist self-discipline is to stop flowing unconsciously with the dominant socio-cultural forces and to stop unreflectively reproducing and perpetuating the existing norms. Instead, through self-discipline one actively monitors the dialectical relation between what is outside of oneself and what is inside. Besides consciously screening what comes in ("observing the rules of restraint" — intention number 10 in Prebish's list), it might also be necessary to eliminate what has already gone in ("destroying present defilements" — number 5). When the conditioning forces in the society are revealed and critiqued as such, it is then possible to have a psychological space in which a different perspective can be opened up, a different kind of consciousnesses can be developed, and the volition to resist the power structure or change the reality can be generated and sustained. And when what goes out is carefully watched, one may be able to stop reinforcing the current way of life that may be mutually destructive, and to unsettle those socio-cultural sedimentations that have been problematic. Then it is possible to bring about a more mutually beneficial way of coexistence, and thereby benefit non-followers (number 7) and prevent future defilements (number 6), both on the part of the self and on the part of others.

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<sup>48</sup> Charles S. Prebish, "Varying the Vinaya: Creative Responses to Modernity," in *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, edited by Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61.

Some of the reasons for having precepts in the Buddhist communities (or any other communities for that matter) are very practical. For one thing, people in the same community often do not think and act the same, which may become problematic when some members disregard community interests altogether and take advantage of others' good behaviors. They deplete the resources shared by the whole community and erode the mutual trust that has been built over time by all community members.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, some precepts are needed in order to protect those who behave themselves out of their care for the whole community (number 4) and to ensure the long-term comfort and harmony of the community (number 2). For another, when individuals or communities need to network for a cause that is of mutual concern, keeping mutually agreed-upon precepts is an effective means of preventing individuals or communities from getting into conflicts. Self-discipline denotes that each party, be it an individual or a community, should take responsibility for the well-being of all parties.<sup>50</sup> The practice of self-discipline is thus mutually protective (number 1). Moreover, it helps to establish the reputation of the community (or the network of communities; number 9) and enhance its ability in moving toward the greater goal that all parties desire to reach. In addition, the voluntary self-discipline on the part of individuals in the community (or individual communities in the network) may have the double effects of attracting those who envision a harmonious life with

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<sup>49</sup> This type of behavior, unfortunately, has become all too familiar in modern times, with corporations' depleting both moral capital and natural capital of the global community. Relevant critiques can be found in Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 49-51.

<sup>50</sup> Roongraung Boonyoros puts it well when he expounds the reason that householders need the Five Precepts, "The reality is that, of necessity, we already have relationships with people everywhere. We are surrounded by people with different duties and needs, different habits and immediate goals, with whom we must associate simply to accomplish the diverse tasks of our daily lives." Boonyoros, "Householders and the Five Precepts," 172.

others (number 8), and of warding off those self-indulgent people who only want to take advantage of others (number 3). Therefore, Peter Harvey states, “The monastic discipline (*Vinaya*) developed by the Buddha was designed to shape the *Sangha* as an ideal community, with the optimum conditions for spiritual growth.”<sup>51</sup>

Providing “the optimal conditions for spiritual growth,” the *Sangha* that the Buddha set up was to operate by consensus. “The Buddha advocated frequent meetings of each local Sangha, with the aim of reaching a unanimous consensus in matters of common concern (*D.II.76-7*). If necessary, there was also provision for voting and majority rule (*Vin.II.84*).”<sup>52</sup> This participatory decision-making process, Simon Zadek points out, was to help overcome egocentric attitudes and thus can be considered an aid to achieving *nibbāna*.<sup>53</sup> It is another way of putting the sociality of existence front and center, reminding people that any decision affects the wellbeing of all, themselves included. No one should be making decisions for others based on his/her own perspective and concerns.

To share resources and make decisions communally is not to eliminate individual differences and make everyone the same. For one thing, in the analysis of the Five Aggregates, due to the differences in individuals’ life experiences and their unique ways of “putting [things] together” (*saṅkhāra*), no two persons are ever the same, nor is it practical to expect them to be the same. For another, according to the *Nikāya* texts, the Buddha never seemed to expect, much less demand, uniformity. Quite the contrary, he affirmed his disciples for what they had been,

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<sup>51</sup> Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 73.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* See also Uma Chakravarti, “Buddhism As a Discourse of Dissent?: Class and Gender,” *Pravada* 1.5 (May 1992): 16.

<sup>53</sup> Simon Zadek, “The Practice of Buddhist Economics: Another View,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 42, no. 4 (October, 1993): 435-6.

each in his own right. In the *Mahāgosinga Sutta*, six of the Buddha’s disciples were asked the question, “What kind of bhikkhu could illuminate the delightful Gosinga Sāla-tree Wood?”<sup>54</sup> Judging from their answers, they understood the question to be what kind of *bhikkhu* was the ideal and could bring the most good to that local *sangha* where they were dwelling. Each of the six answered by describing the kind of *bhikkhu* he himself was, with the talent and achievement that he himself was known for. Each of these disciples naturally perceived and pursued *the* ideal in different ways because their dispositions and capacities had been conditioned by different co-arising and because of the working of their *saṅkhāra*. When Sāriputta finally brought the question to the Buddha and asked “which of us has spoken well?”, the Buddha said, “You have all spoken well, Sāriputta, each in his own way.”<sup>55</sup> Anyone who was determined to dedicate oneself to the realization of the *Dhamma* could bring good to the *sangha*.<sup>56</sup> Individual differences, as long as they do not result in unwholesome consciousness and conduct, need to be appreciated and respected.<sup>57</sup> As such, “Buddhism does not recognize one single way,”<sup>58</sup> and

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<sup>54</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.212-9 (*Mahāgosinga Sutta*).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, i.219.

<sup>56</sup> This is further implied in the following words of the Buddha:

Hear also from me what kind of bhikkhu could illuminate this Gosinga Sāla-tree Wood. Here, Sāriputta, when a bhikkhu has returned from his almsround, after his meal, he sits down, folds his legs crosswise, sets his body erect, and establishing mindfulness in front of him, resolves: “I shall not break this sitting position until through not clinging my mind is liberated from the taints.” That kind of bhikkhu could illuminate this Gosinga Sāla-tree Wood.

*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> As quoted above, the Buddha did use “with mutual appreciation” as a modifier for “living in concord.”

<sup>58</sup> Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 117. Uniformity, some theorists point out, may negatively affect movements for justice and peace, and even reinforce domination and intensify conflict. Refusing the peace theories of the elite, which rest on order, one of the

uniformity is not expected, much less demanded. After all, one of the criteria for “good friends” is being able to provide one with different perspectives.

Understandably, the greater the community grows, the less likely is it for consensus to be reached or for the decision-making process to be participatory. As the early Buddhist *Sangha* gradually reached “the acme of worldly gain,” “the acme of fame,” “the acme of great learning,” and “the acme of long-standing renown,” more people joined the *Sangha* for reasons other than the resolve to realize the *Dhamma* itself, and hence more precepts were laid down in order to “ward off those things that are the basis for taints” so that the *Sangha* members would not be affected negatively by the newly-gained fame and the gradually-acrued material goods.<sup>59</sup> The

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founding figures of contemporary peace studies Johan Galtung asserts that “peace has something to do with *entropy*, here taken in the sense of ‘disorder’,” which does not denote “messiness in any pejorative sense.” Rather, it points to “high complexity of the system: many and diverse components, and many and diverse ties of interaction between them.” He explains,

[T]he moment the system tends to crystallize, becomes more orderly, then the number of social types (such as nations, blocs, alliances) becomes smaller; the concentration on one point more pronounced. And the links of interaction no longer fill the total space of possibilities, but tend to connect certain types only, and often mainly in a negative, hostile way. At that point the system may look very orderly, but is in fact poised for destructive battle. ... With significant diversity and symbiosis deficits our world becomes a warlike system, with efforts to control violence through power balance of power monopoly policies. ... We are building war structures, not peace structures, very low on diversity and symbiosis; very low on entropy.

