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# TOWARDS BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORK AND HAPPINESS\*

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## ABSTRACT

Not only be one of the crucial bases for accomplishing merit, but “social work” is one of the names for “happiness” — that is, the “meritorious deed” in the Buddha’s discourses or *suttas* as well. With a long distance to its origin, social work, in its first reference as *dāna* (giving), was expressed in the Buddha’s time as a spiritual force for the creation of social conditions favourable to tackle such critical social *dukkha* (problems) as poverty, hunger, wars and the suffering resulting from these problems. And after more than 2,600 years, these same old problems have continued, together with new social problems and risks. In the turn of the twentieth century tendency, however, are emerging such social-environmental-economic development crises along with those problems as ecological catastrophe, environmental degradation, climate change, human trafficking, drugs, and recently the paradox of happiness of people in the developed nations — for the current economic situation does not really make their citizen happy, although the countries have succeeded much in industrialization and modernization guided by the “pursuit of happiness,” an efficient economic ideology in search of an affluent and good ‘welfare state’ of *Homo economicus* of the mainstream economic paradigm. This paper, in quest for solutions relevant to those contemporary problems, analyzes their causes and considers the ‘Buddhist social work’ as a vital path in pursuing genuine happiness via the Buddhist economics of happiness standpoints.

*Key words:* Social work, Buddhist economics, *Homo economicus*, Happiness paradox

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\* This article is based on some parts of the author’s dissertation in Buddhist Studies, entitled “Buddhist Economics of Happiness: An Analysis of the Paradox of Happiness in Western Economics” submitted to the Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, on 31 March 2014/B.E. 2557, academic year 2013 C.E. / B.E. 2556.

## 1. Introduction

Not solely one of the crucial bases for accomplishing merit, social work is one of the names for 'happiness,' that is—*puñña*—the “meritorious action” in the Buddha’s discourses or *sutta* as well. As a so-called ‘the good,’ social work is a common aim of all Buddhists and a ‘method’ or ‘means’ to an end goal of life—that is, ‘happiness’. Nonetheless, happiness is not always the good, while the good is certainly happiness, according to the Buddhist ethics. Although impermanent and liable to change, happiness of social work causes the seekers more benefits than threats.

On the contrary, happiness of *Homo economicus*, the economic man, although transient, changeable, and worldly the same nature as that of social work, it causes the seekers more threats than benefits. It arises when want or craving (*taṇhā*) is satisfied. Thus, it is unfinished or boundless and can lead a community and society to social and economic injustice, political corruption, poverty, hunger, financial crises, environmental deterioration, and climate change. In short, happiness of *Homo economicus* and its pursuit always ends up with *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness. Also, it can appear as the societal suffering due to seekers’ unlimited want and inability to see happiness as it really is.

And after more than 2,600 years, the individual and social *dukkha* have continued and recently lead to the paradox of happiness in the developed nations—for the current economic situation does not really make their citizen happy, although the countries have succeeded much in modernization guided by sciences and technology. The “pursuit of happiness,” an efficient economic ideology is used in search for an affluent or good ‘welfare state’ of the mainstream economic paradigm. In quest for the policy relevant to solve those structural problems, this article analyzes the causes of such social-economic problems and considers the Buddhist social work as the path for human pursuing right happiness through the Buddhist economics of happiness standpoints.

## 2. History of Social Work

With a long distance to its origin, social work was in its first reference as *dāna* (generosity, charity) and *veyyāvacca* (offering the service). Both meanings were expressed in the Buddha's time as spiritual force for the creation of social conditions favourable to tackle the critical social *dukkha* (problems) such as wars (among states), poverty, hunger, and the suffering resulting from these problems. According to the traditional story, such distinguished individuals as Sudatta-Anāthapiṇḍika<sup>1</sup> and Visākhā (Migāra's Mother);<sup>2</sup> both who situated at the upper class of society and very wealthy, as well as Suppiyā,<sup>3</sup> and Ugga of Hatthī village,<sup>4</sup> all choose to follow the spiritual path and became the noble ones through 'generosity' and 'rendering the service'.

