

A Buddhist Concept of Good Community

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According to the teaching of *Dependent Causation*, Buddhism does not think that there exists something completely isolated from other things. The good life cannot be gained without surrounding and supporting conditions. In the *Mangala Sutra*, the Buddha says that good community is required to have a good life. We will devote this Paper to explore how Buddhism thinks about the meaning of good community.

There can be several ways to speak about good community. A way to be used in this paper is something called in philosophy as '*social philosophy*.' For the reader who is not acquainted with philosophy, I have a few words to say about this term. Suppose a Western anthropological scholar comes to Thailand and spends his time visiting the villages. What he is interested in is the way of life of the villagers. He wants to know what plays the role behind the worldview and the way of life of the villagers. After staying and studying for years, he returns to his country and writes the research paper or the book describing what he observes and interprets. In one chapter of his book, he says that Thai society is one of a few good societies remaining in the modern world. He explains that Buddhism plays the significant role behind the Thai way of life found in the villages. The picture of good community mentioned in the work of the anthropologist is *descriptive* in a sense that it is a result of observation. It should be noted that the meaning of good community found in the work of this kind is defined by behaviors of the Buddhists inside the community. In social philosophy, we do different things to find out the meaning of good community. When Karl Marx writes his theory about the good community, he does not observe how people behave. Marx's communism is solely created on the basis of reasoning. In the same way, when Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes his *The Social Contract* he never means that there really exists a thing called the social contract done by people in the community. In social philosophy, when a philosopher needs a thing called good democracy or something like this, what to be done is to think how good democracy can be created and what should be the contents of good democracy. In the view of anthropologist, what done by people in community is neither right nor wrong. They just do. Likewise, what done by Buddhists in Buddhist community is neither right nor wrong. In descriptive sciences a concept of right and wrong is not useful. But in *normative* sciences such as religion and philosophy, this concept is very useful. Sometimes the reader of books on Buddhism outside Thailand expects that when he comes to Thailand one thing might be found is that: vegetarianism is widely practiced because according to the books he has read Buddhism teaches that killing animals is an evil. As we know, in Thailand vegetarianism is hardly practiced. Many books on Buddhist ethics are written on the basis of the thoughts and behaviors of Buddhists in Buddhist community. This kind of Buddhist ethics could be called an *anthropological* Buddhist ethics. The good community to be found in the work of this kind could be also called an anthropological good community. In this paper we will not try to find the meaning of good community like this. What we will explore is the *normative* meaning of good community according to normative Buddhist ethics. It should be noted that the meaning of good life is not the result of the anthropological study; it results from the philosophical study of Buddhist texts. We will do the same thing with the meaning of good community.

According to me, to have a good community these questions must be answered:

- (1) What is justice to be used in that community?
- (2) The rights of people are treated in what way?
- (3) Freedom of people is accepted in what manner?
- (4) How the ruler of the state is obtained and how far the ruler can use his political power?

We will use these topics as the means to explore what should be counted as the contents of good community in Buddhist perspective.

Let us begin with *justice*. In general meaning, justice means fairness. Normally, when we discuss this concept, it is understood that justice is a property of the action provided by the State to its subjects. In another words, justice is a name given to the relation between the State and the people. For example, I am a Thai citizen. Ideally, whatever the Thais have as the rights I must have too because I am the Thai citizen like other Thai people. Suppose one day the Thai State releases a new law stating that Thai people who are over 49 are not permitted to be the taxi-drivers. I am 52. I feel that this law is not *just* for me and for other Thai people who are over 49. It should be noted that justice in the example is a name given to the political relation between the Thai State and me. We say that whenever the State treats people fairly, the State is just; on the contrary, whenever the State treats people unfairly, the State is unjust. Justice in this context is a property of the action given to people by the State.

Sometimes it is not the action of the State itself that causes the debate about justice, but it is the action between people themselves. For example, Mr. A is employed by Mr. B to be his personal car-driver. In the contract, B has promised to pay A 10,000 baht per month. One month B refuses to pay A 10,000 baht for the reason that A is not responsible for his job. A thinks that it is unjust for him, as B cannot exactly identify how A is not responsible for his job. A sues B for that action. In this story, who are in the conflict are not the State and its subjects, but the subjects of the State themselves. However, finally everything will go to the State. The court is a tool of the State to provide justice for its subjects. Suppose the court rules that B is not guilty so he needs not to pay A. A could possibly feel that he is treated unjustly by the law of the State. In this case, we will find that eventually justice is a property given to the action of the State.

How Buddhist community conceives the idea of justice in the meaning said above. Some scholars of Buddhism from the West, for example Winston L. King in his great book *In the Hope of Nibbana*, have noticed that Buddhism seems to have no a thing called social philosophy compared with other religions. This suggestion is important. First of all, social philosophy meant by these scholars might be a set of the ideas concerning 'what is the meaning of good society,' 'how to obtain the good society,' 'what is the proper relationship between the ruler and the people,' and so on. I think an easy way to consider whether such a religion has social philosophy over the community is to examine the law used in that society. In Islamic countries, the law is usually based on the teaching of Islam. In the past, what happened in Hindu and Christian communities is not different from what happens in Islamic community now. So, it can be said that most religions of the world have social philosophy. Buddhism differs from these religions in that while these religions originate as social institutions Buddhism seems to originate as personal way of life. The picture of Buddhism as a personal way of life makes it very hard to expect the political or social views concerning right, liberty, justice, freedom, and so on from Buddhism.

In Buddhist communities such as Thailand, it seems that Buddhists are of two different views about what we have said above. Some Buddhists, who could be called

the *conservative* Buddhists, are of the view that: really Buddhism should be viewed as a moral system aiming at the cessation of suffering. Beyond this meaning, Buddhism has no any responsibility. For them, Buddhism needs not to respond to the questions about social philosophy because Buddhism is not set up by the Buddha to say about social justice, political freedom, and so on. In the *Tipitaka*, the Buddha says clearly that what he teaches is only ‘suffering’ and ‘the cessation of suffering.’ The attempt to find social ideas from Buddhism is fundamentally wrong.

Some Buddhists, who could be called the *liberal* Buddhists, do not agree with the view of those Buddhists. As I consider myself to be included in the Buddhists of latter group (please do not think that the terms ‘conservative Buddhists’ and ‘liberal Buddhists’ have a value connotation; these terms are used for the purpose of classification only like naming A and B), I have something to argue here as follows.

First of all, I accept that the early form of Buddhism can be considered as a personal moral practice performed individually to reduce suffering in one’s life; but this does not mean that the Buddhist is advised by his master, the Buddha, to be the individualist. I think that the person who claims that Buddhism needs not to respond to the questions concerning social philosophy understands Buddhism as an individualistic way of life. This understanding is *not fair* on what is done by the Buddha and his disciples as recorded in the *Tipitaka*. In short, a Buddhist community, as found in the *Tipitaka* and in the Buddhist world today, is not a place where a number of individuals do not look at others and try to practice the *Dhamma* to eliminate desire in their own life only. *We can never find this kind of Buddhist community on the earth.*

Second, there are at least two kinds of social ideas to be found in religious teaching. The first is the explicit ideas given by the texts or by the actions of religious followers in their community. What happens in Islamic, Hindu, and Christian communities can be cited as the example of this kind of social philosophy of religion. The second is what I would like to call the inexplicit ideas to be derived from what the master has said in the religious texts. I think that the social philosophy of Buddhism is of the second kind. I have written somewhere that there are some scholars of Buddhism who think that Buddhism never says anything about human rights; for these persons, what I would like to respond is that: if what you mean is the *word*, certainly we have no such a word ‘human rights’ in Buddhist teaching, but if what you mean is the *content*, I dare to say that we have such a thing everywhere in the texts. The Buddha says, “It is not the birth or the family that makes men different, men are different by their actions.” Does this saying not refer to anything about what we call human rights? In the same way, the social philosophy of Buddhism is something to be derived from what the Buddha and his great followers have done and said. In my view, the contents of social ideas from these two kinds of source can be clearly seen alike. From this assertion, I would like to mention that we can make the social philosophy of Buddhism explicitly given. All depends on our ability to derive it from the texts.