Johan Galtung, *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace* (Ratmalana, Sri Lanka: Sarvodaya Book Publishing Services, 1993), 1-2 and 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.445 (*Bhaddāli Sutta*). Later in the Theravāda tradition the number of precepts for *bhikkhus* evolved to be 227, and that for *bhikkhunīs*, 311. Since these precepts were added in response to the situation at that particular time, and given the fact that situations would be constantly changing, the Buddha told Ānanda before his passing: “If they wish, the order may abolish the minor rules after my passing.” *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.154 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*). However, there was disagreement as to which precepts could be considered “minor,” and as a result no precept, not even the *garudhamma* that were probably interpolated at a later time, was abolished.

growth of the Buddhist *Sangha* also resulted in more hierarchical internal structure<sup>60</sup> and eventually the split of the *Sangha*.<sup>61</sup> While it was uncertain whether the Buddha had foreseen the immense growth in size of the *Sangha* when he established it, in the *Nikāya* texts it did not take a large group of people to form a *sangha*. The first *sangha* consisted of the Buddha and the five ascetics with whom the Buddha practiced. The presence of the mini-*sangha* of Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila, who had been living in concord and benefiting one another, was extolled as “a great gain for the Vajjians.”<sup>62</sup>

Considering the purposes of having communities, it may actually be more beneficial to have smaller communities rather than big ones. In a smaller social circle, it is easier for people to see the impacts of their actions on each other and to generate benevolent social concerns. It is also easier to include everyone in the decision-making process when the community is small, and hierarchy is less likely to be formed. However, it remains that, in Buddhist thought, the wider that one sees the ways in which one’s actions reverberate through the web of interconditionality, the wiser and the more *dukkha*-alleviating choices one will make. Small geographical or spiritual communities are not to become yet another object of one’s ego-attachment. They are effective “skillful means” to the generation of benevolence and the development of wisdom in the Buddhist sense, both of which are indispensable in actualizing the

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<sup>60</sup> It was recorded that, before his passing, the Buddha said, “whereas the *bhikkhus* are in the habit of addressing one another as ‘friend’, this custom is to be abrogated after my passing. Senior *bhikkhus* shall address more junior *bhikkhus* by their name, their clan or as ‘friend’ (*āvuso*), whereas more junior *bhikkhus* are to address their senior either as ‘Lord’ (*bhante*) or as ‘Venerable Sir’ (*āyasmā*.” *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.154 (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*). Theretofore the *Sangha*, in whichever tradition of Buddhism, was hierarchicalized according to seniority.

<sup>61</sup> According to the tradition, the first split happened at (or shortly after ) the Second Council in Vaiśālī, which was held one hundred years after the Buddha’s passing.

<sup>62</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* i.210 (*Cūḷagosinga Sutta*).

goal of *nibbāna*. They are not to be closed systems that claim sacred status and demand members upholding their traditions at all cost. After all, communities change as individuals and the interconnections amongst them change; no community has an abiding, unchanging “Self.” Therefore, no community or community identity is in and of itself so sacred that it should be preserved as it is, in all aspects, at all costs. Nor can a “sacred community” as such be built once and for all. New life situations, new people, and new interaction patterns among people will always emerge, and they demand new approaches and new codes of conduct. Previous decisions can serve as references, but no rule or custom will be “sacred” for all people at all times.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, it is worth noting that, at the time of the Buddha, the *Sangha* was not geographically defined. The Buddha instructed his disciples to go forth for the welfare of many and maintain daily contact with people,<sup>64</sup> which in effect meant that the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* were to form a *sangha* with people of the same locality as they traveled. Thus members of a *sangha* in any locality were not always one’s old acquaintances and did not come from the same region. Being in a community helps one feel connected and see connections, so that one is prompted to dedicate oneself to wholesome and *dukkha*-alleviating practices out of benevolence and wisdom. Once sufficiently, though never fully, grounded in wholesomeness, one is

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<sup>63</sup> In this spirit, Thích Nhất Hạnh states in the Charter of the Order of Interbeing: “Every word and every sentence in this Charter is subject to change, so that the spirit of the Charter will be allowed to remain alive throughout the history of the practice. ... This Charter ... should be revised and amended ... in order to keep it relevant to today’s societies.” Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1998), 113.

<sup>64</sup> Phra Rājāvaramuni speaks as a *bhikkhu* in the Theravāda tradition: “In principle, at least, a Buddhist monk cannot live even a single day without contact with lay people.” See Rājāvaramuni, “Foundations of Buddhist Social Ethics,” 31.

encouraged to form connections with unfamiliar others, thereby influencing others to take up wholesome practices as well. Puṇṇa, for example, was recognized by the Buddha as having enough self-control and peacefulness to go forth to the Sunāparanta country, where people were known for being “fierce and rough.”<sup>65</sup> Puṇṇa then went and “established five hundred men lay followers and five hundred women lay followers in the practice.”

A person needs a community, a small enough social circle, as the starting point in accustoming oneself to wholesome practices. Attachment to a certain locality or a certain community identity, however, is a form of ego-attachment and therefore is discouraged in Buddhism. Instead, one is encouraged to build more connections and form communities with multiple others, trying to maintain benevolence and wisdom at every moment, with every “other” that one encounters. Exactly as Indian Buddhist scholar Dharmachari Lokamitra states:

Spiritual friendship is clearly more than just a context for practice, it is a practice in itself. It requires constant effort to be able to cultivate the friendship and trust necessary to be able to be fully open, confess, and rejoice in the merits of others.<sup>66</sup>

It is the process of community building, rather than any particular community with its particular set of rules and customs, that matters. Moreover, with colonialism and capitalistic neo-colonialism broadening and deepening various forms of *dukkha* globally, it is increasingly difficult, and perhaps even socially irresponsible, for people to consider only the interests of their local communities.

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<sup>65</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* iii.267-270 (*Puṇṇovāda Sutta*).

<sup>66</sup> Dharmachari Lokamitra, “Buddhism and Society — the Dynamics of Right Livelihood” (paper presented at the Fourth Chung-Hwa International Conference on Buddhism: The Role of Buddhism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Taipei, Taiwan, January 18-20, 2002), 11.

Viewed from the perspective of Interdependent Co-Arising, a socially constituted and constrained subject still can make a difference. And, also viewed from the perspective of Interdependent Co-Arising, social institutions and cultural conventions, like socialized individuals, can be changed.<sup>67</sup> As a matter of fact, the very establishment of an alternative community that vows to “lead in a different direction” indicates that, from the Buddha’s point of view, many of the social institutions and cultural conventions *should* be changed, and socialized individuals are responsible for effecting the changes. The way in which a socialized individual can better society is through moral self-conquest on the one hand, and on the other building more connections with multiple others in manifold aspects. The Buddhist ideal of community building is for people to train themselves to maintain benevolence for others in the community, to respect others as equals and decision-making partners, to share resources with them, and eventually to extend all these practices to all others via forming connections and building communities with them. On the Indra’s Net, the change of shade and color on some jewels will be reflected on others, and through enough connections can be reflected on all. Small enough communities allow people to see and feel the interconnections and thus motivate them to discipline themselves out of a sense of social responsibility, reconditioning their own attitudes, tendencies, and habitual behavioral patterns for the benefits of both self and others. By delimiting a tentative social circle in which one can more easily cultivate virtue, benevolence, and the wisdom of seeing co-arising, communities also provide temporary grounding and guidance in the overwhelming, seemingly impossible task of reaching *nibbāna*. Benevolence,

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<sup>67</sup> Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, 191.

sharing, and egalitarian practices, once sufficiently developed in some through the help of small communities, can influence multiple others through inter-relationships.