Hence, the history of philosophical idea of eastern social work must begin with the great contribution of the Buddha. The Blessed One understands the major cause of social problems within the individual. By focusing on the individual, even though he also knows how much culture and the structure of society (caste system) have influence upon individuals; his Dhamma can cure the social problems of his time.<sup>5</sup> This is because to serve a society in a real and long term is difficult, if the person is devoid of 'individual development'. Therefore, the Buddha urged his sixty disciples who had attained the *arahantship* to travel from village to village, city to city, to teach his Dhamma<sup>6</sup> to people for their welfare and happiness:

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<sup>1</sup> F.L. Woodward (tr.), **Aṅguttara-nikāya: The Gradual Sayings**, vol. 1, (no. 18), [Part I: The Book of the One, (f) Lay-follower, men], (Oxford : PTS, 1995), p. 23.— Sudatta-Anāthapiṇḍika, the lay-follower, (praised by the Buddha), chief (*etadagga*) among men disciples of alms-givers.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., [(g) Lay-follower, women], p. 24.— Visākhā (Migāra's Mother), the lay-follower, chief among women disciples who minister to the Order (and of performing *dāna*).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 25.—Suppiyā, the lay-follower, (praised by the Buddha), chief (*etadagga*) among women disciples who nurse the sick.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., [(f) Lay-follower, men], p. 23.—Ugga of Hatthī village, the householder, chief among disciples who give pleasant gifts.

<sup>5</sup> This is evidenced by some major indications told by King Pasenadi of Kosala in the *Dhammacetiya Sutta* that the king praises and thanks the Buddha of his *Dhamma* which have brought peace and happiness to his country.— I.B. Horner (tr.), **Majjhima-nikāya: The Middle Length Sayings**, vol. 2, (no. 11), [89: *Dhammacetiya Sutta*], pp. 298-302.

<sup>6</sup> The word *dhamma* (Sk. *dharma*) has several definitions. The most common are: teaching (as contained in the scriptures), Ultimate Truth (to which the teachings point), law, doctrine, nature, phenomenon, and a discrete 'moment' of life, seen as it really is.—Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto (*Phra Phrabrahmaguṇābhorn*), **Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of**

Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of *devas* and men. Let not two (of you) go by one (way) Monks, teach *dhamma* which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending. Explain with the spirit and the letter the Brahma-faring completely fulfilled, wholly pure.<sup>7</sup>

Those suggestive words not only instigate the strategic age of social work in the world, but also signify the first Buddhist thought of the kind of social work and duty in a humanitarian sense that is found in the sacred history of humankind.

### 3. *Homo economicus*: The Economic Man

As mentioned earlier that early social work (both in the East and West) has its main focus and origin in 'poverty' and its economic and social consequential problems such as disease, lack of education, prostitutes, crime, etc. Actually, these problems are closely linked to notion of *homo economicus*: the economic man of western mainstream economics of capitalism ideology. *Homo economicus* who is always rational, self-interested, and stresses on individualistic preferences via his/her 'pursuit of happiness' is one of the most important and powerful tenets of the Neoclassical Economics.

This humanistic model was thought to be proposed by John Stuart Mill in 1836.<sup>8</sup> In Mill's opinion, the economic man is "solely as a being who *desires* to possess wealth, and who

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**Conditionality**, tr. by Robin Moore, (Bangkok : Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2011 / B.E. 2554), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> I.B. Horner (tr.), **Vinaya Piṭaka: Book of Discipline**, vol. 4, (no. 4), [I: *The Great Section*], (Oxford : PTS, 1993), p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> John Stuart Mill, "On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It," **London and Westminster Review**, October 1836. Reprint, Mill, **Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy**, 1844. Reprint, **Collected Works**, vol. 4, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), pp. 120–64. See, Joseph Persky, "The Ethnology of Homo Economicus," **Journal of Economic Perspectives**, vol. 9, No. 2, (Spring 1995): 221-231.

is *capable of judging* the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end.”<sup>9</sup> [*italic added*] Such a ‘desire’ is ‘unlimited want’ or ‘self-interest’ in a human’s nature, although it is nothing new, it can appear in the position of power and control over humanity, natural resources, economic and political systems.