As I have a habit to discuss a philosophical issue through example, I think that the following example might be useful in criticizing how Buddhist ethics conceives the idea of justice. Suppose a girl is pregnant by being raped. She is a Buddhist and now is living in a Buddhist community. Buddhism teaches that killing is an evil. So, if the girl commits an abortion she will do the evil. My question is not concerned with whether this girl has committed the evil if she decides to take abortion. My question is: The law of our community should permit an abortion for this case or not? And why we have such an answer?

Please note that my question is: how our community as a Buddhist community should react to this dilemma. The law accepted and practiced in our community, for me, represents our thoughts more or less. One time I have heard a conservative Buddhist responding to the above question that: it is not the business of Buddhist ethics to give the opinion on this matter. This response is so heartless in my feeling. We have a highly unfortunate girl who is raped and gets pregnant. She does not feel that the child is her son. She extremely needs a permission from us to take abortion. We as the Buddhists must decide because our community is Buddhist community and this serious problem is happening in a Buddhist community. If Buddhist ethics is not responsible to give the opinion for the kind of case, what institution in our community will be responsible for? We must not forget that this kind of problem is *ethical* problem, and the institution in our community which has the experience in dealing with ethical problems most is Buddhism. So, the idea to prevent Buddhism from the involvement in this kind of problem is so unreasonable.

I think that the difficulty in deciding over this kind of problem may come from a fact that: we do not know how to respond to it. We do not know how to start. Sometimes the difficulty found in our life is nothing but not know how to start. As soon as we have the point to start, everything then runs smoothly. To start anything sometimes is to put it into the proper category. I would like to try this thing to the case of the girl above. Suppose we put it under the subject of justice, what we should question is: between permitting and not permitting an abortion to the girl, which one is just and which one is unjust? Now, I think, we will see a light shining in the darkness.

As we have considered previously, justice is a property given to the actions of the State; when we talk about justice in the case of the girl, it should be known that we are considering the action given to the girl by the State through the law. Justice is a relative concept in a sense that if you are the only one living in the world the concept of justice will not be found. Justice will be found in a community where two persons or more have the conflict and such a conflict needs justice to solve. In the case of the girl, the two sides of person in conflict are the girl herself and the child in her womb. In the past, the debate over abortion has divided people of the world into two groups. One group has the opinion that the State must protect the child. One another group has the different view that the State must protect the personal right of mother over her body.

It is not my purpose to explore the concept of justice in Buddhism in detail. To do so a whole book is needed. What I want to say here is that when a Buddhist community places the issue of the girl under the category of justice and then finds that there are two persons to be weighted by the law of the community, the subject is half solved. What to do next is to consider in detail that between the child and the mother who should be more protected and why we decide like that. At this point, the Buddhist teachings proper to use as the base of thought will be useful to make our decision reasonable as much as possible. A thing I would like to add here is that it is not easy to judge moral dilemma like the case of abortion. But finally I believe that wisdom will tell us which way we should go. Concerning the case of the girl, I would like to say that: justice for this case must primarily be considered from one important principle in Buddhism: no ones should be responsible for the result given them by other. This principle is derived from the teaching of *kamma* and *intention* which we have considered in detail before. The girl is not pregnant by her choice. She is a victim of the crime. So, not permitting her to abort the child could be questioned extremely unjust.

However, we could ask as well that suppose we permit the right for the girl to abort the child, can this be considered as injustice to the child. The above principle about the intentional action and responsibility must apply to the child too. The child does nothing. He is born from the action of others. So, it can be said that he is also a victim of crime like her mother. Permitting abortion can be questioned as unjust action given to him by the State. This suggestion is reasonable. Then, how we the Buddhists deal with this extremely difficult problem?

I have written somewhere that if the primary principle cannot be used to solve the problem completely, other secondary principles must be added to help find the solution. In this context, I think that other teachings in Buddhism such as the teaching of suffering and loving kindness could be used as the supporting principles. In applying the teaching of suffering to the case, we could question that between the girl and the child who more suffers from our decision? Suppose we do not permit an abortion, the girl will be forced to adopt the child as her son. We can imagine how much she will suffer this pressure. Suppose we permit an abortion, the child will die. In this case, a suffering that occurs to the child is death. Comparing between the mother and the child, we will see that mother's suffering is the pain, the oppressed feeling, the sorrow, and so on. These states of mind differ from the child's suffering in that the child does not feel any pain because when he is aborted his life just begins in a form of the very tiny embryo. By weighting as said, we will see that the mother is more painful from our decision. So, we must protect her.

As the case is concerned with the death of the child, loving kindness is very important to be used as supporting principle to reduce the evil as much as possible. The abortion must be done on the ground of sorrowful feelings of the persons who are involved. It must be done as the 'parable of the meat of son' given by the Buddha says. In the *Tipitaka*, the Buddha has mentioned an evil done from necessity, saying that when we are forced to do this kind of evil, we must do it from the sorrowful mind like the parents who have to eat the meat of their dead son during a journey across the desert to live.

One of the important features of justice is justice in wealth distribution. I think that a good community must be a place where people of different economic statuses can live peacefully together. In capitalist society, distributive justice is judged through the rule of free competition. By this rule, it is said that it is just for the best to win and for the worst to lose. How Buddhist ethics thinks about this? This question is important. The answer will determine how a Buddhist community deals with wealth contribution; for example, should we demand an inheritance tax? I have heard some Buddhist scholars say that according to the law of *kamma* men are born different. The rich are rich because they have done good deeds in the past lives. The poor are poor because they have done bad deeds in the past lives. So, the rich and the poor deserve what happens to them. It is not right to take the wealth from the rich to support the poor. It should be noted that this interpretation of Buddhist teaching is also done through the *individualist* approach as I have suggested before.

In social philosophy, there are many approaches to the meaning of justice and one important approach is the individualist as found in capitalism. So, to base our thought on individualism is not strange or bad thing. A Buddhist community can use the individualist approach if we find it reasonable. However, a question I would like to raise here is: between *individualism* and *communalism* * which one is endorsed by

* The term '*communalism*' is used by me to refer to a system of thoughts in which individual right is not the only primary value to play the role in community. I have avoided using the

Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism, this question is not needed to raise as it is so clear that the spirit of Buddhism according to Mahayana is centered on the interest of public. The monastic rules found in the *Sangha* of Theravada School seem to suggest the communalist spirit of Buddhism as well. It is known that the Buddhist monk is allowed by the monastic rules to possess a limited private property. Most of properties in the community of monks are shared by everyone. Some scholars of Buddhism think that if we accept that the community of monks can be used as the ideal community of laity, private properties in a Buddhist community should be allowed as less as possible. This interpretation of Buddhist teaching makes the economic justice in Buddhism share much with Marxist socialism.

My personal assumption concerning ownership of private property according to Buddhism is that: there are many texts in which we can find the sayings of the Buddha that indicate the acceptance of private property. The community of monks is a special community. The Buddha well understands the difference between monk community and laity community. Wealth gained from right means is considered by the Buddha to be rightfully possessed by those who make it. The second precept of the *Five Precepts*, according to me, is nothing but a statement claiming the moral rights over personal wealth. Why stealing other's money is an evil? We can never answer this question without the acceptance of moral rights over private property.