What the Buddhist Path provides that does not exactly find a counterpart in contemporary justice discourses is its attention to, and techniques of dealing with, individuals' "inner" states. Emotions, values, beliefs, dispositions, and thinking patterns affect not only the individuals who hold them, but manifest "outwardly" in their interactions with one another and thereby in social realities, which in turn condition the ways in which people think, feel, and act. From a Co-Arising point of view, it is insufficient to address only the societal or structural problems without at the same time addressing the ways in which people think and feel, and the ways in which people behave themselves and interact with one another. The Buddhist Path therefore consists of three main parts that support and enhance each other. Ethical discipline is fundamental in generating social awareness and making concentrated meditation possible. Various meditative practices, through repetition, help generate compassion, sustain social engagement, heighten awareness, and remove the sources of emotional disturbance and epistemological prejudice, dissolving their residual influences. Together they are conducive to the rise of wisdom, which in Buddhism refers to both the cognitive aspect of seeing the interconditionality of each situation, and the volitional aspect of striving to continually act in the most wholesome ways possible to break the cycle of *dukkha*-production. While engagements in the *samsāric* world can be utterly enervating, which is exacerbated by the antagonistic reasoning in contemporary justice discourses, the Noble Eightfold Path provides a different way of thinking about and coping both "inner" troubles and "outer" obstacles. With the wisdom of seeing Co-Arising, one does not get engulfed in the animosity that arises with the "either with us or against us" oppositional thinking. Meditative practice, as Rita Gross finds,

further tames aggression, brings forth clarity, and sustains continuous compassionate engagement in the world.<sup>68</sup> The Three Trainings contained in the Noble Eightfold Path, when practiced in the midst of spiritual communities that inspire and support such practices, allow practitioners to take a proactive role in reconditioning themselves and redirecting together the co-arising in the world from *dukkha*-inducing to *dukkha*-alleviating. They nurture in the practitioner the consideration for others, raise awareness of the co-arising both within and around herself/himself, direct her/him to see the myriad ways in which s/he is connected with others, strengthen her/his benevolent volitions, and allow her/him to clear-headedly engage in the world and work on the myriad problems in the *samsāra* for the long haul.

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<sup>68</sup> Gross, “What Keeps Me in Buddhist Orbit?” 107-20.

## CHAPTER 6

### THIS-WORLDLY *NIBBĀNA*: PARTICIPATORY PEACEMAKING

The Buddhist goal is *nibbāna*, the cessation of *dukkha*. In accordance with the Buddha's practical concerns and the socio-ethical implications of Interdependent Co-Arising, *nibbāna* can be understood to have a very this-worldly and dynamic character. If all persons are socio-psycho-physical compounds whose actions are continually conditioning each other's behaviors, emotions, and consciousnesses, then for as long as they live as co-arisen beings *nibbāna* is not a state of mind or a static existence in which co-arising stops. It is a never-ending process of alleviating *dukkha* and, more importantly, of discerning and removing the causes of *dukkha*, including egocentric attachments as well as the aspects of socio-cultural *rūpa* that justify or encourage *dukkha*-producing actions. Given the interconnections among beings, it also involves building connections throughout the web of co-arising while continually striving for "wholesome" actions and choosing the courses of actions that would be the most beneficial for both others and oneself.

Part of this dynamic, this-worldly sense of *nibbāna* finds a parallel in contemporary peace studies literature. In 1990, twenty-one years after theorizing about "structural violence," Norwegian peace research scholar and the founder of the *Journal of Peace Research* Johan Galtung introduced the concept of "cultural violence," which refers to "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence — exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) — that can be used to justify or

legitimize direct or structural violence.”<sup>1</sup> Cultural violence renders aggression (direct violence) and domination (structural violence) normal and natural, which on the one hand sanctions exploitation by the “topdogs” and on the other hand pushes the “underdogs” to get even or get revenge.<sup>2</sup> Peace, therefore, requires much more than simply the absence of direct violence, which Galtung terms “negative peace.” “Positive peace”<sup>3</sup> requires the presence of social justice (the absence of structural violence) and, more fundamentally, the restructuring of cultural norms so that direct and structural violence become unacceptable (the absence of cultural violence). Similarly, the cessation of *dukkha* entails far more than stopping suffering in its obvious forms in the material and physical planes; it requires removing the causes of *dukkha* embedded in the socio-cultural *rūpa*, including the unjust social structures and the cultural values that encourages, sanctions, and glorifies aggression, antagonism, domination, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (August 1990): 291. See also Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Oslo, Norway: International Peace Research Institute; and London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 31. Galtung considers direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence to be forming a triangle and states that the causal chain can begin with any one of the three. In terms of time relation, however, he thinks cultural violence is the invariant, the permanent condition underlying and justifying direct violence and structural violence. Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 294-295.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>3</sup> Another renowned peace studies scholar Kenneth E. Boulding criticizes Galtung’s careless definitions of the terms “negative peace” and “positive peace.” While I do agree with Boulding’s critique that Galtung seems to hold a very static view and lack a grasp of the dynamics of social situations, unlike Boulding I find Galtung’s distinction between “negative peace” and “positive peace” useful. At least by making the distinction he is pointing out that there is much more to be desired than just the absence of direct violence, and thereby rejecting possible structural oppression done by the ruling class in the name of maintaining “peace” that is “negative” in nature. For Boulding’s critiques on Galtung’s static view and definitions of terms, see Kenneth E. Boulding, “Twelve Friendly Quarrels with Johan Galtung,” *Journal of Peace Research* 14.1 (1977): 78-9.

At the same time, Buddhist *Dhamma* teaches that one cannot attain *nibbāna* via *dukkha*-producing mental, verbal, and physical actions. One who is bound by the disturbing emotions and delusional thinking cannot bring about the cessation of *dukkha*. In Buddhism, an individual is a receptor of the socio-cultural *rūpa* constructed by past individuals and social *kamma*, but s/he is at the same time a *kamma*-creating agent whose actions affect others through interrelationships. Acting out of greed, aversion, and egocentrism, one is in effect spreading and promoting greed, aversion, and egocentrism in the *kammic* network, even if one's purpose is to stop suffering. In Buddhist thinking, to cease *dukkha*, one has to perform *dukkha*-ceasing actions bodily, verbally, and mentally. The means and the end are not different things. "They coalesce, *Nibbāna* and the path, just as the waters of the Ganges and the Yamunā coalesce and flow together."<sup>4</sup> If *samsāra* is a dynamic process of the co-arising of *dukkha*, then *nibbāna* is a dynamic process of striving for *dukkha*-free deeds, words, and thoughts, instead of an endpoint that can be brought about by *dukkha*-filled actions. "There is no way to peace," Thích Nhất Hạnh puts it well, "peace is the way."<sup>5</sup>

As a non-theistic tradition whose original Teacher discouraged egocentric attachment to lineage and scriptures and instead emphasized the pragmatics of the wellbeing of all, Buddhism has much to contribute to contemporary peace and nonviolence movements. On the one hand, it allows accommodation of different views and, in fact, encourages its followers to develop all-encompassing "wisdom" by building connections with and learning from multiple "good friends." On the other hand, its non-theistic and pragmatic appeal makes it possible for people

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<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.223 (*Mahāgovinda Sutta*).

<sup>5</sup> Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing*, 6.

of a variety of religious affiliations to accept and adopt its teachings without giving up the religious or non-religious identities with which they are familiar. More importantly, the dynamic constructiveness conveyed by the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising promotes a different way of considering ethics. With its central teaching refuting any static, eternal existence and any inherent, unchanging “nature,” Buddhist ethics is an ongoing process of striving to be ethical in the ever-changing contexts rather than a prescribed, inalterable structure of behavioral codes. Upholding the cessation of *dukkha* as its unwavering goal, nonetheless, Buddhist ethics does not fall into extreme relativism but retains a universal character. With its pragmatic, non-theistic teachings of dynamic, inter-relational existence expounded through contemporary theories and studies, Buddhism has great potential in motivating people of different identities to engage in the world and participate, each in their own way, in the ongoing reconstruction of a peaceful, *nibbānic* culture for the welfare of all beings implicated in the interconnected web of life.