Due to Venerable Buddhādāsa, the human desire is *taṇhā* or craving that has many dimensions. In addition to the three levels on which it operates, craving disturbs the mind in three basic directions or ways: “There is the desire to get, have, possess, and enjoy material things. There is the desire to be this, to be that, to become somebody or something. And there is the desire to not be, to no longer exist, to be annihilated, to become nothing.”<sup>10</sup> Craving then has many ways to disturb the mind and ruin its ‘natural ecology’—the spiritual realm of mindfulness and wisdom—that has no chance of being healthy.

Additionally, as the institutional structure, David Brandon argues:

These cravings have become cemented into all forms of social structures and institutions...These structures and their protective institutions continue to exacerbate and amplify the basic human inequalities in housing, health care, education and income. They reward and encourage greed, selfishness, and exploitation rather than love, sharing and compassion. Certain people’s life styles, characterised by greed and over-consumption, become dependent on the deprivation of the many. The oppressors and oppressed fall into the same trap of continual craving.<sup>11</sup>

As a product of the economic and social theories that support capitalist society, the *Homo economicus* model is a basis on which modern economic theories are built as well. The model ensures an individual’s free will to pursue one’s own interests. It also deeply rooted in the East with the West tradition of capitalism. People in such a model only seem to think, as affluence creeps in, that they can become happy if they get their desires fulfilled. As GDP swells, therefore, their lives turn around cash. People worship money. Many Asians and developed capitalist countries fall into such a pursuit of happiness (material wealth).

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, (1836, p. 321); (1995, p. 223).

<sup>10</sup> Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, “Conserving the Inner Ecology (1990),” tr. by Santikaro Bhikkhu, Suan Mokkhabalarama, November 1997. [online], available at <http://www.suanmokkh.org/archive/arts/ecology1.htm>, [20 April 2015].

<sup>11</sup> David Brandon, **Zen and the Art of Helping**, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 10-11, in Ken Jones, **Access to Insight**, (Legacy edition), 30 November 2013. [online], available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/jones/wheel285.html>, [3 June 2015].

Although achieved much, capitalism does not actually make people happy because the life of *homo economicus* is paradoxical in many senses. The greater quantity of happiness (goods and services) they pursue, the fewer amount of utility and life satisfaction they obtain. This implies that: “getting what ones want does not always lead to wanting what ones get (getting)”. All these paradoxical phenomena can be realized only by the wise—that happiness is transient (*aniccam*), unsatisfactory (*dukkham*), and non-self (*anattā*). When one expects it to satisfy oneself, one solely suffers from it.

Therefore, the economic man, when reach the societal level, reacts efficiently to the tremendous economic and political pressure from the forceful capitalist-driven ideology. People acquire more power, more materials, and become caught up in boundless routines of “getting more and spending more”. They exploit others as well as destroy the ecology and nature for ages—undoubtedly, devoted to “happiness” which is not that far from ‘money’ or ‘wealth’. These irrational behavior and selfishness (craving) have instigated new social problems and risks, for instance, human trafficking, children on/of the street, family violence, drug abuse and juvenile justice, that emerged in Thailand and the ASEAN since the 1990s. Absolutely, they expand the demand for social work such as to create more ecosystem restoration program, open more homeless program, release more refugee resettlement program, build more mental hospitals, open more drug rehabilitation programs, etc.

All problems have human desire, in the old-time view, selfishness or greed, as an origin. So, why do we not get rid of it? or, why do we not reject the use of *homo economicus* as an analytical tool in the mainstream economics?

#### **4. The Western Social Work**

Social work in the western society, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is “any of various professional activities or methods concretely concerned with providing social services and especially with the investigation, treatment, and material aid of the economically, physically, mentally, or socially disadvantaged. Although it has been a humanistic social action since the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, social work these days concerns various procedural forms and reports to characterize ways of relieving suffering and enhancing people well-being, rather than direct interacting with clients or the needy.

According to Soydan,<sup>12</sup> the theoretical idea of social work initiates with the contribution of two classical theorists: Mary Richmond (1917)<sup>13</sup> who seeks the main causes of social problems within the individual by focusing on the individual in order to remedy social problems; and Jane Addams (1902, 1960)<sup>14</sup> who focuses on the structure and culture of society and their influence upon the individual.