However, by the acceptance of private property in Buddhism it does not mean that Buddhist ethics endorses individualism. I would like to suggest that many scholars of Buddhism usually equate the doctrines in Buddhism to individualism. This could be one of many great mistakes that need serious reconsidering. In general, I think that a theory of justice provided by John Rawls in his great book named *A Theory of Justice* is rather close to what to be said in a name of the Buddhist concept of justice. Firstly, Rawls has the idea that freedom of individual must be provided and protected by the State. When Buddhism accepts that an individual has the moral rights over his private property, this means further that the legal rights over personal wealth must be supported by the law. As the moral and legal owner of the wealth, one has freedom to use that thing as he sees proper. This point, I think, is shared by Buddhism and Rawls. Another thing mentioned in his theory is that: if inequality must be done by the State due to some necessity, such inequality can be done only when the lowest people in community will be beneficiary. For example, as the members of community, we have equal duty to pay tax. The tax to be paid by people in community ideally must be the same. But in practice, people pay tax differently. The rich pay more than the poor. According to Rawls, this is inequality; but this kind of inequality is explainable. The State demands the rich to pay more tax, say 20% of their income; but does not demand like that from the poor, say the State demands only 5 % from their income. This practice is done to collect the wealth from the rich to support the poor. It is just to do so.

Even though Buddhism shares this idea with Rawls, the reason given by Buddhism to support this view is different from what given by Rawls. As philosopher, a thing used by Rawls is reasoning and imagination. Rawls argues that (Rawls does not say exactly like this; I have rewritten the thought of Rawls using the example created by me to make it understandable for the reader outside philosophy circle): suppose we have created a community and decide to live together. That community at first is not

word '*socialism*' for the reason that the latter term sometimes has a connotation of the rejection of private property. In communalism, private property is possible—*Somparn Promta*.

political community as it has no any political rules. Now we decide to make it political community. We know that in making political community, the rules for living together are necessary. These rules will function as the guidelines to tell us that this kind of thing will be permitted but this kind of thing will not be permitted. We are now considering the rule of wealth distribution. We know that people cannot be born the same. We are different. Some difference is not a problem, but some is. We accept that each family will have children. We can never guarantee that our children will be born perfect. They can be either the wise or the fool. As well, they can be either the genius of the abnormal. Now we are deciding to set up the rule for our children to be born in the future. The question is: what kind of rule will be most beneficial for our children *in every situation*? We mean: suppose our children are born as the wise, they will be protected by community; suppose they are born as the fool, they will be protected by community. Rawls says that the rule which contains two propositions as follows must be the best in our opinion as they can serve what we hope above:

(a) All persons in community have the rights to their private properties; these rights must be equally protected by the law of community.

(b) The State cannot treat people differently. If there is some necessity for the well being of community that requires the State to treat people differently, the unjust* action of the State can be done only if it will be beneficial to the people who stay at the lowest position in community.

Suppose our children are born as the wise. We have nothing to worry about as we know that they will look after their life well by themselves. The wealth that they gain from their abilities will be protected by the law of the community. Even though some of their wealth will be taken by the State to transfer to the poor through social welfares the rest of wealth will remain as their private properties. Suppose our children are born with middle qualities, not high and not low. In this case, we have nothing to worry about again. We know that our children will survive well by their middle abilities. They might not be on the top, but they might not be at the bottom as well. Suppose our children are born as the persons without talents. We know that without the support of the State they will suffer a hard life. But as the State has the rule that unjust action can be performed by the State for the benefit of the lowest persons, we hope that our unlucky children will be protected by the law of community.

From above, we will find that these rules seem to be the best as they can save people's life in any circumstance. Looking from Buddhism, what presented by Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* could be considered as a middle part. In social philosophy, there are two political theories that could be viewed as the extremes according to the Buddhist theory of the middle way. The first is liberalism which states that individual freedom is the highest value to be protected by the State. Individual freedom here covers even freedom of the rich to not allow the State to take some of their wealth to support the poor. The second is socialism which states that individual freedom has no any meaning in community. Private property is not allowed in socialist community. All people are treated by the State as the members of the same big family. Inside this kind of society, personal talents have no meaning. The wise and the fool share the same amount of wealth distributed by the State regardless of their difference of qualities.

It should be noted that the theory of justice given by Rawls seems to be based on a thing called 'self-interest' or 'rational selfishness' as mentioned by Ayn Rand in her

* 'Unjust' in this context means 'treat people differently'—*Somparn Promta*.

works like *The Virtue of Selfishness*. We have considered that rational selfishness plays the role behind cooperation among human beings. Sometimes we give to other because we feel that we might take back from them some day. The justice model set up by Rawls in its very essence is nothing but giving before and taking after. We are born different. Although now I am born as a wise man, this does not mean that my children to be born in the future must be wise as I am. So, I as a wise and rich man am willing to pay some of my money to the poor in order that in the future if my children are poor they will be supported by others like what I am doing now. This is rational selfishness. This is cooperation. And this is the wise decision.

In general, the Buddhist concept of justice might not be different from what given by Rawls. However, the reason given to support this model by Buddhism is different from Rawls. I would like to suggest first that if we accept that the Rawls' model of justice is based on selfishness the Buddhist model of justice could be viewed to base on unselfishness. The terms 'selfishness' and 'unselfishness' used here do not mention any values; they are used merely to point out that these two models of justice are rooted on different grounds.

So, we can say that Buddhism accepts that it is *good* to give some of our wealth to the State so that the State can give it to the poor on the ground of selfish feeling as said above, but it is *better* to do that thing on the ground of unselfishness. As I have said many times before that the interpretation of Buddhist teaching should not be taken under the assumption of individualism, to understand that the Buddhist model of social justice is based on unselfishness one thing might be useful is to view that this model of justice is not individualist. It could be said that the Buddhist theory of justice is based on communalistic spirit of Buddhism itself.

Please consider this example. Suppose I am born as a rich man because my parents are the rich persons. I accept the model of justice as given by Rawls and Buddhism as said. In the opinion of Rawls, I accept this model because I do not know that one day my children to be born in the future will fall into poverty or not. Logically, it is possible for every rich man to be a poor man some day. The reason which based on rational selfishness tells me that the model of justice as said is the best as it will save the life of my children in the case they fall into poverty. But looking from Buddhist perspective, the reason given above is not used. It is not used because it has nothing related with the truth of life. It just stems from commonsense and instinct.

The point that Buddhism teaches us to look at is: the rich person may think that his riches are gained from his talents and abilities alone; this thought is not valid. To understand why Buddhism has this kind of idea, it might be well to consider the Buddhist teaching concerning the interdependence of things in the world. According to this teaching, there is nothing absolutely independent from other things. The teaching about conditions given in the *Abhidhamma* of Buddhism shows that: Buddhism looks at things in the universe as a net of beings. The world according to Buddhism is a whole, not merely a collection of independent things. In the same way, community in Buddhist view is a whole, not merely a collection of independent persons. Through this kind of view, Buddhism thinks that any individual can be viewed to possess two positions at the same time. For example, we have a man functions as a doctor in our community. Being doctor is partly *individuality* and partly *communality*. The doctor has his own personal life. He has family, job, friends, and so on. This being is individuality. Through the teaching of individuality, Buddhism teaches that every person has his or her own *kamma*. Looking from individuality, it can be said that everyone in the community is accepted by Buddhist ethics as an independent being. So, the doctor in the story is an independent being in a sense that

he has his own *kamma* to be responsible for. When he does a good thing he will collect a new good *kamma*. When he does the bad one he will collect a new bad one too. This is individuality. The Buddha says that purity or impurity is personal matter; no one can help other to purify the mind. This saying is based on the concept of individuality as said. Another position of that doctor is called by me as communality. This term, which derived from a Pali word *paticcasamuppannadhamma*, I use to mean a meaning of that thing as a part of the whole as said above. According to Buddhism, a word 'doctor' never has its own meaning without a connection to something. 'Doctor' has a connotation pointing at the patient. You can never be a doctor without a patient. We can imagine that if the doctor from the city lives alone on the lonely island, like Tom Hanks in the movie *Cast Away*; being doctor within such a situation is totally meaningless because there is no a patient to support the status as the doctor. Buddhism looks at every individual in community through this truth. So, every person, besides individuality, has one another important dimension of life called communality.