### **6.1 Boundary-Crossing Interconnections**

In the Buddhist understanding of the interdependently co-arisen phenomena in the world, absolute demarcations between groups or schools of thought, like the absolute separation between self and others or between Pure Consciousness and Materiality, is a “mental formation” (*saṅkhāra*). That mental formation results from, and further results in, the ego’s wish to reify itself, to isolate itself from non-self elements and beings, and to elevate itself above others. It has been found in some conflict studies that identity attachments play a central role in the

inception and escalation of inter-group conflicts.<sup>6</sup> It has also been found that, if in the process of trying to solve conflicts between ethnic or political parties a mediator reinforces the idea that the relation between them is necessarily adversarial, the parties involved will have difficulty in ever beginning a dialogue, let alone cooperating with each other.<sup>7</sup> Oppositional thinking, being rooted in the attachment to a certain identity-view and the delusion of the separation of self and others, in this way, is an unenlightened, *dukkha*-producing way of thinking. Non-Self teaches that an individual person is being constituted and reconstituted in an intricate web of causal and conditional relationships, emphasizing the ever-changing-ness of an individual's identity as well as the interconnections between self and others. Understanding Non-Self and Interdependent Co-Arising, one will have the wisdom to recognize the expediency of categories and the continuous mutual influences between phenomena, entities, or beings, and will not hold onto dichotomies or boundaries in an antagonistic manner.

Not to engage in oppositional thinking, it is worth noting, is not the same as not to be socially engaged. Not to act out of anger, likewise, is not the same as not to act at all. Quite the contrary, the cessation of *dukkha* hinges on ongoing effort of transforming both oneself and others and requires all to be actively involved in the never-ending process of removing *dukkha*

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey R. Seul, " 'Ours Is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 5 (September 1999): 553-69; Ronald J. Fisher, "Cyprus: The Failure of Mediation and Escalation of an Identity-Based Conflict to an Adversarial Impasse," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 3 (May 2001; Special Issue on Conflict Resolution in Identity-Based Disputes): 307-26; Salman Elbedour, David T. Bastien, and Bruce A. Center, "Identity Formation in the Shadow of Conflict: Projective Drawings by Palestinian and Israeli Arab Children from the West Bank and Gaza" *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 2 (May 1997): 217-31.

<sup>7</sup> Davin Bremner, "South African Experiences with Identity and Community Conflicts," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 3 (May 2001; Special Issue on Conflict Resolution in Identity-Based Disputes): 393-405.

and the social, cultural, and mental causes of *dukkha*. *Dhammic* actions do not at all exclude challenging the *status quo*, if the *status quo* has been causing suffering. They do, however, exclude the kind of actions taken out of attachment to a certain identity, such as ethnic or sectarian ones, or out of greed or hatred.

Identity attachments begin with naming and reifying the differences conveyed by names. The linguistic utility of naming the “self” easily morphs into the delusion of an ontological existence of a “Self” that is separate and separable from all other animate and inanimate worldly phenomena. The reification of the name “Self” provides the ground for excluding the non-Self others and disregarding their wellbeing, in whatever way the others are defined. “If the self had intrinsic identity,” the Dalai Lama points out, “it would be possible to speak in terms of self-interest in isolation from that of others’.”<sup>8</sup> With differences considered substantial and raised to the ontological level, interconnections amongst differences are non-existent and unnatural by default, and benevolence is reserved only for one’s own “kind,” those whose connections with oneself are obvious and undeniable. The needs and interests of others are therefore dismissed, and adversity and hostility frequently easily ensue when conflict of interests arises. The attachment to a self-identity can thus obstruct the formation of relationships with others, diminish the benevolence one might have for them, debase them to various degrees, and disregard their needs and interests.

However, as pointed out in Section 5.1, the Buddhist injunction of abandoning identity-view is not to be mistaken with “fear and disgust with identity.” Fear and disgust with identity and craving for static non-existence, in the Buddha’s teachings, are as *dukkha*-producing

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<sup>8</sup> Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*, 47.

as clinging to a piece of social construct or mental construct to be one's eternal, unchanging "Self." As the Dalai Lama puts it,

When we say that things and events can only be established in terms of their dependently originating nature, that they are without intrinsic reality, existence, or identity, we are not denying the existence of phenomena altogether. The 'identitylessness' of phenomena points rather to the way in which things exist: not independently but in a sense interdependently. ... It is, therefore, quite wrong to infer from the idea any sort of nihilistic approach to reality. ... even the [concept of the] absence of intrinsic existence exists only conventionally.<sup>9</sup>

To say that individual or group differences are not everlasting, non-changing essences is not to say that all people are the same or different identities should not exist. Instead of focusing on either commonality or difference, or endorsing the validity of this dichotomy in any way, the Buddha taught interdependence. Non-Self, in its understanding of the constructedness of both "self" and others and in its refusal of accepting any reified identity that is isolated from all others and is supposedly inherently superior (or inferior), is not the negation of any individual self or the denial of any existing difference. Rather paradoxically, it is the affirmation of all different selves embedded in the *kammic* web of existence, including one's own. Given the perspective of the interconnectedness and interconditionality of all, in Buddhism the welfare of oneself is inseparable from the welfare of all others, and the affirmation of oneself is realized through the affirmation of all others.

Like Buddhist teachings, Johan Galtung observes that the exaltation of Self, and the concomitant debasement of the Other, is one of the major forms of cultural violence.<sup>10</sup> With the exaltation of Self, "Egotism and familism are considered normal. So is nationalism, and —

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 298.

within limits — sexism and racism,” while “Altruism across boundaries...is easily seen as abnormal.”<sup>11</sup> The perspective of network causality conveyed by Interdependence Co-Arising dissuades clinging to a socially or mentally constructed idea of the self and extensions of the self, including self-groups that are defined by blood relations and physical traits. Instead, by buttressing the concept of Non-Self, Interdependence affirms diversity, and emphasizes symbiosis, two necessary conditions for the “positive peace” in Galtung’s thinking. Galtung explains,

In nature diversity and symbiosis would lead to ecological balance. In human beings diversity and symbiosis would lead to rich, mature human beings, to persons, capable of developing several dispositions within themselves and letting them play together. At the social level diversity and symbiosis would lead to pluralistic, even fascinating societies, not only fragmented into diverse parts but with the parts interacting with each other, constantly evolving. And at the world level diversity and symbiosis would lead to active peace coexistence between several systems... Both social and world spaces can evolve so much better through symbiosis between diverse parts.<sup>12</sup>

Recognizing the constructedness and the tentativeness of the boundary between self and “others,” one then may be able to dedicate oneself to the welfare of all that are interconnected through their *kamma*. In an interdependently co-arisen world with diverse beings and groups, it is futile to pursue individual peace, if the beings in direct or indirect interconnections with the self or self-group do not approach the same kind of liberation, due to whatever reasons. Maintaining benevolence toward diverse others and building connections and networking with them, therefore, is an indispensable part in attaining the cessation of *dukkha* or “positive peace.”

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<sup>11</sup> Galtung, *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. See also footnote 58 of Chapter Five. After listing twenty strong points of Buddhism in its possible contribution to world peace and six points in which Buddhism appears to be weak, Galtung concludes that “Buddhism has a tremendous potential as a source for active peace politics,” albeit it remains largely untapped. *Ibid.*, 4-22.