Nowadays, social work in the West is: “A business agency with the highly procedural forms. Its organization and education are subordinated to and transformed by the imperatives of managerialism.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, it is the job done by someone who works for a government or private organization that helps people who have financial or family problems.<sup>16</sup> From a Buddhist view, this nature of the agencies has worsened the true spirit of social work. As it frustrated the workers with a barrage of forms that their work currently took:

We are now much more office based...The whole team was in the office working at their desks. We have loads more forms which take time to complete. But we social workers also do less and less direct work with clients. Increasingly the agency buys in other people to do the direct work and we manage it.<sup>17</sup>

Another worker condensed the frustration, which seems the same experience as the first worker's:

I feel so deskilled because there are so many restrictions over what I can do. Yes I go out and do assessments, draw up care plans, but then we

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<sup>12</sup> H. Soydan, **The History of Ideas in Social Work**. (Birmingham, UK: Venture, 1999), quoted in Silvia Staub-Bernasconi, “Social Work as a Discipline and Profession,” p. 12, published in Vesna Leskosek (ed.), **Theories and Methods of Social Work: An Exploring Different Perspectives**, Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana, 2009, pp. 9-30.

<sup>13</sup> M. Richmond, **Social Diagnosis**, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917).

<sup>14</sup> J. Addams, **Democracy and Social Ethics**, (New York: Macmillan, 1902); and J. Addams, **A Centennial Reader**. (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> J. Harris and V. White, **Modernising Social Work: Critical Considerations**, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2009), quoted in Iain Ferguson, “‘Another Social Work is Possible!’ : Reclaiming the Radical Tradition” p. 90; published in Vesna Leskosek (ed.), *op.cit.*, Chapter 5, pp. 81-98.

<sup>16</sup> More detail—see Morley D. Glicken, “An Introduction to Social Problems, Social Welfare Organizations, and the Profession of Social Work,” in *Social Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Chapter 1, (Phoenix, USA: Arizona State University, 2011), pp. 3-20.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Jones, “The Neo-liberal Assault: Voices from the Front-line of British Social Work,” in I. Ferguson, Lavalette, M., Whitmore, E. (eds.), **Globalisation, Global Justice and Social Work**, (London: Routledge/Telor & Francis Group, 2005), p. 98.



aren't allowed to do anything. I can't even go and organise meals on wheels for somebody without completing a load of paperwork, submitting a report to a load of people who would then make the decision as to whether I can go ahead and make the arrangements. I just wonder why I am doing this. It's not social work.<sup>18</sup>

Although stresses on 'poverty' as its birth, social work in the Western economic world and the rise of its philosophical idea are greatly different from the Eastern tradition.

## 5. Towards Buddhist Social Work: An Analysis

In the East, that is to say—Buddhism—social work is defined as 'happiness' or 'human flourishing'. It is an action which is said to be 'good' or 'right' when it has tendency to augment happiness and welfare or well-being of the community or society. Not only be synonymous to human happiness, social work is an 'advantage' or 'boon' (*puñña*) stated in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* by the Buddha, thus: "Monks, be not afraid of deeds of merit. It is the name for happiness, that is, meritorious deeds."<sup>19</sup>

The Blessed One has also restated such meritorious deeds to an angel named 'Lāja' to be pursued and done repeatedly since its result is happiness: "If a person were to do good, he should do it again and again; let him delight in it. The accumulation of good is happiness."<sup>20</sup> Based on such the Teaching, happiness of one who performs social work (its quality) is totally opposed to that of *Homo economicus* that arises when want is satisfied; it is unfinished; and ends up with suffering due to its impermanent and non-self nature.

As a task that takes the good of society, the Buddhist social work constitutes "human flourishing" as the core of "human happiness" which is subscribed to its philosophy. As it is evidenced by the Buddha after his enlightenment encouraged his 60 disciples who were the *Arahants* to serve a society for the benefit and happiness of the greatest number

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> E.M. Hare (tr.), **Aṅguttara-nikāya**, vol. 4, (no. 21), [The Book of the Sevens, v, § ix a (59a): Amity], p. 54. (A 6.54)

<sup>20</sup> K.R. Norman (tr.), **Khuddaka-nikāya** (The Minor Anthologies): **Dhammapada** (The Word of the Doctrine), (no. 30), [118; Ch. IX: *Pāpavagga*], (Oxford : PTS, 1997), p. 18.

of people.<sup>21</sup> His action not only explains the value of social work and benevolence, but also expounds social work as a 'duty' that must be guided by Dhamma. And his Dhamma that becomes a primary axis for cultivating virtue is defined as morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The threefold can not only treat the ills of life: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), but also enable people to live their lives properly and do not harm others.