In the same way, being a rich person can be considered as a kind of communality. Or, we can say that I have two positions at the same time. On the one hand, I am an individual who has personal *kamma* to be responsible for. I in this position have no relation to other. It should be remarked that I in this position am not the rich man, but purely human being. So, being a rich man has totally meaning related to others in community or in the world. It can be said that on the other hand I as a rich man cannot be considered as individual; I in this context must be considered as something whose status has the meaning because there are other persons in community to support. The rich man is judged from his wealth. Wealth in one person's possession does not happen from emptiness; it comes from other persons. Some rich men could argue that their wealth is obtained by the right means; Buddhism does not criticize this point. Buddhism accepts private rights over private properties as said above. The point that Buddhism tries to give is that: even though it is true that you have collected this wealth by your personal abilities and your attempts, this does not mean that you have no moral obligation to other persons. The poor in community are those who support you through their lack of ability and opportunity in competition with you. Looking from this point, you cannot say that the wealth that you are possessing is created by you alone. The rich without the poor are impossible in Buddhist perspective.

The interdependence of things taught in Buddhism is used by Buddhism itself to be the ground of moral obligation that man must express to other things. The exploitation of nature is bad because it is contrary to this moral obligation of man. Loving kindness taught in Buddhism is partly based on the belief in the interconnection between things. The rich who eat alone are those without loving kindness.

Somewhere I have argued that according to Buddhism, even though justice is necessary, this does not mean that justice alone can lead to good community. The good community should be a place where no one can harm other. But this is not enough. The role of justice seems to prevent the bad person from harming other person. This is good, but not enough. Happiness in Buddhist perspective is something more than having the bad person unable to harm other in community, but having so plus having the good person who cares for other's suffering. The poor is considered by Buddhist ethics as the person in suffering. Poverty is taught in the *Tipitaka* to be eliminated from the state by the ruler. Or, we can say that one of the duties of the State according to Buddhism is to eliminate poverty. In the *Cakkavatti Sutra*, the Buddha even says that the State that allows poverty untouched is making an evil. It is the evil in a sense that due to poverty, poor people will do crimes. It seems that

Buddhism believes that there are so many criminals who commit crimes because they are poor. So, the good community must be a place where the State takes it as a duty to eliminate poverty. The State that does not do so can be called irresponsible.

From what we have considered above, it seems that the Buddhist model of social justice, in which the unjust actions performed by the State can be allowed on the ground of the benefit to happen to the lowest persons in community, is reasonable in itself. By using wisdom, we will find that this is the most reasonable theory. Being reasonable here means putting the right thing on the right place. Why the poor must be protected by the State? Because if the State does not do so; the State is unjust. Why the State is unjust by not protecting the poor? Because the rich are supported by the poor; the poor so have moral rights to take back from the rich; the State which does not play the role in taking from the rich to support the poor is not putting the right thing on the right place. The right place here means the poor need the support from the rich, and the right thing here means the rich give to the poor. The State must put the right thing (taking from the rich) to the right place (giving what gained from the rich to the poor.) The State which does not perform what we have said can be called the *unjust* State.

The Buddhist model of social justice differs from the Marxist model of social justice in that while Marx rejects the rights to private properties Buddhism does not reject. The reason behind the acceptance of private property rights in Buddhism is that: the rejection of the rights over private properties is irrational looking from the teaching of *kamma*. *Kamma* in Buddhist teaching is intentional action and this intentional action has a moral value. Normally, when the concept of *kamma* is studied, people usually look to some sides of the *kamma*, for example the side which says that good action will give good result and bad action will give bad result. There is some side of the concept of *kamma* which I feel usually unnoticed by Buddhists. This side of *kamma* says that the action performed by man through his attempts and abilities must be respected by other. A taxi-driver earns 500 baht from his attempt (driving a taxi whole day). This money must be respected by other because he uses his bodily attempt to make it. Stealing is wrong according to the second precept taught in Buddhist ethics. Anyone who steals this money from the taxi-driver is the bad person. Why stealing is wrong? Because by stealing it means that we do not respect the moral rights over the money of the taxi-driver.

One more important thing to be mentioned is that even though it is reasonable to take some of the wealth from the rich to support the poor as we have considered in detail above, the process must be done on the ground of mutual understanding between the rich, the poor, and the State. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has criticized the Marxist theory of justice that: the poor in communist society are angered by the thought that they are exploited by the rich and the rich are angered by the thought that their money is stolen by the poor. This kind of justice can never produce happiness. In Buddhist community, the rich should be educated by the State's education and religion enough to understand that they have moral obligation to pay back to the poor. This is not a kind of compulsion. No one is unjustly forced to do what beyond his social responsibility. To use a Buddhist word, the rich should understand that paying the tax is a practice of the *Dhamma*. On the other side, the poor should be educated also to understand that their life owes the debt much to the rich in the community. Even though it could be said that the poor have moral rights to take back from the rich, this does not mean that the rich can have nothing to repay from the poor. The Buddha has taught a kind of *Dhamma* called 'the duty-based *Dhamma*.' For example, the master and the slave in Buddhist community have the duties to do to each other.

One of the duties as the master is to care for the life of the slave as a member of his own family. The master who does not do this thing is considered by Buddhism as the evil master. In the same way, the slave must perform his duties to the master. One of the duties as the slave is doing what assigned by the master as best as possible. The slave who does not do this thing is viewed by Buddhism as the evil slave. It should be remarked that the evil in this context is judged from not performing the duty.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu says that the rich, he means the rich according to Buddhism, are the ones to be respected by the poor. I think that in Buddhist community the poor who receive the support from the State can repay to the rich through a practice of *Dhamma* taught in Buddhism such as loving kindness and compassion. Preecha Changkhwanyuen, Chulalongkorn scholar of Buddhism, says that it is not the rich only who can give loving kindness to the poor; the poor also can give loving kindness to the rich. The beggar, who sees the millionaire not closing the door of his car well, walks to that car and says, "The door is not closed well, sir." This is the example of loving kindness given to the higher person by the lower one. For Preecha, a good community is not judged from the rights that each can claim from the State, but judged from the good relation between people and people and between people and the State. Justice, in the view of Preecha, is just one *outer* condition to make a good community. We have many *inner* conditions to be added in making good community.

Besides justice, right and freedom are other conditions required in having a good community. In the view of some Buddhist scholars, the concept of right and freedom is not necessary in Buddhism. A master thesis submitted at philosophy department at Chulalongkorn claims that there is no concept of right in Buddhism.* In the West, the question about whether Buddhism has the concept of rights is one among crucial questions usually raised to debate. Some scholars have a belief that Buddhism has no any idea about 'right' and 'freedom' as understood in social philosophy taught in philosophy class in university.

The assertion whether Buddhism has the concept of right and freedom cannot be separated from the understanding of the meaning of these terms. It should be noted that for those who believe that Buddhism has no any idea about these terms usually understand that the concept of right and freedom requires self-interest to be protected, so Buddhism seems not having this concept as Buddhism rejects the existence of self as something to be protected. This understanding is in accordance with the basic teachings of Buddhism. So, we can say that if 'right' and 'freedom' mean the claim over the self and self-interest, Buddhism has nothing to say about this.