It is for this reason that I propose in the last chapter that “taking refuge in the *Sangha*” involves dedicating oneself, skillfully, to the process of community-building, the process of networking with myriad others, rather than identifying with (and getting attached to) any particular geographical location or drawing boundaries between “one’s own kind” and other-groups.

The fact that the majority of the transmitters and exegetes of the Buddhist *Dhamma* were privileged males may have played a role in diminishing the importance of companionship and social relationship while idealizing seclusion and individualistic pursuit. Sulak Sivaraksa maintains that “when the Sangha and/or members of the leading lay Buddhist communities were close to the rulers, they compromised the teachings of Buddha or lost their moral integrity for non-violent social change.”<sup>13</sup> And Rita Gross comments that “romanticization of aloneness is...a common, though unconscious strategy in our hypermasculine and highly alienated culture.”<sup>14</sup> In a society highly stratified with class *and* gender, men of high social status are likely to have grown up perceiving others merely as service-providing instruments without recognizing that they are in fact dependent on those service-providing people. Their life experiences make it difficult for them to see their dependence on others and often bring them to “opt for a social adjudication based on power.”<sup>15</sup> In their life experience, there is not much need to adjust or reconsider the courses of their actions for the sake of others. When they do

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<sup>13</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, “Buddhism in Asia: Challenges & Prospects,” *Just Commentary: International Movement for a Just World* 6, no. 9 (September 2006): 9.

<sup>14</sup> Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 263.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald M. Green, “Buddhist Economic Ethics: A Theoretical Approach,” in *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics*, edited by Russell F. Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 225.

recognize their dependence and realize that they do need to consider for others, it becomes work. Relationships thus signify burden for them.

Nevertheless, based on Interdependent Co-Arising, one is not completely liberated from *dukkha* unless all are. The “inner peace” brought about through seclusion is temporal, and it is futile to seek *nibbāna* without tending social relationships that have been and will be conditioning one’s emotions and consciousnesses. *Nibbāna* cannot be achieved with one or a few persons’ efforts, and it certainly cannot be completed with one action. Due to the interdependent nature of social existence, the task of transforming *samsāra* to *nibbāna* requires continuous and patient effort from those who are already aware of the Interconditionality, and it depends on spreading wholesome,<sup>16</sup> mutually beneficial practices, and the will to take on such practices, through interrelationships. Cultural sedimentations only happen when most people have been engaging in certain types of practices for a long enough time. That means, for one thing, that anyone who wants to alleviate *dukkha* needs to find a way to stay in the cause for the long haul, without feeling enervated or recouring to *dukkha*-perpetuating measures out of prolonged frustration. For another, one would need to build connections with multiple and diverse others, engaging them in *dukkha*-alleviating *kamma*.

One may not be able to connect with and influence all kinds of others, especially if the “others” are indifferent to the *dukkha* they have caused or even intentionally uphold *dukkha*-inflicting social structures.<sup>17</sup> Through building as many interconnections as one can, however, eventually someone in one’s social circle may be able to reach out to someone in

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<sup>16</sup> See Section 2.1.

<sup>17</sup> See Section 5.1.

his/her social circle who is “conscientized” and has the ability and means to influence those who have been inflicting *dukkha*. Or, eventually the network of interconnections will be influential enough that new cultural norms can be reset through change of practices and social institutions, through change of *kamma* and socio-cultural *rūpa*. At any rate, besides continuous effort, one also needs tremendous patience in reducing *dukkha*. It is no accident that patience has been extolled as a virtue together with effort throughout Buddhist history and in all branches of Buddhist traditions. It is also no accident that most Buddhist schools teach that it takes many lifetimes to reach *nibbāna*.

The network causality conveyed by Interdependent Co-Arising may shed light on some of the deficiencies of some contemporary social theories and activisms, such as the “single issue” thinking that blames only one person or fixates on one social institution, and the oppositional thinking that fuels self-righteous anger, exhausts the activists, and exacerbates oppositions between individuals or groups. One person or one institution does not create all problems, and removing one person or restructuring one institution cannot solve all problems. For instance, without addressing the alienation that many non-Westerners feel under Westernization in general and U.S. dominance in particular, taking out Osama bin Laden alone cannot eliminate terrorism.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, without examining and challenging the naturalized capitalist

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<sup>18</sup> Even in the “Key Judgments” that was released by the White House on July 17, 2007 that considers primarily the Al-Qa’ida and the threat it posts, the National Intelligence Estimate acknowledges that “violent Islamic extremists” and “non-Muslim terrorist groups” consisting of “small numbers of alienated people” are forming “self-generating cells” and becoming more connected globally, without a centralized “terrorist organization, training camp, or leader.” Clearly more people bear anti-U.S. sentiments than just Osama bin Laden. See [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20070717\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf), 6-7. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project report released on July, 24, 2007, while 19 of the 47 publics surveyed worldwide consider the U.S. their most dependable ally, 17 deem it their greatest threat,

values and the imperialistic agenda, changing the president will not change U.S. foreign policies.<sup>19</sup> By the same token, advocating women's rights to paid jobs alone cannot bring forth gender equality. In effect, it has further devalued the work that most women have traditionally done at home, such as nurturing, cooking, and cleaning.<sup>20</sup> All too often fixating on one issue

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including countries in South America, Asia, and Africa. See <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/257.pdf>, 45-54.

<sup>19</sup> David Loy relates that in a personal communication the social critic Micah Sifry writes, "Does anybody think that we can send the *USS New Jersey* to lob Volkswagen-sized shells into Lebanese villages — Reagan, 1983 — or the fire cruise missiles on a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory — Clinton, 1999 — and not receive, someday, our share in kind?" Loy then suggests some of the more hidden capitalistic and imperialistic concerns behind U.S. foreign policies by asking the question: "how much of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has been motivated by our love of freedom and democracy, and how much by our need — our greed — for its oil?" Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 107. Zillah Eisenstein characterizes U.S. foreign policies as being about "maintaining an imperial kind of globalization" that is composed of "unilateral nationalism and transnational capitalism." Zillah R. Eisenstein, *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2004), 9. For a short account of the imperialistic foreign policies of the U.S. based on corporate interests since the World War II, see Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, 136-42. For the component of military coercion in the U.S. global hegemony, see John Agnew, *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), 60-1, 71, 125, 133-4, 136-8, 148-9, and 187.

<sup>20</sup> Domestic work, usually performed by women, is crucial in both sustaining life and supporting the (capitalistic) economy. The fixation on women's rights to getting paid jobs outside of the home as men, though not without its benefits, is indirectly endorsing the value system that judges the worthiness of work by the monetary return it produces, which then is underscoring the unworthiness of domestic work since it is either unpaid or paid very little. Relevant discussion on the capitalistic devaluation of women's domestic work can be found in Nancy Chodorow, "Mothering, Male Dominance, and Capitalism," in *Capitalist Patriarchy: The Case for Socialist Feminism*, edited by Zillah R. Eisenstein (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 86-90. Rachel Bowlby points out that the devaluation of the feminine-domestic (as opposed to the masculine-worldly) is even reflected in the various kinds of negative connotations of the word "domestication." Rachel Bowlby, "Domestication," in *Feminism Beside Itself*, edited by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 71-91. Ann McClintock shows that the devaluation of domestic work is not only linked to the devaluation of women but is also deeply connected to classism, racism, and imperialism. Ann McClintock, "Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising," in *Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, edited by George

only leads to the exacerbation of problems in other aspects of life, and targeting one individual or one group only further widens the gap between “us” and “them,” creating intense ideological opposition and hostility.