There are ten virtuous actions where the Buddha defined as the pursuit of right (ordinary) happiness known as *Dasa-puññakiriyāvatthu*.<sup>22</sup> This Pāli term is composed of four small words: *dasa* (ten) + *puñña* (merit) + *kiriyā* (action, deed) + *vatthu* (bases, ways) that is rendered the 'Ten-Bases of Meritorious Action'. All ten-bases are the Buddhist practical, peaceful action of attaining the right 'worldly happiness'— a kind of 'feeling good' (*sukha-vedanā*). *Puñña* (Sk. *puṇya*) is a popular term for wholesome (*kusala*) action.

The Ten-Bases of Meritorious Action, in group, are called as the 'Three-Bases of Meritorious Actions' (*tīṇi-puññakiriyāvatthu*)<sup>23</sup> that can be applied to explain the human's behaviour and societies. The three-bases are defined as: 'generosity' (*dāna*), 'morality' (*sīla*), and 'mental development' (*bhāvanā*). They are the triad of volitional deeds. Not solely they can produce good effects, but they also give social workers the highest blessing known as *maṅgala* or "the auspicious".<sup>24</sup>

Also, the triad can provide a strong foundation for the higher levels of Dhamma—that is, "the Threefold Training" (*ti-sikkhā*)—namely, morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). They are the core of which involves the good practice called as *Ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* (the Noble Eightfold Path)<sup>25</sup>—to perform in a firm and secure manner. All in

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<sup>21</sup> I.B. Horner (tr.), *op.cit.*, footnote 7.

<sup>22</sup> Pe Maung Tin (tr.), **Aṭṭhasālinī Aṭṭhakathā: The Expositor** (Buddhagosa's Commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*), (no. 48), vol. 1-2, p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> F.L. Woodward (tr.), **Khuddaka-nikāya** (The Minor Anthologies): **Itivuttaka** (As It Was Said), vol. 2, (no. 24), (Oxford : PTS, 1996), p. 154; See also, A IV 164-6.

<sup>24</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (tr.), **Khuddaka-nikāya** (The Minor Anthologies): **Khuddakapāṭha** (The Minor Readings), (no. 23), [V: *Maṅgala Sutta* (The Good Omen Discourse)], (Oxford : PTS, 1991), pp. 2-4.

<sup>25</sup> That is evidenced by the saying of the Buddha to Venerable Ānanda, "What is that good practice? It is the Noble Eightfold Path ... which leads to complete disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*."— I.B. Horner (tr.), **Majjhima-nikāya: The Middle Length Sayings**, vol. 2, (no. 11), [83: *Makhādeva Sutta*, par. 2], p.272 (M 83.21)

all, these two levels of Dhamma: the Three-Bases of Meritorious Actions and the Threefold Training are inter-correlated.

Besides, the Three-Bases and Ten-Bases are signified in *Tipiṭaka*, as follows:

| Three Bases of Meritorious Action           | Ten Bases of Meritorious Action<br>(Merit acquired by...)   |
|---|---|
| 1. Generosity<br>( <i>Dāna</i> )            | 1) <i>Dānamaya</i> : generosity, giving, sharing material things                                  |
|   | 2) <i>Pattidānamaya</i> : sharing others in merit or good deeds                                   |
|   | 3) <i>Pattānumodanāmaya</i> : rejoicing in others' merit  |
| 2. Morality<br>( <i>Sīla</i> )              | 4) <i>Sīlamaya</i> : observing the precepts or moral conduct                                      |
|   | 5) <i>Veyyāvaccamaya</i> : rendering services and assistance                                      |
|   | 6) <i>Apacāyanamaya</i> : respecting the elders, the holy ones; and honoring others               |
| 3. Mental Development<br>( <i>Bhāvanā</i> ) | 7) <i>Bhāvanāmaya</i> : mental development (meditation)   |
|   | 8) <i>Dhammassavanamaya</i> : listening to the Teachings  |
|   | 9) <i>Dhammadesanāmaya</i> : instructing others the Teaching                                      |
|   | 10) <i>Diṭṭhujukamma</i> : straitening one's own views in accord with the Teachings of the Buddha |

**Remark:** For *Diṭṭhujukamma*, it is actually not fixed to be with the third group. It can be with any one of those three groups.—Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto, **Dictionary of Buddhism**, [89], (B.E. 2551 / 2008), pp. 93-94.