However, we cannot say that this is the whole meaning of the terms. As I understand, 'right' and 'freedom' are not necessarily connected to the self. I admit that in the West the concept of right and freedom has been much related to the self. For example, when I read John Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Governments*, someone tells me that what playing a role behind Locke's exploration of private property rights in this book is the intention of the middle class to protect their property from the noble class. Locke represents the self of the middle class. I think that could be possible. Even though it is true that Locke writes this book to protect his own property rights, I see no any moral guilt in such doing. For me, if you believe in the self, anything done by you must be related to that self. Self-love and self-protection have no any wrong as far as you can justify it.

There can be two kinds of self. The first is 'my self' and the second is 'other's self.' I think that the self acquainted by philosophers of the West is of the first kind while

* This thesis is written by Boontham Poonsarb—*Somparn Promta*.

the self of the second kind is well acquainted by Buddhists. It should be noted that the teaching of non-self in Buddhism could be interpreted as a doctrine that rejects 'my self' only. 'My self' means the feeling, "I exist and I have to protect myself." The concept of right and freedom in Western social philosophy seems to be based on this concept of self. In her books, Ayn Rand usually says that: what we need in community is not a love from other but a respect of our rights from other. By this saying, it seems that the author believes that if everybody in community protects oneself by not allowing other to violate one's rights and freedom, the whole community will be protected too. Peace can be created from the protection of the self of each member of community.

Another kind of the idea concerning the self is not centered on 'my self' but on the self of other person. In detail, there can be a difference of the meaning used in these two kinds of the self. That is, while the self of the first kind seems to cover a thing called metaphysical self, as claimed by most religions of the world such as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the self of the second kind is needless to cover such a self. In Buddhism, we know that the Buddha does not think that there exists the metaphysical self. But this does not mean at all that Buddhism does not accept that a person has moral rights to be respected by other person. I mean that it is true that according to Buddhism Mr. Green has no any permanent metaphysical self, but the lack of metaphysical self cannot be used as a ground for saying that Mr. Green has no any moral rights over his life. Killing Mr. Green is an evil. This evil really exists. Some reader of Buddhism may feel it is rather strange that Buddhism rejects the existence of the self of Mr. Green but accepts that there is an evil happening from doing something to him. How the evil done to Mr. Green is explained? Buddhism answers this question that even though Mr. Green has no any metaphysical self, this does not mean that he has no other kind of self. There is a kind of self accepted in Buddhist teaching, which I would like to call '*moral self*.' This moral self is the base on which the explanation of the evil done to empty life is placed.

One another difference between the self in Western tradition and Buddhist tradition is that: the moral self as said above is not used by individual to claim over his life and his property. On the contrary, in Buddhist community we use this concept to ask for a respect in other's life. Please consider the following example. Suppose you are a rich man. You have two sons. One day you and your family come to the zoo. During spending your family time in the zoo, you find a boy selling the souvenir. You talk to him and know that he is a son of the zoo's lower officer. He sells the souvenir every Saturday and Sunday while other days he goes to school. What happens in your mind while talking with this boy is that: This child has to work even in the days which are the holidays for other children. He has no time to play like your sons. You as the father of your sons know that every father in the world wishes the children to have the best things for them. You try extremely to get the best things for your children such as a good school. You know further that comparing with this boy your sons have more opportunity to get a happier life as your sons are born in the rich family, making them have more chance to take the best thing such as education as said. You ask yourself why human beings are created unequal. You do not think that this boy hopes the best things in his life less than your sons. But his hope seems to have a lesser chance to be satisfied comparing with your sons. You buy a souvenir from the boy and give him other extra money, saying, "I give this money so that you can buy something as a gift for yourself in this New Year."

In Buddhist perspective, what you have done above is the action stemming from *metta* and *karuna*, loving kindness and compassion. The Buddha once says, "Loving

kindness saves the world.” This saying of the Buddha can be compared with a word of Jesus, “Love is God. Find God through loving your neighbors.” It should be noted that when you feel such a feeling on the boy, you do not think that the boy has the right to be respected by you. This story can be cited as the example against the concept of right in Western philosophy. As we see, right functions well in preventing us from the violation given by other; but right never makes the rich have the compassion to the poor. In the view of Buddhism, when you feel that the boy is so pitiful; this feeling occurs as a result of some comparison that you make (secretly?) in your mind. I think that at that time the two pictures are merged together in your mind. The first picture is of this boy and the second picture is of your sons and other fortunate children in the world. In comparison, one thing is used by you (unintentionally?). That thing is: every boy in the world shares a hope for the best thing in his life. As Buddhism does not define self from metaphysical reality, the state of mind aiming at the best thing in one’s life as said can be viewed as the *moral self* as I have mentioned.

One of the meanings of good person in Buddhism is an ability to see the hidden moral self in other person. There are so many people in the world who love only their children. The persons of this kind see only moral self of their children. Sometimes, what they see is not even the moral self in other persons; it is just their own deeply hidden desire which has been transferred to their children as the medium to make that desire successful. Some persons have the unsatisfied past; when having a son or a daughter, they feel that unsatisfied past can be compensated by pushing their children to make it. This action does not stem from loving kindness because it is solely rooted in selfishness. Normally, Buddhism believes that a person who sees moral self in his children will see that moral self in other children because to see the moral self wisdom is required. When a person has wisdom, be it gained from whatever method; wisdom will make him transcend all kinds of ignorance, in which the ignorance of not seeing other’s moral self is included. So, a good Buddhist who sees the moral self in his children or other family members is hoped to see the moral self of other outside his family as well.

What we have considered previously is concerned with the moral self of other viewed from the ethics of individual. In terms of the ethics of community, there must be the action of the State that provides a political system in which the respect of other’s moral self will be effective. A good community, in other words, is partly judged from the ability of the State to see the moral self of its subjects especially those of the lowest position in community. I have argued somewhere that in Buddhist community loving kindness and compassion must be transformed into the policy of the State. In Western social philosophy, we usually understand that what can be put as the ground of the law of the state is seemingly ‘right’ only. But what I have stated mentions the possibility to put ‘loving kindness and compassion’ to be the reason supporting the law of the state. In terms of logic, the use of right as the basis of law is easier to justify. Why you cannot steal other’s money? Because it is not your money; you have no right on that money. So, it is self-evident, meaning needless to explain why, to use the concept of right to prevent stealing money. However, I think we can use the concept of loving kindness and compassion to be the base of the law not differently from what we have said with right. Why you cannot steal other’s money? Because the State shall never permit such an evil to be done by anybody in our community. Why the State shall not permit such an action? Because the State accepts the moral self of the subjects as the most important thing to be protected. Arriving at

this point, we will see that the use of moral self as the basis of law has the weight not different from the use of right.

At the beginning, I have questioned: in a good community according to Buddhism the rights of people are treated by the State in what manner. This question is partly raised to consider the Buddhist view of right in comparison with the right according to major Western social philosophy. As we know, liberalism admits personal rights to be over everything in the state. On the contrary, in socialism, personal rights are not important comparing with the just distribution of wealth. In a good community in Buddhist perspective, we have found that, personal rights play the important role, but not in the same way as stated in liberalism. The difference is personal rights in liberalism are centered on 'my self' but in Buddhism these things are based on 'other's self.' More differently, the self in Buddhism is not the selfish self, but rather the moral self. In Buddhist community, individuals are not advised to think, "I have a certain number of rights to be claimed." On the contrary, they are advised through the State's education and religion to think, "We love ourselves in what manner; others love themselves in that same manner; so we must take it as important thing to respect other's life and properties." The law of community will be set up by the State to make the respect of other's rights effective as most as possible. It should be noted that within this understanding of rights, the State will function as the protector of people's rights on the basis of the acceptance of the moral self of the state's subjects as said through the good law and social justice. People are not advised to isolate themselves from others through the concept of personal rights as found in the West, at least as claimed by Ayn Rand.