If one’s goal is the cessation of *dukkha* for all, one cannot afford excluding any “other” on account of their differences. In the very least, it needs to be recognized that any difference or opposition at the moment is difference or opposition *at the moment*. Differences and oppositional situations can be viewed as a “skillful means” for motivating and inspiring one to expand the scope of one’s benevolent concerns and strive for a more universal liberation from *dukkha*. It is one thing that, out of compassion, one takes actions to rectify the oppressive situation and redress the *dukkha* produced by those who are most responsible. It is quite another that one begins with identifying the enemy, *one* enemy, and then acts out of resentment and hatred toward them. As a mental formation, absolute demarcation between self and others needs to be perceived and then disregarded, like any beginner of Buddhist meditation will be taught to deal with their ever-arising thoughts. Clinging to oppositional demarcation one will act upon it, and acting upon it one is simply deepening the hostility and planting the seed of future antagonism, all the while enervating oneself.

It is also worth remembering that, in Buddhism, discerning those who have been more responsible in *dukkha*-production should not lead to aversion or animosity.<sup>21</sup> And the fact that

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Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, and Tim Putnam (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 131-54. Regarding the complicated intersection between the devaluation of women’s domestic work on the one hand, and classism, racism, and imperialism on the other, see Cynthia Enloe, “ ‘Just Like One of the Family’: Domestic Servants in World Politics,” in *Bananas Beaches Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1989), 177-94.

<sup>21</sup> See Section 4.2.

some of their practices are *dukkha*-inflicting does not mean that all of their practices are necessarily unwholesome, much less that they are inherently, inalterably evil. The fact that certain unfamiliar and different others have inflicted *dukkha* also does not imply unfamiliarity or difference is in and of itself bad.<sup>22</sup> Different others are resources in approaching *nibbāna*. It is through the different perspectives provided by “good friends” who are also dedicated to alleviate *dukkha* that one learns to go beyond one’s egocentric views and concerns. It is through knowing and interacting with multiple and different others and considering them “good friends” that one gradually grasps the manifold and multifarious ramifications of one’s own actions, thereby developing more wisdom and being able to discern and adopt the courses of actions that can benefit many. “The assumption that similarity makes commonality makes alliance makes effective movement is mistaken,” feminist activist and theorist Janet R. Jakobsen writes.<sup>23</sup> This view is shared by feminist Zillah Eisenstein, who advocates what she calls “polyversal humanism,” which is enacted through “seeking out cultural differences in order to deepen understanding by sharing and decentering the self with a newly fulfilling complexity.”<sup>24</sup> “Good friends” of different temperaments and perspectives who are also dedicated to alleviating *dukkha* help one along in the process of better training oneself to be more all-encompassing in view and more wholesome in practice. They are therefore considered one of the forerunners of the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Sections 2.2 and 5.2.

<sup>23</sup> Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference*, 59.

<sup>24</sup> Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> See Section 2.2.

Just as an individual moral agent needs to continually practice within a community of different “good friends” so that they can continually learn from each other and alleviate *dukkha* for each other, an intimate local community that can contribute to the culture of peace and the cessation of *nibbāna* will have to be open enough to allow variety amongst its own members, as well as to build connections with various cultures outside of itself so that it can receive inputs from and render assistance to them if the situation so requires. For the currently disadvantaged individuals and groups, in particular, it is crucial to cultivate the capacity to connect and work with multiple different other individuals and other groups. As feminist Bernice Johnson Reagon puts it, coalition is necessary because the “barred rooms” where minority or minoritized people get together with one’s own kind and feel at home “will not be allowed to exist. They will all be wiped out.”<sup>26</sup> It is by crossing boundaries, coalescing strengths with people of different identities, and borrowing from sources other than the tradition in which one is confined, that the disadvantaged stand a chance to alleviate their own suffering.

Furthermore, liberation from *dukkha* requires everyone’s participation in *dukkha*-free actions, just as the cycle of *dukkha* has been set forth due to people’s complicity in it. Joanna Macy points out that liberation or emancipation in the early Buddhist texts was not presented as an escape from causation, but was linked to Co-Arising.<sup>27</sup> Hence Macy maintains that liberation is reached “by employing causation, by using the leverage of conditionality.”<sup>28</sup> Living with “multiplicities of contacts and currents,” Macy observes, is not only a source of

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<sup>26</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” in *Feminism and Politics*, edited by Anne Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 247.

<sup>27</sup> See *Samyutta Nikāya* II.29-32 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

<sup>28</sup> Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, 60.

constraint or reinforcement, but also a source of power as well.<sup>29</sup> On Indra's Net where all jewels are reflecting, and reflected in, each other, a change with the color of a jewel could travel all over to other jewels. The more interconnections are built, the sooner and wider the change travels. It is through multiple interrelationships that any *dukkha*-reducing movement can take place, gain momentum, and eventually change the socio-cultural sedimentation.

## 6.2 Peace at Every Step

Recalling the Buddha's very practical concerns with being ethical in the world at every moment and his teachings against the pervasive social inequity and violence at his time, it is not too far-fetched to conclude that *nibbāna* has a very this-worldly meaning and encompasses enacting peace in everyday life, even though some may argue peace in the world does not constitute the entirety of *nibbāna*. In the interconditioned web of worldly existence, problems or improvements in one aspect of life always reverberate through the web, generating problems or improvements in other aspects. Seeing the ways in which phenomena interdependently co-arise, it is delusional to assume that the rectification of social structures alone will bring forth justice and peace once and for good, and it is equally delusional to assume all will be well once a person's "inner peace" is attained. In the same way that no individual can exist independently above the influences of social realities, no social structures can exist without individuals' continuous participations in them. Peace in the world therefore does not mean passivity, nonactivity, or purely "inner" peace in the form of training oneself to be content under

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

whatever kind of *dukkha*-inflicting social structures. Quite the contrary, it involves being tirelessly yet mindfully active at all times, dedicating oneself to the never-ending task of alleviating and reducing *dukkha* for all embedded in the *kammic* network.

It is significant that the Buddha taught *kamma* as volitional action *here and now*. “Nonviolence as the Buddha taught it was directed at each interaction in each moment,” Paul R. Fleischman observes.<sup>30</sup> Being peaceful or practicing nonviolence as such is by no means the same as being passive. The ethics based on interdependence is neither one-size-fits-all control nor let-it-be nonactivity. While Buddhist leaders such as the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Thích Nhất Hạnh, two of the most well known masters on nonviolence in the contemporary world, do not mistake non-antagonism with social retreatism, nonviolence with no action,<sup>31</sup> many do. Historically, Buddhist leaders have been more likely to fall short of actively removing the socio-political causes of *dukkha* and less likely to engage in antagonistic belligerent activities driven by attachment to their ethnic or sectarian identities.<sup>32</sup> “There are still those Buddhist leaders,” Brian Daizen Victoria observes, “predominantly in Asia, who believe that Buddhists, especially clerics, should not take part in any form of social activism, most especially that which challenges either the political or social status quo.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fleischman, *The Buddha Taught Nonviolence, Not Pacifism*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh urges that people “work vigorously against the political and economic ambitions of any country” on national and international levels, in order to prevent societal violence. Nhất Hạnh, *Interbeing*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> “When Buddhism turns its less beautiful side up,” Galtung remarks, “it spells retreatism, ritualism,” but “[B]y no stretch of imagination can Buddhism be used to justify direct and structural violence, war and exploitation.” Galtung, *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Brian Daizen Victoria, “Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2 (2001): 72. On occasion, however, some Buddhist masters would support

“[N]onviolence does not mean turning way from violence or being passive,” Sulak Sivaraksa asserts, “It means responding to violence with *upaya*, or skillful means, action appropriate to the time and circumstance.”<sup>34</sup> He continues, “Peace is a proactive, comprehensive process of finding ground through open communication and putting into practice a philosophy of nonharming and the sharing of resources.”<sup>35</sup> Scholars of peace and nonviolence studies agree. Gene Sharp, for instance, maintains that nonviolent action is neither passive nor an attempt to avoid or ignore conflict. “It is *not* inaction. It is *action* that is nonviolent.”<sup>36</sup> Through actions such as giving public speeches, signing petitions, and organizing protests, one nonviolently sends a message.<sup>37</sup> Through actions such as boycotting, going on strikes, or withdrawing one’s cooperation, one nonviolently suspend social and economic relations.<sup>38</sup> Peace and nonviolence are different from pacifism and nonactivity.<sup>39</sup>

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or even advocate military actions. And on each occasion, their words would betray strong attachments to their organizational or nationalistic ego. *Ibid.* See also David R. Loy, “Zen and the Art of War,” in *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 143-56; Ananda Abeysekara, “The Saffron Army, Violence, Terror(ism): Buddhism, Identity, and Difference in Sri Lanka,” *Numen* 48, no. 1 (2001): 1-46.