According to the ten-bases, only two of them, *dāna* and *veyyāvacca*, which imply to society and social work are taken into consideration.

### 5.1 *Dāna*

The Pāli *dāna* is derived from the root *dā* as in *dadāti* “to give” and in *dāti*, *dyāti*, meaning “to deal out”. Thus, *dāna* is defined as giving, generosity, dealing out, gift, almsgiving, liberality, and munificence, especially, a charitable give to the community of bhikkhus, the *Saṅgha*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), **The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary**, (London : PTS, 1979), p. 356.

*Dāna* in the Buddha's time was social activities/actions made distinctly by *seṭṭhī*, the rich householder, who is comparable to a 'capitalist' (Thai: *nai-thun* นายทุน) in our modern Western world. However, the value gaining from their 'generosity career' is dissimilar. Venerable Buddhāsa once explained the difference:

A *seṭṭhī* is a wealthy person who uses his/her accumulated wealth to build a *rong-than* [โรงทาน] for the sake of social welfare. The status of *seṭṭhī* was measured by the number of their *rong-than*. It is an almshouse or a communal place where the poor could come and receive what they lacked materially...The more *rong-than* one had, and the wealthier one was considered to be.<sup>27</sup>

In such a way, generosity a *seṭṭhī* performed implies a great deal of load of social work he/she did through building and operating numerous *rong-thans*. Also, the wealth he/she properly obtained and used has been seen as a 'sign of virtue' and 'happiness' or a 'gift' for themselves and everyone. His/her generosity not only creates opportunities to benefit the greatest number of people, but also being used as the solution to help the needy provide for their basic needs, material things, and well-being. By cultivating generosity or *dāna*, those *seṭṭhī* can develop "non-attachment" to their wealth and property—as the 'special wealth' they gain in return as well as become the 'enlightened being'. In other words, value of money and economic wealth they earned cannot be compared to the supreme goal of enlightenment and cannot obstruct them to follow the spiritual path via social work called *dāna*.

On the contrary, "a capitalist," according to Venerable Buddhadasa, "is a wealthy person who keeps accumulating material wealth far beyond what he or she really needs."<sup>28</sup> In reality, much money and 'surplus' in capitalist society usually feed over-consumption and -capital accumulation. This causes consumerism and the pursuit of happiness or self-interest of *homo economicus* to grow: the more one buys and has; the more one wants. This tendency has gradually aggravated the real Buddhist concept of *dāna* to 'quantity' or 'things' that can be compared.

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<sup>27</sup> Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, **Dhammic Socialism**, 23, tr. by Donald K. Swearer, "Dhammic Socialism," quoted in Tavivat Puntarigvivat, "Toward a Buddhist Social Ethics: The Case of Thailand," notes: 22, [online], available at <http://www.crosscurrents.org/buddhistethics.htm> [24 June 2015].

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

Thus, a capitalist today understands *dāna* as making merit in terms of money.<sup>29</sup> This understanding, however, is not for moving people out of poverty to increase his/her freedom and peace of mind as the *seṭṭhī* in former time did. More often, he/she donates money for 'prestige-oriented comparisons with others' and for 'status survival'. In such a manner, *dāna* is no longer an act of social work as its sense of circulating *puñña* (boon) because 'the gift' from social work is being lost, while attachment to 'self' and 'wealth,' alienation, individualism, and selfishness enlarge. This stimulates social and economic injustice as well as prolonged poverty.

## 5.2 Veyyāvacca

The Pāli, *veyyāvacca*, and Sanskrit *Vaiyā + pṛtya* from *vyāpṛta* means "active" or "busy". It was later translated into Pāli-Sanskrit as *vaiyāvṛtya* [as *vi + ā + vṛt*] means service, attention, rendering a service; work, labour, commission, or duty.<sup>30</sup> This paper prefers using the translation of *veyyāvacca* as 'rendering the service'.