Freedom, like right, can be considered in many ways. Normally freedom understood by most of Western philosophers is also *isolated* concept as right. This means that you will have freedom if other persons are not allowed to prevent you from having that thing. Or, we can say that this meaning of freedom is *exclusive*. So differently, freedom in Buddhist perspective is *inclusive*. Sometimes Buddhism compares the good things taught in Buddhism such as freedom to the light of candle. Imagine we burn a candle in the dark night. The light of the candle shines. People from other houses come to us and ask for our permission to let them burn their candles from the fire of our candle. In allowing other persons to burn their candles, our candle is still shining bright. It loses nothing. The good things to happen in the world are considered by the Buddha like the light of the candle. Freedom in Buddhist teaching should not be a state in which people of the world are divided from each others. On the contrary, freedom should be a state in which people are connected to share the good things.

Freedom in Buddhism can be viewed both in macro and micro perspectives. In micro perspective, freedom is the attainment of self-transcendence. This meaning of freedom cannot be viewed independently of the concept of highest goal in personal life taught in Buddhism. In short, Buddhism thinks that a normal person, a person as naturally born, is placed under the influence of desire. The feeling of 'my self,' which we have considered as the foundation of the concept of right in Western social philosophy, is viewed by Buddhism as a kind the actions run by desire.* Desire

* A word '*desire*' in Buddhist teaching is used to refer to a natural state of mind which sometimes is viewed by Buddhism itself as a neutral fact, but sometimes is viewed as a morally negative state of mind. In this context, desire is used in the first meaning. So, when we say that the concept of right in Western social philosophy is based on desire, this does not mean any value connotations—*Somparn Promta*.

functions in many ways. One of its important functions is to protect 'my self' and 'what belongs to my self.' In Western social philosophy, freedom usually means, "If I can claim to have the right to this thing, you must be taken away by the State from my thing." Please note that freedom used within this context is nothing but a means to protect personal life and private property. Even though Buddhism accepts that a person has the moral right over his life and property, sometimes the use of freedom in the above meaning is viewed by Buddhism to cause suffering. We can imagine a community where the protection of personal right and private property is highly effective, but inside that community people still have suffering. *It is suffering results from having the lonely self.* It can be possible that you can protect everything in your life; you can be safe inside the very strong wall provided you by the law of the state; but there is no anything guaranteeing that inside that strong wall you must have happiness. Inside the wall, what you can claim is safety. In the end, the use of right will lead to a safety in the wall. The question asked by Buddhism is: this state of life should be called freedom?

From above, we see that Buddhism understands the term 'freedom' in another way. Freedom in Buddhist teaching is the potential of mind to deal with things in a way that ultimately a person will transcend everything in a meaning that suffering will not occur as a result of that situation. For example, Mr. Black buys a car from Mr. White. Later Mr. Black knows that this car has so many problems and these problems are never mentioned by Mr. White who is the former owner. Buddhism has no any objection if Mr. Black will protect his right by suing Mr. White as Buddhism accepts that Mr. Black has the right to do that. However, Mr. Black is warned by Buddhism not to allow suffering to happen after he has done everything best. Freedom in this context is an ability of the mind to not allow the pain, the sorrow, or the suffering to attack the peacefulness of mind.

Freedom as said above seems to sound a religious freedom, not social or political freedom. The freedom in the latter meaning is given by Buddhism through the second category, i.e. freedom in macro scale. Freedom in this meaning is the space inside the community permitted by the State for its subjects. As Buddhism believes that personal freedom cannot be separated from supporting conditions, freedom in macro scale is needed to make freedom in micro scale possible. In terms of logic, sometimes we believe that to make men free they must be compelled. For example, in Thailand slavery was abolished by King Chulalongkorn, whose name is used in establishing Chulalongkorn University. Some of the slaves are not willing to have such freedom as they feel safer to be the slaves. But the law does not permit them so. In this case, we can say that the slaves are forced to be free. In the same way, some political theory, *paternalism*, believes that to make men free they must be compelled by the State. Buddhism partly shares the view with paternalism. However, if the word 'paternalism' is used to mean a political theory which states that *all* subjects of the state must be compelled to be free, Buddhism and paternalism are different as Buddhism believes that *some* persons in community only need the compulsion from the State to make them free.

As we have found previously that Buddhism is of the idea that the rights of people should be provided and protected by the State on the basis of the concept of the moral self, freedom of the people should be also treated by the State in the same manner. For the persons who have the potential to take care of themselves, the compulsion from the State should be as less as possible. Learning to be a good person in Buddhist perspective requires freedom to some certain extent. What Buddhism needs in a good community is not merely a good action as this thing can be gained by the force of the

State. But what really needed are the good mind and the free will to do a good thing by oneself. However, the difficult point behind this thought is that how to divide between those who need no compulsion from the State and those who really need. The law given by the State to its subjects must be the same for everyone. It seems that paternalism sees this difficulty, so its theory about the freedom of people is set up to cover all citizens of the state.

Some Buddhist scholars in Thailand, for example a former Chulalongkorn philosopher Wit Wisadavet, are of the idea that between liberalism and socialism, Buddhism is rather close to the former than the latter. The reason given by them is that: Buddhism does not agree with the use of the force to make a person good, even though this can be viewed good and sometimes necessary; personal rights and freedom are required in a Buddhist community as a condition to make a person good by himself. I am not sure that how far the freedom of people in a Buddhist community should be allowed by the law of the state. Some years ago, I have examined this subject in my research monograph, *Law and Morality in Buddhist Perspective*. In that, I have stated that Buddhist legal philosophy has two principles to deal with the problems concerning law and morality. The first principle is called by me 'The Harm Principle' whose content says that an action that harms other cannot be allowed by the law. The second principle which I call 'The Critical Principle' says that a personal action which does not harm other but harms oneself in two manners (i.e. critically harms his bodily health or critically harms his spirituality) cannot be allowed by the law of the state. The intentional sale of the organs such as a kidney by the poor person cannot be allowed as it affects his spirituality. Human beings are not the object to sell. We cannot allow this thing even though it does not harm the seller in terms of bodily health. Taking the drug is the example of personal action that harms oneself critically in terms of bodily health, so this kind of action cannot be allowed by law.

From what I have given, it seems that the State in Buddhist community plays that role as the father of its subjects more or less. This model of the State seems to differ from the Liberalist State in that in a liberalist community the State never plays the role as the father. The State just plays the role as the referee to keep the law of the game. Justice in a liberalist community is judged from the fair play of the State as the referee. People are those who are in the game. They fight each others inside the game. Some will lose and some will gain. This is the nature of the game. The referee has no any duties to take side with the weak in the game. Buddhism does not accept this model of state. Buddhism does not think that the relation between people in a community should be a competition; it should be something nobler than that because we are human, not beast.

It seems that everything happening in our community is the result of one starting point. It is: how to view the relation between people in the community. Certainly, it is human mind that gives the meaning to everything including this subject. Even now I still wonder why the wise people like John Stuart Mill or John Locke choose to give the meaning to the relation between people in community like that. I accept that we as a kind of species on the earth are inherited to have a competitive instinct; but we have so evolved to transcend the lower part of instinct, making it not necessary for us to fight against each others anymore.

In terms of sociology, the occurrence of political and social ideas cannot be seen independently of the background of the community. It could be possible that some empirical facts play the role behind the occurrence of the idea concerning relation of people as found in the theories of Mill and Locke. However, ultimately Buddhism has the idea that the political theories can (and should) be modified to cope with the

change of history of humankind. I think that these days a political theory to be accepted by people of the world should be the one that endorses the cooperation between human beings rather than the one which endorses the competition as before. Even in capitalism we will find this trend as well. There are a number of capitalist thinkers who try to base capitalism on cooperation rather than competition. It seems that the gap between liberalism and socialism has been reduced gradually.