<sup>34</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, “Buddhist Solutions to Global Conflict,” in *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World* (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2005), 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Gene Sharp, “Nonviolent Action: An Active Technique of Struggle,” in *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice*, edited by Robert L. Holmes (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1990), 147.

<sup>37</sup> Gene Sharp, “The Methods of Nonviolent Action,” in *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Practice and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Potential* (Boston, Massachusetts: Extending Horizons Books), 51-4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-9.

Peace “can never come about through nonpeaceful means.”<sup>40</sup> To be peaceful and nonviolent, one needs to refrain from enacting direct, structural, and cultural violence. With every direct or symbolic appeal to violent action,<sup>41</sup> one is making violence more “citable” in the culture while constructing a violent disposition for oneself. In the same way that individuals’ states of “inner peace” will prove to be transitory if the social structure remains unjust and keeps causing suffering, change of social order does not guarantee peace if violence remains the prevalent mode of action whenever there is a conflict of interests. In trying to remove structural violence by resorting to direct violence, one only reinforces the grip of cultural violence that will further justify future implementation of both direct and structural violence. The “end” of removing structural violence, therefore, does not justify the “means” of direct violence or the perpetuation of cultural violence. This stance again finds echoes in contemporary Western feminist literature. For example, The Combahee River Collective states,

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving ‘correct’ political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. See also Mark Kurlansky, *Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea*, foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama (New York: Random House, 2006), 6.

<sup>40</sup> Nhât Hanh, “Ahimsa,” 156.

<sup>41</sup> Rita Gross comments, “I have always been horrified by the peace movement symbol of a clenched fist inside a circle. I am equally horrified by the phrase ‘fighting for’ peace, justice, the environment, or any other worthy cause. These symbols and phrases indicate a great deal about the collective psyche of the culture, about its assumptions that only confrontation and overcoming opposition will gain any results.” Gross, “What Keeps Me in Buddhist Orbit?” 119-20.

<sup>42</sup> The Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, edited by Anne C. Hermann and Abigail J. Stewart (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), 33.

As long as the society at large continues to naturalize domination and violence, and as long as the society at large continues to foster the mentality of seeing all others in opposition to one's "self," people will perpetually create *dukkha* for each other as well as for themselves.

Peace requires dissolving cultural violence and restructuring cultural values. Since the nature of social existence is that any social phenomenon is continually being constructed and reconstructed by all involved, cultural values cannot be restructured once and for all. Likewise, peace is not an end point that can be reached once and for all. Rather, because of *co-arising*, peace is *peace-making*. And because of *co-arising*, peace-making is *participatory*. It requires the participation of everyone, and it requires everyone trying to be peaceful with every action, at every moment.

Emotively, one cannot enact peaceful actions if one is angry or greedy or so attached to an identity that one no longer finds it wrong to sacrifice the wellbeing of people of different identities for one's own gain. This is where the Buddhist emphasis and techniques of mental training can contribute the most to contemporary movements and activism for justice and peace. From the perspective of Interdependent Co-Arising what is "inner" eventually finds its manifestations in the "outer" world. Buddhism thus places great emphasis on monitoring one's own state of mind in taking any actions. David Loy draws on the current Dalai Lama's call for "internal disarmament" and maintains,

For genuine peace — which is much more than the absence of overt violence — such internal disarmament is as important as external disarmament, and this involves taming the greed, ill will, and delusion in the minds of all those involved, starting with ourselves. It is not possible to work toward peace in a confrontational, antagonistic way.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 109. For the Dalai Lama's call to "internal disarmament," see "Dialogue on Religion and Peace," in *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, edited by David W. Chappell (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 190.

Having mental training as one of its main components, the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path provides a program for people to consciously and proactively recondition both their mental states as well as their behavioral patterns, both of which build up the cultural contexts.

Conceptually, being peaceful with every action at every moment depends on understanding the *co-arising* of things, thereby realizing that complete peace or total nonviolence is not attainable and that peace-making is a continuous effort and a never-ending process.

Thích Nhất Hạnh states,

We cannot be completely nonviolent, but ... we are going in the direction of nonviolence. If we want to head north, we can use the North Star to guide us, but it is impossible to arrive at the North Star. Our effort is only to proceed in that direction.<sup>44</sup>

Along the same line, Fleischman argues,

[N]onviolence is continuous, a pervasive and quotidian effort. ... The student of Dhamma seeks the least harm *at all times*. ... He or she will be called upon also to recognize the complexity and ambiguity that rests on the shoulders of those who have positioned themselves to make decisions in a world of turmoil and suffering. But the sincere devotee of Dhamma understands that the goal of *every moment* is to generate empathy and compassion, to minimize anger and hate.<sup>45</sup> (italics added)

In the ever-changing world of interdependent co-arising, peacemaking is participatory and on-going in character. It requires each individual to scrupulously examine the co-arising in each situation, closely monitoring his/her own motives and mental states at every moment and carefully choosing the most peaceful courses of actions possible, so that the interaction patterns and social structures that ensue can help nurture further *dukkha*-alleviating mentalities and

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<sup>44</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh, "Ahimsa," 155.

<sup>45</sup> Fleischman, *The Buddha Taught Nonviolence, Not Pacifism*, 28.

behaviors. Every volitional action here and now matters because it is through every volitional action here and now that an individual's disposition is constructed, and it is through every volitional action here and now that socio-cultural norms are sedimented. *Nhât Hanh* thus says, "The way to take care of the future is also to take good care of the present moment."<sup>46</sup> The path to the cessation of *dukkha* in a co-arising world is to strive for the cessation of *dukkha* at every present moment. There is no point at which effort can cease; *nibbāna* in an ever-changing world is a never-ending process.

Being ethical is a continuous effort and never-ending process, too. It involves far more than vowing to take a number of precepts. In the interconnected web of existence, being ethical involves being socially benevolent and conscionable. And in the "contextual pragmatism"<sup>47</sup> of Buddhism, being socially ethical involves attending and responding to the particulars of each situation. Doing the right thing means doing what is wholesome and proper in the context. One is not ethical simply by abiding by precepts, and one is not ethical simply by being ethical in one situation at one time. In the ever-changing world of Interdependent Co-Arising, ethics is not something one keeps a while and then transcends, though certain precepts may be. Rather, being ethical is striving to be ethical in all arising situations, just like being peaceful/nonviolent is to be peaceful/nonviolent at all times.

The worldview of Interdependent Co-Arising warrants that each situation, being co-arisen with the particular existing phenomena (*dhamma*) in its particular context, be given due

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<sup>46</sup> Thích *Nhât Hanh*, "Community As a Resource," in *Engaged Buddhist Reader: Ten Years of Engaged Buddhist Publishing*, edited by Arnold Kotler (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1996), 204.