The Theravāda Buddhist seems to think that an individual without 'mental development' or 'self-cultivation' is not easy to serve a society or 'render the service' in a real meaning of term. In other words, social work must be rooted in *sīla* (morality). And, the 'cultivation of *sīla*' must be observed at the same time, or even before the person does rendering social service, or else he/she might fail or corrupt his/her social duty.

The Five Precepts are basic Buddhist *sīla*. The Precepts are one kind of social work taken upon in order to abstain from some types of actions. They signify relationships and activities that do not take advantage of anyone, and that are for the mutual benefit of oneself, others, and the public. Besides, the Precepts advise to people how 'the wise' behaves ahead of any sense of 'self' and selfishness. Moreover, as Ken Jones explains: "The Precepts invite us to loosen the grip, unclench the fist, and to aspire to open-handedness and open-heartedness. Whether, and to what extent, he keeps the Precepts is the responsibility of each individual."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Dāna* (generosity) is not confined to the donation of money and material things. It embraces such various forms as teaching, training, helping, working, giving, organizing services, political; environmental; or natural disastrous actions, etc.

<sup>30</sup> T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 720.

<sup>31</sup> Ken Jones, "Buddhism and Social Action: An Exploration," Wheel Publication No. 308/331, (Kandy, Sri Lanka : Buddhist Publication Society), section 2.7: Violence and non-

*Sati* (mindfulness), furthermore, is a key instrumental Dhamma for ‘mental development’ (*bhāvanā*) aside from the practice of *dāna* (generosity) and *sīla* (morality). Regarding Venerable Payutto:<sup>32</sup> “*Sati* (mindfulness) aids the arising of wisdom (*paññā*). It helps the mind not to fall into the past or float into the future with delight and aversion, but seeing things as they are.” Pertaining to the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, the practice, the development, and the cultivation of mindfulness through its four foundations is also the development of concentration (*samādhi*) therein.<sup>33</sup>

When seeing the Dhamma and things ‘as they really are,’ from the training of insight, ones see the existence of themselves and things; they are related to each others through the law of Dependent Origination or *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Ones voluntarily work for the welfare and happiness of others as the work ones performed have tendency to augment *puñña* (boon), that is happiness and gains of societies. They then realizes the higher meaning of social work that means ‘mind(ful) training’—the practice of Dhamma.

Those will bring them to the true nature of worldly and spiritual life that enables them to realize impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anattā*)—the three qualities stated as the ‘beneficial’ (*sappāya*) for *nibbāna*—the supreme happiness.<sup>34</sup> The social worker is, therefore, unperturbed by gain or lost, praise or blame, fame or defame, and sorrow or happiness. This is the highest form of rendering the service or *veyyāvacca* in the philosophy of Buddhist social work.

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violence, p.18, [online], available at <http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/misc140400.pdf> [2 June 2015].

<sup>32</sup> Phra Debvedi (P.A. Payutto), **Helping Yourself to Help Others**, tr. by Puriso Bhikkhu, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1990), p. 37-8. [online], available at [http://www.buddhistlibrary.org/en/albums/userpics/10005/helping\\_yourself\\_to\\_help\\_others.pdf](http://www.buddhistlibrary.org/en/albums/userpics/10005/helping_yourself_to_help_others.pdf), [10 April 2015].

<sup>33</sup> I.B. Horner (tr.), **Majjhima-nikāya: The Middle Length Sayings**, vol. 1, (no. 10), [44: *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*], pp. 363. (M 44.12).

<sup>34</sup> F.L. Woodward (tr.), **Samyutta-nikāya: Book of Kindred Sayings**, vol. 4 (Salāyatana Vagga), (no. 16), [Ch. xxxv, iii, 5, § 146 (2): *Helpful* (i)], p. 86.

## 6. Conclusion

The Buddhist social work is an action that is no longer developed in the context of *homo economicus*—where his/her behaviour is driven by self-interest or greed. The philosophy of Buddhist social work has to deal inter-dependently among individuals, the economy, ecology, environment, society, and morality—which is for the individual and social transformation. Its idea is based on awareness-understanding of inter-dependence among individuals and those surrounding systems—which all are in unity. Besides, it needs to work together, care for each other, make sacrifices, let go of 'self' and give up self-interests for the sake of Dhamma, the welfare of others, the happiness of the greatest number of people, and finally, the good of society.