The role of the State (the ruler of the community) is one of the important factors to have a good community. It should be noted that we have two different models of the ruler: the ruler as a referee in the game and the ruler as the leader of community. Between these two models, a different implication is found. In liberalist model of the ruler, people in community are divided into a unit and every unit has its own interest to be protected. In socialist model of ruler, people are united within one single community as a family and the relation between the people is viewed as the relation between family members. Buddhism originated at the time when the model of the ruler in the world was mostly based on the idea that the state is an organism with the head of the organism and other supporting parts. In ancient India, a political theory prevailing was of Hinduism in which the four sectors of people are mentioned: the *Brahmin* (religious teachers), the *Kshatriya* (the king and his army), the *Vaishya* (common people), and the *Sudra* (the slaves). According to this model, the King plays the role as the head of the state. The King has a group of higher religious teachers as consulting committee whose primary duties are to give moral advice concerning administration of the state to the King.

Sometimes the Buddha is asked to give the advice to the kings. As the result of asking, the Buddha usually gives a sermon on the virtues to be practiced by the kings. There are a number of the virtues given to the kings recorded in the *Tipitaka*. These virtues are alike in that they usually advise the kings to practice two things: first, the king must be a person who has personal virtues; second, the king must use social virtues in the administration of the state. From these virtues, we will find that Buddhism does not separate the duties of the ruler from his personal virtues. Or, we can say that the good ruler according to Buddhism must be both personally and socially virtuous.

The essence of the Buddhist philosophy concerning the properties of the ruler is that: in Buddhism the power of the ruler is replaced by the virtues instead. Virtue according to Buddhism is something that opposes power. The more you use the power to win other person, the more you have lesser virtue. On the contrary, if you use less power or do not use at all, this means that you have more virtues than those who are inclined to use the power in dealing with other persons. By this stance of Buddhism, it can be said that what said by Nicolo Machiavelli in his famous book, *The Prince*, is not accepted by Buddhism. In Chapter XVII, Machiavelli writes, "Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved." For Buddhism, it is useless to make people fear as finally the people will not fear if the use of power given to them by the ruler exceeds their ability to bear.

In the *Tao Te Ching*, four kinds of the ruler are mentioned by Lao-tzu. The best ruler according to Taoism is the one that people do not notice his existence. The next is the one that people love him. The next is the one that people fear him. And the worst is the one that people hate him. It should be noted that the best ruler in Machiavelli's view, the one people fear, is considered by Lao-tzu merely the third from the top. Buddhism and Taoism seem to share the idea that the power to make

people fear so that they will be easily governed by the ruler is worthless. However, the best ruler in Taoism is considered by Buddhism as more imaginative than the real one; so the ruler endorsed most by Buddhism is the one that people love him.

In the *Aggañña Sutra*, the original meaning of the word '*raja*' (the king) is given by the Buddha. In that, the Buddha says, "When the people feel that they are satisfied by this ruler, they name him the *satisfier*." So, the king or the ruler according to Buddhism is the one who gives people satisfaction.* The word 'satisfaction' here has its special meaning. As Buddhism fully knows that people are sometimes satisfied by desirable things more than virtues, so the ruler should understand that the duty of the ruler in making people satisfied is solely concerned with virtues, not pleasure.

It seems that the meaning of the ruler as said above is so far from being the ruler or the governor as we usually understand. It can be said that the ruler according to Buddhism is the state's officer and the moral educator of the people at the same time. Through the status as the state's officer, the king or the ruler is not the master of the people. On the contrary, he is the servant of the people. Through the status of the moral educator of the people, the king or the ruler has the duty to lead people to the right way. It should be noted that the ruler in Western political science or political philosophy is not required to be the moral teacher of the people. But this status is basically required in the social philosophy of Buddhism. In some theories of Western political philosophy such as the one of Machiavelli, the ruler sometimes needs to be the immoral person to make the state most beneficial. This idea is the explicit example of the separation between morality and being the ruler. One thing to be remarked about the idea of Buddhism concerning the role of the king or the ruler as moral teacher is that: this idea is based on some basic assumptions held by Buddhism as follows. Firstly, Buddhism thinks that to rule the country has the meaning wider than just making people materially happy. The success of the ruler in ruling the country cannot be judged only from a thing called GDP. What said above is directly connected to other views in Buddhism such as the view on the meaning of good life. In short, Buddhism believes that to be born as human has the meaning more than what understood by Machiavelli and other philosophers like this. If we accept that people have the most valuable life that needs moral lessons to cultivate the potential to attain the perfection as true human beings, it should be the duty of the ruler to provide the conditions that will make such a thing happen because the ruler is nothing but the servant of people. According to Buddhism, people not only need material food, they also need moral food. People need guiding to the right way. It is the responsibility of the ruler to guide them that way.

In modern world, democracy seems to be the political model widely accepted throughout the world. The question is: how the Buddhist model of the ruler can be applied to democracy. This question is raised as it is understood that the model of the ruler given by Buddhism seems to fit only a community where the ruler is the king or something like this. In democratic society, we have no king to rule the country as before. The ruler is appointed by people. And the power of the ruler is not absolute in a sense that the ruler can use political power under the constitution only. The difference between the ruler in democratic society and the ruler who has the absolute power in ruling the country is that the ruler in the former sense seems to be an abstract entity while the ruler in the latter sense is a person. The point is: what given to the ruler by Buddhism seems to be designed to apply to a person, not an abstract entity.

* The word '*raja*' literally means the satisfier of the people or the one who makes people satisfied—*Somporn Promta*.

That is: according to Buddhism a person can be good or bad, but an abstract entity such as a government, a nation, etc. cannot be good or bad. For example, when a king of a country commands his army to destroy the enemy's state, the command of the king can be judged as an evil. It is an evil because it is done by a person. The king in this context has the absolute power to do anything he wants; so we can say that he has the intention to commit the *kamma*. In Buddhist literature, there are so many stories telling that the king who commits this kind of evil has been punished severely in the hell for hundred or thousand years. But the government in modern politics has no such status as the king. Certainly, there can be a good or bad prime minister; there can be a good or bad president; there can be good or bad ministers. But the badness or goodness in this context has nothing related to being an abstract entity. That is the prime minister is good as a person who is responsible for his assigned duties. He can be good or bad in this context because his action under our consideration is the action of a person and it is done from intention. Sometimes the prime minister can be questioned whether he acts as a person or not. Suppose a prime minister of country A signs his name allowing the country to declare war on country B; in this case can we say that the prime minister does this thing from his intention. Some Buddhists may say, "Yes, he does from his intention. He knows what he is doing, and such knowing makes it enough to claim that the prime minister's action is performed intentionally." However, there could be some Buddhists who think that we cannot say that the prime minister does this thing from his intention. For this kind of Buddhists, intention means intention of a person and that intention must lead to the action for one's own personal matter. In the case of the prime minister, we see that the decision to go to war does not come from him only. His name is given as a final process only. Before that, there are many processes leading to the declaration of war. More importantly, the war that made from the declaration on which his name is signed is not done as his personal matter. It is done on behalf of the people of the nation. How can we claim that from doing this thing the prime minister has intention and commits the bad *kamma*.

It seems that this kind of dilemma also appears to another actions run by the state's officers. The judge who gives a death sentence to a criminal can be said to have intention and commit the bad *kamma* or not; this is not easy to answer. In Buddhist texts, there are the stories saying that the judge who gives death sentence to the criminal is viewed as committing the severe evil; but the judge at that time is different from the judge in our time. The judge in ancient time is normally the same person with the ruler or the king. At that time, the king rules his country as personal property. He is the owner of the whole land and is the master of his people. Everything he does to the country is done as it is his personal matter. So, he can do a good or bad *kamma*. In the modern state, the ruler does not have such a status anymore; everything done by the ruler can be very hardly considered as personal matter. So, the problem is: if we accept that the ruler in modern state is not a person, how the Buddhist model of the good ruler can be applied to modern state.