<sup>47</sup> See Section 2.1.

consideration and be not simply judged by a universal rule imposed from “outside.” While the teaching of Co-Arising does not sit well with rigid universalism, the teaching of *anāṭṭa* — which has its rationale in Co-Arising — does not allow for complete relativism, either. In the same way that no individual independently exists, no ethical situation is a completely closed system. An individual does not exist independently because s/he is always subject to being conditioned by the phenomena arising around her/him, including the ideologies and symbols prevalent in the culture and the actions and interactions of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Other people’s actions (*kamma*) and interactions not only condition their own habits and dispositions, but also construct the social realities that influence the self. Any individual’s actions, likewise, not only construct her/his own personality and character, but have wider effects on both the people directly and immediately involved, and the people who later interact with them. An ethical situation is never completely self-contained because the people directly involved in any one situation are also involved in numerous other situations, and the legacy of people’s actions in one situation will live on through people’s constant interactions with each other. Every new situation compels new courses of actions, and every action at every moment contributes to the shaping of cultural values. Since consequences of actions always reverberate through the interconnected web of life as such, universal principles are still needed. Therefore, the *dukkha*-ceasing Noble Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha was still meant to be universal and did not shy away from claiming the “proper” (Pāli: *sammā*; Sanskrit: *samyak*)<sup>48</sup> view or action,

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<sup>48</sup> See footnote 15 of Chapter One.

even though the Buddha also cautioned against dogmatism<sup>49</sup> and instructed his followers to determine what was proper on their own after careful examination of each situation. What is proper is seeing from the perspectives of all parties involved, considering all possible effects near and far, and then taking the actions that will ultimately cause the least harm or alleviate the most *dukkha* in the interconnected web of life.

Striving to be ethical and peaceful *here and now* may not constitute the entirety of *nibbāna*,<sup>50</sup> but it is an aspect of *nibbāna* that needs to be emphasized in the spirit of the Buddha's own this-worldly concern and his refusal of discussing metaphysical questions. Not emphasizing the this-worldly aspect of *nibbāna*, the Buddhist *Dhamma* can easily be turned inward and individualized, morphing into something about an ineffable, mystical state of mind that each individual approaches on his/her own. Being turned inward and individualized, its social ethics is attenuated, and its critiques of the *dukkha*-producing conditions in the world, mostly brought forth by the privileged and powerful, are neglected. Non-Self then loses its profound socio-ethical implications and becomes a philosophical game of the educated elite. *Kamma* becomes an excuse for the privileges that the powerful enjoy and is used to blame the victims, most notably women. The community-building and society-transforming dimensions of the *Sangha* are lost. With the this-worldly aspect of *nibbāna* neglected, being a Buddhist can easily be translated to diminishing the underprivileged self, being content with the situations in which one finds oneself no matter how oppressive they are, and paying obeisance to the males in

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<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Janet Jakobsen states, "any attempt at complete or comprehensive representation of the moral 'universe' will erase some aspects of the context it claims to comprehend." Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Some do consider it is, such as T. W. Rhys Davids Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids. See Section 2.1.

the monastic order in the hope of accumulating merits so that one gets a less miserable rebirth in the next life.

The Buddhist *Dhamma* has an unequivocal this-worldly agendum, which is the cessation of *dukkha*. The teaching of Dependent Co-Arising conveys the interconditionality of “self” and “others.” As every jewel at the node of the Indra’s Net is reflecting and reflected by all others, what a self thinks, feels, and acts can influence and be influenced by what others think, feel, and act. It is because of this web-like mutual conditioning that neither one’s consciousness nor one’s identity can be static. It is because of this web-like mutual conditioning that every “individual” action has its social, accumulative effects, and as such the contextually constructed and constrained individual subjects are not exempted from the social responsibilities of *dukkha*-alleviation. It is because of this web-like mutual conditioning that any individual person has the power to either reinforce or reconfigure the currently *dukkha*-filled sedimentations of social conventions via the volitional actions s/he takes and the interconnections s/he builds with multiple others. It is because of this web-like mutual conditioning that there is no point beyond which one can stop being peaceful or ethical in this world.

The Buddha consistently conveyed his very practical concerns and taught that the ultimate criterion for a view or a teaching was its ethical value: it should be learned and practiced if it leads to welfare and happiness, and it should be disregarded and abandoned if it leads to harm and suffering; other considerations are either irrelevant or not practical enough. To reiterate, the ultimate goal of learning or teaching about the co-arising and conditionality of existence is so that people will have the wisdom of understanding Co-Arising, will put that wisdom into practice, and thereby will put a stop to *dukkha*. Whether or not people call that

wisdom “*Dhamma*” or recognize a *dukkha*-alleviating practice as “Buddhist” is, based on the teachings of the Buddha himself, beside the point. Bhikkhu Chao Chu puts it this way: “the only real Buddhism, the fulfillment of Buddhism, is no Buddhism at all.”<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, one does not have to be a Buddhist (or a poststructuralist feminist) to understand that we come into being and learn how to think and behave in a web of material and symbolic forces constructed by people’s *kamma*. One does not have to be a Buddhist to understand that the *kammic* network that seems to hold tremendous power over individuals does not have any abiding essence and is subject to change by way of people’s actions. One does not have to be a Buddhist to perceive the various forms of suffering existing in the world. And one does not have to be a Buddhist to understand that the current suffering-filled realities have been constructed and maintained because of people’s repeated participation, and it will take all people’s participation to reorient the society and reduce the existing suffering.

Being Buddhist or not, spiritual self-discipline is an indispensable part of global justice and peace, for any form of violence or conflict or injustice is a product of the co-construction of what would be called “inner” or “individual” factors and what would be called “outer” or “social” forces. Oppressive social structures contribute not only to conflicts between groups and individuals, but also breed bigotries and resentments. Bigotries and resentments reify themselves in social hierarchies, hate speeches, and violent actions, thereby creating *dukkha*-inducing social realities. The “internal” defilements and the “external” injustice feed and bounce off of each other. Spiritual self-discipline is therefore needed to so that one has the capacity to closely examine one’s own mental state as well as the ways in which s/he interacts

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<sup>51</sup> Bhikkhu Chao Chu, “Buddhism and Dialogue Among the World Religions,” 171.

with others, thereby putting a stop to this reciprocity between the “internal” and “external” inducers of *dukkha*.

Sufficiently understood, the reality of Interconditionality can compel people to continually strive for the most wholesome/proper, most nonviolent/peaceful, and least *dukkha*-producing actions possible, together with every “other” with whom they can build connections:

Let us pray for world peace, social justice, and environmental balance, which begin with our own breathing.

I breathe in calmly and breathe out mindfully.

Once I have seeds of peace and happiness within me, I try to reduce my selfish desire and reconstitute my consciousness.

With less attachment to myself, I try to understand the structural violence in the world.

Linking my heart with my head, I perceive the world holistically, a sphere full of living beings who are all related to me.

I try to expand my understanding with love to help build a more nonviolent world.

I vow to live simply and offer myself to the oppressed.

By the grace of the Compassionate Ones and with the help of good friends, may I be a partner in lessening the suffering of the world so that it may be a proper habitat for all sentient beings to live in harmony during this millennium.<sup>52</sup>

In the interconnected and interconditioned world, theoretically the task of transforming *samsāra* to *nibbāna* can start anywhere, be it a thought that a person generates, a relationship between two groups, a governmental policy, or an international agreement. The Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path, however, makes ethics first and last. Ethics is the first for very practical reasons: in the form of voluntarily taken precepts, it makes mental training possible, and it makes cooperation and networking possible. Ethics is also the ever-elusive last that is manifest in the effort of always responding to every “other” in every situation with the most wholesome actions one can

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<sup>52</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa, “A Very Simple Magic,” in *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 59-60.

take. As such, an all-inclusive, rigorously ongoing, nonviolent social ethics has been built into the Buddhist *Dhamma* from the beginning. Therefore, instead of externalizing or extrapolating the Buddhist inner peace as if social ethics was prior to now non-existent in the Buddhist *Dhamma*, followers of the Buddha need only to heed the most basic teachings of the Buddha and to reclaim, revitalize, and actualize them.

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