This question is not only problematic to Buddhist ethics, but also problematic to every ethical theory in the world. In general, ethical thoughts are designed to be used to explain and judge the actions performed by the person. When Kant says that the right thing is judged from duty, not from emotion; this saying well applies to a person. However, this does not mean that ethical theories ever given in the world cannot respond to this new kind of ethical problems. What we need is to modify the former theories; we need not to cancel the theories. This can apply to Buddhist ethics as well.

Turn back to the Buddhist concept of *kamma* again. Even though the teaching about *kamma* is primarily designed to use with a person, the modified teaching concerning

kamma might be usable with a new kind of person, a *collective person*. The new form of the ruler can be considered in a form of a collective person; so when we ask for responsibilities from the State what we must ask for is the responsibilities as a collective person.

We have considered previously that the State* in Buddhist perspective should act as both the provider of material happiness and the moral teacher of the people; the actions of the State in both aspects apply well to the king at the time of the Buddha. The State in modern meaning, in Buddhist perspective, can perform these two functions as well. In every country of the world, the State is acting to provide material happiness; so it can be said that the State in the world has performed one of two duties required by Buddhism already. If one thing can be done, other thing can be done also.

However, between these two duties of the State, it seems that the first duty goes well side by side with any kind of the State; while the second duty can be questioned whether fits the State in democratic community. In Western social philosophy, sometimes the state is said to originate from the social contract done by people. Inside this kind of state, the government is viewed to act only for the benefits of the people. It can be said that: according to the social contract theory, the selfish people are united to create the state and then set up the government to act as the representative of the people; as the people who give rise to the state are selfish, the government must be selfish too. The role of the State as the provider of material happiness is in accordance with the selfishness of people. So, it is not strange if Buddhism requires this role of the State.

But the duty as the moral teacher of people can be doubted not in accordance with the nature of modern state as said. At the ancient time, it is not strange if the king acts as the moral teacher of people because the king is the head of the big family named country. To perform that duty of the king is not different from what the father does to his children in family. The father should be the moral exemplar for his sons and daughters; in the same manner, the king should be the moral exemplar of his subjects. In modern state, the government or the State is a kind of person which we have called 'collective person,' not a single person as the king. The meaning of the State as a collective person is that the persons united as a government cannot do anything without the general will of people. What is more difficult is that even a thing called 'general will' is problematic in itself as we can doubt that how to have a general will from so many different people in community. General will in terms of the practice could be obtained from majority's voice. It seems that from this kind of general view the State can perform the second duty. But the State can do so only if the general will of people agrees. Suppose the general view says, "We do not need morality; what we need is merely material benefits." Does this mean that the State as a collective person can do nothing about morality in the state?

From above, it seems that the Buddhist model of State has the limitation as sometimes it cannot be applied to some kind of community where the general view derived from the voice of majority does not demand the duty of the State as the moral teacher. We have two answers for this question: yes and no. To answer yes, it means that we accept that the Buddhist theory of the State cannot be applied to that kind of state. In choosing this way, we can say further that all happens is not a problem. It can

* The word 'State' (with capital letter 'S') here is used to refer to the authoritative power to act on behalf of the state. Sometimes this word has the same meaning with the ruler or the government. The word 'state' (with small letter 's') is used to mean a nation, a country, or something like this—*Somparn Promta*.

be possible that the selfish people in the state where general will does not demand the role of the State as the moral teacher accept that morality is necessary but it should be placed outside the responsibility of the State. Finally, inside this kind of state morality remains as something important; other institutions besides the State such as religion will be responsible for that. In Western countries where liberalism is adopted, it is understood that the State has no any duties to act as the moral teacher of people. Even the teaching of religious teachings in the State-run schools is prohibited by law. This does not mean that this kind of state is amoral. It just means that there is other institution playing the role instead.

To answer no, it means that we do not think that the Buddhist theory of the State has the limitation as said. In choosing this way, what we have to do is to argue that why it is necessary for the State to play this role even though sometimes people do not demand it. First of all, we must not forget that Buddhism has distinguished between what people want and what is good for people. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu always says, "The weak point in democracy is that: people are convinced to believe that the best form of government is democracy and democracy in their view is the self-rule of people, for people, and by people. People can be mad or selfish; so democracy created by this kind of people is mad democracy or selfish democracy. Democracy should be defined differently; that is democracy should be the rule made for the right benefits of people instead." This opinion of Buddhism plays the role behind the second duty of the State. If we accept that it is possible that sometimes what people need is not good, what we must accept further is that the voice of majority does not necessarily indicate right things to be done by the State. So, finally it is the duty of the State to consider what should be done and what should not be done. Wisdom is very useful for the State to distinguish between these two things; and this is why wisdom is required by Buddhism as one of the virtues to be found in the good State.

It should be noted that the state, or good community, in Buddhist perspective must have moral objective. The state is viewed by Buddhism as something not different from man. Man has suffering. The state has suffering too. Man needs moral improvement. The state needs moral improvement as well. Why the state needs moral improvement? Because this kind of state only can provide a good life. We have considered that good life is a goal in human life. Without good life, we can never claim to live a life as human being. But good life cannot be found from emptiness. Within the good community only the good life can be found.

However, a difficult question to be answered by Buddhism is that: a person in community has the right to not be a good person or not. This question is raised by philosophers who believe in liberalism. For these philosophers, somebody could argue that he does not reject that what Buddhism taught is good; but such goodness is something he does not want; what he wants is just ordinary life, not a noble one; something Buddhism teaches as a bad thing is not bad in his view. As far as his lifestyle does not cause any harm to other person in community, why he should not have a bad life? In Western countries, a bad thing according to the teaching of Buddhism such as pornography is allowed on the ground that it is personal right to be a bad person according to religious teaching as far as such a bad lifestyle does not cause the harm to any person in society. The question is: if this kind of argument is found in a Buddhist community, how does Buddhist ethics respond to it?

This question is hard for Buddhism to answer as Buddhist theory of state is based on the assumption that one of the duties of the State is being the moral teacher. However, we can distinguish between the virtues of the State and of the people. I think that what required by Buddhism is that the State should have virtues more than

people. This means that it is possible for the citizens of Buddhist community to be a bad person to some explainable extent. As Buddhism is a religion which has no history concerned with the use of the force in any form to compel a person to do a good thing, personal freedom and personal right to be permitted by the State in Buddhist community sometimes could include the freedom and the right to be a bad person as said. In Buddhist countries such as Thailand, the intoxicants such as wine, beer, and so on are legal though these things are included into the bad things according to the fifth precept. Why the bad things like this can be legal in a Buddhist country? The answer is: because the Buddhist theory of state accepts that the individual is the owner of his life. The state is not the owner of people's life. Moreover, everybody equally shares a community as the co-owner. The State is not the owner of the community. By this analysis, it is not right to compel a person to act like other persons on the ground that what done by other persons is good according to the teaching of Buddhism.

Normally, the father must have virtue higher than his children, otherwise he cannot teach them to be a good person. In the same way, the State (the Prime Minister, the Ministers, the President, the King, and so on) must have virtue higher than people otherwise a role as moral exemplar will be meaningless. Confucius says that the ruler is compared to the North Star which means the symbol of the state. If the ruler is bad, it is hardly to have the good citizens. On the contrary, if the ruler is good, his goodness will make it possible to have the good citizens. Buddhism totally agrees with Confucius.